



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 14, 2018

Sabres Prospect Will Borgen soaking in Olympic experience

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

February 14, 2018

It first sank in for Will Borgen that he could be an Olympian over the summer. That's when he got an email from USA Hockey telling him he was in the mix to make the U.S. men's hockey team for the 2018 Games.

It started to sink in after Jan. 1 when the team was officially announced and he received congratulations from family and friends.

But it didn't really hit Borgen until last week, when he landed in South Korea and met the rest of the team, for the first time.

"Once they announced it everyone was kind of congratulating me and it got a little more real then," Borgen said via an email interview from South Korea. "But not really until I got over here did I feel like I was an Olympian."

Indeed, Borgen now can list "Olympian" on his hockey resume, although he did not suit up for the U.S. in its opening game against Slovenia, one which saw the Americans blow a 2-0 third period lead en route to a 3-2 overtime loss.

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The 21-year-old defenseman was a fourth-round pick of the Buffalo Sabres in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft. A junior at St. Cloud State, he has 38 points (five goals, 33 assists) in 96 career collegiate games.

2018 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremonies

2018 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremonies

The experience of being an Olympian is one thing, but playing on this particular U.S. team is another. The roster is a collection of players from all types of hockey backgrounds -- four are current NCAA players (including Borgen), while others have NHL experience, some are currently in the American Hockey League and still others are collecting paychecks in European leagues.

"This team is really diverse," Borgen said. "There are a lot of guys from different backgrounds from where they play now and where they're from and in age, so it's a different kind of team than I've ever played on before. I think my role is just to play defense. That's my job so when I get a chance to go out there, I'll just play defense."

Playing on a team with that much diversity of experience is something Sabres coach Phil Housley believes will benefit Borgen's long-term development.

"I think it's just an opportunity to represent your country No. 1 and be in the Olympics No. 2. It's a great honor," Housley said. "I think it's just the experience of being around some veteran guys, seeing what they do, how they approach and how they prepare for the game in a short period of time. I think it will be a great experience for him."

Another call-up for Baptiste means another opportunity to grow into his game

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

February 14, 2018

Nicholas Baptiste is pretty familiar with the New York State Thruway. He's been back and forth between Rochester and Buffalo three times this season. When the Buffalo Sabres have suffered an injury among the forwards, he's been the guy on call.

Eventually, he'd like to work that into a permanent gig in the National Hockey League.

But at 22 and in his third year of pro hockey, he's still growing into his game and taking every opportunity to learn, improve, and turn his potential into tangible results.

"Every game I play it's exciting for me. I don't even think I'm at 30 games yet so every night's exciting for me right now," said Baptiste, who played his 23rd NHL game on Tuesday. "I'm just fortunate enough to be playing with such great players. I'm just trying to play my best and work my hardest to stay in the lineup every night. I think I'm starting to earn a lot more of coach's trust and I want to continue to do that and help this team win."

Baptiste gave the Sabres instant spark on Tuesday night, scoring the game's first goal while helping the team to set an energetic tone in a 5-3 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning in KeyBank Center.

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He was among a handful of skaters who took the ice for an optional practice on Wednesday before the team flew to Ottawa for Thursday night's meeting with the Senators.

Baptiste was last with the Sabres from Jan. 29 to Feb. 1 when Jacob Josefson was out with a lower body injury.

When Josefson returned, Baptiste went back to the Rochester Americans despite playing well over four games. But Baptiste understands the deal. He's on a two-way contract which means the Sabres can make moves with him without dealing with waivers, giving him value as a movable part.

And with each move back to Rochester, he talks with the Sabres coaching staff to get a little more feedback, a few more cues, as to what he needs to develop in order to take up residence in Buffalo.

Baptiste did enough in that previous Sabres stint to earn the call when Jack Eichel went down with a right high-ankle sprain on Feb. 10. And while no one in the room wants their best player, one of the stars of the NHL, out with an injury, it does create opportunity for players like Baptiste to show their value and demonstrate how they've put advice from the coaches into practice.

"I've talked to coach a ton about how I've got to play," Baptiste said. "As you can see I'm just using my speed and being physical, taking the puck wide, and making it tough on their D. Whether I'm playing eight minutes or 18 minutes here or in (Rochester), I'm going to try and do the same thing – use my speed effectively and create offense that way."

Those conversations with the coaches are paying off. The offensive numbers may not be turning any heads (he has two goals in nine NHL games and 18 points in 36 AHL games) but his energy, the way he is using his speed, and his play away from the net, has become more consistent and noticeable.

"I think Nick has done a terrific job when he's been up here," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He's used his speed to create. ... Also I think his wall play has really improved. That's why he's getting shifts late in the third period. I wanted to get him out more (on Tuesday) and reward him but just (couldn't) with all the special teams that were going on during the game, I'd like to see him get more ice time."

Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly continued his dominance on faceoffs in Tuesday's game, winning 25. That came after setting a new career-high mark with 29 faceoff wins in Sunday's loss to Colorado. O'Reilly is on pace to have the second most faceoff wins in a season in the NHL. He currently has 856 wins; Rod Brind'Amour won 1,268 with Carolina in the 2005-06 season.

For reference, the NHL started keeping faceoff stats in the 1997-98 season.

Kyle Okposo knows all about O'Reilly's prowess in the faceoff circle. He's faced it as an opponent, back when Okposo was with the New York Islanders and O'Reilly with the Colorado Avalanche. And he remembers one game in particular.

"He takes a lot of draws and he wins a lot of draws," Okposo said. "You can see it in opposing centers when they're going to line up against him. They're trying to think of different ways to beat him. The fascinating part is he pretty much takes faceoffs the same way all the time and nobody seems to be able to figure it out. I know just in my little experience, I was with the Islanders. We had a six-on-five at the end of the game and I took three draws in a row against him and he won three dead clean. It's pretty special what he does."

The NHL trade deadline is Feb. 26, but the Buffalo Sabres' next opponent, the Ottawa Senators, have already made a deal.

Late Tuesday, the Senators traded veteran defenseman Dion Phaneuf and forward Nate Thompson to the Los Angeles Kings for forward Marian Gaborik and center Nate Shore. Phaneuf was pulled from Ottawa's bench on Tuesday during the Senators's 6-3 loss to the Penguins in Pittsburgh.

"I'm excited to be going to the Los Angeles Kings," Phaneuf told media in Pittsburgh Tuesday night. "It's going to be a real good experience for me to be able to join that team. ... I'm excited about the team that they have, where they're at in the standings and I'm going to go there and do my best to do whatever I can to help their team."

Phaneuf has 16 points in 52 games this season. He has played in 954 games in his 13-year NHL career that included stints with the Calgary Flames, Toronto Maple Leafs and the Senators.

The Senators have lost their last two and sit just three points ahead of the Sabres in the Atlantic Division with 47 points (19-27-9).

Sabres' Kyle Okposo lends support to mental health campaign

The Buffalo News

Scott Scanlon

February 14, 2018

Buffalo Sabres forward Kyle Okposo has a message for those who are struggling with mental illness or thoughts of suicide.

Tell someone.

The Sabres assistant captain has added his voice to the JustTellOne.org project, started 16 months ago by mental health and substance abuse prevention leaders across Western New York to let those struggling with mental illness know they're not alone.

Subjects like depression and suicide "can be a difficult conversation to have but it's a very important dialogue that our society needs to get more comfortable with," Okposo says in a video released Wednesday afternoon.

He encouraged those in the midst of such a struggle to avoid the inclination to lock up those feelings.

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"If you feel comfortable with somebody, talk with them," he said.

JustTellOne.org is a peer-to-peer public awareness campaign focused on teens and young adults, and designed to promote prevention and early intervention of mental health challenges and substance abuse.

As many as one in five young people in the U.S. struggle with depression, which can worsen if left untreated.

"We are delighted to have Kyle join our team and our family of spokespeople," said Carol A. Doggett, campaign director, and senior director of marketing communications and outreach at the Mental Health Association of Erie County. "His profile as an athlete and team leader will help deliver the message to young people that it is OK to speak up about what you are feeling to someone you trust."

JustTellOne.org features videos of teens who have emerged from the depths of mental illness. It also includes live chats, information about helpful resources, and a "Tools and Inspiration" page where users, including family members, can access videos and tool kits to help start important conversations.

Okposo approached leaders of JustTellOne.org late last year to say he wanted to become part of the campaign, particularly around the topics of depression and suicide.

The campaign generated more than 1.5 million views across social media in its first 14 months. Sections viewed most often cover depression and suicide.

Funding for the campaign has been provided by Community Partners of WNY and Millennium Collaborative Care, performing provider systems funded by state as part of the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program. The Mental Health Association of Erie County and Erie County Council for the Prevention of Alcohol and Substance Abuse lead the campaign, with help from community organizations across the region.

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Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ health and wellness/ mental health

Sabres' declining TV ratings further tested by Eichel injury

The Buffalo News

Alan Pergament

February 14, 2018

How the Buffalo Sabres will fare without Jack Eichel isn't a question relating to only the team's play on the ice.

It also is a question for its TV ratings, which already are down significantly from a year ago in this disappointing season.

Before Buffalo's surprising 5-3 home win Tuesday over the league-leading Tampa Bay Lightning, the Sabres were averaging a 5.2 rating for the season, down about 16 percent from the 6.2 rating for the entire 2016-17 season.

Normally, you would think TV ratings without Eichel would tank since he is the most dynamic player on the team. But there always is a chance viewers will be as interested in how some of the players - like Sam Reinhart, for instance - and the team performs without its All-Star as it did with him.

The 5.2 average rating is still very strong for any National Hockey League team. Buffalo usually is near the top of the ratings, though bigger market teams have more viewers since a rating point in their markets is equal to thousands of more viewers.

