



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Rasmus Ristolainen's struggles push Housley's breaking point

Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

February 12, 2018

It was a game that started bad and kept getting worse and worse for Rasmus Ristolainen.

The absent-minded play of the Buffalo Sabres' No. 1 defenseman left coach Phil Housley no choice but to yank Ristolainen from the ice during 5-on-5 situations for virtually the entire second period of Sunday's 5-4 loss to Colorado.

Housley gave Ristolainen his spot back for the third period, with mixed results. And the coach minced no words when asked about the situation afterwards.

"I think you saw the game. I think there's some passengers tonight that weren't prepared to play the game," Housley said, without mentioning Ristolainen by name. "I don't think the game was going his way so I just decided to mix up the pairs."

Ristolainen was burned by a long stretch pass from former teammate Nikita Zadorov on the game's opening shift, allowing the Avalanche to score on a 2-on-0 break just 43 seconds into the game. His giveaway near the blue line allowed Matt Nieto to speed in for a short-handed goal later in the period and he was outmuscled along the wall for the Avs' third goal on the first shift of the second period.

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That was it for the middle frame for Ristolainen at even strength, as he played just 19 seconds while Housley used him only on special teams. In the end, it was one of the worst games of Ristolainen's career as he was on the ice for all five Colorado goals, finishing the game with a minus-3 rating.

Lack of awareness, fumbling with the puck, spotty passes. Ristolainen had all of those issues working against him. He played 23 minutes, 48 seconds overall, his lowest total since Dec. 14 (not counting the Jan. 4 game at Minnesota where he was ejected in the first period). He remains third in the NHL in time on ice, averaging 26:26 per game.

"I don't know. It's just a bad game," Ristolainen said. "Should not happen."

The issue: It's been happening a lot lately.

Ristolainen has been on the team's top defense pair with Marco Scandella much of the season but got dropped to the second tandem with Nathan Beaulieu after butchering a pass in overtime to Jack Eichel that allowed the Anaheim Ducks to gain possession and score the game-winning goal here last Tuesday.

In the seven games since the All-Star break, Ristolainen has an empty-net goal Saturday in Boston and two assists while compiling a minus-4 rating. But in his previous 12 games, the 23-year-old was playing some of the best hockey of his career, with 13 points (3-10-13) and a plus-3 rating. He was third among NHL defensemen in that stretch, behind only Dallas' John Klingberg (17) and San Jose's Brent Burns (16).

So what's happened?

"I think it could be preparation, maybe confidence," Housley said. "I just don't see him sharp in his game right now. I think that's going back to the All-Star break. He's got to refocus and get his game back."

"You've got to always keep your confidence," Ristolainen said. "I know what I can do. It's not about that. Right now, obviously I've got to play better. You play good, you play bad. I've got to learn."

The Sabres were off Monday and need Ristolainen to find his game quickly because they're facing a huge challenge Tuesday night with a visit from the league-leading Tampa Bay Lightning to KeyBank Center.

For much of the season, Housley has seemed loathe to offer much in the way of public critiques of his players. But the Hall of Fame defenseman's gloves are off with Ristolainen, who is clearly frustrating his first-year coach with his lax play.

Housley may be seeing what hockey's analytics community has argued long and hard about the last couple of years.

The prevailing debate has insisted Ristolainen is not a true No. 1 defenseman. Ristolainen's Corsi rating this season is hovering around 46 percent – and that's ranked just 188th in the NHL among blueliners who have played at least 20 games.

His detractors say many of his points and most of his good moments come on the power play. That's happening again this year, as Ristolainen's eight power-play points since Jan. 7 are tied with Washington's John Carlson and San Jose's Brent Burns for most among NHL blueliners.

His supporters say his numbers are suppressed because he's always playing against top competition, on a weak team and very often starting play in his defensive zone. And he's still only 23 even though he's already played 320 career games.

The Sabres continue to hope the numbers geeks are wrong, because he's in just the second season of a six-year, \$32.4 million contract.

"He'll be fine. He'll just wipe this one out," said Scandella. "Clean slate it the next game. He'll come out and be a great player for us. Everyone can have a bad game. Sometimes you just find the puck a little bit."

Ristolainen has four goals and 21 assists this season with a minus-13 rating. He's on pace for 39 points, just up from his average of 35 over his first three full NHL seasons but down from last year's 45-point output. The plus-minus is just one off Beaulieu's minus-14 for the worst among Buffalo's defensemen.

Ristolainen said he never got an explanation from Housley about the move to cut back his ice time – but he understood one wasn't really needed.

"I don't know. I just played bad. That's a coach's decision," he said "I've got to respect that. New game coming Tuesday. I've got to be better."

Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ phil housley/ Rasmus Ristolainen

Sabres Notebook: Fueled by special teams, offense keeps clicking

Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

February 12, 2018

Just as they lose red-hot Jack Eichel from the lineup, the Buffalo Sabres' offense is finding its stride more than at any point all season.

The Sabres put together their third straight four-goal game in Sunday's 5-4 loss to Colorado, a first this season. Until late Monday night, they had even climbed out of their seasonlong spot as the NHL's lowest-scoring team.

With 132 goals in 56 games, the Sabres are averaging 2.36 per game. Arizona has 134 in 56 games after its 6-1 rout of Chicago Monday, inching past the Sabres again at 2.39. Buffalo is scoring three goals per game over the last nine, posting a 4-4-1 record.

