



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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A look at what's been done at other hockey arenas

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

April 4, 2018

Some key renovations completed at NHL arenas built in the 1990s, listing year of opening:

Air Canada Centre, Toronto (1999) – 2008-2010: \$48 million renovation of atrium, 30-50 foot video wall and outdoor plaza. \$10 million upgrade in 2015, including new scoreboard.

Amalie Arena, Tampa (1996) – \$35 million renovation prior to 2012 Republican National Convention: Rebuilt entrance, addition of new padded seats, removal of two upper sections for bar, stage, organ, 11,000-square-foot outdoor party deck, climate controls, lighting, largest video board in North America. Another \$25 million after 2015 Stanley Cup final for reconstruction of club level, addition of loge seats and new concession stands and restrooms.

BB&T Center, Sunrise, Fla. (1998) – From 2011-2013, replaced seats in lower bowl, built Club Red center ice seating on lower level and county-funded new scoreboard (\$4 million) to acquire 2015 NHL draft.

Bell Centre, Montreal (1996) – Ongoing \$100 renovation project for replacement of all seats, upgrades to concourses, addition of restaurants, conversion of Avenue des Canadiens-de-Montréal into pedestrian-only street.

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Bridgestone Arena, Nashville (1996) – Nearly \$70 million in renovation since 2011, including replacement of all seats, new bar arena, service level and locker room enhancements.

Canadian Tire Centre, Ottawa (1996) – \$15 million renovation in 2014 included upgrades to club level and social gathering spots on 100 level.

Capital One Arena, Washington (1997) – \$40 million renovation planned for summer of 2018 to replace all seats. Sound systems, concourses, concessions all upgraded, new team store.

Scottrade Center, St. Louis (1994) – Spent \$34 million last summer on a new jumbotron, ice plant, team dressing room, concession stands, lighting and sound systems.

Staples Center, Los Angeles (1999) – Spent \$20 million in 2016 to upgrade 170 suites, premium areas, sound/lighting and team store.

TD Garden, Boston (1995) – Spending \$160 million from 2014-2019 to upgrade arena and build 1.87 million-square-foot retail, office, residential and hotel complex dubbed The Hub on Causeway that's connected to arena and allowed expansion of building's footprint and atrium.

Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia (1996) – Over the next three years, a \$250 million renovation will create court- and rink-side luxury boxes and eliminate many in the roof and mezzanine levels. Each level of the arena, including team dressing rooms, will be completely renovated and widened.

Source: Buffalo News research

Story topics: KeyBank Center

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BUFFALO'S AGING KEYBANK CENTER?

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

April 4, 2018

A whole segment of Sabres fans still talk about how the team is playing at "the new arena," a step up from the much-beloved Memorial Auditorium. But KeyBank Center, the fourth name of a building that opened in 1996, is hardly new anymore.

Approaching 22 years old, it's in middle age in arena years and has fallen behind the other facilities constructed during the NHL's building boom in the 1990s. Virtually all 17 of those venues have undergone major renovation projects in recent years or are about to. Just last month, a \$250 million renovation was announced for Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. The home of the NHL's Flyers and NBA's 76ers opened in August 1996 – one month before KeyBank Center.

Sabres officials know their arena needs work, both in cosmetics and in major renovations that some estimates figure could cost roughly \$50 million or more. When it opened in 1996, then-Marine Midland Arena was built for \$127 million.

Officials from Pegula Sports and Entertainment, led by Sabres and Bills president Russ Brandon, have made several trips around the NHL the last couple of seasons, visiting other arenas to collect data and help brainstorm ideas. They're needed to spruce up a building that is showing the wear and tear of hosting 21 seasons of NHL hockey and thousands of other sporting events and concerts.

The Sabres close the home regular season Wednesday night against the Ottawa Senators. The team is last overall in the league; their 11 home wins are tied for the fewest in franchise history; and officials have endured season-long complaints about the arena and the product on the ice.

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"Our arena was very well done when it was built," Brandon said in an interview with The Buffalo News. "The sightlines certainly are a plus. We've got nice club areas as far as proximity to ingress and egress, and our suites are nicely positioned. But I can assure you we've had a lot of internal discussion knowing where the building is age-wise and having seen what other facilities across the country are doing that are in the same age bracket.

"On the business side, we want to control the controllables – and that's to provide the fan with the best experience possible. That means maneuvering the building, concessions, merchandise, technology options. How people consume the product is far different than when we started out. We want to take a holistic approach in looking at the positives of other areas and implement what we think is right for our fan base."

Brandon isn't talking specifics just yet, but the Sabres have already met with prominent architects in the sports design field to solicit ideas for what can be done as a renovation in Buffalo.

