



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 29, 2017

Sabres continue to let their chances slip by

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

December 28, 2017

NEWARK, N.J. – Zemgus Girgensons is the Buffalo Sabres' hottest scorer. All it took was a move to Jack Eichel's wing.

The Sabres might need to play Eichel on every line.

An inability to score continues to frustrate Buffalo. The Sabres played one of their more complete games of the season Wednesday against the New York Islanders, and their average goal output actually went down. They rank last in the NHL at 2.16 goals per game heading into Friday's visit to New Jersey, a dip from the 2.17 prior to facing New York.

"We had plenty of opportunities," Girgensons said. "It just comes down to burying them."

The Sabres simply lack sniping ability. They have scored on 80 of their 1,145 shots, good for just 7.0 percent. Since 1997-98, only one team has been worse.

The 2014-15 Arizona Coyotes scored on 6.9 percent of their shots. This edition of the Sabres is tied for second-worst with the 2013-14 Sabres and the 2012-13 Ottawa Senators.

Failing to finish killed the Sabres in their 3-2 overtime loss to the Islanders. Jordan Nolan had a breakaway. Evander Kane had a partial one, then earned a point-blank chance. Sam Reinhart had a great opportunity late.

In fact, 17 of the Sabres' 18 skaters took a shot against the Islanders (only Jason Pominville was blanked). Yet the only players to score were Girgensons and Kyle Okposo, and their average distance from the net was 6 feet.

"It's frustrating," Nolan said Thursday after practice in Prudential Center. "If we keep playing that way and keep getting chances, they're bound to go in sooner or later. We took a good step last night and played the right way. We just can't give up those late-period goals because you're not going to win a lot of hockey games playing like that."

The goal-scoring slump remains a team-wide problem:

- * Johan Larsson has no goals and four assists in 31 games.
- * Pominville has two goals and two assists in 25 games.
- * Benoit Pouliot has two goals and one assist in 19 games.
- * Reinhart has no goals and one assist in 15 games.
- * Rasmus Ristolainen has no goals and two assists in 14 games.
- * Nolan has no points in 12 games.

"It's been tough," said Larsson, who has scored once in 37 games. "Lately, I've been having chances, but it won't go in for me. I just need a little bounce, and then maybe it'll start going more and more."

Excluding Buffalo's no-goal brigade – which includes every defenseman not named Jake McCabe (two) or Nathan Beaulieu (one) – Larsson is last with a 2.6 shooting percentage. He had two shots of the team's 37 shots against the Islanders.

"We had some good chances but couldn't capitalize," Larsson said. "We have to do that."

Girgensons is finally connecting. He went 25 games without a goal, then broke the slump Saturday in Carolina with an assist from Eichel. The center set up Girgensons again Wednesday, reaching 20 assists for the season.

"It's pretty easy to play with a guy like that," Girgensons said. "He can make anything happen out there, so it's fun to play with him.

"It was a long time coming for the first one, and it was definitely nice to get that second one right away."

Too many Sabres are in need of a streak of their own.

"You're kind of just thinking to yourself, 'I've got to bear down on this next one,'" said Nolan, who remains confident because chances are coming. "When you play a simple, defensive game and you're always in the right spot, you're bound to get plays against those skill teams because they might try the extra pass that maybe they shouldn't. That's when you break teams down.

"That's what teams were doing to us early in the season, and we're starting to do that to other teams now."

Sabres Notebook: Winter Classic update; Housley ill; Devils hot

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NEWARK, N.J. – There won't be a blade of grass in the outfield. There will, however, be iconic New York City taxi cabs.

The NHL is continuing to transform Citi Field as the Winter Classic approaches. The rink for the Buffalo Sabres and New York Rangers is in place on the infield. The league is now working on the surrounding areas, including the outfield and the section behind home plate.

"We are theming it to New York City streets, taxi cabs and everything that goes along with that," Steve Mayer, NHL executive vice president and chief content officer, told reporters in the stadium. "It's going to be amazing to see, and there will be no question from the look and feel of the game that it is being played in the city."