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The Sabres have netted four goals in three straight games for the first time since March 29-April 2, 2016, and special teams continue to fuel their attack.

They scored a pair of short-handed goals Sunday, moving into a tie with Florida for the NHL lead with nine – the most by a Buffalo team since 2007-08. And the power play continues to hum along at a furious clip.

The Sabres have tallied at least once with the man advantage in 11 of the last 14 games in which they've had an opportunity. They're 14 for 45 in that stretch, and entered Monday's games leading the NHL in both goals and conversion rate (31.1 percent) over that period. They've moved from 31st in the league to 23rd, with their season rate now at 17 percent.

Ryan O'Reilly leads the league with six power-play goals since Jan. 7 while Eichel and Kyle Okposo are tied for second with nine power-play points, one back of Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby.

In 5-on-5 play, however, the Sabres continue to struggle. They remain last in the league with just 77 goals in 56 games, a paltry average of 1.38 per game. By contrast, the New York Islanders lead the league with 130 while Toronto (129) and Tampa Bay (127) were ranked second and third, respectively, heading into Monday's showdown in Air Canada Centre.

The Lightning will be on a back-to-back and hit KeyBank Center to meet the Sabres on Tuesday night.

The Sabres have lost 12 of their last 13 games to Tampa Bay, going 1-11-1 in a stretch that dates to December 2014. They're 0-4-1 since the lone win, a 4-1 win in Amalie Arena on Nov. 10, 2015.

The Sabres are 0-5-1 in their last six home meetings with the Bolts, dating to a 2-1 shootout victory here on Dec. 2, 2014. The Lightning won this season's first meeting, 2-0, on Nov. 17.

Tampa Bay is first overall atop the NHL standings and has an NHL-best 199 goals on the season.

The Sabres have yet to play this season in Amalie, site of the NHL All-Star Game. They meet the Lightning there Feb. 28 and April 6.

The Rochester Amerks have lost 10 of their last 12 games, going 2-5-5, and an alarming part of the slide has been the play of goaltender Linus Ullmark.

Ullmark, presumed to be the Sabres' No. 1 goaltender next season, made 44 saves to win his lone NHL game of the season Jan. 11 against Columbus. Since returning to the AHL, however, he's having a huge struggle.

Ullmark was 17-5-3 at the time of his promotion to Buffalo but has gone 0-4-4 in his last eight starts for the Amerks after Sunday's overtime loss in Hershey. He's given up 25 goals in those games, compiling a 3.08 goals-against average and .898 save percentage.

The Amerks won their first four OT/shootout decisions this season. Since then, however, they've gone just 5-12 in extra time.

Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ Jack Eichel/ Linus Ullmark/ Rochester Amerks/ Ryan O'Reilly/ Tampa Bay Lightning

Sabres Prospects: Mittelstadt vs. Weissbach in Big Ten matchup

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

February 12, 2018

It was a showdown between two of the youngest Buffalo Sabres prospects in Madison, Wisc., last weekend and it was Casey Mittelstadt who came out on top.

Mittelstadt tallied one assist in the back-to-back games as Minnesota swept Linus Weissbach and the Wisconsin Badgers in a Big Ten conference showdown in Kohl Center.

Both players are freshman this season and were drafted by the Sabres in 2017 – Mittelstadt eighth overall and Weissbach in the seventh round, 192nd overall.

Minnesota defeated Wisconsin, 4-2, on Friday night with Mittelstadt recording six shots and winning 10 of his 16 faceoffs. Weissbach had five shots but was a minus-1 on the night.

The Golden Gophers won 7-1 on Saturday with Mittelstadt setting up the game's first goal. He didn't record a shot but went 6 for 12 on faceoffs.

Weissbach was again a minus-1 and took a penalty for high sticking in the third period.

Mittelstadt continues to impress after a solid showing with Team USA at the World Junior Championship in Buffalo in January. He is tied for 10th in the nation among freshmen in points with 23 on eight goals and 15 assists. He has two game-winning goals with one of the most exciting coming on Jan. 24 when he scored the overtime game-winner against top-ranked Notre Dame in a 1-0 win.

Weissbach has 22 points on the season, putting him tied for 14th on the NCAA freshman point list. The 19-year-old from Sweden ranks third on the Badgers in scoring with eight goals and 14 assists, including three power play goals and one game-winner.

Minnesota (18-13-1) is in fourth place in the Big Ten facing off against Ohio State at home (Feb. 16-17) then closing out the regular season at Penn State (Feb. 23-24).

Wisconsin (14-15-4) is in fifth in the Big Ten and has one series left – on the road at Ohio State (Feb. 23-24).

Rochester Americans: It's been trying times of late for the Amerks who have lost their last four games, two in overtime and two in regulation.

The good news is that the Amerks are finding ways to get points. They lead the American Hockey League with 21 games that have gone to overtime or a shootout with eight coming since Jan. 1. They've collected at least one point in 33 of their last 42 games, but that's not enough to keep up with the rest of the AHL. Rochester has slipped to third place in the North Division and sixth in the Eastern Conference.

Defenseman Brendan Guhle returned to the lineup on Sunday after missing seven games with a lower body injury. Guhle was a minus-1 with three shots in the Amerks 3-2 overtime loss to the Hershey Bears.

