



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

September 26, 2018

Okposo: Players need to buy in for Sabres fortunes to change

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

September 25, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — An offseason of soul-searching led forward Kyle Okposo to realize a roster overhaul alone wasn't going to improve the Buffalo Sabres' fortunes.

Okposo figured out that he and other team leaders would also have to change their approach. They had to buy in mentally and physically if Buffalo stood a chance of climbing out of a rut after finishing last in for the third time in five years.

"Everybody talks about change and change and change. You hear it 100 times. But until you do, you haven't," Okposo said. "You have to put the work in. You can't just show up next year and say, 'Oh, I think it's going to be different,' because that's the definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result."

With Buffalo mired in a franchise-worst seven-year playoff drought, it's now on the players and second-year coach Phil Housley to show they're not the same dysfunctional team, whose season was summed up by now-traded center Ryan O'Reilly's claim of a losing culture having crept into the locker room.

"I've used those words a few time," Okposo said, when asked if he was cautiously optimistic. "It's more of a fresh start, like a baptism almost."

General manager Jason Botterill focused on shaking up an under-achieving roster through a series of trades. Buffalo acquired forwards Jeff Skinner, Conor Sheary, Tage Thompson, Patrik Berglund and Vladimir Sobotka, and signed goalie Carter Hutton in free agency.

And that was after Buffalo drafted 18-year-old Swedish defenseman Rasmus Dahlin with the No. 1 pick.

Housley took aim at addressing the team's culture. He opened a dialogue by allowing his leaders to air differences and raise concerns through a series of frank discussions in what became an offseason-long cleansing session.

"I give them all credit, because they have had to put themselves in a vulnerable position at times, they've had to listen to feedback and a lot of criticism they might not have liked to hear," Housley said, including himself and staff in that equation. "But I think if you are going to make a difference, and you want to change the direction of this franchise, we have to change as people."

The challenge now is seeing how the Sabres respond once they open the season hosting Boston on Oct. 4.

"There's just a really good vibe right now," Housley said. "But when we face adversity, it's going to be interesting how we handle that. And I have the trust and confidence in our group."

DAHLIN ON D

Dahlin has already created a buzz with his smooth-skating and heads-up play-making abilities. Fans packed the Sabres practice facility to watch Dahlin take part in the team's rookie camp in June and a prospects tournament in September. Hall of Fame coach Scotty Bowman told The Associated Press Dahlin has the potential to become the best defenseman in franchise history.

YOU KNOW JACK

Center Jack Eichel has changed his number, from 15 to 9, and acknowledged a need to have a more even-keeled approach by openly showing fewer signs of frustration on the ice and in the locker room. The second player selected in the 2015 draft also enters the first season of an eight-year, \$80 million contract, and eager to show he's maturing into a leader.

"The losing the last few years, I've never dealt with that in my life. You have to learn from it and figure out what you can do to change it," Eichel said.

BETWEEN THE PIPES

Hutton is pegged to share the goaltending duties with Linus Ullmark, who makes the jump to the NHL on a full-time basis after spending most the past three seasons developing in the minors. They replace the tandem of Robin Lehner and Chad Johnson, who departed in free agency. Hutton enters his sixth season after spending the past two in St. Louis, where he went 30-15-5 in 62 appearances.

FROM THE CO-OWNER

"Listen, it can't get any worse. I mean 31st is pretty much the bottom," Sabres co-owner Kim Pegula said with a laugh. But she and her husband, Terry, remain patient.

"Consistency and growth is really where we are from an ownership standpoint, as opposed to the fan," she said. "We need to temper our kneejerk on that."

THE SCHEDULE

The Sabres open with a four-game homestand before playing 12 of 17 on the road, including a western swing that has them playing five games in nine days.

All eyes are on Sabres rookie Rasmus Dahlin in Buffalo

Associated Press

September 25, 2018

LAST SEASON: 25-45-12, 62 points. Finished last in NHL standings for third time in five years.

COACH: Phil Housley (second season, second NHL season).

ADDED: LW Jeff Skinner, LW Conor Sheary, C Tage Thompson, C Patrik Berglund, C Vladimir Sobotka, rookie D Rasmus Dahlin, D Matt Hunwick, D Lawrence Pilut, G Carter Hutton.

LOST: C Ryan O'Reilly, G Robin Lehner, LW Benoit Pouliot, D Victor Antipin, D Josh Gorges, C Jordan Nolan, G Chad Johnson.

