



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 7, 2018

Ristolainen-led defense finally shows its preseason promise

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 6, 2018

When it comes to trash-talking, Rasmus Ristolainen has had better days. But when it comes to hockey, that's what things were supposed to look like.

Ristolainen and his fellow Buffalo Sabres defensemen were a confident, aggressive group during Monday's victory over Toronto. They pressured the Maple Leafs by being first on the forecheck, pinching from the blue line and skating with the puck.

In other words, the defensemen did what Phil Housley promised they would do before the season.

"That's just our system," the coach said Tuesday. "I've talked about it all along that we want to get the D involved in the offensive zone. They're a big part of our attack."

Alas, things haven't gone as planned. Buffalo was the last team to get a goal from a defenseman, carrying the goose egg until Jake McCabe scored two months into the season. Ristolainen, who finally heated up around New Year's with 24 points in the last 29 games, is the only blue-liner in the top 80 in points (tied for 27th with 33). Marco Scandella, with 18 points, is the only other one in the top 115 in the NHL.

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So when the defense corps has a night like Monday, it stands out. The group will go for two in a row Wednesday when Buffalo hosts Calgary.

"We're better when we're more aggressive," Ristolainen said in KeyBank Center. "We forecheck hard. We hit. We're physical, and I think that's the way we've got to play."

Ristolainen was the first player chasing a puck behind the Maple Leafs' net twice Monday. Brendan Guhle also beat everyone below the goal line once. Throw in hard pinches to the low slot by Nathan Beaulieu and Casey Nelson, and Buffalo had the aggressive defense that was advertised during the offseason.

"Absolutely," Sabres goaltender Chad Johnson said. "There was no hesitation with guys jumping up in the play. There's that confidence that guys are going to back you up, that we're going to get through turnovers, that we're going to have guys there to back you up if you make a mistake."

"I think that allows Risto to jump up in the play when we had the puck. Everybody was really getting up when they could."

With the exception of Victor Antipin, every Buffalo defenseman had at least one shot. Ristolainen had two assists.

"I really like the aggressive play from our D, even if it's slamming a wall" at the blue line to keep a puck in, Housley said. "That's where you want to play. You want to play in the offensive zone."

The Sabres still had to play defense. Toronto is seventh in scoring and set up in Buffalo's zone, especially during a 16-shot third period while pushing to erase two- and three-goal deficits.

But Ristolainen blocked five shots, Scandella got in the way of three and Beaulieu added two blocks and three takeaways. It wasn't a perfect night for Nelson and Guhle, but they showed their speed and puck-moving ability to clear the zone against the Leafs.

"When they dumped it in and changed, we really tried to turn and go, and our D-men really could do that," Johnson said. "When we have that, we have a little more speed, and you see us play a little faster. All the guys were really getting up there, so it was great."

"I don't think you can do that against every team. Toronto, just the way that they were, just the way the energy was, it seemed like we had the opportunity to do that."

Ristolainen was the most visible player, which is how it should be nearly every night. The 23-year-old had two points, a plus-3 rating, four hits, five blocks, one shot and one fight in 25:52.

"I didn't think it was the best one, but it was pretty good," Ristolainen said when asked if it was his best game. "You never play a perfect game. I'm a young player, still got a lot of things to learn. Obviously, you can always be better, and every year I try to take strides."

He could use help in his fighting and chirping. Though he exhorted the crowd to get loud after a fight with Nazem Kadri, he did much more clinging and ducking than punching. Things got more interesting in the penalty box.

5 Mar

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Kadri vs Ristolainen pic.twitter.com/TdRHnoVR7q

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8:53 PM - Mar 5, 2018

5,515

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The TSN cameras caught a conversation between the players, and a GIF on Twitter by @TheFlintor captioned the chat. It featured Ristolainen saying the feisty players will meet four more times. Kadri countered that Monday didn't count, so it was only three more meetings.

Ristolainen had a stunned look of realization, then turned away. He's seen the clip.

"It was funny," Ristolainen said. "I just exchanged a couple words with him, and that's it. Not going to tell you guys what we said, but obviously you can read a little bit of what we were talking. It's just two guys who play hard and doesn't like each other."

If he and the defense play a similar game against the Flames, there could be more opportunities to frustrate opponents and show their preseason promise.