The first TV test since Eichel was injured against Colorado Sunday had a 3.8 rating, which was the lowest rating in February. Tuesday's surprising win in the second test had a 5.0 rating on MSG, which indicates fans will be interested if the players perform well.

Recent ratings with Eichel playing were generally in the 4s. However, a Feb. 6 loss to Anaheim and former Sabre goaltender Ryan Miller had a 6.0 rating, which was the highest-rated game since Dec. 14.

The season started with high hopes and a 10.9 rating for the season-opening loss to Montreal.

The highest-rated game was the Winter Classic against the New York Rangers, which had a 12.3 rating on New Year's Day on Channel 2. The other top-rated games on the season were against Detroit (7.2) on Oct. 24, Pittsburgh (7.5) on Nov. 14 and Edmonton (7.0) on Nov. 24.

The season's lowest-rated game was a 1.1 for the game with Philadelphia that was played on the same January afternoon that the Buffalo Bills played their first playoff game in 18 years, a 10-3 loss to Jacksonville.

Jerry Sullivan: Sabres' Phil Housley an early candidate for the hot seat

The Buffalo News

Jerry Sullivan

February 14, 2018

Winger Nick Baptiste was all aglow after the Sabres beat the Lightning, 5-3, at KeyBank Center on Tuesday night. Baptiste, who is still young enough to make the old cliches sound fresh, said they looked like a team that was "desperate to win."

Ah yes, the old desperation thing. How touching to hear that, two-thirds of the way through a disaster of a season, our plucky NHL team would be moved to play with a sense of – here's another old hockey buzzword – "urgency" on home ice against one of the best teams in the league.

They had beaten the Bruins, another elite team, on the road a few nights earlier. So try to contain yourselves, but they might be ready to hit their stride, without Jack Eichel, and stage a heroic run at 70 points.

Evidently, the fans aren't buying. There were roughly 11,000 people in the stands the other night, though you could fetch a ticket on StubHub these days for \$6, or less than one of those overpriced beers. Local TV ratings are down by 16 percent.

Hey, it's a little late for desperation, fellas. The first season after the exiles of Tim Murray and Dan Bylsma has been an abject disaster. Despite Tuesday's heroics, they're still on pace for the worst home record in franchise history – yes, worse than the early days or even those giddy tank seasons.

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You can put a lot of this on a misguided owner, Terry Pegula, a fan boy who couldn't decide whether his general manager or coach was more responsible for last year's regression, so got rid of them both – investing undeserved power in a bunch of entitled players who had never won a damn thing.

But let's not forget the red-haired elephant in the room. Phil Housley has gotten off pretty easy in his first go as an NHL head coach, but his rookie season has been a miserable failure. A Sabres team that was expected to challenge for a playoff spot is at the bottom of the Eastern Conference instead.

They're one of the most hapless five-on-five teams to lace on skates. The defense, which was supposed to flourish in Housley's wide-open system, has been an unsightly sieve, soft and easy to play against in their own end, reflective of their new head coach in his worst moments as a high-scoring Buffalo D.

I understand the notion that you can't keep firing coaches and GMs, that players have to be held accountable. But hockey is an effort sport, and if their effort is lacking on too many nights, especially at home, you have to wonder about the guy who's supposed to be motivating them.

If the Sabres were rolling along on a 90-point pace, the cheerleaders would be praising Pegula for following his heart and bringing home one of his old heroes to be the coach. We'd be hearing how Housley was born to the job and "uniquely qualified" to lead the Sabres, as GM Jason Botterill said when he hired him.

Housley has been a colossal letdown, one that could have been averted. Pegula could have hired Botterill first and let him make the call on Bylsma, whom he knew from Pittsburgh. Instead, ownership swallowed the idea that Bylsma wasn't friendly enough with his players. Tim Murray said Bylsma needed to drink coffee with them more often. Then he got fired. So whose advice was the owner really taking?

They wanted someone who was nicer to the players, and they got it. Housley rips his players as often as Mike Pence rips Trump. Pollyanna Phil wouldn't want to hurt the guys' feelings. When did this sorry bunch earn the right to be coddled? What have they achieved, aside from alienating their own fan base?

You never know about a head coach until he gets his chance. Housley seems to be over his head. He rode a bunch of gifted Nashville defensemen to a Stanley Cup final last year and a head job. He tried to sell the fanciful idea that his defenseman could play the same way in Buffalo. They've been sadly lacking.

Rasmus Ristolainen has been a wreck. He has never been very accountable in his own end, a bit of a floater. But he's allowed to masquerade as an elite player on a team with a weak defensive corps. If he's a No. 1 defenseman, I'm Winston Churchill.

Ristolainen had one of the worst games I've seen from a supposed top defender against Colorado on Sunday. On one play, he turned away from a shot from the boards that wound up in the Sabres' net. It was reminiscent of Housley famously avoiding a slap shot by Stephane Richer in the 1990 playoffs.

The Richer play was symbolic of everything fans despised in those Sabres teams back in the day. Skill without determination and grit. Maybe Pegula wasn't a fan yet. Has it occurred to him that today's fans have turned away from Housley's current team for the same reasons?

