



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 22, 2018

Janmark, Stars beat Sabres 7-1 to finish 3-0-1 trip

AP

Jonah Bronstein

January 21, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Dallas Stars captain Jamie Benn caught one of his teammates reaching for an extra chicken wing in the locker room after Saturday's game.

"Easy," Benn said. "We're only on game 48."

The Stars continued their midseason push into playoff positioning by closing out a four-game road trip with a 7-1 victory over the Buffalo Sabres.

Mattias Janmark had two goals and an assist, Esa Lindell added a goal and two assists, Jamie Benn and Radek Faksa each had a goal and an assist, and Remi Elle also scored for the Stars, who return home after going 3-0-1 on the road.

"It's a battle every game and every day in this league," said Benn, who extended his point streak to seven games. "It seems we've been playing pretty good hockey as of late and I think we are still only seventh in the conference."

The Stars regrouped from a 2-1 shootout loss in Columbus on Thursday night to match their season-high scoring total.

"You want to be a team that can bounce back," Janmark said. "I think all good teams do after losses. So it's a good sign that we were able to."

John Klingberg, the NHL leader in defenseman scoring, tallied three assists and Jason Spezza had two. Kari Lehtonen made 26 saves for Dallas.

"This was a huge road trip for us with how the division is right now," Klingberg said. "We've got confidence and we're just trying to build more confidence. It's huge to get contributions from up and down the lineup."

The Sabres lost for the seventh time in eight games and were booed off the ice after the second and third periods in their most-lopsided defeat of the season.

"They came to work and we didn't," Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

Housley called the effort on home ice "very disappointing and quite embarrassing."

"You can only send a message in so many ways," Housley said. "It comes down to individuals on the team, they have to make a decision to play the right way, and when teams push, we have to respond with a better push."

Sam Reinhart scored Buffalo's goal. Robin Lehner stopped 15 shots before being replaced by Chad Johnson (10 saves) after allowing a fourth goal midway through the second period.

Elie gave the Stars a 1-0 lead five minutes into the game when he knocked in the rebound from Janmark's shot after Lehner made a diving save. Janmark scored off the rebound on a power play to make it 2-0 late in the third period.

Janmark got his second goal of the game and 12th of the season when he beat Lehner on a partial breakaway up the left side early in the second period.

Reinhart scored the Sabres' first goal on a power play midway through the second period. Jack Eichel assisted on the goal, extending his point streak to five games. Eichel, Buffalo's lone All-Star, has 10 goals and 10 assists in his last 14 games.

Benn responded for Dallas 38 seconds later, deflecting Klingberg's long shot into the net for his 19th of the year and chasing Lehner.

"It's always nice when they score and you can go out on the next shift and get one back," Benn said. "It's important to turn that momentum around."

Goals from Lindell and Faksa extended the Stars' lead later in the second period. Tyler Pflück tipped in Klingberg's shot for the seventh goal around the halfway mark of the third period.

NOTES: Stars F Martin Hanzal went to the dressing room in the second period with a lower-body injury and did not return. ... The Stars scratched F Martin Hanzal after he fell into the boards during practice on Friday. ... The Sabres recalled F Nicholas Baptiste from the minors on Friday. Baptiste was scratched, along with D Nathan Beaulieu (illness) and D Victor Antipin (illness). ... The Stars are 9-2-1 against Buffalo since the start of the 2010-11 season.

UP NEXT

Stars: Host Florida on Tuesday to open three-game homestand.

Sabres: Start three-game road trip at Calgary on Monday night.

Lehner takes responsibility but points to team accountability

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

January 21, 2018

Robin Lehner wants some of those goals back. He knows he needs to play better. The puck, at times, has gotten smaller on him.

Lehner has let in some bad goals, particularly over the last two weeks. He's been pulled in three of his last five starts. Over that span he has an 0-4-0 record as backup Chad Johnson was tagged with the losing decision in a 7-4 loss to Winnipeg on Jan. 9.

In his last five games, Lehner has given up 19 goals on 114 shots for a 5.50 goals-against average and an .833 save percentage.

But the Buffalo Sabres goaltender isn't only piece of the problem that has become the Buffalo Sabres free fall this season. And the goaltender won't be the only source of a solution as the organization tries to salvage something good over the next two and a half months.

"I don't turn it around. Ryan O'Reilly is not turning it around. No one is turning it around by themselves. That's not how this works," Lehner said Sunday morning after the Sabres practiced in HarborCenter then returned to KeyBank Center to pack their gear and fly to Calgary.

"In the NHL today, you cannot play one line or one D pair or have a goalie carry you," Lehner said. "It's too good of a league and especially this year with the scoring that's going on, there's a lot more space this year. We've got to do it as a team, all of us have to go out and do our job. I've got to do my job, everyone has to do their job, and that's how we turn it around."

Lehner had plenty to say on the subject. He spoke about consistency, about playing three good periods, not just a solid 20 or 40 minutes. He spoke most passionately about the need for the Sabres to find a way to be a team rather than a collection of talented hockey players.

"It's easy for people maybe looking in that this guy needs to be better, this guy needs to be better, no everyone needs to be better," Lehner said. "It's that simple because everyone just helps each other out. We've all got to take a look in the mirror and go to the next game. There's a lot of games left. We can sulk and feel bad for ourselves as much as we want. You guys aren't feeling bad for us. No one's feeling bad for us. It's no point dwelling on it. It is what it is. We're grown men. We've got to look to Monday."

The Sabres play the Flames in Calgary on Monday then face the Oilers in Edmonton on Tuesday. They stay out west to meet the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday.

Calgary is in the playoff hunt, sitting in third place in the Pacific Division with 55 points. The Flames are coming off a 2-1 shootout loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday.

Buffalo's next two opponents are among the stragglers in the standings of the Western Conference. The Oilers are in 13th place with 45 points while Vancouver is 14th with 42. Both are well ahead of the Arizona Coyotes, now tied with the Sabres for the fewest points in the NHL with 31.

While the Sabres are scoring the fewest goals per game in the NHL (2.24 per game), they are letting in the second most. Buffalo is giving up an average of 3.50 goals per game, second only to the 3.65 being allowed by the New York Rangers.

Story topics: Robin Lehner

Sabres Notebook: Hockey world mourns loss of Johannson

Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

January 21, 2018

The hockey world was rocked Sunday morning by the news that USA hockey executive Jim Johannson had died at the age of 53.

Johannson was USA Hockey's assistant executive director of hockey operations, but that was just one of his titles. He was the general manager of many of USA Hockey's men's national teams, including the national junior team that most recently won bronze at the World Junior Championship in Buffalo. He was also the general manager of the U.S. Men's Olympic Team and helped orchestrate the selection of a roster that for the first time since 1998 would not include National Hockey League players.

The news shook Buffalo Sabres coach Phil Housley, who learned of Johannson's death after practice and did not meet with the media before leaving with the team for Calgary.

Phil Housley

✓

@philhousley6

It comes with a heavy heart hearing about the passing of my close friend JJ. One of the best leaders of @usahockey who grew our game to new heights! My thoughts and prayers are with his family and he will truly be missed, but his legacy will carry on. It's a sad day for hockey!

12:53 PM - Jan 21, 2018

8 8 Replies 107 107 Retweets 805 805 likes

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Johannson went outside the box to hire Housley, then a high school hockey coach, to lead the U.S. men's national junior team in the 2013 World Juniors. The Americans won the gold that year under Housley's guidance and the tournament helped kick-start his NHL coaching career.

Pegula Sports and Entertainment issued a statement on behalf of Terry and Kim Pegula and the Buffalo Sabres organization:

"When we heard of JJ's passing, we are reminded of what an enjoyable person he was to be around, and also what he meant to USA Hockey and hockey worldwide. We should all strive to do our jobs and treat people as JJ did. Jim Johannson, you have moved on, but you will not be forgotten. We will miss you."

[View image on Twitter](#)

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USA Hockey

✓

@usahockey

We are devastated to announce that USA Hockey's Jim Johannson passed away early this morning. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his entire family. JJ will be greatly missed, but always remembered for his immensely positive impact both on & off the ice. <http://bit.ly/2Du8NGr>

11:38 AM - Jan 21, 2018

152 152 Replies 1,459 1,459 Retweets 3,163 3,163 likes

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Coach Tony Granato

✓

@TonyGranato

We lost a true friend in Jim Johannson today.

He was so compassionate and as loyal a friend as you could have. He was the ultimate teammate.

I am deeply saddened and shocked and sorry that he is no longer with us.

He was a special human being.

11:42 AM - Jan 21, 2018

24 24 Replies 276 276 Retweets 1,014 1,014 likes

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Scott Wilson has been a quiet addition to the Buffalo Sabres lineup, coming to the team from a trade with Detroit in December. In 14 games with the Sabres he has one goal and one assist.

Wilson played in the Pittsburgh organization, suiting up in 78 regular season and 20 playoff games for the Penguins in last season's run to the Stanley Cup.

So Wilson has been around a winning culture, which the 25-year-old forward described as taking care of the details.

"I think the biggest thing for me is just to try and get guys to understand, I'm not the most vocal guy, but try to get guys to understand it's about the little things that you gain your confidence through," Wilson said. "I think this group is lacking confidence obviously and a good way to build it is, I think, just doing the little things on the ice – finishing your checks and making the smart little plays. Once everybody gets on the same page with that, things will start rolling."

Wilson played on the fourth line for the Sabres in Saturday's loss to the Dallas Stars with Johan Larsson and Jordan Nolan.

In Sunday's practice, he was on a line with Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart.

The lines shifted as the Sabres practiced in HarborCenter Sunday morning.

Zemgus Girgensons was playing with Jack Eichel and Kyle Okposo. Evander Kane was with Larsson and Jason Pominville with Benoit Pouliot subbing in for Pominville during drills. Nolan was with Evan Rodrigues and Nicholas Baptiste with Jacob Josefson taking his turns in place of Baptiste.