Banners featuring current players hang in the atrium at KeyBank Center. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News)

Upkeep has become an issue

When the arena was built, the giant atrium entrance and the Sabres Store souvenir shop were first-of-their-kind features in the NHL and they continue to stand the test of time as signature elements. The walkway connecting the upper atrium to HarborCenter and the Marriott hotel that was added in 2014 also has proved popular, although the construction of the \$172 million HarborCenter project cut off much of the view of the arena from cars and pedestrians heading south on Washington Street.

What fans have grown increasingly disturbed by is the condition of the building as it has passed the 20-year mark. Cracked concrete is visible in the 100 and 300 levels. Although better in recent weeks, the temperature in the building has made it among the coldest in the NHL for fans. NHL.com writer Amalie Benjamin, formerly of the Boston Globe, infamously tweeted a couple of years ago that her scale of comfort zones in NHL press boxes runs "from 1 to First Niagara Center."

Fans are regularly seen wearing hats and winter coats while sitting in the seating bowl, something uncommon in NHL arenas, even in acute cold-weather places such as the Canadian markets.

A burgeoning narrative is that the arena is dirty and unkempt. Hot water is hard to find in restrooms. Brandon acknowledges he hasn't gone far in recent weeks without hearing about these issues.

"In my three years with the Sabres, it seems to be a growing sentiment," Brandon said. "We're looking into it and have addressed some situations that were unacceptable. It's part and parcel of going through the whole grand view to see where we may not have met our expectations as well.

"There's no reason at any point where the building should not be maintained at an exemplary level of what we can control. We listen, we want to respond. The advent of social media can be negative at times, but it's positive to us with the customers because it gives you the chance to get immediate feedback that we need and can act on."

A broken cup holder is seen on a seat in the 100 level at KeyBank Center. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News)

Speaking briefly to The News during a break in the recent NFL owners meetings in Orlando, Sabres owner Terry Pegula acknowledged those concerns and said the Sabres plan to take the cleaning services back in-house after using an external company this season. Fans have noticed cleaning crews walking the concourse during games in recent weeks, something that had not been seen the last couple of seasons.

"We just attached a hotel and a hockey rink to that arena," Pegula said, referring to HarborCenter. "So we're obviously very concerned about how it looks."

Fans say the Sabres are in desperate need of ripping out the arena's 19,070 seats and replacing them with newer padded models. The backs of most seats, especially in the 100 level, show years of dirt and grime. So do their accompanying cup holders, many of which are rusted.

Dire lack of history

Alumni Plaza outside the arena is a success story. Impressive elements to document the team's history include the French Connection statue, giant photos of Sabres greats adorning the enclosed walkway from the parking garage and plaques on the walkway pillars that honor the NHL debut of every player in franchise annals.

The Sabres famously had thousands of people on the plaza during their runs to the 2006 and 2007 Eastern Conference finals, but the area has gone mostly underused since then. Brandon attended the NHL business summit last month in Las Vegas and was floored by the way the Vegas Golden Knights used the plaza outside T-Mobile Arena.

"We have to take more advantage of our plaza," Brandon said. "We had success during playoff games and there's obviously weather issues during much of the season, but during the beginning of the season, we can be more active in that space as well. Just seeing how Vegas activated things from the time you get out of your car or out of public transit all the way into the building is something we need to look at."

The Sabres also need to look at how they present the history of their franchise throughout the entire arena. Giant banners of current players such as Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, Rasmus Ristolainen and Kyle Okposo hang in the atrium but there are virtually no other photos anywhere of the current team. There are many portraits of Hall of Famers on the 100 level, albeit mostly from the '70s, and not a single picture of any Sabre on the 300 level.

The '98 Eastern Conference finalists and '99 Stanley Cup finalists are nowhere to be found. Same for the '06 and '07 teams or the 2010 Northeast Division champions. A large display of memorabilia cases in the bar area on the 100 level of the atrium has disappeared, replaced by largely blank, painted walls.

There are no interactive displays anywhere in the building such as you see in places like Pittsburgh. No collections of hats to celebrate hat tricks that are prominent in places like Washington, Philadelphia and Columbus. And forget about displays of franchise icons similar to those you see in places like Montreal, Toronto and Edmonton, or salutes to area high school hockey teams like you see in Minnesota, New Jersey or Pittsburgh.

Hats tossed on the ice are collected for a display in Washington's Capital One Arena honoring Capitals hat tricks. (Mike Harrington/Buffalo News)

The press box in Buffalo is full of old photos from the team's past, many of which appeared during its 40th anniversary display at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, but they are not accessible to the public. The team's Hall of Fame display is outside the dressing room, seen only by a few fans each night who are chosen to stand by the gold carpet and watch the team take the ice at the start of a period. It would be a huge attraction to fans.

