



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Ristolainen wants to keep bringing his 'Beast Mode'

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

December 7, 2017

CHICAGO -- Rasmus Ristolainen has played big minutes in his career before. But an eye-popping ice time total of 30:42 Tuesday in Denver came with lots extra attached to it.

More snarl. More bite. Even after the whistle.

He was the top-pair monster that Buffalo Sabres fans need to see every night on defense.

"I want to play as many minutes as I can and try to find that 'Beast Mode'," Ristolainen said after practice Thursday in United Center. "That's how you feel when you play a lot and you don't get tired. You just want to run over everyone and make plays."

Ristolainen's ice time -- which featured a whopping 11:09 of special teams time -- was the second-highest of his career in regulation. And he set a career-best with a plus-4 rating in the Sabres' 4-2 victory.

Coach Phil Housley certainly took note of it, agreeing that it was one of Ristolainen's best games of the season and hoping he'll see more Friday night when the Sabres play the Chicago Blackhawks.

"He had an edge to his game and he does that quite often," Housley said. "He's a true competitor but it was an extra attitude in his game and it's great to see. We're at a point where we've got to scrape for everything right now and that's the attitude we have to go into games with."

"That's the way he has to play," said defense partner Marco Scandella. "He's a horse out there. Big body. Physical. He can really skate. When he's at his best, he's playing a physical game and moving the puck well. He just goes out and competes. It's a staple for him."

So what motivated Ristolainen? There was a bounceback from a subpar set of weekend games against Pittsburgh, including his major flubbed pass that directly led to a Sidney Crosby goal on Friday night. And it was also seeing old friends on the other side.

Ex-Sabres draft pick Nikita Zadorov and Avs winger Mikko Rantanen spend part of their summer working out with Ristolainen in Finland. One of Ristolainen's biggest hits of the game came when he leveled Rantanen in front of the Buffalo net during the first period.

"It's always nice to play against good friends," Ristolainen said. "There's a little extra there."

Ristolainen's big flub against the Penguins came Friday night in a game where he only had one shot on goal. But he played 28:11 in the rematch on Saturday, collecting five shots and 11 attempts. It was more of the same Tuesday with four shots on goal and eight attempts.

"It was a good rebound on his part," Housley said. "There was some disappointment about the series against Pittsburgh and sometimes that can back you off when you make a mistake but he came to the forefront. It was really good to see him respond like that."

Ristolainen has no goals and seven assists this season but has 53 shots on goal. The analytics community has continually said questioned whether he's top-pair worthy and a 43.8 percent Corsi rating last year helped make that point for them. But that figure has jumped to 50.8 percent this year -- and is at 59 percent the last two games.

Ristolainen wants to keep working to generate offense but he knows Friday's game will be more about managing the puck in the defensive zone so the Blackhawks can't do the kind of damage people have become accustomed to seeing over the years.

"We have to manage the puck well, get a third forward back to help the D," Ristolainen said. "You have to play in their zone. They don't want to play there. They want to get the puck and go. We have to play there if we want to win."

Sabres Notebook: Blackhawks figure to be in a dark mood

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

December 7, 2017

CHICAGO -- The Buffalo Sabres might get a bad timing award for showing up in The Windy City when they did.

The Chicago Blackhawks take a five-game losing streak into Friday's matchup in United Center and looking to start a turnaround against a Buffalo club they've dominated in recent years.

The Sabres have lost 11 straight to Chicago (0-9-2) and are 0-6-1 in their previous seven trips to the "Madhouse on Madison," last winning here on Jan. 10, 2007.

"You have to take time and space away. You give them space, they're going to make plays," Buffalo defenseman Marco Scandella said after practice here Thursday. "This is a group where most of them have been together for a long time. They're used to playing with each other. They move the puck well and really can get it going in this building."

Scandella has plenty of experience against the Hawks from his days in Minnesota, including three straight playoff losses from 2013-15 where two of them were on Chicago's path to the Stanley Cup. But the Hawks are in a different spot these days, sitting sixth in the Central Division and just outside the Western Conference playoff teams in the wild-card race.