Pegula isn't very good at running sports teams. But he understands business, and he knows if you have a bad investment, at some point you get out of it.

I'm not saying Housley should be fired, though in some NHL cities, he'd be in trouble. But at some point, the Pegulas have to wonder what's best for the business. If the funk continues early next season and the Sabres are still dreadful at home, hurting attendance and TV ratings, what then?

At the very least, Housley goes into next season on the hot seat. It will be five years after the start of the tank, the fourth year of Jack Eichel as the \$80 million savior, seven seasons and counting without the playoffs.

If the Sabres aren't in the right direction by Thanksgiving next year, things will become truly desperate. They'll have to consider a coaching change. Of course, Pegula's greatest problem as an owner is often his stubborn refusal to admit he has one.

The Sabres were at their best down two men

WGR

Paul Hamilton

February 14, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Buffalo Sabres have been very good on 5-on-3 situations against this season, but their best one may have come Tuesday.

Tampa Bay had a 1:53 two-man advantage, but the Sabres killed it off. The Lightning came in with the second best power play in the NHL and had already scored one, but this was different.

Marco Scandella, Ryan O'Reilly, Jacob Josefson and Rasmus Ristolainen all had big shot blocks. O'Reilly said the coaching staff does a good job to get them ready, "We're prepared coming in, we know the big plays that they want to run and I think we did a good job of taking those away. It starts with Johnny, he made some big saves and he was key."

Victor Hedman has a cannon for a shot, but O'Reilly got in front of it. It hit his shin pad so hard, the puck cleared the zone. O'Reilly said, "I actually wasn't expecting him to shoot it, it was luck for me that I blocked it and the puck got out, but that's what it takes, other guys making huge blocks."

"That was huge, a couple of big blocks by our guys putting themselves in front of the puck."

Phil Housley knows what it takes to win hockey games. He was brought up in many organizations and he said after that kill, they all got a lift, "The guys are really inspired by that, all our penalty killers did a terrific job. Our guys really controlled their time and space for the most part."

You've probably heard in all jobs that if you enjoy what you're doing, you're going to be better at it. Scott Wilson said, "I think we're learning on the PK to really take pride in it. Guys need to enjoy it for it to be successful, so I think guys are having a blast out there and getting it down for each other. Johnny back there keeping the puck out is keeping us confident."

Coaches will always say that the goalie is your best penalty killer. Chad Johnson said when it becomes a 5-on-3 against, his mindset changes. "For me it's more about the depth part of it. You can't really be too aggressive on the shots because if you get too aggressive, teams will give you a fake pass and beat you cross-ice."

"If you watch most goalies will play a little deeper in their crease, deeper than they would on a 5-on-4 because you don't want to get beat on the backdoor plays."

Communication is key on the 5-on-3 kill too. Johnson said they must really be in sync, "We all have to read off each other. I think if there's any hesitation, then you can get exploited in areas. Everybody was on the same page, I knew where the shot was coming, if there was an opportunity there, they gave that to me and they battled the rebound, so everything came together because it has to on 5-on-3 because plays happen very fast."

One of the biggest faults on this team is their lack of awareness, but Wilson said it was the total opposite in this spot, "Being aware of everybody else, especially against a team like that. They have some guys that shift around, you know head on a swivel and just kind of have your stick on the ice, like that one just hit my stick, so it's a little detail that goes a long way."

In the past three games, the Sabres have beaten the top two teams in the NHL. The team played both those games just like they did the 5-on-3. Josefson said, "It all comes down to that you have to sacrifice yourself. You're two men short out there, so we have to be willing to block shots and being in lanes and our coaching staff makes a good game plan for us and make a good scouting report for us, so we know what to expect."

Josefson has had to fight through many injuries this season, but when it came to blocking shots on the 5-on-3 he didn't hesitate, "When the coaches put you out in an important situation like that, all that matters is to keep the puck out of the net and you can't really think about getting injured again, you just do whatever it takes and you just have to deal with the consequences after."

Phil Housley wanted to get his players some rest, so only a few skated on Wednesday before the flight to Ottawa.

Sabres' Chad Johnson could attract interest before trade deadline

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

February 14, 2018

BUFFALO – After winning two games in a four-day span, doubling his season total, Sabres goalie Chad Johnson will likely take a back seat again to Robin Lehner tonight in Ottawa.

Lehner loves facing the Senators, his old team, and is 5-0-2 against them since joining the Sabres in 2015. A terrific outing could convince a playoff contender searching for a netminder – hello, Philadelphia! – to pursue the Swede.

With Lehner, 26, on a one-year contract and goalie prospect Linus Ullmark ready to graduate to regular NHL duty next season, there's a strong possibility the Sabres will deal their starter before the Feb. 26 trade deadline.

But what about Johnson's future? The backup signed a one-year deal to return to the Sabres on July 1 and will be an unrestricted free agent following the season.