Fans love the Pour Man's Aud Club on the 100 level, a wonderful gathering spot featuring fixtures from the Aud and the original, hand-lettered stat boards from the concourse, frozen in time with the names and numbers from the 1995-96 farewell season. They are some of the few touches of team history in the building.

Most NHL arenas as a matter of course have displays about the best players and teams in the franchise's past. The Sabres do not. In the \$867 million Little Caesars Arena in Detroit that opened this season, statues of greats such as Gordie Howe adorn the concourse. So do giant posters of Howe and former captain Steve Yzerman, the latter hoisting the Stanley Cup.

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Mike Harrington



@ByMHarrington

Homage to the old Olympia and Gordie Howe. #Sabres #Redwings

11:47 AM - Nov 17, 2017

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"I can tell you that PSE is taking a look at new arenas like Detroit and how they present their teams," Brandon said. "They really did an amazing job there capturing the great history of the Red Wings and it certainly stood out to us when we visited. We need to capture ours in the next phase of KeyBank Center."

The Sabres are coming up on the 50th anniversary of the franchise in 2019-20 and know their history will be an overriding theme for that year. Still, they know they have to do a better job of honoring it at all times.

"We certainly will have some exciting programming when it comes to the 50th anniversary but that's a one-time celebration for that one year," Brandon said. "While that's great, we have to treat it like year 42. We have to continue to improve but that said, I'm hoping people will be jazzed up with what they see when that year comes."

Partnership required

The Sabres aren't just going to make major renovations of KeyBank Center on their own. While the Pegulas are anticipated to contribute – as they're doing in privately funding an \$18 million renovation of the club areas of New Era Field – it's likely going to have to be a partnership among the state, county and city with the owners. But dollars are always tight. The Pegulas are working on upgrading Blue Cross Arena in Rochester and Syracuse University is pursuing state money to renovate the iconic Carrier Dome, which turns 38 in September.

Erie County owns the building, and County Attorney Michael Sirigusa said this week that he is unaware of any serious conversations from Sabres leadership about the need for arena upgrades. The existing agreement says the public entities are not responsible for the operations, management, repair or improvements to the arena.

County officials say they expect their good working relationship with the Pegula leadership team to continue.

"We're open to a reasonable discussion on a number of issues related to the current conditions of KeyBank Center," said Daniel Meyer, a county spokesman.

The arena lease is the original document signed when the building was built and expires Sept. 30, 2025. The lease at New Era Field does not expire until July 30, 2023.

"Everything is in play," Brandon said. "It's a never-ending wheel of facility management. But as we move forward in year five of the lease at New Era Field and where we stand at the arena, there will be key decisions made in the next few years for the long-term objectives of all of our facilities."

How does Pegula Sports prioritize the renovations of the stadium with any work needed on the arena?

"They're both individual projects," Terry Pegula said at the NFL meetings. "They're both Priority One."

The Sabres can pursue many renovation options. While the 100 level's soaring concourses are impressive and the club and suite levels look good, the 300 level needs a complete makeover. Its narrow concourses are dark and soulless. Concession stands in all levels could use new frontage (and fans have been quick to point out the high prices this season with \$5 bottles of water, \$11 beers and \$6.75 slices of pizza).

Even during games, the concourses on the 300 level are very dark. Fans also have been complaining about price gouging. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News)

Gathering places are becoming much more common at stadiums and arenas, and facilities such as Amalie Arena in Tampa, Scottrade Center in St. Louis and Canadian Tire Centre in Ottawa have all taken out seats to create new club areas where groups of fans can congregate by drink rails or large couches and benches to watch games.

The Sabres have an outdoor plaza on the Canalside view of the building that's hardly used that perhaps could be enclosed to become part of the arena. There's chatter they may relocate their team offices across the street to the new John Labatt House building being renovated at the corner of Perry and Illinois streets, and use the current offices inside the arena as a new premium seating option.

"We feel pretty good about the location of our building and some of our master planning thoughts internally on how we continue to activate and enhance the guest experience," Brandon said. "We think about and live it every day, thinking how we can improve. Jason Botterill and Phil Housley worry about what the actual product is going to look like on the ice. From the business standpoint, we have to control what the guest experience is. And we're not satisfied if one guest is unhappy."