Story topics: Rasmus Ristolainen

Sabres Notebook: Larsson Marches on; Reinhart works tips; Criscuolo injured

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 6, 2018

Johan Larsson's march through March has begun.

Like clockwork, Johan Larsson's game shows significant improvement during the final weeks of the NHL season. After producing next to nothing during the opening five months, the Buffalo Sabres center has one goal and two points in two March games.

Expect the trend to continue.

Mr. March has played 32 games in the month, and he has 10 goals and 21 points. He has 16 goals and 41 points in the other 210 games he's played.

"I had no idea," Larsson said Tuesday of his traditional uptick. "I usually play good at the end of the years. I feel better about my game."

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"I don't know if it's one specific thing, but I know I feel a little more comfortable with everything: the coaches, system and everything."

April typically isn't bad, either, with three goals and seven points in 14 games. So exactly half of his 26 career goals have come during March and April, leaving October through February in the dust.

Part of it is opportunity. The Sabres have cleaned house during Larsson's five seasons, trading forwards and shutting others down due to injuries. Larsson then moves up the lineup – he played a season-high 20:30 against Toronto – and gets power-play time. Of his nine career power-play points, seven have come in March and April.

"It's probably just a little more opportunity at the end of the years with trades and injuries," Larsson said in KeyBank Center. "That could be a factor, too, as well. But I don't think too much right now. I'm just playing and feel good about it."

"It's always nice to play a lot, but you've got to do your role the best you can every night. That's what you're here for, and that's what I'm trying to improve every night."

When the Sabres host Calgary on Wednesday, Larsson will attempt to record points in back-to-back games for the first time this season. It's been a forgettable year for the 25-year-old, who has four goals, 14 points and a minus-17 rating in 64 games.

"It's been really tough for everyone," Larsson said. "It's the toughest one I've been a part of here. It's been a lot of bad days, tough days coming to the rink."

"You try to be a pro every day. It's hard in this league, especially with the way it's gone. But we've kind of found our rhythm a little bit lately and been playing really well as a team. There's some positive things there."

Sam Reinhart's fondness for getting in a goalie's face was talked about again Tuesday. Namely, did he envision himself in that role as he prepared for his NHL career?

"Probably not, to be honest," the right winger said.

Reinhart was a slick-passing, goal-scoring center before the NHL. Now he's most effective when planting himself at the top of the crease and tipping pucks. He did it on the opening goal of Monday's 5-3 victory over Toronto, and he made the whole night miserable for Maple Leafs goaltender Frederik Andersen.

The first time Reinhart ever tried the net-front role was his rookie season under former coach Dan Bylsma.

"Growing up, I was always half-wall or middle, but I was able to take advantage of the opportunity there," Reinhart said. "Obviously, there's some good guys that I've been able to play on the power play with that we've been able to read and react off each other. In terms of five-on-five, the puck's going to go there eventually, so it's kind of crept into my game and I try to use that."

Reinhart has shown a knack for deflections and positioning, but there wasn't a set plan on how to become that type of player.

"There wasn't one thing that I kind of told myself, "That's what I'm going to start doing and that's what I'm going to learn how to do," he said. "It's kind of naturally crept in."

"It's so hard to score goals in this league, and the puck's going to go there eventually. Maybe I just found that out early, had some success early with that and that's how I'm going to have to score goals in this league. I may as well go there."

Kyle Criscuolo was excited to return to the Sabres. The Amerks certainly won't like the result.

Criscuolo suffered an upper-body injury during a collision with Toronto's Matt Martin, and the center will miss four to six weeks. Martin hit the center hard into the boards midway through the second period, and Criscuolo immediately retreated to the trainers' room.

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If you are hit by Martin please seek immediate medical attention.

9:02 PM - Mar 5, 2018

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It was Criscuolo's first game with Buffalo since December. He earned the recall with 15 goals and 34 points in 50 games with Rochester, which will obviously miss his production.

"Tough on him, too," Sabres coach Phil Housley said Tuesday. "In the little time that he did play in the game, I thought he played a really sound game and brought his speed. He's one of those guys that goes to the tough area. He took that hit, and it's unfortunate for him and it's unfortunate for us moving forward."