Johnson could be an attractive and cheap option for teams looking to add a goalie – starter or backup – for the stretch run.

While Johnson, 31, has endured a rough season – it took him three months to earn his second win – his body of work over previous years is strong.

A year ago, Johnson went 11-2-0 over a 13-game stretch with his hometown Calgary Flames. Two years ago, he morphed into the Sabres' unsung hero subbing for an injured Lehner, winning 22 games while posting a sparkling .920 save percentage.

Overall this season, Johnson has compiled poor numbers – 4-9-3 with a 3.54 goals-against average and an .886 save percentage – in 21 appearances.

“I took a chance coming to the Sabres this year on a one-year deal, had a lot of opportunity to go different places, but I believed in this team, the organization, and that's why I came back here,” Johnson said Wednesday inside KeyBank Center. “Obviously, as an organization, it hasn't gone the way we wanted to, and personally, it hasn't gone the way I wanted to.”

Still, since earning his second win Jan. 22 in Calgary, Johnson has performed well in four games, posting numbers – 2.49 and .917 – in line with his career totals.

“He's just been solid, square to the puck, there's no wasted motion, he's letting pucks hit him, he's very confident back there,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said. “I think the games before that he wasn't getting the results.”

Johnson stopped 26 shots in Tuesday's 5-3 win against Tampa Bay and 25 shots in Saturday's 4-2 victory in Boston, performances that possibly increased his value.

“Getting two games, even after getting two days off, I definitely felt like my preparation, just the flow of things is obviously a little easier,” Johnson said.

Johnson, who's received little support from the last-place Sabres, has been adamant all season he feels good about his game.

“Statistical results, I don't think totally (show) how a goalie's performance is, that's just how it is,” he said. “I just trust what I've done and the success that I've had doing what I've been doing.”

Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said: “You got to have a short-term memory as a goalie. Things haven't been all roses for him this year, we haven't played very well in front of him for the majority of the year. He's just kind of stuck with it and stuck with his plan and gone about his business.”

Johnson has already played for six NHL teams. He said he hasn't thought much about his future with the Sabres.

“Most importantly, I want to play, and then secondly, I want to win,” he said of what he looks for when choosing a team. “That’s always been where my loyalty stands. For me, I’ve worked hard to get where I’m at. I owe that to myself to really put myself in a situation to do that, I think everybody does. But I love the organization, I love the team here. I came back.”

If Lehner leaves, Johnson could start the bulk of the remaining games. If he plays well, perhaps the Sabres would consider re-signing him to play behind Ullmark.

Sabres' Nick Baptiste embracing fourth-line role

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

February 14, 2018

BUFFALO – In the NHL, Sabres winger Nick Baptiste often skates short minutes on the fourth line, a role much different than the one he enjoys in the AHL.

But Baptiste, 22, has embraced his job as a fourth-line checker during his recalls to the Sabres this season, scoring two goals in nine games.

“I’ve been doing real well with the role I’m in right now,” Baptiste said this afternoon following the Sabres’ optional practice inside KeyBank Center. “I think obviously with increased minutes, I’ll be able to contribute offensively a little more. But I think right now, I’m doing the little things right.”

In Tuesday’s 5-3 win over Tampa Bay, Baptiste opened the scoring 6:25 into the tilt, zooming to the net and converting Zemgus Girgensons’ nifty feed.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he wanted to play Baptiste more against the Lightning, although power plays and penalties limited him to seven minutes, 36 seconds.

“Nick has done a terrific job when he’s been up here, he’s used his speed to create, you could see the goal in Vancouver (Jan. 25), the goal last night, using his powerful speed just coming off the start,” Housley said. “Also, I think his wall play has really, really improved. That’s why he’s getting shifts late in the third period.”

Baptiste’s speed, of course, is a major asset in today’s NHL.

“I’m just using my speed and being physical and taking the puck wide and making it tough on their D,” said Baptiste, who has played 23 NHL games. “Whether I’m playing eight minutes or 18 minutes here or in Roch, wherever I am, I’m trying to do the same thing, use my speed effectively and create speed that way.”

Baptiste has also provided some critical secondary scoring. The Sabres have won two of their three games without injured center Jack Eichel (ankle), in part, because third- and fourth-liners have contributed key goals.

Winger Scott Wilson, for example, has two goals in the last three games.

“It’s great, it takes some pressure off the other guys,” Housley said of secondary scoring. “It’s important, when you’re playing really good teams, it’s a great way to contribute, just feel good about yourself.”

The Sabres play Thursday in Ottawa.

Is it time for the Buffalo Sabres to trade Sam Reinhart?

WKBW

Matt Bove

February 14, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Will the real Sam Reinhart please stand up? I repeat, will the real Sam Reinhart please stand up. We're going to have a problem here...

There is no player more interesting on the Buffalo Sabres roster than Reinhart. After an abysmal start to the season, Reinhart is finally playing to his potential and producing at an alarming rate.