Yes, Josefson was back at practice. So was defenseman Nathan Beaulieu who paired with Victor Antipin.

The rest of the defensive pairings remained the same. Marco Scandella and Rasmus Ristolainen were the top pair. Jake McCabe skated with Justin Falk and Josh Gorges was paired with Casey Nelson.

Story topics: [Jim Johansson](#)

And the bottom drops out, again, for the Sabres

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

January 20, 2018

Just when you think they've hit rock bottom, the Buffalo Sabres drop to another level of futility.

Saturday afternoon was the team's worst loss of the season, a 7-1 drubbing by the Dallas Stars in KeyBank Center. It was the second time in four games that the Sabres have allowed seven goals, both times at home.

It's the same questions and the same answers in a glum post-game dressing room. And nothing seems on the verge of changing.

The sound bites are great, but the words game after game, and now year after year, ring hollow.

"We can say it in the room," Sabres veteran defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We can tell guys. At the end of the day, it's up to yourself. No one can make me do it. I have to do it myself and I can't make the next guy, he can't make the next guy. At some point we've got to look in the mirror. The onus is only on ourselves.

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"I mean we can talk. Not to go crazy and go way back, but how many years have we been talking about this, trying to turn the page, or what it takes to win? And no one's going to make us do it."

Every time the Sabres show potential, show signs of working hard, of being competitive, of even (gasp) winning some games, the club takes two steps backward with lackluster effort and the absence of passion.

The Sabres entered their five-game bye week with a win over the Columbus Blue Jackets and while they lost the next game to the Rangers in New York, 4-3 in overtime, the team showed some grit and battle even without the ability to win a close game.

But they followed that up on Saturday with a horrible performance in front of a sold-out KeyBank Center for the kids-focused matinee game. Dallas dominated the first 10 minutes of the game, taking a 1-0 lead while outshooting the Sabres, 10-1.

While head coach Phil Housley insisted the team "got the game back" in the first period, the Sabres looked to be chasing the game from the drop of the puck. They fell behind 2-0 after 20 minutes and quickly were in a 3-0 hole in the second.

So much for building on the win over Columbus and a good battle in New York.

"That's probably the most frustrating thing. We don't seem to get any traction and continue to grow," Gorges said. "And I think that's more the mental side of this game than anything. When we have a good effort one night, we get a little bit too far ahead of ourselves, a little bit too comfortable. What do we have to feel comfortable about? In no way should we come in any day, game day or practice day, and feel comfortable. Because we're not in that position."

There was nothing comfortable about the Sabres performance on Saturday.

After falling behind 3-0, there was a brief sign of life on the power play. Jack Eichel's shot hit the post and Sam Reinhart was in front to put in the rebound on his backhand.

But just 38 seconds later, the Stars responded with a goal that chased Sabres starting goaltender Robin Lehner for the third time in the last seven games. Lehner allowed four goals on 19 shots.

Chad Johnson didn't fare much better, giving up three goals on 13 shots.

The Sabres certainly need a little bit more out of Lehner in these games, but the burden isn't his alone.

"It's starting from him out," Housley said. "It's not just Robin. Our whole group, whether it's boxing out in front or tying up sticks ... whether it's making right decisions or finishing checks."

These are all topics the Sabres have addressed before. The problems aren't new. But the solutions, which sound easy, have been elusive when putting them into practice.

"It's a broken record. It's frustrating," said Sabres forward Kyle Okposo. "We've got to find a way to work. It shouldn't be a hard thing to do, to come to work and work. That's it. ... I don't know, it doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't make sense. I'm kind of at a loss for words right now."

Bucky Gleason: Pretty good hockey, Phil? You've got to be kidding

The Buffalo News

Bucky Gleason

January 20, 2018

Phil Housley was about a half-minute into his news conference after the Sabres' offered little resistance Saturday in a 7-1 loss to the Stars, when he provided a startling assessment. It made you wonder if he watched the same embarrassing performance the fans did before they booed his team off the ice.

"We come out and we're playing pretty good hockey," Housley said before trailing off into a tangent about the Sabres taking an undisciplined penalty in the first period and how they "sort of" deflated after giving up the third goal.

The Sabres looked uninterested from the opening faceoff, gave up a goal in the first five minutes and were getting outshot, 10-1, before showing signs of a pulse. Dallas skated circles around them and built a 2-0 lead while Buffalo confirmed why it has been outscored, 43-19, in the first period this season.

Otherwise, yeah, the Sabres were terrific.

"We got the period back from that point," Housley said. "We were starting to come and didn't capitalize in our chances. They're a good team. They capitalized on their opportunities. Would I have liked to see more fight and battle? Yeah, but I don't think it was that bad until it got to the point of 3-0."

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It tells you something about the standards in Buffalo when that passes for pretty good hockey, but Housley wasn't kidding the sellout crowd in KeyBank Center or anyone watching from home. It was that bad, an utter waste of time and energy spent on a listless team and a first-year coach who appears to be over his head.

Remi Elie scored first when he poked home a loose puck while Evander Kane and his soon-to-be former teammates stood around and watched. Mattias Janmark scored a pair of soft goals to chase Robin Lehner. Sam Reinhart scored on the power play for the Sabres. Dallas added three goals in the second period and another in the third.

Ballgame.

If you're looking for sympathy for the Sabres, or their fans, and suggestions of better days ahead, you came to the wrong place. The Sabres are a terrible hockey team in a terrible place, thanks to terrible ownership and a terrible rebuilding plan that was implemented before this long, terrible season.

The Sabres are getting exactly what they deserve after bungling one decision after another since Terry and Kim Pegula purchased the team in 2011. The Sabres will miss the playoff for a seventh full season under the Pegulas, which is hardly a coincidence given the sample size.

Dallas Stars 7, Buffalo Sabres 1

Long gone are the good old days in which delusional Buffalo fans anticipated instant relief with the arrival of wunderkind Jack Eichel and the far-fetched fantasy he would carry the Sabres into the postseason in short order. Wishful thinking has been replaced by the reality of his overpaid, underachieving supporting cast.

No matter how people felt about the tank, there's no denying that it created a culture in which players became entitled and losing became acceptable. And that's how the Sabres performed Saturday while adding another loss to the standings and crossing another game off the schedule as they play out the string.

"As unfortunate as you say it, it's probably a little bit the case," said Jason Pominville, once part of a winning culture in Buffalo. "You play on teams that haven't had success, and it's acceptable. But that's what has to change. Efforts like this aren't acceptable. Practices have to be a compete level that you need."

The Sabres' performance Saturday might have been a new low this season, but it certainly was nothing new. They've gone through the motions since training camp after gaining enough influence at the top of the organization to get veteran coach Dan Bylsma fired because, apparently, they didn't appreciate his communication skills.

Here's how it works, fellas: Players follow orders and give an honest effort. In return, they receive a handsome paycheck. Coaches and GMs make personnel decisions. For players to have any say beyond what happens on the ice reveals incompetence at the top and a broken chain of command.

For years, fans have continued drinking the Kool-Aid and clinging to the idea a savior is coming while enabling the very problems they've wanted fixed. The vast majority embraced the tank even though it made little sense. Years later, ownership continues cashing your checks.

Really, how much has changed?

Sam Reinhart was hailed as a first-line player when he was selected second overall, only to show he's a third-line forward. Eichel is a very good player, and the Sabres should be happy to have him. But they caused so much damage in getting him that they left little room for error.

Ryan O'Reilly signed a seven-year contract worth \$52.5 million but has failed to justify the contract. Kyle Okposo supposedly was a top free agent, but he's grossly overpaid. Rasmus Ristolainen has all the speed and skill required to become a top defenseman but needed about 30 games to play like one.

A few years ago, fans rationalized that they needed to buy season tickets so they had priority for playoff tickets. Some have spent some \$7,500 on season tickets over the past three seasons, plus parking, and for what? For a team that believed losing was required to obtain a top player who would carry them back to the postseason.

It's none of my business how people spend their money, a lesson I learned the hard way many years ago. Simple math suggests the Sabres' most loyal fans aren't getting enough bang for their buck. For years, the organization has taken fans for granted through false promises and rewrapped packages containing hope.

Last summer, it was firing the GM and coach.

Tim Murray became a cartoon character who overpaid for trades and wound up overpaying for players. He knew talent but never understood value. Bylsma was swept out the door with him. The wise play with the Sabres would have been firing Murray first and allowing his replacement to decide about the coach.

It never dawned on ownership that Botterill might have had Bylsma on his short list of coaching candidates. The two forged a good relationship when both worked for the Penguins. Indeed, Bylsma very well could have been hired by the Sabres ... had he not been fired by the Sabres before they hired Botterill.

Housley showed up believing he would implement an up-tempo style while disregarding his own personnel. So far, it has been a failed attempt by a head coach to jam a square peg in a round hole in a way Rex Ryan certainly would understand. Then again, the Pegulas hired Ryan before firing him in less than two seasons.

And like Rex, Housley isn't fooling anyone.

Sabres Notebook: Team-first mentality benefits Dallas

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

January 20, 2018

While the Buffalo Sabres are trying to figure out how to work hard on consecutive days, the Dallas Stars are putting up workman-like numbers as they make a push for a playoff spot in the Western Conference.

With the 7-1 win in Buffalo on Saturday, Dallas took seven of eight points on their four-game road trip. With 58 points, the Stars are in the race in the Central Division and came into Saturday's game holding the top spot in the west's wild card race.

And the key in the eyes of Dallas coach Ken Hitchcock has been the ability for the players to come together as a team.

