



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 15, 2018

Eichel won't play Thursday but his return inches closer

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

March 14, 2018

Jack Eichel was the last player to return to the Buffalo Sabres locker room in KeyBank Center. He skated extra. A lot extra, after the team's practice in HarborCenter. As Wednesday morning turned into afternoon, Eichel was working on his conditioning, working on his skills, working on getting back to healthy.

He's still not quite there.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said that Eichel would not be in the lineup when the Sabres host the Toronto Maple Leafs Thursday in KeyBank Center.

But Eichel is getting closer. And after two full practices, including one of the most strenuous ones of the season, the center is starting to feel like himself.

"I felt good this morning," Eichel said. "I felt really good. I felt better today than I did yesterday. That's what you want to look at for the positives. You just want to take a step forward every day and I thought I did that today."

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Eichel is working his way back from a high ankle sprain that has kept him out of the lineup since Feb. 10.

"We're trying to ease him back into things," Housley said of Eichel. "He's been out a long time. He's got to get some practices in. He won't be playing tomorrow. He's just going to continue to progress."

Could he be back Saturday when the Sabres host the Chicago Blackhawks? Or Monday when they host Nashville?

There is no concrete answer.

"Could be a possibility but I don't want to put a timeline on it," Housley said. "I just feel that his progression is all that matters to us. He's got to feel comfortable. We'll continue to evaluate it every day."

And while Eichel wants to be on the ice, he also doesn't want to rush his return. That's not just a precaution against re-injury. The competitor in Eichel also wants to make sure he's on the ice contributing in meaningful ways for his team.

"I mean I think you always want more practice time," Eichel said. "Four and a half weeks it's been now. As much as you skate and you do everything you can, it's a lot different than being on the ice with these guys competing and battling. ... I'm just going to try and take the right steps forward to get back as soon as I can but I don't obviously want to rush it. I want to get back at a point in my ankle, in my body at where it feels good and where I'm at the point I feel I can contribute the way I want to."

While Eichel is still on the mend, other Sabres are returning from injury. The expectation is that Evan Rodrigues will be in the lineup Thursday, back after missing five games with an upper body injury.

Rodrigues was getting into a groove at the time of his injury, notching a goal and assist on Feb. 25 vs. Boston and scoring a goal while taking five shots on Feb. 28 against Tampa Bay.

"I was getting put into a lot of good situations to succeed," Rodrigues said of his time before the injury. "I just felt like every time I had the puck, I wanted it on my stick. I wanted to make a play."

Housley liked the way Rodrigues was playing before the injury as well, noting mostly his play was a result of "just his tenaciousness. He plays with urgency," Housley said. He would like Rodrigues to "continue to shoot the puck. When he shoots the puck, good things happen."

It was a shorter time on the injured list for Rodrigues this time. He missed the first two months of the season with a hand injury, making this one of his most challenging years in hockey. But as he returned to skating from this injury, his work with Dennis Miller, the team's director of rehab and development, helped Rodrigues get back up to speed.

"We had a few skates," Rodrigues said of working with Miller. "It's about getting your conditioning back up and getting your hands back into it. The injury was only a few days, but a few days off can make you a little rusty so it's just trying to get you back in game-shape and get your hands moving a little bit."

Slowly but surely, injured players are returning to the lineup. Seth Griffith practiced again Wednesday and could return Thursday from an upper-body injury.

Griffith said he feels good and is ready to go, adding that it's heartening to see players return to practice.

"It's tough when guys go down with injuries and I've been there. It's tough," Griffith said. "It's tough watching when you want to be out there helping. It's nice to see guys coming back."

Sabres Notebook: Bailey call-up delays AHL suspension

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

March 14, 2018

Justin Bailey was a little surprised.

He had never been suspended before, so when he got the phone call from Rochester Americans coach Chris Taylor, he was taken aback a little bit. But when he watched the video, he saw he indeed did hit Syracuse Crunch defenseman Reid McNeill too high in Sunday's game in BlueCross Arena.