In the Sabres last 13 games, Reinhart has six goals and ten assists, good for a team-best 16 points over that span. It's arguably Reinhart's best hockey of his three-year NHL career which has plenty of fans wondering -- is now the time to trade Reinhart?

It's a valid question for a player set to become a restricted free agent in the summer. This season Reinhart has stood out for the wrong reasons more often than he's been noticed for what he's done well. Up until his recent hot streak Reinhart had only 13 points in 44 games. It's crazy to think that after this recent tear Reinhart still has only 29 points in 57 games this season.

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Matthew Bové

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@Matt_Bove

Sam Reinhart has 16 points in 13 games. This is fine #Sabres @WKBW

10:09 PM - Feb 13, 2018

93

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His struggles were most evident in a 3-0 loss to the Boston Bruins on December 19. Reinhart logged only 2:05 of ice time in the third period as the Sabres tried to mount a comeback. After the game, Sabres head coach Phil Housley was critical of the former second-overall pick and said he needed to earn his ice time.

Fast forward to Tuesday's win against the Tampa Bay Lightning. A lot has changed with injuries to key players but Reinhart had more minutes than every forward in the lineup not named Ryan O'Reilly.

"I think there is more urgency," Housley said about Reinhart on Wednesday. "I think confidence has a lot to do with it. Obviously, everybody's start was a little bit slow but he has slowly built himself into a very dangerous forward for our team and I think that goes with urgency and battle. To win those battles, going to the net, paying the price to score goals and I like that he's brought more speed to his game."

As Uncle Ben told Peter, with great power comes great responsibility. With his roommate and bicycle buddy out of the lineup, Reinhart has earned extra minutes and doesn't look like he'll cool off anytime soon. Since the tear started, Reinhart has insisted that he's done nothing different than when he was struggling.

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt_Bove

Sam Reinhart has 13 points in 10 games. He had 13 points in the #Sabres first 44 games. So what has changed? @WKBW

9:47 PM - Feb 8, 2018

31

See Matthew Bové's other Tweets

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So why shouldn't the Sabres trade him when his value is soaring? There is no way Reinhart can keep this up, right?

Wrong

When Reinhart is playing his best he is cleaning up the garbage around the blue paint and causing havoc in front of the net. In today's NHL players who can do that are very valuable.

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He's certainly not the fastest player and won't beat many goaltenders with his shot. But what he can do is spread the puck around to his teammates and protect the puck behind the net.

Let's say he cools off and finishes this season with around 40 points. That's certainly not good enough but everyone has a down year once in a while. As hard as it may be, try forgetting that he was a second-overall pick and think of him as a young player that will likely have three seasons with more than 40 points before his 23rd birthday.

You'd have to think most of the teams calling on Reinhart would be contenders, meaning they'll likely end up with a late first round pick. For some perspective, here are the last ten players selected in the first round of the 2014 NHL Draft (year Reinhart was drafted).

Robby Fabbri (STL)
Kasperi Kapanen (PIT)
Conner Bleackley (COL)
Jared McCann (VAN)
David Pastrnak (BOS)
Nikita Scherbak (MTL)
Nikolay Goldobin (SJ)
Josh Ho-Sang (NYI)
Adrian Kempe (LAK)
John Quenneville (NJD)

Some solid players for sure, but aside from Pastrnak, is there anyone you would rather have than Reinhart?

In the offseason, it's not ridiculous to think the Sabres can resign Reinhart to a bridge deal worth \$3 or \$4 million a season. At his age that contract could prove to be a steal and also gives him a few more years to develop. Sometimes it just takes a little bit longer -- not everyone is Jack Eichel or Patrick Laine.

Giving up or trading Reinhart seems premature unless the Sabres get an offer they can't refuse. Jason Botterill should absolutely listen to calls on Reinhart, but if, and only if, it's a great deal.

Sabres have no problem scoring without Eichel

WGRZ

Jonah Javad

February 14, 2018

BUFFALO, NY- When a star NHL forward gets injured with a high ankle sprain, it's common for that team's offense to struggle in his absence.

But, in 2+ games without Jack Eichel, the Buffalo Sabres have had no problem scoring.

Eichel went down midway through the first period Saturday against the Boston Bruins (Eichel's hometown team).

The Sabres responded with four goals in the final two periods, en route to a 4-2 win.

The next day, the Sabres scored four goals in a 5-4 home loss to the Colorado Avalanche.

Then on Tuesday, they scored five goals in a 5-3 win over the NHL-leading Tampa Bay Lightning.

Without their best player, the Sabres have scored 13 goals in their last eight periods.

Those numbers are surprising because Eichel is the team-leader in goals (22), assists (31) and points (53), and because the Sabres average the second fewest goals per game in the NHL (2.40).

So, what's gotten into the Sabres offense?

"[Eichel] is obviously one of the best players in the NHL and when he goes down, everyone has to up their game a bit," said forward Nick Baptiste, who scored the Sabres first goal Tuesday against the Lightning.

"We're having a shot-mentality," said Sabres coach Phil Housley, after a brief optional morning skate Wednesday morning. "We're putting a lot of pucks to the net and things are created that way."