Real taxis are expected to drive around a grid of streets laid out in the stadium. The NHL promises the New Year's Day extravaganza won't look like anything fans of the host New York Mets have seen.

"I will invite anybody to find a blade of grass," Mayer said. "We cover every inch of the stadium and transform the stadium so that when people do walk in and they have their ticket – and even if they come to 50 Mets games a year – they are watching something that is completely different than anything that they have experienced at Citi Field."

The entertainment continues to expand. The Goo Goo Dolls were previously announced as the act for the first intermission. They will be joined by Max Weinberg and Ace Frehley.

Weinberg rose to fame as the drummer for Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band and was elected to the Rock & Rock Hall of Fame in 2014. He and his quartet – known as Max Weinberg and Max Weinberg's Jukebox – will serve as the house band and perform throughout Monday's outdoor game.

Frehley is the original lead guitarist for KISS. He will perform his song "New York Groove" before the Sabres and Rangers take the ice. That's one of the few links to baseball as the tune blares through Citi Field following every Mets home victory.

New York policemen and firefighters will serve as the color guard. The national anthem will be performed by New York's Every Voice Choirs and will feature children born in 2008, the year of the original Winter Classic held in Buffalo. Four F-15 aircraft from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina will do a flyover, and a bald eagle will take flight.

Oh, and the game will be played at 1 p.m, too. It's expected to be sunny and 21 degrees.

"We'll be ready to play hockey on Monday," Mayer said. "Everything is ahead of schedule. The weather in New York has been excellent. It's a little cold, but we are used to that. When we do one of these outdoor games, we are prepared for these things."

As the Sabres prepared for Friday's road game against the New Jersey Devils, they did so without Phil Housley. The coach skipped the workout in Prudential Center because of illness.

Associate coach Davis Payne ran the practice.

Sabres continue to let their chances slip by

The Sabres' penalty killers went 2 for 2 during Wednesday's loss to the New York Islanders. It was their sixth perfect outing in the last eight games.

Forward Johan Larsson credits the players' familiarity with each other. The Sabres primarily use Larsson, Benoit Pouliot, Jacob Josefson, Ryan O'Reilly and Zemgus Girgensons up front, along with defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen, Marco Scandella, Jake McCabe, Justin Falk and Zach Bogosian.

"We keep the same pair, so you kind of know which guy you go with and you read off each other," Larsson said. "We talk about scouting their plays, but in the end you've got to make reads out there. That's one thing, then you've got to be willing to block those shots and be in the lane."

Buffalo certainly has a challenge ahead. The Devils lead the Metropolitan Division with a 22-9-5 record. They are closing a six-game homestand, and they've won the first five games.

They want to go 6-0.

"It's important for us," Devils coach John Hynes said. "The last two games, we've played some good segments, but there have been some lulls in our game and some details we think need to be better. We want to finish off strong."

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Sabres' Housley misses practice.

The head coach became ill

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

DECEMBER 28, 2017

Newark, NJ (WGR 550) - The Sabres practiced on Thursday, but Phil Housley was absent. The Sabres head coach was under the weather and stayed in the hotel. Former Blues head coach Davis Payne ran practice.

Jordan Nolan's game seems to keep getting better and he's been getting more chances to play. On Wednesday in Brooklyn, Nolan played with Jacob Josefson and Johan Larsson.

The trio had lots of possession time in the offense zone and created chances which they couldn't capitalize on.

Nolan was able to beat a defenseman for a clear cut breakaway, but was stopped by Jaroslav Halak. Nolan said despite missing his chances, he's keeping frustration at bay, "I don't think frustration's the word, I think maybe just thinking to yourself that I've got to bear down on the next one, but I'm getting chances and I think I'm playing well lately, so I think they're bound to go in sooner or later. If I'm getting the chances, that's great and if I wasn't, I'd be a little more concerned."

Nolan has only scored in one of the 33 games he's played in Buffalo.