Bailey was suspended for one game by the American Hockey League for an illegal hit to the head.

But that suspension will have to wait. Bailey was recalled by the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday. If and when he returns to Rochester this season, he will have to serve the one-game suspension before playing. Unlike the NHL, there is no appeals process for player suspensions in the AHL.

Bailey offered his vantage point after the Sabres practiced in HarborCenter Wednesday in advance of the Toronto Maple Leafs coming to town for a 7 p.m. game Thursday.

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"I think there's a lot of emotions down in Rochester," Bailey said. "That's a team that we can see ourselves potentially playing in the playoffs. ... Obviously my intent was not to hit him like that at all. I don't wish that on anybody. I think it was just a quick play. I was in desperation mode with a guy in front of the net."

The Amerks were up, 4-2, in the game before Syracuse came back to tie it. Rochester eventually won the game in a shootout.

Sabres coach Phil Housley is glad to have Bailey back with the Sabres. The Buffalo native in his third pro season scored the only goal for the Sabres in their last game, a 2-1 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights in a shootout.

"We want him to continue to grow and develop as a player," Housley said. "I thought he brought a lot of speed and physicality to his last game. Obviously it helps when you score and you feel good about yourself contributing, but I'd like to continue to see (physicality) from him."

While Jack Eichel will be out of the Sabres lineup Thursday against Toronto, the Leafs could still be without Auston Matthews.

Matthews suffered a shoulder injury during a game against the New York Islanders on Feb. 22. Tuesday was his second-straight full practice, albeit with a red sweater to indicate no contact. He was reportedly on the ice, again in red, Wednesday for an optional morning skate before the Leafs hosted the Dallas Stars.

"I'm feeling fine. Felt better every day," Matthews told Toronto media on Tuesday. "It's nice to get on the ice with the guys and take reps and be [involved] rather than just skating by yourself, so you can get your timing and stuff back, which is a big key in returning play."

According to a story from TSN, Leafs coach Mike Babcock said that Matthews won't play until after Wednesday's game against Dallas and noted that a player needs at least one full practice at regular speed before he can return. That would seem to rule out Matthews for Thursday against the Sabres.

Linus Ullmark took the ice Wednesday for practice, but after a pre-practice session for the three goaltenders, left the ice.

"He had a personal matter, a good personal matter, so we'll see where he is tomorrow," Sabres coach Phil Housley said after practice.

Ullmark and his wife, Moa, were expecting the birth of their first child. She was due in March.

Meanwhile, the decision of the Sabres to bring up Ullmark created an opportunity for goalie Paul Berrafato.

Berrafato, a Williamsville native who just finished a four-year goaltending career at Holy Cross, has signed with the Sabres' ECHL affiliate in Cincinnati. The Cyclones had an opening after the Sabres decided Ullmark belonged in Buffalo for the rest of the year.

The NHL club recalled Ullmark from Rochester on Tuesday, prompting the Amerks to recall goalie Jonas Johansson from Cincy. The Cyclones needed someone to share the net with Jason Kasdorf, and Berrafato fits the bill.

Atlantic Hockey named Berrafato as its First Team goalie this season. The 24-year-old played every minute for the Crusaders, finishing 13-16-7 with a .919 save percentage. He set the Holy Cross single-season shutout record with five.

Berrafato, who played for the Buffalo Junior Sabres in 2009-10, also set the Holy Cross career shutout mark with 11. He played in 114 games during his four seasons with the Crusaders, going 46-47-19.

Eichel continues to progress, but he won't play Thursday

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 14, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Jack Eichel has been full go for two long practices, but Phil Housley said he won't play Thursday against Toronto. Evan Rodrigues will return after missing five games.

Housley said he likes the way Eichel has looked, but he needs more time to practice, "He felt really good today. It's one of those things where we're trying to ease him back, he's been out a long time, he's got to get some practices in and he's just going to continue to progress."