"Nothing too fancy, just putting pucks at the net," echoed forward Zemgus Girgensons, who setup Baptiste's goal Tuesday.

Next up: The Sabres visit the Ottawa Senators on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

When it comes to faceoffs, O'Reilly's season has been one for the books

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

February 14, 2018

Kyle Okposo still remembers the moment he learned of Ryan O'Reilly's prowess in the faceoff circle, a lesson he had to learn the hard way. Okposo was still with the New York Islanders, who found themselves trailing but pushing to come back with a 6-on-5 advantage.

Okposo was called upon three times to take draws in that situation, and all three times he found himself matched up with O'Reilly.

"He won three dead clean," Okposo recalled Wednesday morning.

O'Reilly finished among the league's top three in faceoffs won in his each of his first two seasons in Buffalo, but this season his responsibilities have reached new heights. He's won 54 draws in two games since Jack Eichel went down with a high-ankle sprain, giving him a league-high 856 wins this season.

At his current pace - and recent numbers without Eichel suggest that pace will only increase - he would finish the season with 1,238 faceoff wins. That would be the second-highest total in a single season since the NHL began tracking faceoff stats in 1997-98. Rod Brind'Amour holds the record with 1,268 (via @Sabres PR).

Not only is O'Reilly winning draws in mass quantities, he's been doing it with elite efficiency. O'Reilly leads the NHL (minimum 100 attempts) with a 61.3-percent success rate in the faceoff circle. Only two players have won 1,000 or more draws in a season while maintaining at least a 59-percent clip: Brind'Amour (five times) and Boston's Patrice Bergeron (two times).

Phil Housley (2/14/18)

05:46 • February 14th, 2018

O'Reilly's done all this while consistently being asked to perform in high-leverage situations. Not only is he a regular both on the power play and on the penalty kill, his 531 defensive-zone starts rank second league forwards according to Corsica.

Asked if he's ever seen anything like it, Okposo answered immediately: "Nope."

"You can see it in opposing centers when they're going to line up against him," he said. "They're trying to think of different ways to beat him. The fascinating part is he pretty much takes draws the exact same way all the time. And nobody seems to be able to figure it out."

Added Zengus Girgensons, a fellow centerman by trade: "He's definitely the best faceoff guy I know or I've ever played with. ... He's just strong on his stick. He's smart. If you switch it up, he'll adjust to you."

With nearly two full seasons as O'Reilly's teammate now under his belt, Okposo was asked if he learned any behind-the-scenes secrets to O'Reilly's success. He smiled.

"You have to ask him about practice yesterday morning," he said. "I got him pretty good."

Baptiste keeps it simple

Sabres Now (2/14/18)

01:54 • February 14th, 2018

It's been an up-and-down season for Nicholas Baptiste, in the literal sense. He's carved out a consistent role in Rochester with a focus on the small details, which has allowed him to earn multiple recalls to Buffalo.

His most recent recall came Sunday, in the wake of Eichel's injury. He joined the lineup against Tampa Bay on Tuesday and provided instant offense. Collecting the puck off a turnover in the first period, he blazed through the neutral zone, tossed the puck behind his defender along the boards and cut to the net, where he received a return pass from Girgensons to score the game's first goal.

Baptiste's five-hole tally
00:49 • February 13th, 2018

While it's always gratifying to score, Baptiste explained that it's not necessarily what he's looking for at this point of his career. In most cases when he dumps the puck behind defenders, it will be in an effort to wear down opposing players so that the top lines can do their damage.

"I think I've been doing real well in the role I'm in right now," he said. "I think obviously with increased minutes I'll be able to contribute offensively a little more, but I think right now I'm doing the little things right and I'm helping the team get pucks deep and get below the goal line, making it tough on their defense.

"We have tons of skill on this team up top. If I can make it hard on their D, going back for pucks, it's going to opens up tons of ice for those guys."

Nelson stays hot

Casey Nelson is another young player who earned an opportunity due to injuries, and he's run with it so far. Nelson earned his fourth point (1+3) in five games with an assist on Scott Wilson's goal on Tuesday, which further displayed what Phil Housley has described as an "uncanny" ability to get shots to the net.

In fact, the first thing Wilson said to Nelson upon scoring the goal was a compliment of his patience. Wilson was late getting to the lane where he could redirect Nelson's shot from the point. Nelson recognized it and made a move before taking his shot.

Wilson's smooth tip-in goal
00:51 • February 13th, 2018

"I think he's been really solid," Housley said. "There's a lot of areas he can still improve on, but I really like the way he jumps in the play. He tries to be part of the rush. I like in the offensive zone he finds ways, you saw it last night."

Onto Ottawa

The Sabres left for Ottawa following an optional practice on Wednesday, where they'll meet the Senators on Thursday night. The Senators were part of the first major deal of deadline season on Tuesday night, sending defenseman Dion Phaneuf and forward Nate Thompson to Los Angeles in exchange for forwards Marian Gaborik and Nick Shore

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 7 p.m. with the GMC Game Night Pregame Show, or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7:30.