"I think we're really playing for each other and I think that's what the big difference is," Hitchcock said. "We're playing so hard for each other that we're holding each other accountable. We're keeping each other on task. The players are carrying our voices during the competition. They're saying the things on the ice that we're saying during practice. Those are things that you really value because that means we're becoming a team and that's what we're doing.

"I don't know where this is going by the end of the year, there's just so many good teams, not only in the Central but in the West, so many dynamic teams," said Hitchcock, who returned to the Stars this season after coaching Dallas from 1996-2002. "All we have to do to give ourselves a chance is to keep playing well and act as a group and that's exactly what we're doing. We're acting and behaving as one and now guys are vocal about making sure that we stay on task here and that's another good step we're taking."

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Dallas defenseman John Klingberg continues to be one of the top point-producers from the blueline in the NHL this season.

With three assists in Saturday's game, he has points in nine of his last 10 games. His career-high point streak of eight games was snapped in a shootout loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday. That streak was the longest by a Dallas defenseman since Sergei Zubov had points in nine straight games during the 2005-06 season.

"Of course I pay some attention," Klingberg said of his production. "but if I keep playing my all-around game, the points will come. I think it's because I have more energy. I play more minutes, but I have more energy. I think I'm taking a lot more shots this year than I did before. That's something I've always been told from the coaches to shoot more. So I guess it helps."

Rasmus Ristolainen registered his 100th career assist Saturday, helping to set up Sam Reinhart's power-play goal. He now has nine points (three goals, six assists) in his last nine games.

Jack Eichel had the primary assist on Reinhart's goal, giving him 20 points (10 goals, 10 assists) in his last 14 games. Eichel also has 12 points (eight goals, four assists) in his last seven games in KeyBank Center and leads the Sabres with 20 points (11 goals, nine assists) in 21 home games this season.

Speaking of home games, the Sabres still sit at 999 regular-season home wins in franchise history. Sabres coach Phil Housley said his team's inability to compete "in front of our home fans" was "very disappointing and quite embarrassing." The Sabres will again shoot for regular-season home win 1,000 when they host New Jersey at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 30.

The Wraparound: Dallas 7, Sabres 1

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

January 20, 2018

The boos were hearty by the third period as the Buffalo Sabres dropped a 7-1 decision to the Dallas Stars in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres were never in this game, finding themselves in a 2-0 hole after the first period and 6-1 by the third period. Buffalo is now 2-6-2 in its last 10 games.

It was the fifth time this season the Sabres have allowed six or more goals and the second time in four games they've given up seven.

For the third time in the last seven games, starting goaltender Robin Lehner was pulled with backup Chad Johnson finishing the game.

In short, the ugly continues to be a theme for the Sabres in 2018.

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Early lead: Dallas opened the scoring at 5:03 of the first period. Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe made a great sliding save with Lehner out of position, but the Sabres seemed to stop playing. The puck came to Remi Elie who easily scored his fifth goal of the season.

Another slow start: Not only were the Sabres down 1-0 early, Dallas had a 10-1 advantage in shots through the first 10 minutes of the game.

Growing the lead: With Benoit Pouliot in the penalty box for slashing, Dallas took a 2-0 lead with a power play tally by Mattias Janmark. It was Janmark's 11th goal of the season.

Fooling the fans: On an early power play in the second period, Marco Scandella ripped a shot from the point. It hit the side of the net and a healthy number of fans cheered, thinking the puck had gone into the net. It even fooled whomever was operating the goal horn. But alas for Sabres fans, it was only the side of the net and not a goal. Play continued.

Three-goal hole: Buffalo found itself in a 3-0 deficit when Janmark scored his second goal of the game at 6:25 of the second. The Sabres had some sloppy play in the neutral zone, then Lehner gave up a weak goal to Janmark with the shot going under his arm on his glove side.

On the board: The Sabres got a power-play goal with 11:06 left in the second. Jack Eichel's shot went off the post. Sam Reinhart was in front of the net and got to the puck, putting it in on his backhand.

Giving it back: Just 38 seconds later, the Stars responded with a goal from Jamie Benn to regain their three-goal lead and chase Lehner. Johnson came at this point to play the rest of the game.

What's another one? Johnson gave up his first goal at 12:08 of the second as Dallas took a 5-1 lead. Esa Lindell scored on a wrist shot from the right circle, his fifth tally of the season.

And one more: Radek Faksa scored at 17:31 of the second as Dallas took a 6-1 lead into the intermission.

Seven for good measure: Tyler Pitlick scored his eighth of the season at 7:24 of the third to give Dallas a 7-1 lead. They also allowed seven goals to the Winnipeg Jets, who earned a 7-4 win in KeyBank Center on Jan. 9.

Sellout: The Sabres announced a sellout of 19,070 in KeyBank Center Saturday afternoon. Most seats were taken (at least early in the game, before fans started leaving) thanks to a cross-promotion for kids with the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

Scratches: While the Sabres recalled Nicholas Baptiste on Friday, he was a healthy scratch in Saturday's game. Also scratched for Buffalo were defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Victor Antipin. Dallas scratched defenseman Julius Honka and Gemel Smith.

Up next: The Sabres have a three-game western road trip. They kick it off with back-to-back games in Calgary on Monday and Tuesday in Edmonton, finishing with a game in Vancouver on Thursday. The Sabres next play in KeyBank Center Jan. 30 when they host New Jersey.

Inside the NHL: Botterill right to shoot for the moon on Evander Kane

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

January 20, 2018

Jason Botterill certainly wants to get at least a prize in the sky for Evander Kane. So how can you blame the Sabres' general manager for shooting for the stars and the moon?

What TSN is reporting as the Sabres' latest demands, a four-piece return for Kane that includes a first-round draft pick, seems unlikely to actually take place by the Feb. 26 trade deadline. But all it takes is one general manager to enter Stupid Season a few weeks early.

The feeling here is that Botterill isn't getting a first-rounder. Especially since the last lockout, teams protect those like valued currency. The only GM throwing them around was Tim Murray and you see where it's gotten the Sabres.

But what about social media's favorite gotcha point? The Sabres, after all, got a first-round pick from Nashville for Paul Gaustad. That was six years ago. And Kane is obviously a better player. Of more recent vintage, Arizona got a first-rounder last year and a second-rounder this year from Minnesota for Martin Hanzal, who had only four goals in 20 games.

Here's what teams have to ponder with Kane: Can he help them win when he's never played in a single playoff game? How much does he add to the offense? Does he add anything to their power play, when he's only scored five power-play goals the last two years for the Sabres? Will he keep his nose clean in the dressing room and out on the town?

Kane's latest "issue" was the practice dustup he had last week with defenseman Justin Falk. Soon after the exchange of words got tweeted out, the phones of Buffalo reporters began lighting up from Canadian radio and television stations looking for conversation and, more important, footage of the incident.

It all happened so fast that none existed but it left many reporters to quickly use the situation as another example of Kane being a cancer on his current team. It was yet another rush-to-judgment from north of the border. I was in KeyBank Center that day, the folks up there were not.

Kane was standing in the neutral zone and yelled a profanity at Falk, who was still in front of the net working a drill, because Falk had struck both Kane and then Jordan Nolan in the head with his stick. When the drill ended, Falk sprinted at Kane screaming similar invectives and bumped him slightly as associate coach Davis Payne got between them.

The issue, of course, was that Falk called Kane a "selfish so-and-so" a couple of times. That one word could be a red light for hesitant teams. Botterill had to cringe when that dirty laundry got aired.

Botterill is playing a high stakes game and waiting until Feb. 26 might play to his benefit. Botterill promised to prop up the Rochester Amerks and has delivered. He's known to favor drafting college players and the choice of Casey Mittelstadt at No. 1 last June looks terrific. We have no idea, however, how he will do in the No. 1 chair at an NHL trade deadline, so how he navigates it will be fascinating to watch.

Botterill wants assets but he better get some nearly-ready NHL prospects in the deal too. The fan base is very impatient after this disaster of a season and trading your second-leading goal scorer for futures is not going to excite anyone.

More Sabres points

* I'm still baffled by the embellishment penalty Sam Reinhart got nailed for Thursday in New York. Referee Kyle Rehman flat-out choked on the call. What player throws themselves head-first into the boards trying to draw a penalty? It was a dangerous hit by Rangers defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk, close to the standard for supplemental discipline. Crazy call.

* More on that call: Phil Housley needed to go berserk on the bench over that one. That was a garbage call only a last-place team gets and a good public blowup might have gone a long way in his dressing room. Too soft a response from the first-year coach. Can you imagine what Lindy Ruff would have done after a call like that?

* Social media was all over Robin Lehner after Thursday's game. This is the lowest-scoring team in the league with the worst power play and maybe the worst defense corps but the goaltender is the trouble? Please. The guy has never had a chance with this fan base. It's not his fault Murray traded a first-round pick to get him.

Leafs losing touch in Atlantic

Things are getting dicey in Toronto, where the Leafs have won just two of their last 10 games and haven't won at all in regulation since Dec. 28. With just 14 goals in a seven-game stretch, fans and media are focusing on coach Mike Babcock's unwillingness to shuffle his lines.

"We can move guys around if we feel it's going to help us get better," Babcock said. "I just think when I look at our last couple of games, I think that we're in a good situation. I don't feel like you (media) guys do, not one bit, but when I do, we'll change some things.

"I think, the better teams play defensively, the more you shoot to break them down. It creates more randomness rather than thinking pretty plays are going to be there."

The Leafs are losing touch with second place in the Atlantic Division, with Boston on a 15-game point streak (11-0-4). The Bruins hit the weekend with a five-point lead over Toronto and three games in hand.

Gospel of Hitch

Notebooks and tape recorders love Stars coach Ken Hitchcock and he was at it again Thursday after Alexander Radulov's goal was wiped out on goalie interference in what turned into a 2-1 shootout loss for Dallas in Columbus.