The Hawks started the season 3-0-1 and it has set the tone for a campaign of wild mood swings. A 2-5-1 stretch was followed by a 7-3-1 run that seemingly got things back in order.

But now the Hawks are 0-3-2 in the last five, scoring just 10 goals and enduring a 1-for-21 struggle on the power play. It's their longest losing streak since a nine-gamer in the 2011-12 season.

There has to be concern in the Hawks camp being out of a playoff position in early December.

"We know what we're up against going forward," captain Jonathan Toews said after Wednesday's 6-2 loss in Washington. "But when you say you're concerned, it means that you doubt yourself and you don't think that you have what it takes to be where you want to be in the standings. But for us, that's not at all the case."

"There's always a certain degree of desperation that has to be there," added defenseman Duncan Keith. "Everybody can see the standings, what they are. And we want to be better than what we have been right now. Obviously, it's not been good enough, and we need to be better."

The Blackhawks outshot the Caps, 39-25, and had 68 shot attempts in the game but were in a 3-0 hole through 16 minutes and never caught up.

"Don't be fooled," coach Joel Quenneville grumbled after the game. "Shots hit them right in the chest, with no chance of getting a second opportunity. It's almost like we gave the puck back to them, just putting it at the net with no purpose."

Goaltender Corey Crawford has missed the last three games with a lower-body injury and is eligible to come off injured reserve Friday. The Hawks initially said he would return Sunday against Arizona but Crawford skated with goaltending coach Jimmy Waite here Thursday prior to the Sabres' practice while the rest of his team was off. It will be interesting to see if he declares himself ready for Buffalo.

The Hawks will be looking for an instant turnaround with consecutive home games against the Sabres, Florida and Arizona, the three teams at the bottom of the NHL's overall standings.

"If we play the right way, we're a hard team to play against," Keith said. "We have to be excited going back home in our building and try to use that momentum being at home."

South Buffalo native Patrick Kane continues to lead the Hawks in assists (17) and points (27) while Artem Anisimov is the team leader in goals with 12. Kane has 779 career points in 768 games. He has 295 goals and is five shy of becoming the fifth Hawk with 300. Kane will also become the fifth Hawk to 800 points. The other four in both categories are Bobby Hull, Stan Mikita, Denis Savard and Steve Larmer.

Keith's defense partner is former Sabres blueliner Cody Franson, who was not re-signed after last season and took a professional tryout offer from the Hawks before signing a one-year, \$1 million deal.

Franson has one goal and six assists in 18 games with a minus-3 rating. But he's a darling of the analytics community and giving them more fodder to date by leading the Hawks with a 57 percent Corsi rating.

The Sabres have announced they will hold a "Mega Raffle" on Jan. 12 in the Lexus Club at KeyBank Center. It will feature prizes including Sabres autographed items, team experiences and tickets. Doors will open at 6 p.m. and the first spin in the meat raffle-style event will be at 7. Sabres alumni and broadcast personalities will be on hand.

There will be 12 raffle rounds with 3-4 spins per round. Ticket prices per round will range from \$2-5 depending on the level of prizes available.

Fans are encouraged to purchase individual tickets or reserve tables in advance, as space is limited. Admission is \$20 and includes food and beverages. Tables of 10 can be reserved. Proceeds benefit the Sabres Foundation. Contact coordinator of community relations Nick Fearby at Nick.Fearby@sabres.com.

Sabres' Wilson and Rodrigues have been friends for years

The playing chemistry came right back

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

DECEMBER 07, 2017

Chicago, Ill (WGR 550) - Scott Wilson and Evan Rodrigues didn't grow up together. They met when they were 16 and wound up playing on the same line together. Wilson said, "That was the OJHL for the Georgetown Raiders. We were both 16-year-olds playing with overage 21-year-olds, so we were definitely the odd ones out.

"We've kept in touch, I also played against him at school." Wilson played as UMass-Lowell and Rodrigues was with Jack Eichel at BU.

Rodrigues said the two had a friendly competition in college, "Oh yes, definitely, he used to torch us in college. It seemed like every time we'd play him he was putting up at least a goal if not two, so we had a pretty good competition going in college."