The Amerks return to action Friday kicking off a three-games-in-three-days set. They host the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins at 7 p.m. Friday in Blue Cross Arena then travel to Binghamton to play the Devils on Saturday. They return to Blue Cross Arena to host Binghamton at 3 p.m. Sunday.

WHL

Vojtech Budik (defense, Prince Albert Raiders): In 49 games played he has eight goals and 20 assists. Three of those goals have come on the power play.

Brandon Hagel (forward, Red Deer Rebels): Had three points (a goal and two assists) in Red Deer's 7-2 win over the Edmonton Oil Kings on Feb. 9. It was his seventh multipoint game of the season and his third with three points.

OHL

Cliff Pu (forward, Kingston Frontenacs): Has multipoint outings in four of his last seven games. Over his last 16 games he has 14 points (two goals and 12 assists).

Austin Osmanski (defense, Peterborough Petes): The East Aurora native has one goal and 13 assists in 51 games this year.

QMJHL

Vasily Glotov (forward, Shawinigan Cataractes): Through 50 games has 25 goals, surpassing last season's total of 15. Six of those goals have come on the power play, one shorthanded and four have been game-winners. He has 35 points to rank second on the team.

NCAA

William Borgen (defense, St. Cloud State): He is the only collegiate defenseman with Team USA at the 2018 Olympic Games. The U.S. opens preliminary round play at 7:15 a.m. on Wednesday vs. Slovenia. In 26 games with the Huskies this season, the junior has two goals and 10 assists.

Christopher Brown (forward, Boston College): Has scored mostly on special teams this season. Of his six goals, three have come on the power play and one shorthanded.

Jacob Bryson (defense, Providence): The sophomore is on a two-game goal streak. He notched two goals Feb. 3 in a 4-3 loss at Vermont then scored against Maine Feb. 9 in a 3-2 overtime win for the Friars. He has four goals and 18 assists on the season.

Ivan Chukarov (defense, UMass): Has five assists in 23 games.

Casey Fitzgerald (defense, Boston College): Registered his 11th assist of the season on the game-tying goal for Boston College against UMass-Lowell on Feb. 9. The Eagles went on to win, 3-2, in overtime. Has four goals and 15 points this season.

Connor Hurley (forward, Minnesota): After three seasons at Notre Dame, Hurley transferred to the University of Minnesota. He will sit out this season per NCAA transfer rules and have one year of college eligibility left for the 2018-19 season. In 98 career games for the Fighting Irish, Hurley had 48 points (14 goals, 34 assists).

Brett Murray (forward, Penn State): The sophomore has not played since Jan. 13. Has one goal and four assists.

Philip Nyberg (defense, UConn): Has two goals and one assist through 17 games.

Judd Peterson (forward, St. Cloud State): The senior had a goal and an assist in a 4-0 win Feb. 10 at Miami (Ohio). He has five goals and 11 assists.

Max Willman (forward, Brown): The senior played just nine games before an undisclosed injury ended his season. He had one goal and five points with 25 shots on goal.

Europe

Rasmus Asplund (forward, Farjestad BK): In 43 games in the SHL, he has seven goals and 20 assists.

Marcus Davidsson (forward, Djurgardens): Has six goals and eight assists in 32 games in the Swedish Hockey League. He has three goals and an assist in three games played with the Djurgardens Under-20 team in the SuperElit League.

Oskari Laaksonen (defense, Ilves): Has three goals and 11 assists in 37 games in the Under-20 league (Jr. A SM-Liiga). In 14 games with Ilves in Liiga, the Finnish Elite League, he has one assist.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (goalie, LeKi): In 24 games with LeKi in Finland he has a 2.92 goals against and a .909 save percentage.

Victor Olofsson (forward, Frolounda HC): Has 24 goals and 13 assists in 43 games in the Swedish Hockey League.

Jason Botterill has a plan which includes Rochester

WGR

Paul Hamilton

February 12, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Jason Botterill is approaching his first trade deadline as a general manager. In the next two weeks, many players including Evander Kane could be playing elsewhere.

It's hard to believe this with what we've seen from the Sabres this season, but the emergence of Casey Nelson has gotten me to thinking about what is in the system right now. Many writers with agendas say the cupboard is bare. I disagree.

Nelson was signed by Tim Murray after he finished his junior year at Minnesota State. He played seven games to finish up the season in Buffalo and had four assists. It was obvious Nelson needed to get stronger and he's taken to improving his game.

Botterill believes in development on the American League level. It worked for him in Pittsburgh and in just half of one off season, Botterill has the Amerks in position to go on a playoff run. He told Schopp and the Bulldog that what is going on now with the Sabres is unacceptable, but it doesn't have to take years to get it right.

He first hired an experienced GM in Randy Sexton. Sexton hired former Amerk player and assistant coach Chris Taylor to be the head coach.

Taylor has been demanding down there and has gotten some results. I've been saying since training camp, don't give up on Nelson. The defenseman played 95 games in Rochester and will likely not be back down there until the Sabres season ends.

In 12 games in Buffalo, Nelson has shown that he can not only handle playing in the NHL, but handle 20 minutes per night playing on the top pair with Marco Scandella. The 25-year-old has shown moving forward that he will be an important piece.

Next is 20-year-old Brendan Guhle. Guhle was taken by Murray in the second round of the 2015 draft. Botterill could've just started Guhle in Buffalo and he would've been one of their top three defensemen, but was that the best route for Guhle?