"I don't understand where we're going because we practice every day, like every other team does in the NHL, going to the net," Hitchcock said. "Our player went to the net and was responsible for putting a play on the net, and we scored on the rebound. When we're in a situation where you're not counting those as goals now, what are we doing? What are we doing to our game that that can't be a goal?"

Hitchcock was stunned referees told him it was an "easy call" and didn't understand how the play was disallowed.

"That's what every coach wants his players to do and now, you're going to tell your player, 'Well, you can't do that,' " He said. "Or you have to when you go to the net, you've got to be careful and you've got to make sure that you tiptoe around the outside. You can kind of stick your toe in the water, but you've got to go back to the beach." "I don't get it right now."

Disclaimer: The video of this play seemed like a relatively obvious interference call. But no one truly knows where these reviews are going, be they for interference or offside. And taking away offense is never a good thing. On that point, Hitchcock has it right.

Know who to ask

Claude Julien got a standing ovation upon his return to Boston on Wednesday with the Canadiens and then said his team "laid an egg" after its 4-1 loss to the white-hot Bruins. The Habs fell to 2-6-2 in their last 10 games and 7-13-1 on the road for the season. They're 12 points out of a playoff spot in the Atlantic and nine points out in the wild card. In other words, they're toast for the postseason and assured of a 25th straight spring with no Stanley Cup.

A disgusted Julien, when asked if some players have quit: "I think those are questions you have to ask the players. I can't answer for them. It's important for you guys to ask the right people. That's part of your job. My job is to tell you that we weren't good enough and we have to be better."

RIP to the great Mr. Fisher

Red Fisher, the greatest hockey writer of them all, died Friday in Montreal at age 91. He started covering the Canadiens in 1955 -- on the night of the famous Rocket Richard Stanley Cup riot -- and didn't put away the notebook (and by then the laptop) until 2012. Fisher holds card No. 1 among members of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association, and the PHWA's Beat Writer of the Year established last season was named the Red Fisher Award in his honor.

"When things would go wrong for the team or for me, I would search for answers," Hall of Fame goalie Ken Dryden wrote in an email to the Montreal Gazette, where Fisher worked for his final 33 seasons. "If I couldn't find them, I would say to myself, 'I wonder what Red thinks' and wait for the next day's paper. I never did that with anyone else."

A few years ago, Fisher wrote about a Sabres item I had in this newspaper and introduced himself to me as I was walking through the Bell Centre press box. Obviously, he didn't need to do that. I knew who he was. The fact he used my name in his column just about had me falling over in shock. The pleasure was all mine, fine sir. Rest in peace.

Around the boards

* We're past the halfway mark of the season and people still ask if I think Vegas is making the playoffs. The Golden Knights are leading the Western Conference. By now, this isn't a cute little story. This is the real thing. Admittedly, they are in a brutal stretch with 10 of 12 games on the road and six in a row from Jan. 30-Feb. 8. But that's followed by seven in a row and nine of 10 in T-Mobile Arena. They just blasted the Lightning in Tampa on Thursday night and pulled within one point of the Bolts for the Presidents' Trophy lead with Friday's overtime loss in Florida.

Maybe the Golden Knights don't win the West. Maybe they don't even win the Pacific Division. But they're going to be the first expansion team in the playoffs since the league doubled from the Original Six in 1967. Just too deep and too dominant at home (18-2-2) for them to miss. The question is not whether they make the playoffs, it's whether they actually become a buyer at the deadline.

* The NHL endured a huge backlash with the news that Kid Rock would perform at next weekend's All-Star Game in Tampa. Kid Rock is a noted supporter of Donald Trump, has denounced Colin Kaepernick and is well-known for formerly sporting Confederate flags on stage.

NBC Sports Network analyst Jeremy Roenick inflamed the situation during an interview with the Sporting News.

"Why does anything have to do with politics or where he stands with politics when it comes to entertaining and singing to people at a sporting event? It drives me crazy," Roenick said. "All these people have their panties so hung up they can't think even straight. They don't understand the performance. Entertainment has nothing to do with whether he likes Trump or he doesn't like Hillary Clinton. Let him perform, sing his songs that have nothing to do with politics."

* Legendary Bruins anthem singer Rene Rancourt, 78, announced his retirement Wednesday at the end of the season after a fist-pumping career that dates to 1976. Rancourt was one of the legends of the old Boston Garden who followed the team a few feet up Causeway Street when its new home opened in 1995. He's an acquired taste, especially if you're at a game around the holidays and he's crooning Christmas carols during intermission. But he's been part of the scene in Boston for decades and this corner will miss him.

Story topics: Boston Bruins/ Buffalo Sabres/ Dallas Stars/ Evander Kane/ Jason Botterill/ Ken Hitchcock/ Mike Babcock/ Mike Harrington/ Montreal Canadiens/ Red Fisher/ Toronto Maple Leafs/ Vegas Golden Knights

Housley keeps his promise of a tough practice

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

January 21, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - It's rare that coaches bag skate their players anymore because it's a total waste of valuable practice time. For 45 minutes on Sunday, Phil Housley skated his team hard, but it was drills done with pucks. It was a definite punishment for the lack of effort shown Saturday against Dallas.

After practice, Housley learned of the death of his good friend Jim Johansson from USA Hockey. Understandably, Housley was too distraught to speak to the media.

Jacob Josefson and Nathan Beaulieu both returned to practice and Housley totally shuffled the deck.

Girgensons - Eichel - Okposo

Wilson - O'Reilly - Reinhart

Kane - Larsson - Pominville

Nolan - Rodrigues - Baptiste

Pouliot - Josefson

Scandella - Ristolainen

McCabe - Falk

Gorges - Nelson

Beaulieu - Antipin

Jack Eichel was not being difficult at all after practice, but his answers were very short because he just doesn't know what to say anymore. The frustration in the players that do care is boiling over with no end in sight. Eichel said, "Everything has to be better, 7-1 at home is probably not very good, so I'd say everything." Eichel added, "No excuses, I'm being a broken record, we've had this conversation a few times this year. You know what, I don't know what to say."

At the end of the interview Eichel did say, "We're 48 games in and we haven't found the consistency, so it starts with one game, right? It's all you can really focus on and I look forward to playing, so I'm excited about the game, it's an opportunity.

"Does it suck? Yes, we have 11 wins this year, it's pretty embarrassing, we all know what it is."

The Sabres left right after practice for Calgary. They play the Flames on Monday and Edmonton on Tuesday.

Stars rout Buffalo 7-1

WGR550

Pat Malacaro

January 20, 2018

The Dallas Stars scored first and never looked back in their 7-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Saturday afternoon.

Here's how the game played out:

First Period:

16:05 - It has been all Stars so far in this game. Dallas has pinned the blue and gold in their own zone for much of the first four minutes, opening up a 4-0 shot advantage. Robin Lehner has been busy in his crease, not only keeping the puck out but also dealing with Dallas players buzzing around the blue paint.

14:57 - STARS GOAL. Another fire drill in the Buffalo zone, but this time it results in the game's first goal. Robin Lehner was caught out of position and sliding in his crease while the team defense around him allows Remi Elie to get to the front of the net and knock home a bouncing puck. Bad start for Buffalo. 1-0 DAL.

10:21 - Dallas is playing with a real purpose, playing like a team locked into a playoff fight. They have ten shots on goal already, compared to Buffalo's one. For a team that has played a game out of their bye week, the Sabres really are showing little sign of life in this game early.

7:41 - This period could go from bad to worse for Buffalo as Benoit Pouliot sits for the next two minutes for slashing.

5:51 - STARS GOAL. Buffalo did a good job of keeping Dallas out of harm's way on the power play, but another rebound chance goes the visitor's way and it results in the second goal of the game. Mattias Janmark kept the puck low and it appeared to hit off of Jake McCabe's skate and was directed into the net. 2-0 DAL.

End of Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

DAL: 5:03 - Remi Elie (5) (Mattias Janmark, Jason Spezza). 14:09 - Mattias Janmark (11) PPG (Esa Lindell, Devin Shore)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: 12:19 - Benoit Pouliot (2 min., slashing)

DAL: 17:44 - Antoine Roussel (2 min., tripping)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 10, DAL - 13

Second Period:

16:22 - Buffalo nearly got back into this game thanks to a power play, but the bounce went Dallas' way to keep the game 2-0. Marco Scandella took the shot that nearly went in while Alex Radulov was in the box for tripping. Better start to this period than the first, but it needs to result in goals.

13:35 - STARS GOAL. Mattias Janmark nets his second goal of the game on one that Buffalo will want to have back. The young forward was able to unleash a wobbling wrist shot that found the far corner of the net from the left wing side of the ice, and it stuns the Sabre fans here at KeyBank Center. 3-0 DAL.

11:06 - SABRES GOAL. Buffalo finally capitalizes on having a player camped in front of the net and a rebound chance. Sam Reinhart gets the goal that puts the team on the score sheet. Still an uphill climb but it has to start somewhere. 3-1 DAL.

10:28 - STARS GOAL. Robin Lehner's day is done on the fourth Dallas goal. Buffalo can rarely get a goal of their own and use it as a spring board to another positive play. It seems like this year the opponent comes right back and scores, which happened here. Chad Johnson now takes over in net for the blue and gold. 4-1 DAL.

7:52 - STARS GOAL. This one has quickly gotten out of hand. Esa Lindell wires a wrist shot from the point, while Rasmus Ristolainen fails to clear out Jamie Benn from the top of the crease that creates a screen in front of the net. Chad Johnson had little chance when Ristolainen failed to move the man in front. 5-1 DAL.

6:58 - Jordan Nolan is asked to drop the gloves, and he obliges. Dillon Heatherington cross checked Nolan up high to initiate the fight, and then promptly eats several lefts from the Sabre. Heatherington has to go to the locker room for "repairs" as his nose was bleeding pretty good.