In his own words: O'Reilly on 'Hockey is for Everyone'

Sabres.com

Ryan O'Reilly

February 14, 2018

I want to tell you about Jason Birch. In a way, he helped me get to where I am today.

First, let me back up a bit. For as long as I can remember growing up, we had foster children in our home. My mom and dad took in more than 40 kids over the span of 20 years. For the first 14 years of my life, we had four or five kids at a time in addition to myself and my three siblings.

Jason was one of those kids. Now, the thing I remember most about Jason is that he would find time to get in net every day. Every single day. It was so cool - I mean, how many kids have a goalie to shoot on every day?

Him and I shared a passion for the game, and we bonded on the ice. In fact, for a lot of the kids who came through our home over the years, hockey was a unifying force. Where they were from or any differences we might have had - none of that mattered when we were on the ice.

As I got older, I realized just how valuable having that experience was and how much it helped shape me into the person I am today. My parents taught me the value of getting to know children from different backgrounds. I learned how to not only live with them, but to treat them as family.

Knowing how many people my parents have helped is part of what inspired me to serve as our team ambassador for Hockey is for Everyone Month. I'm trying to live up to what they taught me and, at the same time, support an initiative that I believe helps our game.

I consider myself blessed to play this game for a living. I want everyone to have the same opportunity and know that, regardless of what you believe, where you're from or what your background might be, you can play too. It's a team-oriented game, one that can bring people together out on the ice.

Just like it did for Jason and me.

Learn how to Live Fearless in your community.

Sharpen Up: February 14, 2018

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

February 14, 2018

Maybe the Sabres should play against top teams every night.

Ryan O'Reilly tallied three points for the second game in a row in Buffalo's 5-3 win over the first-place Tampa Bay Lightning at KeyBank Center on Tuesday night. The win comes on the heels of a victory over the second-place Boston Bruins on Saturday.

The Sabres will return to practice this afternoon before heading to Ottawa, where they'll meet the Senators on Thursday.

Here's what you need to know.

About last night

O'Reilly continued to step up in the absence of Jack Eichel, not only with his offense but in the defensive zone and the faceoff circle as well. From last night's Lexus Postgame Report:

O'Reilly has come to be known as a Swiss Army Knife of sorts during his three seasons in Buffalo, and he lived up to that reputation in every sense on Tuesday. On offense alone, he tallied a goal and an assist on the power play and tallied a team-high five shots.

Perhaps of equal importance was his impact both on the penalty kill and in the faceoff circle. He accumulated 4:10 of shorthanded ice time, second only to Rasmus Ristolainen, and blocked a heavy shot from Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman during a long 5-on-3 kill in the second period.

In the circle, O'Reilly won 25 of his 42 draws. It was the continuation of what has potential to be a historic season for the forward, who began the night with a league-leading 831 faceoffs won, on pace for the third-most wins by any player since the league began keeping faceoff stats in 1997-98.

"He does it all," said Sam Reinhart, who scored two goals on assists from O'Reilly. "I've been with him and Jack a lot lately, and they've both been unbelievable in the faceoff circle. That makes it so much easier as a winger, that makes it so much easier on everyone when you start with the puck.

"It's just little things like that, and the two-way game he has is something everyone can watch and learn from him."

In addition to a pair of goals from Reinhart and one from O'Reilly, Nicholas Baptiste found the back of the net in his first game since being recalled on Sunday and Scott Wilson scored his third goal in 10 games. Chad Johnson made 26 saves for his first home victory of the season.

Inside the locker room

Hear from O'Reilly, Reinhart, Wilson and coach Phil Housley below:

Ryan O'Reilly Postgame (2/13/18)

03:18 • February 13th, 2018

Sam Reinhart Postgame (2/13/18)

02:16 • February 13th, 2018

Scott Wilson Postgame (2/13/18)

02:54 • February 13th, 2018

Phil Housley Postgame (2/13/18)
03:24 • February 13th, 2018

Hey, Marty

Former Sabres goalie (and current analyst) Martin Biron will be inducted into the Rochester Americans Hall of Fame on Friday night prior to their 7 o'clock game against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins. Biron was unanimously selected by the Amerks Hall of Fame Committee and will be officially inducted as the 62nd member of the prestigious club.

Find more notes on Buffalo's AHL affiliate in Tuesday's Amerks Update.

Looking ahead

Coincidentally, Buffalo's next two opponents were involved in the first major trade of deadline season on Tuesday, with Ottawa sending defenseman Dion Phaneuf and forward Nate Thompson to Los Angeles in exchange for forwards Marian Gaborik and Nick Shore.

Buffalo's matchup with Phaneuf and the Kings on Saturday afternoon will mark another Kids Day at KeyBank Center. With the purchase of one 300-level II ticket, up to four additional "kids tickets" can be purchased for \$15 each.

Puck drop on Saturday is scheduled for 1 p.m.