Guhle came up for two games and played very well. He said he had learned so much starting his pro career in Rochester. He needed to learn the pro game and he's doing that playing on a winning team.

Guhle is now back from an injury and in 39 games, he's scored seven goals with 14 assists for 21 points. Guhle like Nelson is a big part of the Sabres future starting next year.

Will Borgen is in the middle of his junior season at St. Cloud State and he's been so impressive, he made the United States Olympic team.

Borgen, who just turned 21 plays big minutes for the Huskies and scouts can't stop raving about him. The Sabres would be smart to get him signed after this season to avoid the unrestricted free agency clause in the CBA.

Borgen was taken by Murray in the fourth round of the 2015 draft. If he makes it like many scouts think he will, he'd be the first fourth round pick to contribute for this organization since Marcus Foligno. After that you'd have to go back to 2005 and Chris Butler.

After some horrendous drafts, like 2014, the Class of 2015 could produce Jack Eichel, Guhle and Borgen. That's all without a third round pick.

Another defenseman that could have a shot at making the NHL is 2016 third round pick Casey Fitzgerald. He's in his third season at Boston College.

In goal, Botterill did everything he could to make sure Vegas didn't take Linus Ullmark in the Expansion Draft. It cost the Sabres a draft pick, but Ullmark is now a two-time AHL All-Star and the 24-year-old looks ready to make the jump to the NHL.

Botterill could've brought Ullmark up this year and I thought he was going to, but his vision is development so he thought it would be better to sign Chad Johnson to a one-year deal and let Ullmark play on a winning team in Rochester. The 24-year-old was a sixth round pick by Darcy Regier in 2012.

At forward everything starts with Botterill's first round pick last June, Casey Mittelstadt. The slick centerman came to Buffalo for the World Junior Tournament and was the best player there earning tournament MVP honors. He had 11 points leading Team USA to the bronze medal. The 19-year-old was the eighth overall pick and is in his freshman season at Minnesota. Most feel he'll sign with the Sabres after one season, but Botterill may think it's better for his development to play a second year for the Gophers.

Botterill's second round pick, Marcus Davidsson played for Sweden in the World Junior Tournament while the other second round pick, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen played goal for Team Finland.

Murray took Cliff Pu in the third round of the 2016 draft. The 19-year-old has elite speed and impressed so much in training camp, that Botterill kept him around after most had gone back to junior. Pu has 22 goals and 46 assists for 68 points in 53 games with London and Kingston of the OHL.

C.J. Smith was signed by Murray out of college last March. He played three seasons at UMass-Lowell and the 23-year-old is an AHL All-Star in his first pro season. Botterill has resisted the urge to bring him up after 14 goals and 25 assists for 39 points in 50 games with the Amerks. Again, he may get a look depending on who gets traded, but he's learning the pro game the right way

Chris Taylor has helped Nick Baptiste remake himself into a two-way player. He's been called up again and the 22-year-old is learning to use his elite speed at both ends of the ice. I always felt Baptiste could be a top-six forward, but it looks like he may be a guy who can contribute as a bottom-six player.

Hudson Fasching was acquired by Murray in a trade with Los Angeles. The 22-year-old is a guy that has to use his size to be effective and could maybe be a third or fourth liner in the league.

Justin Bailey has only played 25 games between Buffalo and Rochester because of injuries. It'll be interesting to see if Botterill feels this local 22-year-old can play for the Sabres or if he'll be cut loose or traded.

Murray drafted Alex Nylander in the first round of the 2016 draft. The 19-year-old is not even close to being ready to play in Buffalo and quite honestly, doesn't seem to be even ready to play in the AHL. He has two goals in 28 games this season and seems lost. This kid is still young and could develop into something, but Botterill has to have questions here.

We all know that Botterill has a lot of work to do. Trades need to be made, but he has totally committed to young development. The Sabres are going to get another high pick in this June's draft. Many like the say that the cupboard is bare. Murray made many mistakes, but it wasn't all bad. Botterill has some players to work with and he's doing just that. Paying little to no attention to the AHL team has buried this organization into oblivion. You have to breed winning and development in Rochester which is why the Sabres may get better faster than some people think they will.

Sabres' Scott Wilson moving around

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

February 13, 2018

BUFFALO – Early last season, Sabres winger Scott Wilson earned a coveted assignment beside Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby.

But the gig didn't last long for Wilson, a speedy bottom-six forward known more for his checking abilities.

"I played a little bit with Sid and I kind of changed the way I played," Wilson said Sunday inside KeyBank Center. "That's not what they were looking for."

Later in the season, Wilson received another plum opportunity to showcase his talents on a top scoring line, this time beside Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel.

Wilson, who played 20 games during the Penguins' run to their second straight Stanley Cup victory, was ready for it.

"I finally figured it out in the playoffs playing with Malkin and stuff that I just got to play the same way, get them the puck and they'll get it back to you," Wilson said. "It kind of all settles itself."

That duty helped prepare Wilson, 25, for his occasional assignments on a scoring line this season. While Wilson mostly skates on the third or fourth trio, he has acquitted himself well when Sabres coach Phil Housley promotes him.

During the Sabres' recent 3-0 road trip, Wilson enjoyed a three-game point streak, skating about 15 minutes a night at left wing beside center Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart. In Saturday's 4-2 win in Boston, Wilson scored his third goal and utilized his speed down the wing to create Benoit Pouliot's winning goal.