2:26 - STARS GOAL. If the game was not out of hand before, it now is for sure. A broken stick leads to Radek Faksa having a clean look in front of the net and upping the Dallas lead to five. 6-1 DAL.

End of Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: 8:54 - Sam Reinhart (8) PPG (Jack Eichel, Rasmus Ristolainen)

DAL: 6:25 - Mattias Janmark (12) (John Klingberg, Jason Spezza). 9:32 - Jamie Benn (19) (John Klingberg, Esa Lindell).

12:08 - Esa Lindell (5) (Alexander Radulov, Jamie Benn). 17:31 - Radek Faksa (12) (Stephen Johns, Antoine Roussel)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: 12:40 - Jordan Nolan (2 min., roughing). 12:40 - Jordan Nolan (5 min., fighting). 14:52 - Josh Gorges (2 min., interference)

DAL: 0:26 - Alexander Radulov (2 min., tripping). 6:57 - Devin Shore (2 min., tripping). 12:40 - Dillon Heatherington (2 min., cross checking). 12:40 - Dillon Heatherington (5 min., fighting)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 10 (20), DAL - 12 (25)

Third Period:

17:30 - The building is pretty quiet, despite being packed today for the kid's day matinee. There were very few empty seats when this game started, and with so many young fans here today it would have been a good opportunity for Buffalo to really get this place excited early. Unfortunately this game has gone the way many have before. Now it feels like there should be a running clock for the final twenty minutes.

12:36 - STARS GOAL. Another shot from the point hits a body in front of the net and the deficit is now six for the blue and gold. John Klingberg took the original shot that was re-directed. 7-1 DAL.

3:09 - I have a feeling the Sabres will be holding a team meeting after this loss. You can see their frustration boiling over on the ice, and it has been a while.

End of Game

Dallas 7, Buffalo 1

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

DAL: 7:24 - Tyler Pitlick (8) (John Klingberg, Radek Faksa)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: NONE

DAL: 4:19 - Dillon Heatherington (2 min., roughing)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 7 (27), DAL - 7 (32)

Goalies:

BUF: Robin Lehner - 15 saves; Chad Johnson - 10 saves

DAL: Kari Lehtonen - 26 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 of 2 (50%)

DAL: 1 of 4 (25%)

Three Stars:

Mattias Janmark - DAL

Esa Lindell - DAL

John Klingberg - DAL

What's Next:

The Sabres will return to practice on Sunday before heading out to Western Canada to face the Calgary Flames in the first of three games on this road trip. Faceoff on Monday is set for 9 p.m. with pre-game coverage on WGR with Brian Koziol and Paul Hamilton starting at 8 p.m.

From the Locker Room: Sabres-Stars

WGR550

Pat Malacaro

January 20, 2018

It was another tough loss for the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night as they give up four first period goals en route to a 5-1 loss to the Dallas Stars. Hear from the Sabres' locker room with Robin Lehner, Jack Eichel, and head coach Phil Housley following the loss in Dallas.

Robin Lehner

On the tough start for the team: "I think we came out well, I think there's a missed play behind the net there and they got a goal fast. I think we shouldn't have panicked, we didn't panic and then they got a tough bounce, [the puck] was going right on my stick and jumped up on me and they scored on the rebound, and we were behind two nothing. Then they scored a third off that play, [I] honestly think the guys played well today."

On the short night in net before being pulled: "It's a game of mistakes, I made a mistake there and together with a bounce and a good goal, you know, we were down three nothing and it's unfortunate."

Full Audio: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/11-4-jack-eichel-post-game>

Jack Eichel

On the frustrating start: "I thought we had a pretty good start, we were playing in their end, and getting some opportunities, outshooting them [in the] first period and then they just got a couple bounces and all of a sudden you find yourself down pretty big and it's tough to come back from that. It's a good hockey team, so, we needed a big effort tonight and obviously it wasn't there, so it's frustrating."

On the power play not scoring again: "I think we had some good chances on the power play, moved it well, I mean obviously I think on that first one it's a bit frustrating we weren't able to get it setup, but you know after that, you know, we had some chances, you know, probably want a few back, I think. I had a breakaway and I dumped the puck in the corner so, it's kind of tough."

Full Audio: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/11-4-jack-eichel-post-game>

Phil Housley

On the game overall from the team: "I thought we had the start we wanted, we came out, we were forcing the play, we were forcing the issue, just a couple bad bounces. If you look at it, our first period, some of the goals were tough ones to watch and look at because I thought our guys played really well and it's unfortunate but, you look after the first period it was a 1-1 hockey game so, you know, I thought we had the start we needed."

Full Audio: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/11-4-phil-housley-post-game>

Goalie Robin Lehner frustrated by Sabres' struggles

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

January 22, 2018

BUFFALO – After getting yanked for the third time in five starts, Sabres goalie Robin Lehner skated to the bench, sat down and ... left his mask on.

It looked, well, a bit odd.

Lehner kept wearing the protection until the second period ended Saturday afternoon. When he sat down again for the final 20 minutes of an ugly 7-1 loss to the Dallas Stars, he had finally removed it.

“I didn’t feel like taking it off,” Lehner said Sunday inside KeyBank Center. “I was (ticked) off, it (stinks), the situation (stinks). It’s embarrassing, I’m embarrassed.”

Right now, the reeling Sabres are a mess, tied for the NHL’s worst with 11 wins and 31 points, pathetic numbers they share with the Arizona Coyotes.

The Sabres have lost two straight games and seven of the last eight (1-6-1) entering tonight’s tilt against the Calgary Flames, the start of a three-game road trip.

Lehner, 26, has often been the Sabres’ backbone and lone bright spot, earning 10 of their victories. Still, he hasn’t won since Dec. 29.

In his last five games, he has allowed 19 goals and has an awful .833 save percentage.

Lehner can be blunt. Over the past three seasons, he has been unafraid to criticize the Sabres’ poor play, always making sure to include himself.

But Lehner has become a lightning rod for criticism, often getting blamed for many of the Sabres’ woes by the team’s frustrated fan base, which is still upset former general manager Tim Murray traded a first-round draft pick for him in 2015.

Forget that Lehner has regularly been hung out to dry by perhaps the NHL’s worst defense corps for two seasons. Never mind the Swede compiled a terrific .920 save percentage last season facing a barrage of shots.

For many fans, any gaffe or bad goal allowed by Lehner is seared in their memory.

Lehner said he “felt good” Saturday, a game he stopped 15 of 19 shots in 29:28.

“I came out well,” he said.

But Lehner knows the goal Matthias Janmark scored from left circle 6:25 into the second period was weak.

“It was a pretty bad game from all of us yesterday,” Lehner said. “It’s tough when you get these starts. The puck’s getting a little smaller. Obviously, the third goal yesterday, I want it back.

“We have a lot of things we need to figure out, and that’s me included. I’m not trying to pinpoint anything specific in my game. We need to figure some stuff out, all of us. I need to tighten up, I need to play better, too. But this is mentally tough.”

He added: “There was three other goals. I’m doing my best to scramble around and get it, but it’s just not ... going our way right now and we’re not doing enough.”

Despite the Sabres’ sorry state, Lehner has quietly morphed into one of the league’s best home goalies this season. Even after getting pulled in two straight starts, he has some strong numbers – 5-8-2, a 2.37 goals-against average and a .925 save percentage – in 17 games.

“One of the things I’ve been trying to do good this year is play good at home,” Lehner said. “I think ... except the last two games I’ve been one of the top goaltenders at home. I like playing at home, I like playing for these fans here at home. The last two games I haven’t and we haven’t.”

Saturday’s feeble effort, a game the Stars outworked the Sabres in every facet, incensed coach Phil Housley, who skated his team hard Sunday inside HarborCenter.

“We don’t deserve anything else,” Lehner said of the session. “It’s frustrating for a lot of people, because we have a structure in place, we have a game plan in place and we’re just not doing it. So we got to practice until we learn.”

xxx

Housley promoted Scott Wilson to left wing beside center Ryan O’Reilly and Sam Reinhart on Sunday.

Wilson, a December acquisition, won a Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins last season, so he has a unique perspective.

“I’m not the most vocal guy, but I try to get guys to understand it’s about the little things that you gain your confidence through,” Wilson said. “I think this group is lacking confidence and a good way to build it is, I think, just doing the little things on the ice – finishing your checks and making the smart little plays.

“Once everybody gets on the same page with that, things will start rolling.”

xxx

Sabres defenseman Nathan Beaulieu (flu) and center Jacob Josefson (lower body) practiced as extras Sunday.

Meanwhile, winger Nick Baptiste, a healthy scratch Saturday after getting recalled, practiced on a line, possibly pushing Benoit Pouliot out of the lineup.

Sabres coach Phil Housley emotional over Jim Johannson's passing

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

January 21, 2018

BUFFALO – In 2012, Team USA general manager Jim Johannson made an out-of-the-box choice, hiring a high school coach to lead the country's entry at the World Junior Championship.

His name? Phil Housley.

Housley, an NHL legend, had served as an assistant twice for Team USA at the tournament. Still, he had no pro, college or major junior coaching experience. He had only been a head coach for Stillwater High School in Minnesota.

Team USA won gold that year, putting Housley on the coaching map. Months later, the Nashville Predators hired him as an assistant.

Today, Housley is in his first season as the Sabres' coach. Johannson's belief in his close friend buoyed Housley's career.

Johannson died unexpectedly in his sleep this morning in his Colorado Springs home, according to USA Hockey. He was 53.

Johannson was also Team USA's Olympic GM for next month's Pyeongchang Games.

Housley was shaken by Johannson's passing and didn't speak to the media this morning after the Sabres practiced.

Both were born in 1964 in Minnesota and are names synonymous with USA Hockey.