Eichel might play on Saturday, but Housley said, "That could be a possibility, but I don't want to put a timeline on it, I just feel that his progression is all that matters to us and he's got to feel comfortable, but we'll continue to evaluate it every day."

I had wondered if Eichel was sore after working over an hour for two straight practices. He said, "It was a good practice yesterday for sure, I think it was one of the harder practices we've had and coming off of not skating with the team for 4.5 weeks it was tough, but I felt really good this morning. I felt better today than I did yesterday and that's what you want to look at."

Eichel agreed with Housley that he needs to get as much practice in as he can. He said, "You always want more practice time. It's been 4.5 weeks and as much as you skate and do everything you can, it's a lot different than being on the ice with these guys and competing. You really can't practice the same that you would get with the team.

"I'm just going to continue to take the right steps forward and get back as soon as I can, but I don't want to rush it and I want to get back at a point where my ankle feels good and it feels at the point where I can contribute the way I want to."

Kyle Okposo didn't practice due to a concussion, but Housley was extremely encouraged by his winger's progress, "He's very good, better than we thought. He's really responding well and I like where he is right now moving forward."

Linus Ullmark left to take a phone call right after goalie practice. He spoke with goalie coach Andrew Allen and left. Housley said it was a "good" personal matter. Ullmark's wife is known to be pregnant.

Wednesday's lines:

Wilson - O'Reilly - Reinhart

Pouliot - Larsson - Pominville

Girgensons - Rodrigues - Baptiste (Griffith)

Nolan - Josefson (Eichel) - Bailey

Scandella - Ristolainen

Guhle - Nelson

Beaulieu - Antipin

Gorges - Falk

The Sabres bring back Bailey

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 14, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres had one extra forward at practice on Tuesday, but they have recalled Justin Bailey.

Bailey played Saturday against Vegas and scored Buffalo's only goal, his third in eight games.

He has four goals and six points in his last six games with the Amerks, but is currently suspended in the AHL for one game. The suspension was for a check to the head of a Syracuse player last Sunday. Bailey was supposed to sit out Thursday's game.

In 28 games with Rochester this season, he has six goals and five assists for 11 points.

With goalie Linus Ullmark up, Sabres have crowded net

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 15, 2018

BUFFALO – Before a rough outing last week, Sabres backup Chad Johnson was among the NHL’s hottest goalies, going 6-2-0 over a six-week stretch.

But Johnson, 31, might be getting a break soon. In fact, in the near future, he could even be scratched for some games.

Right now, the Sabres have three healthy goalies – Johnson, starter Robin Lehner and prospect Linus Ullmark – on the roster.

The Sabres recalled Ullmark, 24, their netminder of the future, Tuesday. Coach Phil Housley said they plan to give the Swede, a two-time AHL All-Star, some action.

It’s unclear how long Ullmark might stay up or if he’ll start tonight against the Toronto Maple Leafs at KeyBank Center. He left Wednesday’s practice inside HarborCenter early for a personal matter, Housley said.

But soon or later, Ullmark, the only Sabres goalie with a contract for next season, will play. When they summoned him Jan. 11, he responded with a 44-save effort in a 2-1 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets, his only NHL appearance this season.

In recent weeks, the last-place Sabres have been examining some of their prospects up close. Wingers Justin Bailey and Nick Baptiste and defenseman Brendan Guhle should all play again tonight.

It makes sense Ullmark, who made 20 of his 22 NHL appearances two seasons ago, received a recall.

Still, having three goalies on the roster rarely works well, something Housley understands.

“I wouldn’t like it ... if you’re a true competitor,” Housley said. “I think our goalies feel the same but they understand the situation, where we’re at in our evaluation of all our players. He’s earned a right to come up here.”