"I've been able to adapt, and it's obviously nice being able to play with those guys, it makes it a little easier," said Wilson, who was acquired from the Detroit Red Wings on Dec. 3.

In Sunday's 5-4 home loss to Colorado, the Sabres' first game without top center Jack Eichel, Wilson played with center Evan Rodrigues and Reinhart, the new second line.

With Eichel sidelined indefinitely by a high right ankle sprain, Rodrigues, who switched back to the wing last week, could remain at center. That might create opportunities for Wilson to play bigger minutes on a scoring line.

"Being a versatile player, there's not too many guys in the league that can play with the top guys on the team and also play on the fourth line, play those minutes," Wilson said. "I've been working on my PK, too, and I've gotten a good opportunity here with regards to that, so that's definitely something I take pride in, also take pride in playing up and down the lineup."

Wilson said he finally feels settled in with the Sabres following a whirlwind 44-day stretch earlier this season in which he played for three teams.

"I went through the process twice, in Detroit a little bit," Wilson said of acclimating. "I was only there for a short stint (17 games), couldn't really settle in, and then it obviously does take a little time with a new team. But I'm feeling the last little bit ... settling in has helped."

Notes: The Sabres, who host the Tampa Bay Lightning tonight, had Monday off. ... Canisius College product and former Sabres forward Cory Conacher is in his second stint with the Lightning. ... Former Sabres center Derek Roy has been named an alternate captain for Team Canada's Olympic entry at the Pyeongchang Games.

Should Jack Eichel return to the Sabres lineup this season?

WKBW

Matt Bove

February 12, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Waffles are great except when it comes to sport takes. For that, I apologize.

Since learning about Jack Eichel's second high-ankle sprain in as many years, I've waffled on how the Buffalo Sabres should handle his injury.

After talking with some fellow media members on Sunday I realized I'm not the only one who has been waffling. There are several different approaches the Sabres could take with Eichel and both have their pros and cons.

So that brings us to the big question -- Should Eichel play again this season?

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Matthew Bové

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@Matt_Bove

I'm going to try and look at this with a glass half full approach. Here are some of my initial thoughts on the Eichel injury & where the #Sabres go from here @WKBW. My tie also looks stupid. For that I am sorry.

5:43 PM - Feb 11, 2018

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Although a high-ankle sprain is a very serious injury, things could've been a lot worse.

"You talk about ligaments, that's a whole new ballgame with surgery and things like that," Housley said on Sunday. "If there was any good news that came out of it, that's the positive thing."

After recovering from the same injury last season, you'd have to think Eichel would like to return as soon as possible to help his teammates build some momentum towards next season. But would that be the right move for the Sabres to let him play?

Well, the answer all depends on when he's ready to return. At this point, nobody really knows when that will be, although Housley hinted on Sunday that the initial prognosis was somewhere between four to six weeks and said he could even return sooner.

If that timetable is accurate than the Sabres should give Eichel the green light on a return if, and only if, he's been cleared and they are confident he'll be 100-percent. When asked if Housley would be content shelving Eichel for the season he adamantly disagreed.

"No, we've got a lot to prove this season still," Housley responded. "We've got a lot of games at home left. We want to win these games not only for our fans but to build on things and I think we've been playing pretty good on the road and I think we've got to turn that around here at home."

But a return this season is only the right option if the Sabres and their doctors are extremely confident that Eichel won't reinjure his ankle. If they have any hesitations the Sabres need to protect Eichel from himself and hold him out, despite how bad he'll want to return.

Matthew Bové

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@Matt_Bove

Housley says a lot still up in the air with Eichel injury but 4-6 weeks is initial prognosis & says he could even return sooner than that #Sabres @WKBW

4:45 PM - Feb 11, 2018

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Sure, fans pay good money and want to see the Sabres best players -- Eichel clearly falls in that category. However, if the risk outweighs the reward and his ankle becomes a lingering issue because he played five games to end the season than the organization and fans will be livid, and rightfully so.

What this all boils down to is using caution. Fans want Eichel back as soon as possible, yet that might not be the best approach. His injury is still fresh and there are so many questions. It's okay to not know all the answers.

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Can someone please pass the syrup?

Kane focused on Sabres, not Trade Deadline

NHL.com

Amalie Benjamin

February 11, 2018

BOSTON -- The days are rapidly ticking down toward Feb. 26, the 2018 NHL Trade Deadline. Fifteen of them remain. Fifteen days between where forward Evander Kane is now, and where he might be in the future, on another team, in another city, an unknown destination.

With the Buffalo Sabres last in the Eastern Conference and second to last in the League with 42 points in 55 games, it's clear that the best use for Kane is as a trade chip, with him set to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1 and no Stanley Cup Playoffs ahead in Buffalo.

That is an uneasy place to be for any player. But it is also not new for Kane. The speculation has been there for a long time, even if it only gets more pressing by the day.

"I've dealt with it kind of all season," Kane said at TD Garden on Saturday. "Things are getting a little tighter, with the time, but I'm just focused on taking it one game at a time and focusing on my time here."

Kane's breakaway snipe

00:50 • February 10th, 2018

It is not as if Kane doesn't know what it's like to be traded. It was exactly three years ago that he was sent from the Winnipeg Jets to the Sabres in a trade that also included defenseman Zach Bogosian.

And he's doing his best to keep tabs on the situation, as much as he can without driving himself crazy.