Johan Larsson doesn't have a goal in 31 games and has only one this season. Larsson is getting frustrated that he can't break through, "It's frustrating for sure. I think it's been tough because lately I've been having chances, but it won't go in for me, so I need a little bounce and then maybe it'll start going in more and more."

Larsson is probably Buffalo's best penalty killer which helps keep him in the lineup. He's a good shot blocker and anticipates very well to get into the passing lanes. Larsson said it's something he takes pride in, "We keep the same pair, so you know which guy you go with and then you read off each other good. We also talk about their plays, but in the end, you've got to make reads out there and you have to be willing to block those shots and be in the lane."

Since he's come back from injury, Larsson has been paired with Josefson on the PK.

The Sabres practiced on Thursday with the same lines and D-pairs that played against the Islanders.

The weather for the Winter Classic on Monday should be around 20 degrees with sun and wind. The teams will be at the home of the Mets on Sunday to check out the rink for a team practice and a family skate.

Sabres stand in way of Devils' perfect homestand

FoxSports

Dec 28, 2017

After winning the first five games, the New Jersey Devils look to close out their season-high six-game homestand with a perfect record Friday night when they host the Buffalo Sabres at the Prudential Center.

The Devils (22-9-5) beat the Dallas Stars, Anaheim Ducks, New York Rangers, Chicago Blackhawks and Detroit Red Wings on this homestand, outscoring the opposition 20-10 in the process. Along the way, New Jersey's five-game winning streak is its longest overall this season.

"We're not too worried about the streak, I think we're just worried about protecting home ice," explained Devils goalie Cory Schneider, who was outstanding Wednesday, making 31 saves in a 3-1 victory over the Red Wings.

Article continues below ...

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"We have the longest homestand of the year, and I think we've done a great job getting points while we are here. We've got to bank these points while we can."

A four-game road trip follows this homestand for the Devils, though no one is looking that far ahead, nor past the struggling Sabres (9-20-8).

"We want to make this a hard place to play in," stated Taylor Hall, New Jersey's leading scorer who has a three-game point streak entering play Friday. "I think a lot of guys are starting to feel comfortable in this building, and that's a huge thing. Our fans are providing a great atmosphere for us and I think that's a huge boost."

Last season, the Devils won just 16 times on home ice. This season, they have 12 victories at The Rock in only 19 home games, part of a major transformation from last season in general. Currently sitting atop the Metropolitan Division with 49 points, the Devils finished last overall in the Eastern Conference in 2016-17 with only 70 points.

The Sabres know quite well about being in last place, which is where they reside coming into play Friday. They have the second-fewest points in the league, own a minus-43 goal differential and average the fewest goals per game.

"It's probably been the toughest season I've ever been a part of," veteran Sabres winger Ryan O'Reilly told the Buffalo News. "It's been a pretty miserable year, so far."

That misery continued Wednesday in Buffalo's first game following the Christmas holiday break. Seemingly on their way to a feel-good road victory over the New York Islanders, the Sabres allowed a controversial game-tying goal by Josh Bailey with 69 seconds remaining in regulation — one in which the on-ice call was overturned by video review — and then lost 1:08 into overtime when goaltender Robin Lehner misplayed a shot by rookie Mathew Barzal.

The frustration was too much for Lehner following a loss that dropped Buffalo to 4-12-6 since Nov. 10.

"Everything is predetermined against us," Lehner told reporters.

Almost beyond belief, the Sabres score on just seven percent of their shots this season. Johan Larsson is without a goal in 31 games, Jason Pominville has only two in his last 25 games, Sam Reinhart has not scored in 15 games and Benoit Pouliot has only a pair in 19 games.

"It's frustrating," Sabres forward Jordan Nolan told the Buffalo News after practice on Thursday. "If we keep playing that way and keep getting chances, they're bound to go in sooner or later. We took a good step (Wednesday) night and played the right way. We just can't give up those late-period goals because you're not going to win a lot of hockey games playing like that."