Wilson grew up playing for the Oakville Rangers and played against him as kids when Rodrigues was with the Etobicoke Marlies.

There was no draft in the OJHL so Wilson said you just find a team to play for. Both went to the Raiders and became best friends. Just because you're on the same team doesn't mean you're friends with everybody. Wilson said, "I think it was the age difference, most of the team was 21-year-olds, so we kind of stuck together and the wound up playing in the World Junior Challenge together so we always played together on a line.

"It was a lot of fun to play together back then. Looking back on it we probably made some bad turnovers because we liked to try to make plays, so it's been fun trying to get back a little bit of that juice in the last few days."

Rodrigues felt the chemistry was instant, "We seemed to click right from the beginning and we had fun playing hockey together. He's really good at finishing and I tried to just look for him, so it just worked out for us."

Rodrigues was playing his first game with Buffalo this season on Tuesday and he found himself centering a line with Wilson. Rodrigues felt like no time had passed, "Definitely, it was nice to have a friendly face back in the room and I feel like it's made it easier for him transitioning having me here and being able to go to someone with questions.

Wilson likes playing with Rodrigues because of the way he plays, "He plays the exact same way, skilled game, thinks the game really well and he's kept his hands with him, that's for sure."

As far as Wilson knew, Rodrigues was still playing in Rochester at the time he was traded from Detroit to Buffalo. The winger was pleasantly surprised when he found out different, "When Botsy called me as soon as it happened and I didn't know that Rodder had been called up, so he said we might be reunited, so that made me pretty excited to get it going here."

Rodrigues was never drafted and was signed as a free agent with the Sabres. It seems like many underestimate him, but he's never lost faith in himself, "My whole life I've looked at it as whatever happens, happens, but I know if I put the work in and I trust myself, trust my ability, that good things will happen and you just have to enjoy the ride and I firmly believe that if you put the work in, good things will happen."

Rodrigues got some power play time on Thursday at the point in place of Marco Scandella.

Phil Housley said Nate Beaulieu is still not with the club, but didn't rule him out for Sunday in St. Louis.

Sabres' Nathan Beaulieu: Remains sidelined

CBS Sports

by RotoWire Staff

Dec. 7, 2017

Beaulieu (illness) will sit out Friday's contest in Chicago, Mike Harrington of The Buffalo News reports.

The 2011 first-rounder has been battling the flu since being forced to leave Saturday's game against Pittsburgh and hasn't even been able to practice since. Buffalo will be hoping that Beaulieu is feeling well enough to practice prior to the team's game Sunday against the Blues, which is the next possible time for him to return to the lineup. With Beaulieu on the mend, Victor Antipin will continue on the Sabres' back end.

Rodrigues, Wilson still have chemistry from junior days

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 7th, 2017

CHICAGO - Evan Rodrigues was scrolling through Twitter when he found out the Buffalo Sabres had traded for Scott Wilson on Monday afternoon. Rodrigues had joined the Sabres himself earlier that day after being recalled from Rochester for the first time this season.

Rodrigues reached out to his former teammate right away.

"I texted him a minute or two later saying, 'We're back,' Rodrigues said Thursday. "He just sent me a few smiley faces. He had a bunch of stuff going on so he said he'd see me at the hotel."

Sabres Now (12/7/17)

02:03 • December 7th, 2017

If it looked like Rodrigues and Wilson were comfortable as linemates during Buffalo's win in Colorado on Tuesday, it's because they were. The two have a chemistry that dates all the way back to 2009, when they were 16 year olds in the OJHL on a Georgetown team that consisted mostly of 21 year olds.

Their proximity in age, combined with the fact that they played mostly as linemates, allowed them to develop a relationship that they've been able to maintain even as they went their separate ways both in college and professionally.

Amazingly, their chemistry on the ice stuck too. The two played on as linemates along with Kyle Okposo on Thursday and said it didn't feel like much had changed.

"Scott's always brought that energy," Rodrigues said. "He brings a little physicality to his game and has that finishing ability and I would be the playmaking one. We haven't changed much. I think our work ethic has probably gotten a little bit better than it was when we were 16, 17 years old but other than that we still play the same style."