But there have been a lot of unhappy guests this year, both because of the often abysmal play and the numerous issues of a 22-year-old arena. The Sabres have sold an average of 17,958 tickets per game, a decrease from 18,141 last season. However, the arena has been half-empty on many nights and tickets on the secondary market have sold for as little as \$6.

Season ticket-holders have been active on social media saying they plan to drop their tickets. The Sabres hope to stem that tide. Giving them hope of a substantial arena renovation could do that.

"We've built up such great equity with our fan base over the years and our season ticket-holders have been unbelievably patient," Brandon said. "We have to answer a lot of questions to our fans. We understand the disappointment that they've felt this year with where we are in the standings. Parallel to that, we have to make sure we improve and enhance their experience."

Buffalo News writers Sandra Tan and Vic Carucci contributed to this report

Sabres Notebook: Nylander, Porter recalled from Rochester

The Buffalo News

Amy Moritz

April 3, 2018

With just three games left in the Buffalo Sabres regular season, Alexander Nylander and Kevin Porter got the call from the big club.

The Sabres recalled the two forwards from the Rochester Americans on Tuesday afternoon. It's the first call-up for both players this season.

After an injury sidelined Nylander for training camp and the first month of the season, the former first-round pick found his groove with the Amerks. His point production has picked up lately, including eight points (two goals, six assists) in his last eight games.

Nylander was the eighth overall pick at the 2016 NHL Draft by the Sabres and made his NHL debut last season with one assist in four games. In 113 career games with the Amerks he has 54 points (17 goals, 37 assists) and helped Sweden to the silver medal in the IIHF World Junior Championship in Buffalo this season.

Porter, the captain of the Amerks, was signed by the Sabres on July 1 to provide roster depth and much-needed leadership in Rochester as the organization looked to make a culture change. Porter ranks third on the Amerks with 40 points (16 goals, 24 assists) in 64 games this season and has helped the Amerks to their first playoff berth since 2014.

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Porter has played in 249 career NHL games with 58 points (29 goals, 29 assists) and has 290 points (111 goals, 179 assists) in 421 career AHL games.

* * *

It's the final home game of the season for the Buffalo Sabres which means two things – a celebration of the fans and an end to the suffering.

The team will host its annual Fan Appreciation Night with a 7:30 p.m. faceoff Wednesday against the Ottawa Senators in KeyBank Center.

Home hasn't been a friendly confine for the Sabres this season. They will finish with the worst home record in the National Hockey League. Through 40 games, they have an 11-24-5 record. They've scored 89 goals while giving up 133.

With the performance lagging, the Sabres have stepped up festivities for Wednesday, including giving every fan in attendance a Dominik Hasek bobblehead. Prices at the concession stands will be down for the game, too, as hot dogs, soft pretzels, popcorn tubs, and Sabres souvenir soda cups will be \$3 each.

The Sabres store will offer 40 percent off purchases.

The team and its corporate sponsors will present awards in a pregame ceremony including Fan of the Year, Sabres Foundation Man of the Year, Unsung Hero, Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player.

* * *

The Sabres were off on Tuesday following their 5-2 loss in Toronto to the Maple Leafs.

Buffalo scored twice on the power play, but a major lapse in the second period in which the Leafs scored three times in a span of 5:31, helped give playoff-bound Toronto the win.

In the second, the Sabres got away from "puck management," forward Jason Pominville said after the game. "We got away from what we do. We've got to defend hard to win games. Maybe too many turnovers fed their transition and what they do

best. They're a good team. They stick to it. They don't deviate. We've got to defend and stick to what we do best to win games."

Sticking to the game plan has been an issue all season for the Sabres and Monday night's loss was another case study in their inconsistency. Buffalo had beaten the Leafs in Toronto a week earlier and had knocked off the Predators in Nashville, 7-4, on Saturday.

"That's the frustrating part," Pominville said. "At times you take a step forward and you think you're heading in the right direction and then we take a step back and didn't play the way we want to play. I mean we're playing good teams. We played a great game in Nashville and got a good start (Monday in Toronto) and then after that it just wasn't the way we need to play to win and we got the result we did."

* * *

Wednesday will mark the fourth and final meeting between Ottawa and Buffalo this season with the Sabres holding a 2-0-1 advantage.

The Sabres opened the season series with a 3-2 win in KeyBank Center on Dec. 12. Buffalo scored three times in the second period to open up the lead on goals from Benoit Pouliot, Kyle Okposo and Evander Kane. The Sens came back with two in the third, but Robin Lehner shut the door with 23 saves against his former team.

The Senators picked up two points on Feb. 15 at home in a 3-2 overtime win. Buffalo had a 2-1 lead in the third period, thanks to a goal from Evan Rodrigues at the 15:31 mark. But Derick Brassard scored with 31 seconds left to send the game to overtime and Mike Hoffman tallied at 1:13 of OT to give Ottawa the win.