Ullmark earned a recall because he has been one of the AHL’s best goalies this season, going 20-11-10 with a 2.44 goals-against average, a .923 save percentage and two shutouts in 42 contests with the Rochester Americans.

“You measure his consistency down in Rochester, his numbers speak for themselves,” Housley said. “I think ... he had a really good, solid game against Columbus in here. I really like that he was out attacking, he was on his angle, he was challenging shooters. I also like his puck movement, mobility back there.”

Lehner said: “It’s very normal for teams in our situation (to have three goalies). There’s a lot of young guys up here right now, everyone’s getting a lot of experience.”

Johnson, who didn’t dress the last time Ullmark played, knows “there has to be some look to the future.”

“I understand that part of it,” Johnson said. “At the end of the day, it does (stink) having three goalies, because obviously, being the older guy, I feel like I’m the odd man out, which is tough. It is what it is. There’s only three weeks left and you deal with it.”

In his early days with the Ottawa Senators, Lehner, 26, was the prospect coming up from the minors and taking playing time from the established talent.

At first, Lehner spelled Alex Auld and Brian Elliott. Later on, he battled Craig Anderson and Ben Bishop. The Senators eventually traded Bishop.

“I was in the same situation since I was 19 years old,” Lehner said. “I was up and down, I got looks, I got games. It’s how you break into the league. It’s obviously a situation where that’s where our team’s at.”

Lehner, a restricted free agent after the season, isn’t worried about losing playing time.

"I'm going to play games," said Lehner, who has played 50 times. "Linus is going to get some looks, he deserves it."

Meanwhile, Johnson, an unrestricted free agent, has played 27 contests. He started slowly this season before catching fire in January.

"We all want the net, we're all confident, we all believe we can play in this league," Johnson said. "I feel like that. ... I feel I can have success and be a good goalie or a great goalie in this league given the right opportunity. It's part of the game.

"Every ... organization has three guys now that can play in the NHL and it's just a matter of time who gets there and the opportunity they get and where the organization sees them fitting in."

Sabres' Jack Eichel out Thursday; Kyle Okposo doing well

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 14, 2018

BUFFALO – Sabres center Jack Eichel won't be ready for Thursday's home tilt against the Toronto Maple Leafs and will miss his 15th straight game.

Still, Eichel, who returned to practice Tuesday, has been progressing in his recovery from a high right ankle sprain. The Sabres just don't want to rush the youngster.

"He felt really good today," Housley said this afternoon inside KeyBank Center. "It's one of those things we're trying to ease him back into things. He's been out a long time, he's got to get some practices in."

Housley said Eichel, the Sabres' leading scorer, could be a "possibility" for Saturday afternoon's game against the Chicago Blackhawks.

"But I don't want to put a timeline on it," Housley said. "I just still feels that his progression is all that matters to us."

Eichel, who was injured Feb. 10, said "you always want more practice time."

"As much as you skate and you do everything you can, it's a lot different than being on the ice with these guys competing and battling," he said of practice compared to a game. "You can't really put a practice together the same as you would get with the team. I felt good today and I'm just going to continue to try and take the right steps forward."

Eichel practiced this morning inside Harbor Center beside some fourth-liners and players he likely wouldn't skate with in games.

In other injuries news, Housley said winger Kyle Okposo, out since suffering a concussion last Thursday, is doing "very good, better than we thought."

"He's really responding well," Housley said. "So we'll continue to look at that every day. But I like where he is right now."

Okposo also endured a scary concussion late last season.

Center Evan Rodrigues, meanwhile, practiced fully again today and should return from his upper-body injury against Toronto. Rodrigues has missed five games.

"I feel back to normal," Rodrigues said.

The Sabres also recalled winger Justin Bailey from the Rochester Americans this morning following a brief AHL assignment.

"It was a crazy couple days," Bailey said.

The Williamsville native scored in Saturday afternoon's 2-1 shootout loss to the Vegas Golden Knights. The next day in Rochester, he earned a one-game suspension for an illegal check to Reid McNeil's head.