"Honestly, he plays the exact same way," Wilson said of Rodrigues. "Skilled game, thinks the game really well. He was more of the dangler back then. I was still like I am today, I was kind of the shooter - play hard and finish my checks. Back then I probably had a little bit better hands but he's kept his hands with him, that's for sure."

Apparently, Phil Housley saw enough out of the duo to use them in high-leverage situations. The two worked together throughout the night on the penalty kill, with Wilson lifting the stick of Colorado forward J.T. Compher to prevent a scoring chance in the first period.

Housley later had their line on the ice with the Sabres protecting a one-goal lead while the Avalanche had its goalie pulled late in the third period. They were stuck on the ice for 1:36 straight, but protected the lead nonetheless. Rodrigues said their familiarity helped.

"Penalty kill especially, we kind of knew exactly what each other was going to do," he said. "You feel a lot more comfortable and you play a lot looser when you know what your linemates are going to do with the puck and without the puck."

Wilson was brought into Buffalo because of his ability to do the little things, and he directly contributed to Jake McCabe's goal in the second period with his net-front presence. While he remains scoreless this season, he received a season-high 14:19 of ice time.

Wilson scored 26 points in 78 games for Pittsburgh last season. With a new opportunity and a linemate he trusts, more offensive contributions could be on the horizon.

"I think that's what I'm trying to do," he said. "I haven't really gotten the bounces this year with regard to points but at the same time I haven't played that much either. I'm playing a little bit more here so I've just got to keep playing the right way."

"Even though it sucks sometimes not getting points, I think the mental part of it is just sticking with it and grinding through. Eventually the hockey gods will come on your side."

With Wilson and Rodrigues back together, it seems they already have.

Thursday's practice

Defenseman Nathan Beaulieu did not join the team for practice in Chicago and has been ruled out for Friday's game against the Blackhawks. Beaulieu did not play in Colorado after leaving Saturday's game in Pittsburgh due to an illness. He has not been ruled out for Sunday's game in St. Louis.

With Beaulieu absent, the lineup remained the same as it was in Colorado, with Josh Gorges and Zemgus Girgensons skating as a fourth defensive pair:

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
67 Benoit Pouliot - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 24 Hudson Fasching
20 Scott Wilson - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 21 Kyle Okposo
17 Jordan Nolan - 22 Johan Larsson - 23 Sam Reinhart

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
19 Jake McCabe - 47 Zach Bogosian
41 Justin Falk - 93 Victor Antipin
4 Josh Gorges - 28 Zemgus Girgensons

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson

In his own words: Rodrigues on returning from injury

by Evan Rodrigues

Sabres.com

December 7th, 2017

I've had a long history in hockey of needing to work for what I have. I knew it would be no different when I broke my hand in the preseason.

We were on a power play in Toronto, and the puck had gotten caught between my feet as I skated into the offensive zone. I looked down at it and before I knew it, I kind of got blown up by one of their defensemen.

At first, I didn't even know I was injured. It wasn't until I got back to my feet, put two hands on my stick and began to backcheck that I realized something was wrong. I couldn't feel my stick at all.

The moment that our athletic trainer, Rich Stinziano, told me I'd need an X-ray, I immediately began to fear it was broken. I'll admit, it was a heartbreaking moment. I had worked hard all summer and felt I had put myself in position to potentially make the team in Buffalo out of training camp. All of a sudden, my camp was over.

For all of the frustration that set in initially, I had a life's worth of experience to lean on to help me through it. The way I've looked at it my whole life is, Go play hockey. Whatever happens, happens. I was a 10th-round pick in the OHL Draft, but I earned my way to a four-year career at Boston University. I went undrafted in the NHL, yet I've still had the opportunity to wear a Sabres sweater.

I approached my injury the same way. I trusted by ability and knew that, if I put the work in during my rehab, then I'd wind up back in Buffalo. When I recovered and was sent to Rochester, I embraced the opportunity to be with the guys and show my ability.

So far, it's worked out. I was recalled on Monday and played my first game of the season in Colorado on Tuesday. Now, I need to make sure I do whatever it takes to earn my stay.