Their meeting on March 8 also went beyond regulation, but this time it was the Sabres picking up the two points in a shootout win. Marco Scandella, Sam Reinhart and Scott Wilson all scored in regulation while Jacob Josefson had the game-winner in the shootout.

Sabres call up a pair from Rochester

WGR550

Brayton Wilson

April 3, 2018

With three games left in the 2017-18 season, the Buffalo Sabres have made a couple of call ups from the Rochester Americans.

Forwards Alexander Nylander and Kevin Porter were recalled from the Amerks on Wednesday as the team had the day off from practice.

Nylander got off to a rough start to the 2017-18 season in Rochester after returning from a lower-body injury during the Sabres Prospects Challenge in September. After just two goals and four assists in the first 15 games of the season, Nylander was loaned to the Swedish National Hockey team for the IIHF World Junior Championship in Buffalo. He scored a goal and added six assists for the Swedes, but ended up capturing the silver medal after losing out to Canada for the gold.

Since January 27, Nylander has been playing very well in Rochester, registering five goals and 20 points in 26 games.

The 20-year-old has been playing well enough in Rochester to garner another look at the NHL before the end of the season. Last season, Nylander spent the last four games of the year with the Sabres, registering his first career point on an assist in the final game against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

So far in 113 games in the AHL, Nylander has scored 17 goals and added 37 assists.

As for Porter, he will look to dress as a Sabre for the first time since December 21, 2013. Porter had spent two seasons with the Sabres organization, appearing in 43 games while scoring six goals and adding six assists. Since then, Porter had spent three seasons with the Pittsburgh Penguins organization and played in 43 games at the NHL level.

This season in Rochester, Porter has scored 16 goals and registered 40 points while serving as team captain.

The Sabres will return to the ice on Wednesday for the morning skate before the home finale against the Ottawa Senators.

Jason Pominville strong veteran voice for struggling Sabres

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

April 3, 2018

BUFFALO – It's no secret Sabres winger Jason Pominville has lost a step. The popular veteran's 35 years old. What else would you expect?

Earlier in his 13th season, the former NHL All-Star scored just once over a 34-game stretch.

While Pominville has produced some offense – after scoring in two straight games, he has 14 goals – at this stage of his career, leadership is his greatest asset.

That's why the Sabres, who close their home schedule tonight against the hapless Ottawa Senators, reacquired Pominville last June.

Pominville has experienced just about everything throughout his 984-game career. Unlike his teammates, the three-time 30-goal scorer has also won big games with the Sabres. That's significant.

A young team trying to establish itself needs Pominville's strong voice and professionalism.

"He's not going to be the loudmouth of the room," Sabres winger Scott Wilson said last week. "He's just one of those guys when he talks, everybody shuts up and listens. It's been great for me having him around."

But Pominville's no longer captain, a role he filled from 2011-12 until the Sabres traded him to the Minnesota Wild on April 3, 2013. Remember, the Sabres have utilized four alternate captains this season instead of a single captain.

So how has the Sabres' oldest player used his voice throughout a miserable season?

"I've addressed stuff that I think needs to change," Pominville said. "We have meetings, we've had group meetings, we've had team meetings. I think I've been a vocal guy in the room and pretty honest when I see stuff that to me is unacceptable."

"But, yeah, until we buy in as a team, it's not going to change. We have to buy in and be more consistent at it, because we do it on some nights, some nights we're great. Up until we do it consistently, it's not going to work."

Pominville embraces his role and has evolved from his first stint in Buffalo.

"You've seen more so you can address things in different ways, you maybe know how to talk in situations more, when to push the buttons," he said. "I think it's important for me, when I was here (the first time), I had older guys to help me out and I'm here helping out the young guys, so it's important they can have that around. ..."

"So you need those guys around that are good influences that can help out different guys in different situations."

Sabres coach Phil Housley said: "He says the right thing at the right time. We need more of that in our room, guys being more vocal, keeping everybody honest."

Naturally, Pominville's frustrated. Messages from himself, other veterans and Housley often don't sink in.

Pominville said this has been the toughest season of his career. A regulation loss tonight inside KeyBank Center, where the Sabres have only won 11 times, will secure the NHL's lowest point total for the third time in five years.

"You're always constantly trying to think what you can do, what you can say, what you can basically do to help the team, help the organization out," Pominville said. "It just kind of drains a lot of energy from you. Losing is mentally fatiguing."

Despite the lack of success, some players have felt Pominville's impact.