The Sabres recalled Criscuolo because an injury to Evan Rodrigues left the team short at center. Rodrigues is week-to-week, so Buffalo will have to recall another player from the Amerks, move Zemgus Girgensons back to center or adjust in another way against the Flames.

Sabres' Reinhart embraces role he never envisioned

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 6, 2018

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Story topics: Sam Reinhart

It's that time of year when Sabres' Larsson goes Marching in

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Story topics: Johan Larsson

The Sabres and Amerks lose Criscuolo for weeks

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 6, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - With Jack Eichel and Evan Rodrigues injured, the Sabres needed a center. Against Florida, they tried Zemgus Girgensons and that didn't work so they called up Kyle Criscuolo from Rochester.

Criscuolo is a big part of why the Amerks have done so well this season, scoring 15 goals and 19 assists for 34 points in 50 games.

Early in the game against Toronto, Criscuolo went to check Matt Martin against the wall. The move backfired as Martin braced himself and the 5' 8", 165-pound center bounced off. He went straight to the room holding his shoulder and the Sabres have announced he's out 4-to-6 weeks. That's a big blow to a team in the Amerks that is already missing their leading scorer and rookie All-Star C.J. Smith.

Smith's lower-body injury must be coming along because he's now listed as week-to-week.

Rodrigues is no longer day-to-day and is listed as week-to-week with what is believed to be a rib injury.

The Sabres had an optional skate on Tuesday because they have four games in six days this week with the last game a 1:00 start on Saturday.

Ristolainen enjoys his battles with Kadri

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 6, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - After Rasmus Ristolainen tangled with Nazem Kadri on Monday, the two sat in the penalty box and trash talked each other. It hit Twitter in a GIF and it seems like everybody saw it. Ristolainen also saw it and he said with a laugh, "It looks funny."

It looked like Ristolainen was telling Kadri they have four more games against each other and then Kadri was telling him it was only three, Ristolainen wouldn't confirm, "I'm not going to tell you guys what we said, but obviously you can read a little bit of what we were talking about, but it's just two guys who play hard and doesn't like each other."

Ristolainen had a pretty good night against Toronto. He had two shots tipped in by the 3:43 mark of the game and he was nasty and strong playing 25:52. He was active in the offensive zone pinching and getting in deep. He said, "It don't think it was my best game, but it was pretty good."

Housley said it's nice to see, but it's what he's wanted to see from the start, "That's just our system, we want to get our D involved in the offensive zone and they're a big part of our attack, but I really liked the aggressive play from our D, even if it's slamming a wall because that's where you want to play, play in the offensive zone."

One thing I've noticed with Ristolainen is he never seems satisfied when we talk to him. He said he will never be happy with his game, "You never play a perfect game and I'm a young player with still a lot of things to learn and obviously you can always be better and every year I try to take strides."

The Sabres are 6-5-1 since Jack Eichel got hurt. Now nobody is dumb enough to think this team is better without him. Phil Housley just thinks players know they have to contribute more and in different ways, "We're rallying around the players that are out. It started in Boston when Jack went down early and the guys just came together. We know that Jack is a huge part of our team and part of the future of this organization, but right now what we can control is how we can prepare for the next game and I think our guys have done a tremendous job of just keeping the game simple, not doing anything cute and making the right plays."

Housley said that Chad Johnson would start Wednesday against his old team Calgary. He indicated that Robin Lehner would get the start against his old team on Thursday in Ottawa.

Kyle Criscuolo left the Toronto game holding his shoulder. He will be out 4-to-6 weeks, so the Sabres need another center.

With four games in six days, Housley only had eight players skate on Tuesday.

Sabres' Chad Johnson one of NHL's hottest goalies

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 6, 2018

BUFFALO – When Chad Johnson hit free agency last summer, the goalie said he could've pursued opportunities to join teams much better than the Sabres.

Ultimately, Johnson said his heart led to him re-signing here as a backup following a season with his hometown Calgary Flames, tonight's opponent at KeyBank Center.

Johnson, 31, said he trusted new Sabres general manager Jason Botterill and the organization.

"There was something that drew me back to this team – the city, the fans, the organization," Johnson said Tuesday. "There was just something – I don't know – I had a connection to it the year before. I wanted to be in it for the long run. ...