It's always been my nature, working for what I get. That's what I'm going to continue to do throughout my career.

#DUFFALO: Tales of the Midwest

by Brian Duff

Sabres.com

December 7th, 2017

ON ICE

A daunting road trip began on the right note for the Sabres in Denver on Tuesday.

With a fresh face from Rochester in Evan Rodrigues, and recently acquired winger Scott Wilson making his debut, the Sabres appeared to have a bit more balance and attention to detail among the forward lines. Buffalo outshot Colorado at even strength 25-23, and outscored the Avs 3-0. Given the club had been minus-23 for the season playing at even-strength, these are definitely numbers to build off of.

As for why I used the word "daunting" to describe the trip?

Buffalo hadn't won at Pepsi Center since 2005. They haven't won in Chicago since 2007. And they are winless in St. Louis since 2009.

Here's hoping the slump-busting continues!

QUOTABLE

"Still the second ever, I think. The only other person in the running right now is Cal Petersen..." -Amerks forward C.J. Smith on the fact that he and retired netminder Scott Clemmensen are the only born-and-raised Iowans that have made it to the NHL

OFF ICE

Now that we've got your attention with a Cal Petersen mention, let's add a few more layers to the C.J. Smith story that debuted this week.

Americans Made: C.J. Smith

03:18 • December 5th, 2017

Ironically, it's Smith's connection to another Petersen that could help him reach his ultimate goal.

Toby Petersen was a 9th-round pick (244th overall) of the Penguins in 1998. At 5-foot-10 and a type-one diabetic, Petersen would overcome significant odds to play more than a thousand professional games in the AHL (621) and NHL (416), regular season and playoffs combined.

He had two cracks at the Calder Cup in his first four seasons with the Penguins organization. In his 14th year of professional hockey (and seventh with the Stars organization) he helped the Texas Stars to their first Calder Cup in 2014 and retired as a champion.

In short, the Minnesota native, product of NCAA hockey (four years at Colorado College), and first-year Amerks assistant coach has an awful lot to impart on Smith, a player he has "known" for more than a decade.

"Well, he was the locker-room stick boy when I was playing in Iowa, so we go back a ways," Petersen laughed.

Although they hadn't kept in touch, Smith was quick to re-introduce himself to Petersen when the Sabres convened for the Prospects Challenge at HarborCenter back in September.

Knowing that hockey was what "he wanted to do", Smith's family understood his passion for the game and a higher level of competition, and they moved to Minnesota as he entered eighth grade.

His first two years in the State of Hockey were spent at Bloomington Jefferson - the same Bloomington Jefferson where Petersen had played 13 years earlier.

At age 16, Smith figured he was probably the second youngest player in the NAHL.

He would play for the Austin Bruins in his final two years of high school before one season in the USHL, and then it was off to UMass-Lowell - in part due to the recommendation from a former Bruins teammate in Christian Folin, now a defenseman for the LA Kings. (And because it seems inevitable based on how this story is being woven, Folin would also find his way to Iowa for parts of two seasons while trying to earn a full time spot with the Minnesota Wild!)

As for Smith, he's doing everything the Amerks could have asked for - seeing time on both the power play and penalty kill and leading the team in points with 23 in 22 games, good for a spot in the top 10 in the AHL.

Speaking from experience, Petersen said that Smith's biggest challenge this year will be the length of his first pro season, the need for proper rest and conserving his energy.

The only downside I can see is the intra-conference schedule in the AHL this year, meaning Smith won't be making it back to his hometown for a game anytime soon.

"I take pride in it. It's pretty cool," Smith said of his roots. "Iowa is obviously not a hockey hotbed if I'm just the second one to make it to this level, so I'm pretty proud of where I came from, and pretty proud to make it where I've made it."

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Rewinding to our family vacation and summer baseball tour through the Midwest, I'd be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to pump up an outstanding restaurant in Des Moines.

We were only in this emerging city for a few hours but it was pretty clear based on the Sunday breakfast we sat down to that this is one fine establishment in the heart of a very cool downtown.