"I think I'm probably the most well-informed guy when it comes to these type of things, the rumors, obviously you're aware of what's going on and what's being said," said Kane, whose Sabres will play the the Colorado Avalanche at KeyBank Center on Sunday (7 p.m. ET; MSG-B, ALT, NHL.TV). "But I'm really not focused on that. If and when that time comes, then I'll be able to answer those questions. But for right now I'm really just focused on taking it day by day and game by game moving forward."

It has been three mostly unfulfilling seasons in Buffalo for Kane, though he has 115 points (65 goals, 50 assists) in his 190 games with the Sabres, including 37 points (17 goals, 20 assists) this season. The Sabres have not made the postseason in his tenure, a drought that goes back to the 2010-2011 season, and Kane has yet to play in a playoff game in his NHL career.

That could change soon.

A number of contenders are rumored to be in the mix for Kane, including the Columbus Blue Jackets, the San Jose Sharks, the St. Louis Blues, the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Calgary Flames and the Minnesota Wild. It's also possible a team like Kane's hometown Vancouver Canucks could trade for him, assuming they would get a leg up on re-signing to a contract this summer.

For now, as Kane said, "I'm not holding my breath."

He isn't getting out of bed, wondering if today might be the day he's traded. He is trying not to think about it, while trying to focus on the Sabres, on his here-and-now, all while his future is dangling in front of him.

Kane puts home a backhand

00:40 • January 4th, 2018

"Yeah," he said, when asked if it was difficult to be in his situation. "It's definitely not easy, but it's part of what you have to do as a pro."

That's something that has been recognized by those around him, how he handling things, how he's reacting to the uncertainty and the impending deadline, the questions that come in each city he visits.

"I think he's really trying to work through it, especially the position he's in," Sabres coach Phil Housley said before the Sabres' 4-2 win against the Boston Bruins on Saturday. "He's hit some posts. He's had some bad luck, but he's just got to find a way to continue to work through it, use his speed."

It had been a rough go of late for Kane, until his luck changed a bit on Saturday. Kane scored the first goal for the Sabres, a breakaway that started off a much-needed win over the red-hot Bruins. Before that goal, Kane had not tallied a point in 10 games and had not scored in 14, since a goal on Jan. 4 against the Wild.

It's possible that the pressure and the unknown is weighing on him, even if he's not admitting it. It's also possible that downturn in play could affect the return that the Sabres can get for the forward.

He was clearly relieved on Saturday, after the game and the goal.

"I've been looking for that for a while, so it was nice to put one in the net and hopefully it starts a streak," Kane said.

That would be optimal. It would allow him to concentrate on what's in front of him, not on what might be. When a trade comes -- if it comes -- then he will figure out where to go from there. Then, he can determine how to feel and what to do.

He laughed at a question about his time in Buffalo, adding, "We're talking like it's over right now, and it's not."

But it might be soon. That's what Kane is facing right now, and what he'll continue to face until a trade is completed or until those 15 days tick down to nothing.

Olofsson continues to fill the net for Frolunda

Sabres.com

Kris Baker

February 12, 2018

Sharp-shooting winger Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) connected for a pair of power-play goals on Thursday while skating for a career high 21:32 as Frolunda HC was doubled by Skelleftea AIK 4-2.

It was a family affair of sorts for the Olofssons as Victor's 24-year-old brother Jesper scored twice for the winning side, making the siblings responsible for four of the game's six tallies.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

THIS GUN FOR HIRE: Victor Olofsson connects for two more power-play goals in a Frölunda loss. That's his fourth two-goal game of the year. Olofsson's 24 marks lead the Swedish Hockey League. Of the 24, 13 have come on the PP and six have been game-winners. #Sabres

8:38 PM - Feb 8, 2018

119

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With his team already trailing 4-0 in the opening period, Olofsson took the puck from his usual spot in the right-wing circle and quickly released a wrist shot with less than a minute to play in the frame to get his team on the board.

Olofsson would fill the net for the second time with 5:09 remaining in regulation when he played catch with a defender high in the zone and one-timed a slap shot from just above the right circle for the game's final goal.

Olofsson, who was quiet in Saturday's 4-3 triumph over Rogle BK, leads the Swedish Hockey League with 24 goals, and ranks second on the Indians' roster with 37 points through 43 games.

The SHL will enjoy a two week break for the Olympics, but the race is on with Olofsson looking to hold off Vaxjo Lakers HC forward Andrew Calof, who sits one behind with 23 goals, for the league's goal scoring title with just seven games left on the regular season schedule.

OHL

Cliff Pu (2016, third round) produced two assists Wednesday in Kingston's 5-3 win at Oshawa and extended his point streak to six games with a three-assist effort Friday as the Frontenacs were defeated by Owen Sound 4-3 in overtime.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Cliff Pu added three assists to his stat line Friday in Kingston's 4-3 loss to Owen Sound. Pu has 14 points (2+12) in his last six games. #Sabres

10:39 AM - Feb 10, 2018

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Pu, whose streak came to an end Sunday in 3-2 loss to North Bay, has overcome a slow start to the season to post 22 goals and 68 points in 53 games.

Peterborough defenseman Austin Osmanski (2016, seventh round) continued to execute as a defense-first presence last week as the Petes won one of their three contests.

The East Aurora, N.Y. native has one goal, 14 points, and 76 shots on goal in 51 outings for a struggling Petes squad that has one victory in its last 10 contests.