"I decided to come back knowing the team necessarily wasn't going to be at the top, win a Stanley Cup, whatever it was. I wanted ... to be a part of the organization because I believed in the group that was in there."

Of course, the Sabres, despite their current 7-5-1 run, have been perhaps the NHL's biggest disappointment, winning only 21 of their first 66 games. Johnson, meanwhile, endured a brutal start, going more than three months without a win.

"I'm not happy with how the season's gone and how things have played out," said Johnson, who will start tonight's game.

But Johnson began turning his season around Jan. 22 in Calgary, making 32 saves in a 2-1 overtime win. The confidence his first victory since Oct. 15 generated helped buoy him.

Since then, Johnson has been one of the NHL's best goalies, going 6-2-0 with a 2.05 goals-against average and a .933 save percentage in 10 games.

Among netminders with seven or more appearances over that stretch, Johnson's goals-against average and save percentage both rank fifth. He has also won three straight starts.

Before that Calgary win, Johnson had compiled downright awful numbers – 1-8-3, 3.84 and .877 – in 17 contests.

Throughout his struggles, Johnson insisted he felt fine and would keep the same approach, something Sabres goalie coach Andrew Allen echoed.

"It's funny, you start winning games and people ask if it's the best you've ever felt," said Johnson, who has a one-year contract. "I've said from the start I've felt good about where my game is at and what it needs to be to have success. I can't say enough about the way the guys are playing in front of me."

His teammates, Johnson said, have been the biggest factors in turning around his miserable campaign.

"The way things were going on in the games, they're completely different from what's going on in front of me now and that's why you're seeing the results," Johnson said.

Johnson said the Sabres have stopped giving up premium scoring chances.

"We're not giving up two-on-ones, getting back-doored, giving up tons of deflections that are going in four times a game," he said. "We're not giving up three-on-twos with a guy coming with tons of speed down the middle and getting a clear-cut shot.

"So situations have changed, the chances we're giving up have changed, we have a lot more pressure on guys. There's less time and space for guys to pick corners because we're closing that time."

Johnson said the Sabres are reacting to plays instead of thinking.

"That creates more space for me to see the puck," he said.

Sabres coach Phil Housley believes Johnson has been showcasing a new level with his teammates.

“Let’s make no mistake, Chad has really given us some key saves at key moments in games,” he said. “He’s really stepped up his game, you can really see it in the results the last games he’s played.

“But I really like his demeanor in the net. He looks really comfortable. He doesn’t chase anything, he’s letting pucks hit him, he’s square to the puck, and when you do that, it’s not a wasted motion. He seems to be swallowing a lot of pucks.”

With Johnson playing so well again, it’s fair to wonder if he could return next season. Remember, he was terrific two years ago subbing for injured goalie Robin Lehner, compiling a .920 save percentage in 45 outings and earning the team’s unsung hero award.

Johnson wouldn’t speculate much on his future. Still, he could have one in Buffalo. Whether or not Lehner returns – he’s a restricted free agent and could be moved with prospect Linus Ullmark ready for NHL duty – the Sabres will need a backup.

Sabres' Kyle Criscuolo out four to six weeks with upper-body injury

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 6, 2018

BUFFALO – Sabres center Kyle Criscuolo will miss four to six weeks after suffering an upper-body injury in Monday's 5-3 win against Toronto, the team announced today.

The injury, of course, is a blow to the entire organization. Criscuolo, who was recalled Sunday, is one of the Rochester Americans' leading scorers with 15 goals and 34 points in 50 games. The Harvard product certainly would've been returned to the Amerks for the AHL playoffs next month.

Criscuolo, 25, left his ninth NHL game when Maple Leafs winger Matt Martin hit him with 13:40 left in the second period.

"In the little time that he did play in the game, I thought he played a really solid game and brought his speed," Sabres coach Phil Housley said this afternoon inside KeyBank Center. "He's one of those guys that goes to the tough area. He took that hit. It's unfortunate for him, it's unfortunate for us moving forward."

The Sabres summoned Criscuolo because Evan Rodrigues' upper-body injury left them with only three healthy centers. They might need to recall one before Wednesday's home tilt against the Calgary Flames.