This is Buffalo's final game before taking part in the Winter Classic outdoor contest against the New York Rangers on Monday afternoon at Citi Field, home of baseball's New York Mets.

The Devils pack their bags for a road contest Saturday against the Capitals in Washington, the start of their four-game road trip.

Josefson looks forward to 'special' return to New Jersey

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 28th, 2017

NEWARK - As practice wrapped up for the Buffalo Sabres at the auxiliary rink at Prudential Center on Thursday afternoon, Jacob Josefson was called upon by his teammates to lead the closing stretch. This season, it's become customary for the player who leads the stretch to then give a message to the team before breaking the huddle.

Josefson, a quiet presence in the Sabres dressing room, said he kept his message short and sweet.

"I just told the guys we have to win," he said.

Sabres Now (12/28/17)

02:15 • December 28th, 2017

When the Sabres return to Prudential Center to play the New Jersey Devils on Friday, it will be Josefson's first game in the building as a member of the visiting team. The forward was drafted by New Jersey in 2009 and played 296 games with the Devils, including six in the playoffs.

Josefson left the Devils to sign a one-year deal with the Sabres when free agency opened on July 1, a split he said was best for both sides. He's already played his former team once, a 6-2 Devils win when the two teams met in Buffalo on Oct. 9.

"I think it's good to have that first one out of the way playing in Buffalo," he said. "I have a lot of friends on the team. Obviously they won't be friends tomorrow, but it's probably going to be a special feeling to play on this ice in a different jersey."

An ankle injury has limited Josefson to just 13 games this season, during which he's tallied a goal and an assist. When he has played, he's been at his best when sharing a line with Jordan Nolan on his wing. It was no different against the New York Islanders on Wednesday, when Josefson centered a line with Nolan and Johan Larsson.

After the game, Phil Housley credited their line with helping to swing momentum in Buffalo's favor with their tenacity on the forecheck.

"I think we all play pretty similar," Nolan said. "I think we all play a pretty simple, puck possession kind of game. I think when we're out there, we kind of know where each other are because we're usually trying to be in the right spot for each other. I just think we work really well together."

Josefson and Larsson are both of Swedish descent, which both players said helped them find instant chemistry against New York. They've also both been key cogs in the Buffalo penalty kill, which ranks 11th in the NHL this season at 82.5 percent.

Against the Islanders, Josefson and Larsson each skated 2:38 of shorthanded ice time, often sharing the ice.

"We keep the same pair, so you kind of know which guy you go with and then you read off each other," Larsson said. "We talk about their plays and scouting their plays, but in the end you've got to make reads out there."

Josefson said his most cherished memory in New Jersey came in 2011-12, when the Devils made their run to the Stanley Cup Final. They lost to Los Angeles in six games, but Josefson said he learned about what it takes to win that season from veterans like Martin Brodeur and Patrick Elias.

That was nearly six years ago, and while Josefson still may not be the type to give a moving speech while he breaks a huddle, the qualities he has brought to Buffalo - his work ethic and his smart, simple approach on the ice - make him worth watching for the team's younger players.

"He's just a great professional," Nolan said. "He's always doing the right thing, always working hard, and his emotions never get too high or too low. I think he's been around for a while now, so I think it's good for the guys to see that."

Housley misses practice due to illness

Housley did not make the trip with the team from New York City to Newark on Wednesday, instead staying off the ice to recover from an illness. Associate coach Davis Payne led practice in his absence.

Lines at practice

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo

67 Benoit Pouliot - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville

22 Johan Larsson - 10 Jacob Josefson - 17 Jordan Nolan

20 Scott Wilson

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

19 Jake McCabe - 47 Zach Bogosian

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 41 Justin Falk

4 Josh Gorges - 93 Victor Antipin

40 Robin Lehner

31 Chad Johnson

Sharpen Up: December 28, 2017

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 28th, 2017

For a moment on Wednesday night, it looked as though Robin Lehner had made the save of the year. The goalie had lunged across the goal line to snag a Josh Bailey shot with his glove, seemingly preserving a 2-1 lead for the Sabres with 1:09 remaining in regulation.