Late this morning, Housley tweeted the following: "It comes with a heavy heart hearing about the passing of my close friend JJ. One of the best leaders of USA Hockey who grew our game to new heights. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and he will truly be missed, but his legacy will carry on. It's a sad day for hockey!"

The Sabres, who just hosted the World Junior Championship and have close ties to USA Hockey, released the following statement from owners Terry and Kim Pegula: "When we heard of JJ's passing, we are reminded of what an enjoyable person he was to be around, and also what he meant to USA Hockey and hockey worldwide. We should all strive to do our jobs and treat people as JJ did. Jim Johannson, you have moved on, but you will not be forgotten. We will miss you."

Phil Housley

✓

@philhousley6

It comes with a heavy heart hearing about the passing of my close friend JJ. One of the best leaders of @usahockey who grew our game to new heights! My thoughts and prayers are with his family and he will truly be missed, but his legacy will carry on. It's a sad day for hockey!

12:53 PM - Jan 21, 2018

8 8 Replies 107 107 Retweets 805 805 likes

Hapless Sabres embarrassed by Stars

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

January 20, 2018

BUFFALO – There is no rock bottom with the 2017-18 Sabres, a team quickly becoming the worst in the franchise's 47-year history.

Just when you think they've hit it again, they implode, give another effort more feeble and embarrassing than the last one.

Take, for example, Saturday's miserable 7-1 loss to the upstart Dallas Stars, who annihilated the Sabres all afternoon. After falling behind early, they showed little interest in competing, getting outworked in nearly every facet.

The capacity crowd of 19,070 inside KeyBank Center booed the Sabres off the ice when they ended the second period down 6-1. As the final seconds ticked down on the home team's 35th loss this ugly season (11-26-9), the smattering of fans who stuck it out booed again.

"There's nothing to say, there's no excuse, and to not be sharp, not be prepared, that's a hell of hockey team over there," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "To even be close to them, you got to be at your best – mentally, physically. When you're not, this is what happens."

The Sabres, of course, have said similar things following some of their other blowout losses. So why isn't rookie coach Phil Housley's message getting through?

"You can only send a message in so many ways," a seething Housley said. "It comes down to individuals on the team, they have to make a decision to play the right way, and when teams push, we have to respond with a better push."

Housley said the Sabres pushed and "got the period back" after falling behind 5:03 into the tilt.

"We come out and we're playing pretty good hockey, we take an undisciplined penalty," Housley said of winger Benoit Pouliot's slashing call.

At one point early, the Stars held a 10-1 shot advantage. Housley really thinks the Sabres played "pretty good" early?

"Would I have liked to have seen a little more fight and battle?" he asked. "Yeah, but I don't think we were playing bad until it got to the point of 3-0."

That point came 6:25 into the second period, when Stars winger Mattias Janmark scored his second goal of the day.

Sabres winger Sam Reinhart responded on the power play at 8:54, but Stars captain Jamie Benn scored 38 seconds later, giving Sabres goalie Robin Lehner an early exit. Lehner spent the rest of the period wearing his mask on the bench as backup Chad Johnson tended goal.

"We give up the third one, and then we deflated, you could sort of see it every puck battle, every competitive situation they won," Housley said. "They had a big push and we didn't respond the right way. That's why it became 7-1, and at that point, it's just missed coverages, it's just a lack of attention to detail ... and the battle that we needed. We didn't rise to the occasion.

"Give Dallas credit, they came to work and we didn't. We're not going to compete in our game, in front of our home fans, which is very disappointing and quite embarrassing, we're going to compete tomorrow in practice."

The Sabres competed in Thursday's solid 4-3 road loss to the New York Rangers, a game they erased three deficits. But they have a maddening penchant for regressing after any sort of success.

"It's a broken record, it's frustrating," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "We've got to find a way to work. It shouldn't be a hard thing to do, to come to work and work. That's it. That's what we needed to do and we just didn't do that."

So, in a season full of low points – remember, the Sabres got shut out three straight games in the fall – was Saturday the lowest point for Housley?

“It just really tells me a lot about the individuals on our team and what kind of direction we need to go moving forward and what buttons to push,” he responded. “We’re playing a lot of good hockey teams right now, they’re in playoff contention or fighting for a playoff spot. That’s what I want to see our team play, that’s what I want to see our team respond.”

Gorges said the Sabres must “look in the mirror.”

“How many years have we been talking about this, trying to turn the page and trying to figure out what it takes to win?” he said. “No one’s going to make us do it. We have to make that decision.”

Sabres' Sam Reinhart seeing net results

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

January 20, 2018

BUFFALO – Sam Reinhart is no speedster. The Sabres winger is usually at his best around the crease, tipping pucks and creating offense.

So it's hardly surprising getting to the net has buoyed Reinhart's offensive burst. He scored a power-play goal in front of goalie Kari Lehtonen 8:54 into the second period of Saturday afternoon's ugly 7-1 loss to the Dallas Stars inside KeyBank Center.

The former second overall pick also consistently worked his way to the net in Thursday's 4-3 road loss to the New York Rangers, a game he registered two assists.

Perhaps a solid two outings can ignite Reinhart, who has endured a rough season.

"That's been my mentality all year," Reinhart, 22, said of getting to the net. "I actually think I've felt, over last two games especially, I've been better away from it as well. Maybe that's led to a couple more bounces for me.

"I think I've been there. It's just a matter finding the puck and vice versa, the puck's going to find me. So I'm going to keep going there."

Reinhart, who ended a five-game goal drought, has compiled eight goals and 16 points in 46 contests this season.

xxx

The Sabres missed their first opportunity to win the 1,000th home game in their 47-year history. They get their next chance Jan. 30 against the New Jersey Devils.

So how did the Sabres earn their first home victory Oct. 23, 1970 over the Detroit Red Wings at Memorial Auditorium?

Ron Anderson scored the short-handed winner with 6:20 left in the third period. Cliff Schmutz tied the game earlier in the period.

Now you know.

xxx

Sabres defenseman Casey Nelson, who struggled in his season debut Thursday, taking two penalties, played again Saturday.

"I like the way he played," Sabres coach Phil Housley said of Nelson's effort in New York. "He tried to get up in the rush a couple times. He's just got to build off that, it was a tough start for him taking that penalty, I think he got backed off on his heels a little bit, first game in big stage like that (Madison Square Garden)."

Nelson played 17 minutes, 19 seconds on Saturday.

Defenseman Victor Antipin, who recently battled the flu, was scratched for the 12th straight game.

xxx

Old Sabres foe Jason Spezza, one of the Senators' stars during the heyday of the fierce Buffalo-Ottawa post-lockout rivalry, has started graying a bit with the Stars.

Following a 50-point season a year ago, Spezza, 34, has 20 points this season, his fourth in Dallas.

But Spezza has responded since getting scratched Monday. The center scored twice Tuesday and added two assists Saturday.

Spezza has compiled at least 50 points in his 12 full NHL seasons. He has 882 points in 958 NHL games.

xxx

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen recorded his 100th NHL assist on Reinhart's goal. Center Jack Eichel had the primary assist, giving him 20 points – 10 goals and 10 assists – in the last 14 games.

xxx

In an effort to spark the Sabres, winger Jordan Nolan fought Stars rookie Dillon Heatherington in the second period.

5 Observations: Stars stomp Sabres 7-1

WKBW

Matt Bove

January 20, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - In their first meeting this season, the Dallas Stars jumped out to a 4-0 lead over the Buffalo Sabres just 13 minutes into the game. Believe it or not, Saturday's matinee was even uglier. Dallas scored four goals in the second period on their way to a 7-1 win. With the loss, the Sabres remain firmly in the basement of the Eastern Conference with 31 points in 46 games [11-26-9].

Five observations from Saturday's ugly loss:

Downward spiral

Just when we didn't think this season could get any worse the Sabres told us to hold their beer. Pick any synonym for terrible and that applies perfectly to the Sabres efforts on Saturday.

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt_Bove

2:21 PM - Jan 20, 2018

2 2 Replies 2 2 Retweets 43 43 likes

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After falling behind 3-0 the Sabres gave fans a glimmer of hope as Sam Reinhart scored on the power play to make it a two-goal game. But wouldn't you know it, the Stars responded less than a minute later, regaining their three-goal lead.

If Buffalo has been good at anything this year it has been allowing their opponent to score almost immediately after they themselves find the back of the net. For my money, this was one of the Sabres most uninspired games this season, which is saying a lot.

The reaction

Like so many of you, I was curious to see how Sabres head coach Phil Housley would respond after the loss. He didn't hold back.

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt_Bove

Housley didn't hold back after the game.

Question: Is this the low point?

Housley: Well, it just really tells me a lot about the individuals on the team....

4:09 PM - Jan 20, 2018

39 39 Replies 76 76 Retweets 176 176 likes

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"Well, it just really tells me a lot about the individuals on the team," Housley said when asked if this was the low point. You can hear the entire post-game interview in the video attached.

Problems in the blue paint

After Dallas scored their fourth goal of the afternoon Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner was given the rest of the day off. As he skated to the bench fans cheered as backup Chad Johnson came in for relief. Johnson didn't do much better, allowing three goals himself. Touchdown Stars, the extra-point is good!

Both Lehner and Johnson struggled on Saturday, that was obvious, but they also didn't get any help from the players in front of them. Take any goalie in the league and put them in net for the Sabres on Saturday and I guarantee the Stars would've still won. Sure, it probably would've been a closer game but it wouldn't have changed the outcome. The Sabres have a lot of problems and on Saturday that was evident -- goaltenders included.

Do Something Botterill

For the past several seasons there has been a season-ticket holder that sits in section 317 that yells "Do something Murray/Botterill" when things get ugly. Somehow, someway, he still has his voice because he's yelled a lot.