“He’s one of the classic veterans of the league, he’s played with different players and different teams,” Wilson said. “So I know a lot of us young guys kind of value him as not somebody just we can talk to, but having a voice and really listening when he has something to say, because he’s normally bang on with whatever he’s said in the locker room.”

Sabres recall Alexander Nylander, Kevin Porter from Amerks

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

April 3, 2018

BUFFALO – The Sabres recalled prospect Alexander Nylander, the eighth overall pick in 2016, and veteran Kevin Porter from the Rochester Americans today.

Neither forward has played in the NHL this season. The Sabres finish their home schedule Wednesday against the Ottawa Senators.

Nylander, 20, played four NHL games last season. Following a slow start this year, the Swede has caught fire, compiling five goals and 16 points in his last 20 outings

Overall, Nylander has scored seven goals and 26 points in 48 games.

Meanwhile, Porter, 32, has scored 16 goals and 40 points in 64 contests this season. The captain played 43 games with the Sabres over stints in 2012-13 and 2013-14.

The Sabres have today off.

Nylander, Porter earn late-season call-ups to parent Sabres

Democrat & Chronicle

Leo Roth

April 3, 2018

Alex Nylander and Kevin Porter are getting a late-season look from the parent Buffalo Sabres.

The Rochester Americans forwards were recalled on Tuesday. It's the first call-up of the season for each.

More: In Casey Mittelstadt, Sabres fans are given another reason to hope

More: Basketball great Bill Walton's one-liners and health get better with age

Nylander, Buffalo's first-round pick in 2016 and No. 8 overall, has spent the majority of his first two pro seasons in Rochester.

He has 17 goals and 37 assists in 113 career games for the Amerks, including eight (2-6) points in his last eight games. He recorded one assist in four games with the Sabres late last year.

Porter is third in scoring for the Amerks this season with 16 goals and 24 assists for 40 points in 64 games. The Detroit native has appeared in 249 NHL games and has scored 29 goals to go with 29 assists at the top level.

Sabres recall Nylander, Porter from AHL's Rochester Americans

Sportsnet

Mike Johnston

April 3, 2018

Mike Johnston

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April 3, 2018, 2:21 PM

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Buffalo Sabres fans are being afforded the chance to get another look at one of the franchise's top prospects, as forward Alexander Nylander has been recalled from the AHL's Rochester Americans.

The eighth-overall pick from 2016 also finished the 2016-17 season with a brief stint with the Sabres, registering one assist and averaging 12:20 of ice-time in his first four NHL games one year ago.

Nylander has seven goals and 26 points in 48 games with the Americans this season. The winger also won a silver medal with Sweden at the 2018 world juniors. He's the latest youngster to be put on display with the big club. Casey Mittelstadt, the team's top pick from 2017, made his NHL debut this past week and has two assists in three games.

Buffalo has three more games remaining on their schedule — their home finale Wednesday against the Ottawa Senators before finishing the season with a two-game Florida road trip.

The team also recalled forward Kevin Porter. The 32-year-old has 16 goals and 24 assists in 64 games with Rochester. A fourth-round pick of the Coyotes in 2004, Porter has suited up for 250 career regular-season NHL games but has played only two NHL games since the 2015-16 campaign.

Both Nylander and Porter are expected to be sent back to the Americans prior to the start of the Calder Cup playoffs.

LeBrun: Sabres feel the urgency to turn things around next season

The Athletic

Pierre LeBrun

April 3, 2018

TORONTO — This won't come as much solace to long-suffering Buffalo Sabres fans, but it's a fact worth mentioning in the final week of the regular season as the team appears set to finish dead last in the NHL for the third time in five years.

The Colorado Avalanche were a distant last overall last season, I mean, a worse outfit than these Sabres, and this season they are in a playoff race with less than a week to go.

The point being, there is indeed hope, the young and surprising Avs, led by Hart Trophy candidate Nathan MacKinnon, should be all the motivation in the world for the Sabres.

"It just shows you that you're never as bad as you think you are, but at the same time, they had to look internally and they had to figure some stuff out," Sabres veteran Kyle Okposo said Monday when asked about the Colorado example. "You look at Nate's year and what he's doing and how he's really driving the engine of that team. They have a lot of guys having much better years. It definitely comes from within. You have to look at yourself in the mirror and got to get to where you want to be and maybe raise your game to new levels. I think they've done a really great job of that."

The reality of this parity-filled NHL, with the salary cap spreading talent around as evenly as ever before, is that the top teams aren't as great as you think, and the terrible clubs aren't as bad as they look.

Now, it's hard to sell that to a Sabres fan base that is stomaching a seventh consecutive year without spring hockey.