WHL

After registering three shots on goal in in 3-2 shootout win over Calgary on Wednesday, Red Deer winger Brandon Hagel (2016, sixth round) worked his way to two helpers plus an insurance goal Friday to help the Rebels to a dominating 7-2 throttling of Edmonton.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Brandon Hagel worked to get a pair of helpers Friday before adding a late goal in Red Deer's 7-2 thrashing of Edmonton. Hagel's third three-point effort of the year gives him 9-24-33 at the 40-game mark. #Sabres

10:39 AM - Feb 10, 2018

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Hagel, who was again held without a point Saturday in a 4-3 loss at Edmonton, has 33 points (9+24) in 41 contests.

Prince Albert defenseman Vojtech Budik (2016, fifth round) recorded two assists Wednesday in a 4-3 victory over Kootenay, and then posted a combined five shots on goal as the Raiders closed the weekend with a pair of losses to Swift Current and another to Saskatoon.

The mid-week helpers give Budik a career-best 28 points (8+20) through 49 appearances.

QMJHL

Vasily Glotov (2016, seventh round) recorded 11 shots on goal last week as lowly Shawinigan won once in four tries.

Glotov has now played 50 games with the Cataractes, leading the club with 25 goals, including four game-winners, and 35 points.

NCAA

University of Minnesota centerman Casey Mittelstadt (2017, first round) saw his three-game point streak snapped in Friday's 4-2 doubling of Wisconsin, but got back on track Saturday when he took a defender around the edge and connected on a centering pass for a primary helper as the Gophers swept the Badgers with a 7-1 victory.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Nice primary helper from Casey Mittelstadt Saturday as he gets wide and turns the defenseman around before slipping it to Leon Bristedt in the Gophers' 7-1 win over Wisconsin. #Sabres

7:46 AM - Feb 12, 2018

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Through 28 contests, Mittelstadt has amassed eight goals and 23 points. His .82 points per game are tied for the team lead.

Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) was unable to produce Monday as Boston College lost their opening round game of the Beanpot tournament 3-0 to Northeastern.

The Eagles edged Massachusetts Lowell 3-2 in overtime on Friday, but Brown was again held without a point for the third-straight game. Brown, a junior, has produced 15 points (6+9) in 29 games.

Boston College defenseman Casey Fitzgerald (2016, third round) racked up four shots on goal in the Beanpot loss to Northeastern, and added another four shots while picking up an even-strength assist Friday as the Eagles needed extra time to get past Massachusetts Lowell.

Fitzgerald has appeared in 28 games, notching 15 points (4+11) with a eight of them coming on the power play.

Sophomore defenseman Jacob Bryson (2017, fourth round) scored for the second game in a row Friday as Providence earned a 3-2 overtime decision over Maine.

Kris Baker

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Providence D Jacob Bryson scored for the second consecutive game Friday as the Friars got past Maine 3-2 in OT. Bryson's 22 points (4+18) rank third among Hockey East D and t-20th overall among conference point-getters. #Sabres

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The slap-shot marker gives Bryson four goals and 22 points through 31 appearances.

Linus Weissbach (2017, seventh round) posted five shots on goal Friday and was blanked on Saturday as Wisconsin was swept by Minnesota by scores of 4-2 and 7-1. At the 30-game mark, Weissbach is currently tied for third in team scoring with 22 points (8+14).

Ivan Chukarov (2015, seventh round) contributed four shots on last week as Massachusetts tied Boston University 3-3 on Friday and followed up Saturday with a 3-0 shutout of Massachusetts Lowell.

Chukarov has played in 23 games since missing the first month of the season due to injury, producing five assists and a minus-2 rating.

With teammate William Borgen (2015, fourth round) away with the United States Olympic Men's Hockey Team, senior forward Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) was kept off the score sheet in Friday's 5-2 win at Miami but rebounded nicely the next night with a short-handed marker and one assist as the Huskies' earned the conference road sweep with 4-0 blanking of the RedHawks.

Peterson has appeared in all 28 games, collecting five goals and 16 points while leading the Huskies with 239 face-off wins.

Penn State had a weekend off, leaving sophomore winger Brett Murray (2016, fourth round) an empty-net goal and five total point in 17 games this season. Murray has played in just one of the Nittany Lions' last dozen games.

Second-year defenseman Philip Nyberg (2016, fifth round), who was scratched over the weekend as Connecticut earned victories at Brown and Northeastern, remains with two power-play goals, three points, and a plus-6 rating in 17 contests.

Europe

Marcus Davidsson (2017, second round) returned from a three-game injury absence Thursday, posting one shot on goal in 12:37 of work as Djurgarden IF knocked off first-place Vaxjo Lakers HC 3-1.

Davidsson continued to make an impact while skating for 14:42 Saturday in a 7-0 pounding of Karlskrona HK, leaving the 19-year-old forward with career bests of six goal, 14 points, and a plus-14 rating in 32 games.

Rasmus Asplund (2016, second round) went without a point last week as Farjestad BK defeated Linkoping HC 3-1 on Thursday before suffering a 5-4 loss to Mora IK on Saturday.

The 20-year-old centerman has captured career bests of seven goals and 27 points in 43 appearances while manning the second line center role.