"There was a lot of emotions down in Rochester," Bailey said of the Amerks' 5-4 shootout win against the Syracuse Crunch. "I think that's a team that we could see ourselves eventually seeing in the playoffs. We got up on them early and they started to run around, we started to run around."

"Obviously, my intent was not to hit him like that at all. I don't wish that on anybody. I think it was just a quick play, a play where I was kind of in desperation mode, a guy in front of the net."

In other news, Housley said goalie Linus Ullmark left today's practice for a personal matter.

Eichel takes another step forward, but will not play Thursday

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 14, 2018

Jack Eichel took another step forward in his recovery from a high-ankle sprain on Wednesday morning. The Buffalo Sabres will ensure that he has time to progress even further before adding him to their lineup for game action.

Eichel was a full participant in practice for the second day in a row but will not play against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday. Phil Housley left the door open for a potential return when the Sabres host the Chicago Blackhawks on Saturday but refrained from putting a concrete timeline on the forward's recovery.

"He felt really good today," the Sabres coach said. "It's one of those things, we're trying to ease him back into things. He's been out a long time, he's got to get some practices in. He won't be playing tomorrow."

Sabres Now (3/14/18)

01:56 • March 14th, 2018

The Sabres held a lengthy practice session at HarborCenter for the second day in a row after having had Sunday and Monday off. Tuesday marked Eichel's first practice with the team since sustaining his injury on Feb. 10, and he was please with the response from his ankle.

"It was a good practice yesterday, for sure," he said. "I think it was probably one of the hardest practices we've had and obviously coming off of an off day and not skating for four and a half weeks, it was tough. But I felt good this morning. ... I felt better today than I did yesterday, and I think that's what you want to look at for the positives.

"You just want to take a step forward every day and I thought I did that today."

Evan Rodrigues and Seth Griffith also participated in practice for the second day in a row as both forwards work their way back from upper-body injuries. Housley said he expects Rodrigues, who has missed the last five games, to return to the lineup on Thursday.

Rodrigues had tallied nine points (4+5) in his last 11 games prior to sustaining his injury, including goals in back-to-back contests. He's scored a career-high 16 points (6+10) in 35 games with Buffalo this season.

"I was getting put in a lot of good situations to succeed," Rodrigues said. "My linemates were playing great with me and I just felt like every time I had the puck I wanted it on my stick and I wanted to make a play. I'm going to continue to try and do that tomorrow."

Rodrigues centered a line with Zemgus Girgensons on the left wing and Nicholas Baptiste alternating with Griffith on the right. He also practiced on Buffalo's top power-play unit alongside Ryan O'Reilly, Sam Reinhart, Scott Wilson and Rasmus Ristolainen.

Sabres recall Bailey

The Sabres will have options at forward should Griffith and Rodrigues both be ready to play on Thursday, as the team recalled Justin Bailey from Rochester on Wednesday morning. Bailey scored a goal upon being recalled for the team's game against Vegas on Saturday but was reassigned to play with the Amerks the following afternoon.

Bailey received a one-game suspension from the AHL for an illegal check to the head in that contest against division rival Syracuse. He showed remorse for the play after practice on Wednesday.

"I think that's a team that we could see ourselves eventually seeing in the playoffs," Bailey said. "We got up on them early and they started to run around, we started to run around. Obviously, my intent was not to hit him like that at all. I don't wish that on anybody. I think it was just a quick play, a play where I was kind of in desperation mode, a guy in front of the net."

Ullmark leaves practice for personal matter

Linus Ullmark was in full gear and ready to take the ice for practice when he stopped to take a phone call, spoke to goalie coach Andrew Allen and left the arena. Housley said that Ullmark left to tend to a "good personal matter." He and his wife, Moa, are currently expecting a child.