In fact, it begs the question: If the league is so damn close and there's so much turnover in the standings every year (which there is again this season), why aren't the Sabres partaking in the parity party?

Good question, with only tough answers. First-year GM Jason Botterill has now had a full season with his new club and has a better understanding of what needs to be done. Not that it can happen overnight. But I think the questions he had about this team heading into the season have mostly been answered. My sense is, he won't be shy to act this summer.

"Our key to our success long term is obviously Jack (Eichel) and the development of Jack," Botterill told The Athletic on Tuesday. "One, we got to keep him healthy. Two, it's just becoming more of that leader. You look at the success from some of the teams that turned it around this year, New Jersey and Colorado, it's (Taylor) Hall and MacKinnon that really took that step."

As a group, there needs to be change.

"Look, I do believe there are some pieces here," said the Sabres GM. "But there's also a level of consistency that's just not here at all. That level of consistency goes through practices. It's easy to say we want to change the culture, but it's a little more difficult of implementing that and going through it. Just look at the last couple of weeks. We beat Toronto at home a few weeks ago, and then we lose the next (game) 5-1 at home to Calgary, and honestly, it should have been 10-1. We can't sustain any success. To me, that goes back to working harder in practice and having more of a base, more of a foundation so we can actually have a bit more consistency to our game."

Just as MacKinnon has led by example in lifting his team after last season's last-place showing, which he says left him embarrassed, you get the sense from talking to Eichel that the young Sabres superstar has the same desires for next year. His eight-year, \$80 million contract begins next season and he doesn't intend to re-live another lost year. He's clearly had enough. He will welcome any change that helps this team on and off the ice.

"I'm fully invested in this team. I think that's important," Eichel said Monday morning at Air Canada Centre. "We need to bring guys in here who are invested on and off the ice. We want things to change around here. I think that's the biggest thing; nobody is going to do it for us. It's got to be the guys in the room. We got to find consistency in our game and consistency in our practices. We need to mature, guys need to grow up and realize what situation we're in. We can't keep just passing up years and saying it's going to be next year, next year."

And at this point in our conversation, Eichel singles himself out.

"Hey, it falls on me. I need to be better on the ice every night and more of a leader and (lean) on guys more," said the 21-year-old center. "But obviously it's been frustrating. You go through this the first two years and look to make a jump in the third year and you take a step back. You just got to reflect and try to be the difference and be part of the change. You have to go into the summer with a good attitude and come back next season as a better leader to take charge of things."

Another core leader, Ryan O'Reilly, also looks internally when asked to put into words another lost season.

"It's disappointing, and I'm disappointed in myself this year," said O'Reilly. "When it comes to it, it's the guys who go out on the ice, you can't blame anyone else because no one else is playing. We thought things would change dramatically. It's so frustrating. It's a summer we're right back in this situation again. ...

"I'm a guy that plays a lot of minutes," he added, looking down in frustration as he spoke. "I have to be one of the guys that steers the ship and gets it going when it's needed. It's tough. I wish I had the answer so we can figure out how we do change that."

And whether it's a guy like O'Reilly or any other core player, the Sabres are going to have to make some tough decisions about the direction of their team. Do they listen on some core players?

“Let’s be honest, with our team, we have some good, young pieces, but when you finish 31st, you do have to evaluate everything,” Botterill said. “Even with our core guys, we’re going to have to make the assessment here leading up to the draft and free agency, do we keep our guys or make an adjustment there?”

Because it is beyond frustrating for this team to be here yet again.

Because it is beyond frustrating for this team to be here yet again.

“Yes, it is. It’s something I think that’s plagued the organization for a long time,” said Okposo. “The Pegula’s are really invested in getting this team back to where it should be. They want to have success more than anybody and I know it’s really eating away at them. I think we have to really look at ourselves, look at the areas we can get better ourselves.

“But all we can do as a group is figure out if some of our behaviors are conducive to winning hockey and some of our habits are conducive to winning; and if they’re not, then we got to change.”

Hours later, the Sabres would lose 5-2 to the Maple Leafs. Buffalo’s rivals, just a two-hour drive away, are the annoying reminder of what’s played out, as the Leafs were 30th overall in the NHL just two years ago, 12 points behind the Sabres in the standings that season, and now look years ahead in their development.

“They’ve really kind of had that culture change,” Okposo said after I asked him about the Leafs’ successful rebuild. “You can see they play the right way every night. They’re still a young team, they still make some mistakes, they’ve had some of those mistakes cost them games I think; but they learned from them. They play hard every single night and I think we can really take some lessons from that.”

Of that, there is no doubt.