PLAYER TO WATCH: All eyes will be on Dahlin, the 18-year-old Swedish-born smooth-skating, play-making defenseman selected with the first pick in the draft. Dahlin has such potential, Hockey Hall of Fame coach and nine-time Stanley Cup-winner Scotty Bowman says the youngster has the potential to become the best defenseman in Sabres history. Dahlin has already roused a fan base, which jammed the Sabres 1,800-seat practice facility to see him perform during the team's rookie camp in June and a four-team prospects tournament earlier this month.

OUTLOOK: The Sabres can't get much worse than the over-priced and under-achieving squad that won three straight games just once, and endured losing streaks of four or more games seven times last season. Things became so grim, O'Reilly in April revealed he lost his passion for playing at times, and a losing mentality crept into the locker room. O'Reilly was traded to St. Louis in one of numerous moves GM Jason Botterill made to overhaul a roster that will feature anywhere between nine and 12 players not in the season-opening lineup a year ago. The question is how long it will take for the newcomers to find chemistry.

Mittelstadt remains a work in progress

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
September 25, 2018

CLINTON -- What's wrong with Casey Mittelstadt? Nothing really.

He's 19. He's played six NHL games. Less than two years ago, he was still in high school. He's supposed to still be on his deep learning curve.

So when do you start to worry? Is it even valid to worry about such a player, one drafted No. 8 overall?

Expectations soared over the summer after Ryan O'Reilly was traded to St. Louis, instantly anointing Mittelstadt as the Buffalo Sabres' No. 2 center on depth charts everywhere. In hindsight, that was unfairly premature.

Mittelstadt had no points in the first eight periods of the Prospects Challenge and has no points in his three preseason appearances. He was blanked again in Tuesday's 4-2 loss to Columbus and the notion that Mittelstadt would start the season as the No. 2 man in the middle already seems to be flimsy.

It's far more likely that the lineup used here Tuesday will be what we see on opening night, with Jack Eichel in the top slot and newly acquired veteran Patrik Berglund as No. 2 to give the Sabres a strong two-way player and the kind of faceoff option they need to replace the departed Ryan O'Reilly.

It's easy to forget Mittelstadt is just 18 months removed from high school hockey in Eden Prairie, Minn. The tiny Clinton Arena was reminiscent of many rinks in Minnesota, and Mittelstadt apparently took some needling in the Sabres' broom closet of a dressing room when he pointed that out before the game.

"The guys were making fun of me for saying it felt like high school," Mittelstadt said after a morning skate attended by about 1,200 fans that included a few hundred school children. "It was obviously cool to see all the fans and things like that."

As for the game, Mittelstadt was certainly better than he was in the Sabres' home-and-home series against Toronto. His struggles defensively Friday in Scotiabank Arena prompted coach Phil Housley to drop him a line, and he centered Kyle Okposo and C.J. Smith here Tuesday.

Mittelstadt and Okposo had one first-period sequence where they dominated the puck on the cycle in the Columbus zone, and Mittelstadt had a much stronger two-way game overall.

"He was very strong and he was explosive tonight," Housley said. "And I really liked Kyle Okposo's game too. He had guys on his back. That whole line was pretty good."

Holding his position is key for Mittelstadt. When he gets scattered in the defensive zone is when he finds trouble.

"Playing high school I think you can kind of follow the puck around and get away with it -- more than get away with it actually," he said. "For me, there's things to learn and I've always caught on pretty quick and it should be the same way here."

"His defensive zone is the one thing I'm worried about," Housley said. "He's got great skill and speed in the way he attacks the game. Just his defensive reads, make sure he clamps down in that zone."

The one tough lesson for a young player to understand is that some shifts will be a wash. When nothing is happening, you can't force the action. You simply get off the ice, return to the bench and start preparing for the next one.

"For me, that's probably one of the biggest things I've had to learn," Mittelstadt said. "Playing high school, there's always something you can do and a play you can make. Obviously at this level, there's not and you've got to

learn that you're not going to be able to be perfect and do something every shift. With every game, every practice, I continue learning."

Bettman on Sabres: 'I think the team is being rebuilt in the right way'

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2018

CLINTON — The Buffalo Sabres have not been in the Stanley Cup playoffs since 2011, but NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman is like most observers from around the league: He's expecting that cycle to finally change.