"You never want to see anyone get hurt," Martin said Tuesday. "It's not what you are trying to do out there. You want to be physical and have an impact. I don't even know when I hit him, exactly. It's a physical game and rivalry games like this are always a little more physical."

In other news, Housley said goalie Chad Johnson will start against the Flames, his old team.

Sabres' Rasmus Ristolainen on argument: 'It was funny'

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 6, 2018

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen has watched the video of his argument with Toronto Maple Leafs center Nazem Kadri from their respective penalty boxes.

“It was funny,” Ristolainen, who fought Kadri early in the second period of Monday’s 5-3 win, said this morning inside KeyBank Center.

Ristolainen said he “just exchanged a couple words with him, that’s it.”

Actually, the Finn also exchanged some numbers with Kadri. The clip, which went viral, generated laughs because they were apparently arguing about the number of the remaining games the rivals have left.

When Ristolainen held up four fingers and said “four more times,” Kadri emphatically corrected him, telling him they only have three more meetings.

“I’m not going to tell you guys what we said, but probably you can read a little bit about what we were talking (about),” Ristolainen said. “It’s just two guys who play hard and (don’t) like each other.”

The Sabres play the Leafs three more times over the next 13 games.

5 Mar

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Kadri vs Ristolainen pic.twitter.com/TdRHnoVR7q

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pic.twitter.com/67FeByGAZ8

8:53 PM - Mar 5, 2018

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Reinhart's been thinking less, scoring more during hot streak

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 6, 2018

Now and then, Sam Reinhart is asked what he thinks about when he's out on the ice. The ideal answer, he said, is actually to have no answer at all.

"If I can tell you, that's probably not a good thing in my game," Reinhart said. "I'm just going out and playing and reading and reacting. The game's so fast that that's the way you've got to play. That's the way I play best."

It's that type of simplicity, combined with renewed confidence, that's helped Reinhart establish one of the most productive stretches of his young career since the beginning of January. He's scored 23 points (9+14) in 22 games dating back to Jan. 18th, tied for 15th in the NHL during that span.

Reinhart only scored 11 points in 38 games prior to his goal at the Winter Classic on Jan. 1. He said after a three-point night against the New York Islanders on Feb. 8 that nothing had changed preparation-wise, but admitted on Monday that he's been thinking less during games as of late.

The result, said linemate Ryan O'Reilly, has been a player who's been in command in all aspects of his game.

"I think he's just confident," O'Reilly said. "He's trusting himself and impacting the game. He's been huge, one of our best players, and for me he makes my job so much easier. He's smart with the puck and just away from the puck ... just his reads on stuff, the puck seems to find him and he's making plays off it."

Sabres Now (3/6/18)

01:59 • March 6th, 2018

It should come as no surprise, but a lot of those plays have come below the dots in the offensive zone, be it on quick feeds from around or behind the net or deflections in front of the goaltender. In fact, six of the nine goals he's scored during his hot streak have come on either tips or rebounds.

Reinhart said he had never played the net-front position on the power play prior to his rookie year in 2015-16, when he first established himself as a net-front presence. Since then, it's become an essential part of his game both on the power play and at even strength.

It wasn't an intentional point of emphasis, he insists. Rather, it crept into his game naturally.

"It's so hard to score goals in this league," Reinhart said. "The puck's going to go there eventually. Maybe I just found that out early."

Reinhart's redirection PPG

00:43 • March 5th, 2018

He crashed the net often against Toronto on Monday, scoring on a tip of a Rasmus Ristolainen shot during a power play early in the contest and later having multiple run-ins with Maples Leafs goalie Frederick Andersen as the result of his presence in the crease.

Phil Housley said after that game that Reinhart's recent productivity stemmed from his willingness to "pay a price" to get to scoring areas. An example of that price can be found during a power play against Dallas on Jan. 20. Reinhart is knocked to the ice by Dallas defenders ...

... But he re-establishes himself and scores nonetheless.

Reinhart's backhand PPG
01:03 • January 20th, 2018

"Guys are big and strong in this league," Reinhart said. "You're going to get knocked down. But I think it's easier offensively getting to the net than protecting it. It's always tough defending and having to watch for the puck. I mean, I know where guys are going to be putting it for the most part so it's easy reacting off that."