Sharpen Up: April 3, 2018

Sabres.com

Chris Ryndak

April 3, 2018

The Sabres are back in Buffalo following a two-game road trip that ended last night with a 5-2 loss to Toronto. Sam Reinhart and Jason Pominville were your goal scorers.

Buffalo will prep for the home finale tomorrow night against Ottawa. There are only three games remaining this season.

Here's what you need to know.

Looking back at last night

Sabres fall to Leafs, 5-2

05:09 • April 2nd, 2018

From the Lexus Postgame Report...

Sam Reinhart set new career-highs for goals and points in a season with a power-play marker early in the second period, but turnovers and defensive lapses proved costly for the Buffalo Sabres in a 5-2 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs at Air Canada Centre on Monday.

The Maple Leafs scored three goals in the span of 5:31 - two from William Nylander and one from Auston Matthews - following Reinhart's goal, which had tied the game at one goal apiece. Nylander and Matthews finished the game with three points each, having both tallied two goals and an assist.

Phil Housley Postgame (4/2/18)

02:46 • April 3rd, 2018

"We didn't manage the puck very well at that point," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We get caught in a line change, we turn the puck over and the game gets out of our reach. We talked about this team, they have a terrific rush game and they finish on their opportunities.

"We fed it to them and it was unfortunate. It's not characteristic of the way we played the last game. If you do that, that's the result you get."

Sam Reinhart Postgame (4/2/18)

01:05 • April 3rd, 2018

"I think we gave them too many looks coming through the neutral zone with the puck," Reinhart said. "They're going to make you pay."

Chad Johnson Postgame (4/2/18)

02:24 • April 3rd, 2018

"That's a good team over there, they brought it tonight," Chad Johnson, who stopped 30 shots, said. "Their skilled players or their best players were their best players. At the end of the day you wish you could, personally, as a team, beat all these top teams all the time and have great numbers, great statistics.

"It's tough beating these guys when they're at their best. There's a reason why they have as many points as they do. We're still finding that consistency in our game."

Jason Pominville Postgame 4/2/18
02:23 • April 3rd, 2018

Injury update

More from the Lexus Postgame Report...

Brendan Guhle did not dress for the game and is day-to-day with an upper-body injury, Housley said. He was replaced in the lineup by Matt Tennyson, who skated 13:54 in his first NHL game since Nov. 4. Tennyson was recalled Monday morning with Nathan Beaulieu sick and Victor Antipin out indefinitely with a concussion.

"He's day-to-day, just being a little cautious," Housley said of Guhle. "I would expect him to play Wednesday though."

Guhle had appeared in 13-straight games since being recalled on March 4. The rookie has scored two assists and averaged 17:43 of ice time in 15 total games for Buffalo this season.

Fan Appreciation Night is Wednesday

For the regular-season home finale against the Ottawa Senators on April 4 at 7:30 p.m., the Sabres will host Fan Appreciation Night presented by ADPRO Sports. As part of giveaways at the game, KeyBank will provide every fan in attendance with a Dominik Hasek bobblehead as they enter the arena. Hasek was chosen as the bobblehead giveaway by a fan vote earlier this season.

Tickets are on sale now.

Other team sponsors will be providing additional prizes for Lucky Row Giveaways, including (716) Food and Sport, Healthy Scratch, Moe's Southwest Grill, Perry's Ice Cream, Tim Hortons, Wegmans, and La Nova, who will provide an entire section with a voucher for a free pizza. In addition, KeyBank has invited former KeyBank Money Minute contestants to attend the game and participate in a random drawing to win \$5,000.

The fan-favorite Jersey Off My Back giveaway will also make its return to Fan Appreciation Night in 2018, with Sabres players presenting their game-worn, Winter Classic-themed jerseys to select season ticket holders after the game.

The winner of the Fan of the Year Award, presented by BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, will be part of a ceremonial faceoff prior to the game. Winners of this season's player awards will also be announced as part of the pregame ceremony. Awards will include Sabres Foundation Man of the Year presented by Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, Unsung Hero presented by Labatt Blue, Rookie of the Year presented by Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort and Most Valuable Player presented by KeyBank.

The Sabres have also teamed with Moe's Southwest Grill to allow fans to choose the Moe's Hot Players for the final home game of the season. The top three vote-getters on a post on the Sabres Facebook page will be chosen as the Moe's Hot Players for the game on April 4.

During the game, fans will be able to purchase hot dogs, soft pretzels, popcorn tubs and Sabres souvenir cups with soda for just \$3 each. Additionally, the Sabres Store will be giving all fans 40 percent off their entire purchase during the game on April 4.