In Finland, LeKi goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (2017, second round) made 33 saves Friday in a 4-1 loss to Kettera. Luukkonen has earned wins in 11 of his 23 appearances this season while posting a 2.92 goals-against average and .909 save percentage.

Defenseman Oskari Laaksonen (2017, third round) netted a cumulative minus-1 rating in limited duty last week as Ilves lost to KalPa and split a home-and-home series with JYP.

Now a professional rookie after graduating from the junior ranks in January, Laaksonen has captured one assist in 14 Liiga efforts while averaging 9:34 of work per outing.

For more on all the youngsters in the Sabres pipeline, check out Kris Baker's website, SabresProspects.com. You can also follow him on Twitter (@SabresProspects) for in-game updates throughout the week on any Buffalo prospects that are in action.

Sharpen Up: February 12, 2018

Sabres.com

Chris Ryndak

February 12, 2018

The Sabres fell last night to Colorado 5-4 in their first full game without Jack Eichel. He's out indefinitely with a high-ankle sprain sustained on Saturday.

Casey Nelson scored his first NHL goal and Buffalo also received goals from Ryan O'Reilly, Benoit Pouliot and Evander Kane. O'Reilly also went 29-for-39 on draws (74 percent) and posted two assists for a three-point night.

Buffalo is back in action tomorrow night at KeyBank Center against Tampa.

Here's what you need to know.

About last night

Sabres fall to Avs, 5-4

04:38 • February 11th, 2018

From the Lexus Postgame Report...

Less than a minute had ticked off the clock at KeyBank Center on Sunday night when Nikita Zadorov sent a pass from behind his own net off the boards in the neutral zone and onto the stick of Colin Wilson, stationed all the way at the opposite blue line.

Phil Housley Postgame (2/11/18)

04:31 • February 11th, 2018

Wilson had snuck behind the Buffalo Sabres' defensive duo of Nathan Beaulieu and Rasmus Ristolainen and was promptly joined by linemate Alexander Kerfoot. Kerfoot buried a feed from Wilson on the 2-on-0 rush, giving the Colorado Avalanche a lead just 43 seconds into the contest.

The goal was characteristic of the lapses that would plague the Sabres for the rest of the night in a 5-4 loss

Casey Nelson Postgame (2/11/18)

01:55 • February 11th, 2018

"We just totally got away from a simple game, getting pucks deep, forechecking, working in the offensive zone," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We wanted to play an east-west game, turning pucks over through the middle of the ice. ... They have a terrific rush game and we just fed it and we got on our heels."

Ryan O'Reilly Postgame (2/11/18)

02:27 • February 11th, 2018

"We made too many turnovers from the start," O'Reilly said. "We tried to play an east-west game, that's not our style. We had to keep it a little simpler off the bat to get some stuff going and we didn't. We just fed their transition and obviously they got ahead, and it was tough to climb out of it."

Ristolainen Postgame (2/11/18)

02:24 • February 11th, 2018

News and notes

With his shorthanded goal, Pouliot scored in consecutive contests. In his last 10 games against the Avalanche, Pouliot has 10 points (5+5), including at least a point in each of the last five (4+2).

Nelson became the second player in Sabres history to tally his first career goal while shorthanded, joining Kevin O'Shea (3/14/71 at Minnesota).

Buffalo scored two shorthanded goals in a game for the second time this season (last: Oct. 7 at NY Islanders). The Sabres are now tied for the league lead with nine shorthanded goals this season.

O'Reilly led all skaters with three points (1+2), including his 400th NHL point. It was O'Reilly's 15th career game with at least three points and his third of the season.

O'Reilly now has 15 points (8+7) in his last 15 games.

Prospect William Borgen ready for Olympic experience

[View image on Twitter](#)

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SCSU Men's Hockey

@SCSUHUSKIES_MH

With #TeamUSA us@TheNCHC Athletes@SCSUHUSKIES_MH Will Borgen (left) and DU's Troy Terry.#TeamUSAStudentAthlete #unleashSCSU #StCloudState #StCloudMN #CollegeHockey #NCAAHockey #OlympicWinterGames
GOOD LUCK TEAM USA!

10:36 PM - Feb 11, 2018

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Horizon Middle School

@HZNSpuds

In 2008 Will Borgen was a 6th grader at our school. Today he is on the USA Olympic Hockey team in S Korea. #GoWill #SpudPride #USA

10:51 AM - Feb 8, 2018

545

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[Catch a video feature about him here.](#)

KFGO

@790KFGO

#KFGOPodcast: How is the 15 hour time adjustment for a Moorhead native and an Olympic hockey player? Listen to @wborgen19, the pride of @MHDHockeyHub and @SCSUHUSKIES_MH, and member of the 2018 @TeamUSA, explain! <http://kfgo.com/podcasts/morning-crew/944/moorhead-grad-competing-in-olympics/#.WoG2X0GuAnE.twitter> ...

10:44 AM - Feb 12, 2018

Moorhead grad competing in Olympics

Will Borgen, a 2015 Moorhead High graduate and current member of the St. Cloud State University Hockey Team , is competing in the Olympics on Team USA Hockey . He joined Bonnie and Doug live...

kfgo.com

1

See KFGO's other Tweets
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Team USA's first group stage game is scheduled for Wednesday at 7:10 a.m. ET against Slovenia. The U.S. was drawn into Group B, which includes the Russian team, Slovenia and Slovakia.

Look for Kris Baker's weekly Sabres Prospects Report later today.