The Sabres still had two goalies at practice in Robin Lehner and Chad Johnson. Housley said that the plan is to carry all three and get Ullmark some starts before the end of the season.

Okposo is progressing

Phil Housley Practice (3/14/18)

03:21 • March 14th, 2018

More good news on the injury front: Kyle Okposo is progressing well in his recovery from a concussion, Housley said Wednesday. Okposo sustained the concussion during an open-ice collision with Ottawa Senators forward Bobby Ryan on March 8. He missed the last six games of last season with a concussion as well.

"[He's] very good, better than we thought," Housley said. "He's really responding well. So, we'll continue to look at that every day. But I like where he is right now."

Lines at practice

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

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 13 Nicholas Baptiste / 25 Seth Griffith

67 Benoit Pouliot - 22 Johan Larsson - 29 Jason Pominville

17 Jordan Nolan - 10 Jacob Josefson / 15 Jack Eichel - 95 Justin Bailey

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

45 Brendan Guhle - 8 Casey Nelson

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 93 Victor Antipin

4 Josh Gorges - 41 Justin Falk

40 Robin Lehner

31 Chad Johnson

Sharpen Up: March 14, 2018

Sabres.com

Chris Ryndak

March 14, 2018

Jack Eichel was a full participant in yesterday's practice. It was his first go with the team since sustaining a high-ankle sprain last month, and while he's eager to get back, there's no timetable set for his return to the lineup.

Buffalo hosts Toronto tomorrow night at KeyBank Center.

Here's what you need to know.

Yesterday's practice

Here's Eichel's interview session with the media and some footage of him skating:

And from the Ice Level Practice Report...

Whether this is a precursor to a potential return against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday remains to be seen. Sabres coach Phil Housley refrained from putting a timetable on Eichel's return to game action, and Eichel echoed that sentiment.

"I don't really know," Eichel said. "I don't want to put a timetable or pick a specific game. I would like to play as quickly as I can. It's more about how I feel and how my ankle reacts in practice today, how it feels tomorrow, how I feel physically.

"Mentally, obviously, you're back already whenever you're out there that long and you missed that much time. You wish you were playing a few weeks ago."

Eichel said he'll continue to look for ways to avoid similar injuries in the future. Last offseason, he implemented activities in his training regimen focused on strengthening his ankles.

"I think you look into everything," he said. "Your skates, edges, whatever you're doing. I think I'll do a lot of digging this summer on how to help myself. I think that most things are preventable. In that situation, it's unfortunate that it happened like that.

"... It's a freak accident so I'm just going to continue to do the best I can to be healthy as long as possible and be on the ice every time I can."

Other fresh faces at practice

Evan Rodrigues and Seth Griffith, both out with upper-body injuries, were back at practice as well. Housley said they'll be evaluated again after today's practice to see if one or both of them will be ready to go against Toronto.

Buffalo is also carrying three goalies on the active roster. They recalled Linus Ullmark from the Amerks yesterday and Housley said that he'll have an opportunity to play. Ullmark is 20-11-10 with a .923 save percentage and a 2.44 goals-against average in 42 AHL games this season.

Justin Bailey is back with the team too. After scoring in Saturday's game against Vegas, he was sent back down to Rochester to play in the Amerks' home game on Sunday. He was recalled again this morning.

What else is going on?

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

#Sabres prospects Casey Mittelstadt (Minnesota) and Linus Weissbach (Wisconsin) have been named to the Big Ten All-Freshman Team.

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Buffalo Sabres



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Our game-worn jerseys from Feb. 8 against the Islanders are now up for auction - bid here <http://bufsabres.co/hAafiX>

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Enjoy a Girls Night Out! 🍷 ☐

Our next #SabresStyle will be Thurs., March 29th when we take on Detroit - sign up <http://bufsabres.co/KWdWLw>

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Coming up today

Stay tuned for full practice coverage. We'll check on the progress of Eichel, Rodrigues, Griffith, et al.