His wish may soon come true. With how bad things have gotten I wouldn't be surprised if Botterill starts to make some deals. Circle February 26 on your calendar, that's the date of this year's trade deadline. There's a very good chance this will be a busy few weeks.

Another slow start

At KeyBank Center, the shots registered by both teams are usually displayed on the scoreboard at center ice and behind both nets. For whatever reason, those scoreboards weren't working during the first ten minutes of the game. That's probably not a bad thing, considering the Stars were outshooting the Sabres 10-1 when the scoreboards finally turned on.

Buffalo eventually cut into their shot deficit, finishing the period with only three fewer shots than the Stars. Unfortunately for the Sabres, they trailed 2-0 in the only category that really matters after 20 minutes.

Stars score seven, defeat Sabres

NHL.com

Joe Yerdon

January 20, 2018

BUFFALO -- Mattias Janmark had two goals and an assist to help the Dallas Stars to a 7-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

Esa Lindell (one goal two assists) and John Klingberg (three assists) each had three points for the Stars (27-17-4) and Kari Lehtonen made 26 saves.

Janmark, who set up Remi Elie at 5:03 of the first period for his fifth goal to make it 1-0, scored a power-play goal at 14:09 on a rebound of a Lindell shot and a 2-0 lead.

[WATCH: All Stars vs. Sabres highlights]

"I think lately before the bye week I had a really good stretch since after Christmas," Janmark said. "But I don't see myself as a player that's only evaluated by points; I try to play my game. ... I feel good, I like the line I play with, and coach is putting me out there, so hopefully I can keep contributing."

Janmark's power-play goal
00:51 • January 20th, 2018

Janmark made it 3-0 at 6:25 of the second period when his shot from the right face-off circle beat Sabres goalie Robin Lehner over his glove for his 12th goal.

"We've started to get the second wave opportunities that (Tyler Seguin's) line sets up," Stars coach Ken Hitchcock said. "They get a strong, hard match every game, especially on the road, so sometimes they're just going to break even and then other people have got to come through and that's what's happening now is that other people are getting an advantage on a match-up and they're coming through for us."

Dallas finished its four-game road trip 3-0-1.

Sam Reinhart scored for the Sabres (11-26-9), who have lost two straight games and seven of their past eight (1-6-1).

"It's a broken record," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said. "It's frustrating. We've got to find a way to work. It shouldn't be a hard thing to do, to come to work and work. That's it. That's what we needed to do and we just didn't do that tonight."

After Reinhart made it 3-1 with a power-play goal at 8:54 of the second period, Jamie Benn made it 4-1 38 seconds later with his 19th goal. Lehner, who made 15 saves, was replaced by Chad Johnson (10 saves) after the goal.

Benn's nifty deflection
00:57 • January 20th, 2018

"It's always nice when they score and you can go out on the next shift and get one back," Benn said. "It's important to turn that momentum around."

Benn assisted on Lindell's fifth goal of the season at 12:08 of the second to make it 5-1. He extended his point streak to seven games (three goals, six assists).

"It's a battle every game and every day in this league now," Benn said. "It seems like we've been playing pretty good hockey as of late and I think we are still only seventh in the conference. Point streaks don't really matter; it's what the team can do."

Radek Faksa made it 6-1 at 17:31 of the second with his 12th goal when he tipped a shot by Stephen Johns past Johnson.

Tyler Pitlick made it 7-1 at 7:24 of the third period.

"There's nothing to say, there's no excuse, and to not be sharp, not be prepared, that's a [heck] of hockey team over there," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "To even be close to them, you got to be at your best - mentally, physically. When you're not, this is what happens."

They said it

"It's not only impressive what he's doing point-wise on the score sheet, but the kid can play defense too. He's a leader on this team and he's taken big steps this year." -- Stars captain Jamie Benn on defenseman John Klingberg who has points in nine of his past 10 games (two goals, 13 assists)

"We give up third one, and then we deflated, you could sort of see it every puck battle, every competitive situation they won. They had a big push and we didn't respond the right way. That's why it became 7-1, and at that point, it's just missed coverages, it's just a lack of attention to detail what we talked about before in our game plan and they outcompete and the battle that we needed, we didn't rise to the occasion. Give Dallas credit, they came to work and we didn't." -- Sabres coach Phil Housley

Need to know

Radulov extended his point streak to seven games (four goals, eight assists). ... Eichel extended his point streak to five games (three goals, six assists). Ristolainen got his 100th career assist. ... Stars center Martin Hanzal left the game in the second period with a lower-body injury and did not return. Hitchcock said he is day to day with a muscle pull.

What's next

Stars: Host the Florida Panthers on Tuesday (8:30 p.m. ET; FS-SW, FS-F, NHL.TV)

Sabres: At the Calgary Flames on Monday (9 p.m. ET; SNW, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Sabres hold high-intensity practice before leaving for Western Canada

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

January 21, 2018

Phil Housley said following a 7-1 loss on Saturday that if the Buffalo Sabres weren't going to work hard in front of their home crowd, then they'd have to make up for it in practice. They did so on Sunday in an intense, fast-paced session at HarborCenter.

For the majority of the 45-minute practice, the Sabres skated with the puck. For the last few minutes, they skated without it.

"We don't deserve anything else," goaltender Robin Lehner said. "It's frustrating for a lot of people, because we have a structure in place, we have a game plan in place and we're just not doing it. So, we've got to practice until we learn."

Sabres Now (1/21/18)

01:52 • January 21st, 2018

The loss to Dallas marked the second time that the Sabres allowed seven goals at home in the span of less than two weeks. Afterward, Housley and some of the team's veteran players were critical of the collective work ethic against the Stars.

Scott Wilson won a pair of Stanley Cups in Pittsburgh, and thus knows what it takes to win in the NHL. He was promoted to a line with Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart at practice on Sunday, and suggested Buffalo's issues may be more a matter of working smarter than harder.

"Any time there's arguments about compete level, obviously it's not good," Wilson said. "At the same time, I can pretty much talk for everybody that we're trying out there. It's not like we're not trying and battling."

"Obviously, coaches think we have an extra edge to our game that we need to get to and I think all the guys agree. But at the same time, we're trying to compete out there every night and get some wins for the fans and try and turn this thing around."

At the heart of Buffalo's woes this season has been their tendency to start slow and go down early. In Pittsburgh, Wilson learned that confidence is gained early in games by paying attention to small details, whether it's finishing checks or making smart plays up the ice.

"First 10 minutes of a game they were chipping pucks out, making smart plays," he said. "Not only do you get your confidence for the game that night, it carries over to the next night. That was something I think we need to focus on, is our first 10 minutes. Not turning pucks over, being physical and just learning the process at the beginning of a game."

Lehner was pulled from the game on Saturday after allowing four goals on 19 shots in 29:28. He took responsibility for his performance on Sunday, but said it will take team accountability to turn things around.

"It was a pretty bad game from all of us yesterday," Lehner said. "It's tough when you get these starts. The puck's getting a little smaller. Obviously, the third goal yesterday, I want it back. We have a lot of things we need to figure out, and that's me included."

"... I don't turn it around," he continued. "Ryan O'Reilly is not turning it around. No one is turning it around by themselves. That's not how this works. In the NHL today, you cannot play on one line or one D pair or have a goalie carry you. It's too good of a league and especially this year with the scoring that's going on, there's a lot more space this year. We've got to do it as a team, all of us have to go out and do our job."

The Sabres will head into the All-Star break with a three-game road trip in Western Canada, which begins in Calgary on Monday night. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 8:30 p.m. with GMC Gamernight, or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for just after 9.

The Sabres mourn the passing of Jim Johansson

Housley did not speak to the media on Sunday after learning of the passing of Jim Johansson, assistant executive director for USA Hockey and general manager of the 2018 U.S. Olympic men's hockey team. Johansson passed in his sleep early Sunday morning at age 53.

Phil Housley

✓

@philhousley6

It comes with a heavy heart hearing about the passing of my close friend JJ. One of the best leaders of @usahockey who grew our game to new heights! My thoughts and prayers are with his family and he will truly be missed, but his legacy will carry on. It's a sad day for hockey!

12:53 PM - Jan 21, 2018

8 8 Replies 107 107 Retweets 806 806 likes

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Johansson - like Housley a Minnesota native - joined USA Hockey in 2000. Housley represented Team USA 10 times since then, four times as a player and five as a coach.

Sabres owners Terry and Kim Pegula released the following statement on Johansson's passing:

[View image on Twitter](#)

[View image on Twitter](#)

Buffalo Sabres

✓

@BuffaloSabres

Statement on the passing of @usahockey's Jim Johansson.

12:32 PM - Jan 21, 2018

Replies 41 41 Retweets 176 176 likes

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

Sunday's practice

Jacob Josefson and Nathan Beaulieu both rejoined the team for practice. Josefson has missed the last three games with a lower-body injury, while Beaulieu has missed two games due to an illness.

Here's how the two players factored into the lineup:

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 15 Jack Eichel - 21 Kyle Okposo

20 Scott Wilson - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 23 Sam Reinhart

9 Evander Kane - 22 Johan Larsson - 29 Jason Pominville / 67 Benoit Pouliot

17 Jordan Nolan - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 13 Nicholas Baptiste / 10 Jacob Josefson

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

19 Jake McCabe - 41 Justin Falk

4 Josh Gorges - 8 Casey Nelson

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 93 Victor Antipin

40 Robin Lehner

31 Chad Johnson

Sabres unhappy with lack of work in loss to Stars

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

January 20, 2018

From another slow start to a string of four unanswered goals to end the game, the Buffalo Sabres were left searching for answers following a 7-1 loss to the Dallas Stars at KeyBank Center on Saturday afternoon.

According to some of their veteran leaders, they need look no further than to the performance of their opponent. Quite simply, they said, the Sabres were outworked by the Stars.