That said, Reinhart thought the effort to get in front of the net had been there earlier this season as well. His recent opportunities down low, he said, are more likely a product of better play along the boards and in the neutral zone. His coach added the defensive zone to that list as well.

"He's just determined right now," Housley said. "I think a lot of it just has to do with his confidence. Once you start getting some offensive production, you start feeling better about yourself. But the thing I've really liked is the defensive awareness. He's a player you can trust in your own zone. He's making those good little plays to get pucks out and right now his instincts are taking over."

With 16 games remaining, Reinhart can still surpass the career-high 47 points he scored last season if he maintains his point-per-game pace, a mark that would have seemed unlikely just two months ago. His goal is to continue learning from his current run, beginning when the Sabres host Calgary on Wednesday.

"Of course I'm going to," he said. "That's something we're trying to do here. Everyone's trying to do that. We have another chance tomorrow against a team that's fighting for a playoff spot and in a position that we want to put ourselves in as soon as possible."

Criscuolo out 4-6 weeks with upper-body injury

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 6, 2018

It seems like the injury bug has focused its attention on the centers of the Buffalo Sabres.

Kyle Criscuolo will miss four to six weeks after sustaining an upper-body injury in Monday's tilt with the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Sabres announced Tuesday. Criscuolo had been recalled on Sunday to fill in at center for Evan Rodrigues, who has been labeled as week-to-week with an upper-body injury.

Criscuolo was playing his first shift of the second period on Monday when he went to deliver a hit on Maple Leafs forward Matt Martin along the boards. He skated directly to the bench after the collision and went to the dressing room.

"In the little time that he did play in the game I thought he played a really solid game and brought his speed," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He's one of those guys that goes to the tough area. He took that hit. It's unfortunate for him, it's unfortunate for us moving forward."

The Sabres are also without their top center in Jack Eichel, who resumed skating this past weekend as he continues his recovery from a high-ankle sprain. The team has not put a timetable on Eichel's potential return, although Housley did say that Eichel's goal is to play before the season ends.

Buffalo still has 12 healthy forwards on its roster, with Seth Griffith having sat as a healthy scratch on Monday. The team has the option to move Zemgus Girgensons from the top-line wing back to center, as it did in Florida on Friday.

The Sabres held a light optional skate on Tuesday amid a stretch of three games in four days. They won 5-3 over the Maple Leafs on Monday, host Calgary on Wednesday and then visit Ottawa on Thursday.

Tomorrow's goaltender

With back-to-back games coming up against Calgary and Ottawa, Housley said it's fair to expect both Chad Johnson and Robin Lehner to start against their former teams. Johnson spent last season as a member of the Flames and is a Calgary native, while Lehner played parts of five seasons with the Senators.

"I believe so," Housley said. "We look at the track records, obviously, and who's had success against other teams. We know Chad had a huge game against Calgary. We know where he's from and he'll be playing tomorrow night in net."

Johnson stopped 32 of 33 shots in a win over the Flames on Jan. 22. That began a stretch of nine appearances in which he's gone 6-2-0 with a .933 save percentage and a 2.05 goals-against average, including a 38-save performance in the win over Toronto on Monday.

"I think we're playing a lot better, boxing out guys in front of our net," Housley said. "I think he's seeing more pucks. But let's make no mistake, Chad has really given us some keys saves at key moments of the games. He's really stepped up his game."

"You can see it in the results of the last games he's played. But I really like his demeanor in the net. He looks very comfortable. He doesn't chase anything. He's letting pucks hit him, he's square to the puck."

A chat from the penalty box

Rasmus Ristolainen admitted to laughing off a GIF of his post-fight chat with Nazem Kadri on Monday, which featured subtitles of the two players discussing how many games were left between the Sabres and Maple Leafs this season (there are three). He would not, however, confirm whether those subtitles were accurate.

"I'm not going to tell you guys what we said," Ristolainen said. "Obviously you can read a little bit what we're talking [about]. We're just two guys who play hard and [don't] like each other."

Sharpen Up: March 6, 2018

Sabres.com

Chris Ryndak

March 6, 2018

One down. Three (yes, three) to go. The Sabres beat the Maple Leafs 5-3 last night in the first of four games against each other in a five-week stretch.