IN THE COMMUNITY

For all the right reasons our Iowa love-in continues with a terrific Buffalo News story on WGR's Sabres beat reporter (and proud Iowa State alum) Paul Hamilton.

Keep it up Hammer, we are all very proud of you!

Here at the rink the Sabres will be back home on Tuesday Dec. 12 to host the Senators. That will provide fans with another opportunity to help those in need by supporting the Salvation Army's annual holiday kettle drive.

And don't forget that our next Road Crew party is on deck for Jan. 17 in New York City!

Happy Holidays, everyone!

Sharpen Up: December 7, 2017

by Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 7th, 2017

Coming off a 4-2 win in Colorado on Tuesday, the Sabres will return to practice this afternoon in Chicago. They'll play the Blackhawks tomorrow night.

Here's what you need to know.

We'll have full lineup news and notes for you later today when the team takes the ice at United Center.

Nathan Beaulieu did not travel with the team to Colorado as he's dealing with an illness so we'll see if he's back. We'll also see if any other changes are in store following what Phil Housley called a "total team effort up and down the lineup" on Tuesday.

The Sabres will play the Blues on Sunday night in St. Louis before heading home for a game against Ottawa on Tuesday.

Road Crew takes Manhattan

The Buffalo Sabres Road Crew, presented by Delta Air Lines with supporting sponsor Dave & Adam's, will make its second Tour Stop of the 2017-18 season on Wednesday, Jan. 17 in New York City prior to the team's game against the Rangers on Jan. 18.

This Tour Stop will take place at McFadden's Saloon (800 2nd Ave., New York, NY 10017) from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$10 each, with all proceeds benefiting the Buffalo Sabres Foundation.

Fans can purchase tickets online [here](#).

As part of the Road Crew program this season, Delta will again be sponsoring the "Fly You Home" promotion. Every fan who attends the event will have a chance to win two round-trip tickets home to Buffalo and two tickets to see the Sabres play at KeyBank Center during the 2017-18 season.

Fans attending the event will get the opportunity to meet Sabres alumni Rene Robert, Danny Gare and Rob Ray, as well as Sabres broadcaster Dan Dunleavy. More Sabres special guests will be announced at a later date.

The event will also include drink specials, Sabres trivia, giveaways, raffles and much more. Dave & Adam's will also be raffling off merchandise from their Jack Eichel Collection, which will include items signed by Eichel.

Everyone who purchases a ticket will receive an official Sabres Road Crew credential and lanyard.

Team Canada sets its preliminary roster for World Juniors

From Hockey Canada's press release...

Hockey Canada moved one step closer to finding out who will wear the red-and-white at the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship, as 32 players earned an invitation to Canada's National Junior Team Sport Chek Selection Camp in St. Catharines, Ont., Dec. 12-15.

The selection camp roster includes four goaltenders, 10 defencemen and 18 forwards.

Among the 32 players are seven returnees from last year's silver-medal team: goaltender Carter Hart (Sherwood Park, Alta./Everett, WHL); defencemen Jake Bean (Calgary/Calgary, WHL), Kale Clague (Lloydminster, Alta./Brandon, WHL), and Dante Fabbro (Coquitlam, B.C./Boston University, HE); and forwards Dillon Dubé (Cochrane, Alta./Kelowna, WHL), Michael McLeod (Mississauga, Ont./Mississauga, OHL), and Taylor Raddysh (Caledon, Ont./Erie, OHL).

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

So no Pu leaves the Sabres down to five WJC hopefuls: Davidsson, Mittelstadt, Luukkonen, Budik...and the biggest question mark, Nylander.

2:02 PM - Dec 6, 2017

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Buffalo Sabres

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@BuffaloSabres

#Sabres prospect @CMittelstadt of @USAHockey us is a player to watch for at @WJCinBUF 🧊🧊

Highlights + analysis from @SabresProspects on @TheInstigators. #WJCinBUF

10:41 AM - Dec 7, 2017

3 3 Replies 27 27 Retweets 109 109 likes

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Ticket packages and more info on the tournament (including details on the outdoor game between the U.S. and Canada on Dec. 29 at New Era Field) can be found at BuffaloWorldJuniors.com.