Then, as play continued, a horn sounded. The NHL's Situation Room in Toronto initiated a review of the play and ruled that the puck had completely crossed the goal line in Lehner's glove. Bailey's shot stood as the game-tying goal, and Mathew Barzal later scored in overtime to clinch a 3-2 win for the Islanders.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said after the game that, while he initially disagreed with the call, he eventually saw a view that offered conclusive evidence that Lehner's glove had indeed crossed the goal line. Here's the view offered by the NHL:

The Sabres will return to practice around 2 p.m. this afternoon in Newark to prepare for their game against the New Jersey Devils on Friday. We'll have practice updates here on Sabres.com and on Twitter @BuffaloSabres. Until then, here's what you need to know.

About last night

What made the loss all the more disappointing for the Sabres was that they felt they had outplayed the Islanders for the majority of the night. From our Lexus Postgame Report:

After being outshot 10-1 through the game's first eight minutes, the Sabres responded with a hard-working, simple game and finished the night with a 37-34 edge in shots.

Jason Chimera opened the scoring for New York early in the second period, cleaning up a rebound at the edge of the crease, but Zemgus Girgensons scored to tie the game shortly after and Kyle Okposo scored the go-ahead goal with 8:27 remaining in the third.

"It's a tough break," Okposo said. "I thought we played a pretty good hockey game. With the exception of the first six, seven minutes of the game, I thought we outplayed them. We had our chances. We played a pretty simple game and moved our feet. It was a tough outcome."

Kyle Okposo Postgame (12/27/17)

01:04 • December 27th, 2017

Lehner was vocally upset with the call on Bailey's goal, comparing the reversal to Buffalo Bills wide receiver Kelvin Benjamin's overturned touchdown catch against the New England Patriots on Sunday.

"Well, I know Toronto already made up their mind that it was a goal before they shot the puck," Lehner said. "That's just how it works in this league."

Robin Lehner Postgame (12/27/17)

02:19 • December 27th, 2017

Housley lamented his team's missed offensive opportunities, of which there were several. Jack Eichel shot high from the slot in the third period, Jordan Nolan had his breakaway attempt stuffed and Sam Reinhart had a shot alone from in front of the net with 1.7 seconds remaining in regulation.

Even in overtime, Evander Kane had a point-blank attempt before the Islanders took the puck the other way and scored the winning goal.

Phil Housley Postgame (12/27/17)
01:43 • December 27th, 2017

"It's sort of a common theme, we're getting that golden look and we're not capitalizing on it and it comes back the other way," Housley said. "It's just unfortunate because I thought our guys played hard. They were physical, they were fast, they were hard on the forecheck, we had a lot of O-zone time.

"That's one of the things that's disappointing, because the guys really played well tonight."

Girgensons' goal was his second in as many games, both of which have been assisted by Eichel.

"We have a pretty good chemistry," Girgensons said. "It's pretty easy to play with a guy like that. He can make anything happen out there, so it's fun playing with him."

Girgensons Postgame (12/27/17)
01:18 • December 27th, 2017

With the assist, Eichel now a 14 points (6+8) in his last 11 games.

Sabres prospects are back in action today

The 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship continued in Buffalo on Wednesday, with Switzerland edging Belarus 3-2 and Canada winning 6-0 over Slovakia. All five Sabres prospects who are involved in the tournament will be back in action on Thursday, including one head-to-head matchup.

Goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (2017, 2nd round) and Finland will kick play Denmark at 12 p.m., while defenseman Vojtech Budik (2016, 5th round) and the Czech Republic will play Alexander Nylander (2016, 1st round), Marcus Davidsson (2017, 2nd round) and Sweden at 4.

Casey Mittelstadt (2017, 1st round) will look to build on his two-goal debut when Team USA meets Slovakia at 7.

Tickets, coverage and more can be found at BuffaloWorldJuniors.com.