Eight Sabres recorded points with Jason Pominville (1+1), Sam Reinhart (1+1), Ryan O'Reilly (1+1), Johan Larsson (1+1) and Rasmus Ristolainen (0+2) each recording multi-point efforts. Chad Johnson was steady in net, stopping 38 shots.

The Sabres are back at it for practice today (full coverage on the way) and a game against the Calgary Flames at home tomorrow night.

Here's what you need to know.

About last night

Recap: TOR 3, BUF 5

04:54 • March 5th, 2018

From the Lexus Postgame Report...

Jason Pominville said over the weekend that he was intrigued to see if the rivalry between the Buffalo Sabres and the Toronto Maple Leafs would be how he remembered, with some five years having passed since he was last a part of it.

He got his answer on Monday. Following a game that featured a constant back-and-forth from fans on both sides, a total of eight goals scored and physical play throughout, Pominville smiled at his locker in KeyBank Center.

"Yeah, it hasn't changed," he said.

Johan Larsson Postgame (3/5/18)

02:45 • March 5th, 2018

Apparently, neither has Pominville's knack for scoring against Buffalo's neighbors to the north. He came into the game with 48 points (18+30) in 50 games against the Maple Leafs as a member of the Sabres, and he added two more to that total with a goal and an assist to help lead Buffalo to a 5-3 win.

Phil Housley Postgame (3/5/18)

03:35 • March 5th, 2018

"It was really important to get some net-front presence and have a good shot mentality," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "... We got off to a good start. We started on time against an opponent where we knew they were coming off of three losses. We knew they were going to be hungry and we got that all-important first goal."

Chad Johnson Postgame (3/5/18)

02:40 • March 5th, 2018

"We didn't blink," Pominville said. "We got a couple bounces go our way, for sure, on a couple goals. But we didn't blink, we kept pushing. ... We stuck with it tonight and found a way, which was nice. Lately we've been doing it quite a bit. It's something we've got to build off of."

As it often does, emotion seemed to spill from the stands onto the ice on Monday, resulting in a physical affair. A second period-fight between Ristolainen and Nazem Kadri ended with Ristolainen waving his arms in the air to rile up the crowd.

Sam Reinhart Postgame (3/5/18)
01:59 • March 5th, 2018

"It's tough for us to go through this last little bit, but we're trying to build something," Reinhart said. "We're trying to improve and keep this consistent play going. If we get an atmosphere like this any time, especially on this ice and to be able to put a good product out for them, that's motivation enough for us."

Housley did not have an update on the status of Kyle Crisculo after the game. The forward, who was recalled from Rochester on Sunday, left the game early in the second period after taking a hard hit into the boards by Matt Martin.

Crisculo was fourth on Amerks scoring at the time of the call up. He has 34 points (15+19) through 50 games in the AHL. We'll have our weekly Amerks Update for you later today.

The Sabres are also without center Evan Rodrigues, who is dealing with a rib injury and has missed the last two contests.

Johan Larsson Postgame (3/5/18)
02:45 • March 5th, 2018

Postgame Notes
Courtesy of @SabresPR:

The Sabres are now 19-3-1 in their last 23 home games against the Maple Leafs and 70-27-8 at home against Toronto all-time.

The win improved the Sabres' record to 6-1-1 in their last eight games against Atlantic Division opponents.

Chad Johnson made 38 saves on 41 shots faced, improving to 6-2-0 in his last nine appearances with a .933 save percentage and a 2.05 goals-against average in those contests.

With a power-play goal and an assist, Sam Reinhart now has 23 points (9+14) in his last 22 games. He also now has 13 points (5+8) in his last 13 home games.

With two points (1+1), Jason Pominville now has 50 points (19+31) in 51 games against the Maple Leafs as a member of the Sabres.

With two assists, Rasmus Ristolainen now has six points (1+5) in his last six games.

Johan Larsson's two-point night (1+1) gives him nine points (4+5) in eight career games against Toronto, including five points (3+2) in the last three meetings.

Ryan O'Reilly logged two points (1+1) and now has 12 points (3+9) in his last 11 games and 21 points (8+13) in his last 16 home games. His four-game point streak (1+4) is tied as his longest streak of the season.