"If anything, I think we should take example of the way they compete, the way they play, the way they don't give up much," Jason Pominville said. "A typical example of a [Ken] Hitchcock team, playing in arguably the toughest division in the league.

"The way they play is impeccable. They were tough. They held onto pucks and made us look bad and outcompeted us, and that's the bottom line. If you want to win you've got to compete, and they outworked us."

Facing a Dallas team that came into the afternoon with a 12-1-1 record when leading after one period, the Sabres knew their start would be imperative. When the two teams met in Dallas back in November, the Stars scored four times in the first period on their way to a 5-1 win.

It was a similar story on Saturday. The Sabres fell behind 10-0 in the shot column to begin the game and entered the first intermission trailing 2-0. Remi Elie opened the scoring for Dallas on a rebound off the rush and Mattias Janmark added a second goal on a power play with 5:51 left in the period.

Janmark scored again after 6:25 had passed in the second, and things began to snowball from there.

"We give up the third one, and then we sort of deflated and you could see it," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "Every puck battle, every competitive situation, they won. They had a big push and we didn't respond the right way. That's why it became 7-1."

Phil Housley Postgame (1/20/18)

03:25 • January 20th, 2018

One recurring issue for the Sabres as of late has been their tendency to allow opponents to score on shifts following goals of their own. That's what lost them their game in New York on Thursday, when Pavel Buchnevich scored the winning goal for the Rangers just 1:03 after the Sabres had tied the game.

The problem arose again after a power-play goal from Sam Reinhart, which cut the deficit to 3-1 with 11:06 still left to play in the second period. Dallas responded with a goal from Jamie Benn just 38 seconds later, chasing Robin Lehner after he allowed four goals on 19 shots.

Dallas added two more goals, from Esa Lindell and Radek Faksa, ahead of the second intermission. Tyler Pitlick capped the scoring with 12:36 remaining in the third.

"That's a good hockey team with some high-end players," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "What did they do all night? They just created turnovers, threw the puck in behind us and went to work. Heavy on the forecheck, heavy in the neutral zone, heavy in their end. They just battle and compete.

"That's what it takes to win in this league. If you're not ready to have that all-out effort, compete, battle, you're not going to win many hockey games."

It was only 11 days ago that the Sabres last allowed seven goals in front of their home fans, a 7-4 loss to the Winnipeg Jets. Since then, they'd responded with strong efforts in a win over Columbus and even in their loss to New York. That they've shown they're capable of such efforts only made the lack of work on Saturday more confounding.

"I mean, that's a million-dollar question," alternate captain Kyle Okposo said. "We've had stretches where we have but today we didn't. I don't know, it doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't make sense. I'm kind of at a loss for words right now."

"Maybe we get a little too ahead of ourselves, we start feeling a little too comfortable," Gorges added. "What do we have to feel comfortable about? In no way should we come to the rink any day - game day or practice day - and feel comfortable. Because we're not in that position."

The Sabres will have plenty more chances to make it up to the home crowd. They head on the road for a three-game swing in Western Canada this week, then play nine of 16 games at home in February.

Until then, if there's one certainty, it's that there will be no rest on Sunday.

"Give Dallas credit, they came to work and we didn't," Housley said. "If we're not going to compete in our game in front of our own fans, which is very disappointing and quite embarrassing, we're going to compete tomorrow in practice."

Eichel extends his streak

Jack Eichel earned the primary assist on Reinhart's power-play goal to extend his point streak to five games. Eichel ripped a shot from the left circle that rung the post, and Reinhart was in position to clean up the rebound off his back hand.

Reinhart's backhand PPG

01:03 • January 20th, 2018

Eichel now has 20 points (10+10) in his last 14 games.

100 for Risto

Rasmus Ristolainen received the secondary assist on Reinhart's goal, marking the 100th assist of his career. The defenseman now has nine points (3+6) in his last nine games.

Up next

The Sabres will head to Western Canada for a three-game road trip that begins in Calgary on Monday night. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 8:30 p.m. with GMC Gamenight, or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for just after 9.

Sabres to roll same lineup vs. Dallas

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

January 20, 2018

Robin Lehner will get the nod in net for the Buffalo Sabres when they host the Dallas Stars at KeyBank Center on Saturday afternoon. Phil Housley said the lineup will remain the same from Buffalo's 4-3 loss to New York on Thursday night, meaning Nicholas Baptiste and Victor Antipin will be scratched.

That also means another opportunity for defenseman Casey Nelson, who took two penalties in 12:46 in his season debut against the Rangers. Housley said the first penalty - which occurred early in the first period - might have put the young defenseman on his heels, but he liked his game overall.

"I think it's just more or less taking care of our own end first," Housley said. "All those things will take care of themselves ... Hopefully this game he'll get back to what got him up here, and it's just good puck movement, getting back to the puck first and defending well."

Buffalo's defense will have its hands full against Dallas' top line of Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov. Seguin has scored 12 points in his last 12 games while Benn and Radulov both enter the afternoon riding six-game point streaks.

Phil Housley Pregame (1/20/18)

02:28 • January 20th, 2018

The Sabres have met the Stars once already this season, a 5-1 loss in Dallas on Nov. 4. The Stars, who are 14-1-1 when leading after one period, scored four first-period goals in that game.

"They're very deadly," Housley said. "You look at their team, they're number three overall on the rush at getting pucks to the net. That tells me our puck management's going to be critical, especially when [the top line is] on the ice and getting pucks deeps. Forcing them to play defense is the best position we can put them in."

The Sabres are coming off a game in which they outshot the Rangers, scored twice on the power play and had one of their best performances of the season when it came to creating net-front traffic. They erased three one-goal deficits along the way, only to lose on a late goal from Pavel Buchnevich.

Kyle Okposo scored a goal and an assist in that game, while Jack Eichel recorded a pair of helpers. Both players enter Saturday having scored multiple points in three straight games.

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 12:30 p.m. with GMC Gamenight, or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 1 p.m.

Projected lineup

67 Benoit Pouliot - 15 Jack Eichel - 21 Kyle Okposo

9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 29 Jason Pominville

28 Zemus Girgensons - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 23 Sam Reinhart

20 Scott Wilson - 22 Johan Larsson - 17 Jordan Nolan

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

19 Jake McCabe - 41 Justin Falk

4 Josh Gorges - 8 Casey Nelson

40 Robin Lehner

31 Chad Johnson

Sharpen Up: January 20, 2018

Sabres.com

Chris Ryndak

January 20, 2018

This afternoon, it's the Sabres and Stars live from KeyBank Center. Faceoff is scheduled for 1 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550 with Dan and Rayzor on the call. Watching from home? Check out the GMC Game Night pregame show with Duffer and Marty starting at 12:30 on MSG.

And it's a special Kids Day Game at the arena so children in attendance should be on the lookout for a drawstring backpack giveaway today courtesy of BlueCross Blue Shield of Western New York when they enter the gates.

Here's what you need to know.

Yesterday's practice

Sabres Now (1/19/18)

01:41 • January 19th, 2018

The Sabres recalled forward Nicholas Baptiste from the Amerks yesterday morning.

From the Ice Level Practice Report...

Look at the numbers alone, and one might think Nicholas Baptiste has taken a step back in his second pro season. The 22-year-old forward has scored seven goals and 10 assists in 34 games for Rochester, not quite on pace to match his 59-game total of 41 points (25+16) he set as a rookie last season.

In the big picture though, Baptiste believes he's taken a step forward. He's maintained his status as a top-line presence in Rochester, but has developed in other areas - chiefly on the penalty kill and in the defensive zone - to show he can be trusted at the NHL level.

It appears that the organization agrees. With the team in need of an extra body up front, Baptiste was recalled on Friday morning.

"I don't think it's changing my role," he said. "I think it's finding a way to play at this level, and if you're not scoring, being able to provide physical play, speed and helping in my D-zone. So, I think I [didn't] change my game, but developed my game."

Phil Housley (1/19/18)

04:38 • January 19th, 2018

"I just think he's doing the things that they're telling him to do," Housley said. "He's tenacious on the forecheck. He's really strong down low. He's getting to the net more. He's creating things offensively. That's why he's up here."

Housley said there has not yet been a decision as to whether he'll play against Dallas on Saturday or on the team's upcoming road trip in Western Canada.

Today's matchup

From the Game Notes...

This is the second of two meetings between the Sabres and Stars this season.

Last meeting: Dallas defeated Buffalo 5-1 in Dallas on Nov. 4

The Sabres are 3-7-0 in their last 10 games vs. the Stars; 7-2-1 at home.

Jack Eichel enters today's game with three straight multi-point games for the first time in his career (3+4).

Kyle Okposo has also recorded at least two points in each of his last three games (2+5) and is seeking his first career four-game multi-point game streak. Okposo has recorded 13 points (3+10) in his last 13 games.

Ryan O'Reilly has recorded five points (2+3) in his last four games.

Rasmus Ristolainen has eight points (3+5) in his last eight games, dating back to Dec. 29, despite getting a game misconduct after just 5:43 of ice time in one of those games. Ristolainen's eight points during that span tied for third among NHL defensemen entering play Friday.

Speaking of Ristolainen, let's hear what he has to say about his OT winner against New Jersey in a new edition of Tablet Talk:

Tablet Talk: Risto's OT goal

02:59 • January 19th, 2018

More on Eichel

The Sabres' All-Star representative is currently on pace to shatter his personal bests in goals (24), assists (33) and points (57) on the strength of improved production at even strength (T-7th in NHL in ES goals, T-12th in ES points entering play Friday).

With his 17th even-strength goal in his 44th game of the season on Jan. 11 vs. Columbus, Eichel surpassed his career-best total from 2015-16 (81 games).

Eichel's 33 even-strength points through 45 games match his total from last season (61 games) and are just two shy of his career-best total from 2015-16 (81 games).