"By all appearances, the team is on an upward spiral," Bettman said when asked by The Buffalo News during the first intermission of Tuesday night's Kraft Hockeyville exhibition against Columbus in Clinton Arena. "All of these things happen in cycles. You look at the young talent they have and the moves they made over the summer — among those acquiring Jeff Skinner — I think the team is being rebuilt in the right way."

Bettman praised owners Terry and Kim Pegula for their continued commitment to finding the right solution for their team.

"I assure you nobody wants to win more than they do," he said. "And they want to win for the fans in Buffalo. It's something I remember Terry saying from the very first time I met him.

"You've heard me say repeatedly in a variety of contexts there's nothing more important to the stability and success of a franchise than ownership, and Buffalo is more than fortunate to have the Pegulas so committed to the Sabres and the Bills and, as importantly, to the city of Buffalo with all of the things they've done in the city that positively impacts the quality of life."

Bettman would not comment specifically on the Sabres' plans or requests for events like the NHL All-Star Game or international games. Buffalo has not hosted the all-stars since 1978 and the prevailing theory is a subpar convention center is the reason. The league holds a large FanFest in conjunction with the game.

Bettman said the convention center issue, which drew headlines in Buffalo last week due to talk of two sites for an expanded or new building, has not been brought up to him.

He also did not say specifically if the Sabres are in line to head overseas, although most wisdom has them heading to Sweden in the next couple of years in the wake of Rasmus Dahlin joining the club.

"All of our teams are asking for everything," Bettman said. "Whether it's outdoor games, all-star games, drafts, international travel. Nobody is being overlooked and I have no doubt that every team including the Sabres and Blue Jackets have asked to be considered for any and all."

The Wraparound: Blue Jackets 4, Sabres 2

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2018

CLINTON -- Star forward Artemi Panarin burned Buffalo on a pair of third-period power plays Tuesday night as the Columbus Blue Jackets snapped a tie and went on to a 4-2 exhibition win over the Sabres at Clinton Arena.

Panarin's power-play goal on a wicked slapshot with 13:29 left beat Buffalo goalie Scott Wedgewood to put Columbus ahead for keeps. His neat drop pass to Kevin Stenlund set up another man-advantage tally with 11:05 left as Stenlund lasered a wrist shot over Wedgewood's shoulder. That goal came after an Alexander Nylander turnover.

"He's trying to make something happen," coach Phil Housley said of Nylander. "We gave up two goals on the PK where we had total control and possession of the puck where we'd still be playing right now. It's unfortunate. Those are things you've got to learn."

The Sabres outshot the Blue Jackets, 33-26, but fell to 2-3 in the preseason with their third straight loss. Columbus (2-4) snapped a three-game skid of its own by scoring three power-play goals in the game.

Here's more of the seen, scene and heard of the Sabres' visit to the Hockeyville USA game:

The setting: Clinton Arena, which dates to 1953, was packed with about 2,000 fans. There are only six rows of seats encircling the rink and row one on the end, in fact, was just a collection of folding chairs. About 90 seats were not used behind the penalty box so protective netting could be removed for the NBC Sports Network cameras.

"It's people like this that drive the game of hockey and make it so popular," said Sabres forward Sam Reinhart. "I don't take opportunities like this for granted to come to a town like this, be able to play in front of them and show them what the league is about first-hand."

The prizes: Clinton (population 2,000) was selected as Hockeyville in April, winning \$150,000 in arena upgrades and the right to host the game. The arena used the money for higher glass, new netting, a new refrigeration system and other lighting and technical upgrades.

Back for more: The Sabres have been in a Hockeyville game four games in the last 10 years. Their previous locales were Roberval, Quebec; Dundas, Ont., and their 2016 trip to Marquette, Mich.

The lineup: The Sabres had a strong top line of Jack Eichel between Reinhart and Jeff Skinner and used Patrik Berglund between Alexander Nylander and Andrew Oglevie. Kyle Okposo moved down to give a veteran presence to center Casey Mittelstadt and winger C.J. Smith while the fourth line had Evan Rodrigues between Justin Bailey and Danny O'Regan.

The big change was on defense, where Rasmus Dahlin was paired with Casey Nelson after spending his first two preseason appearances with Jake McCabe. Zach Bogosian was reunited with McCabe, his partner the last couple of years. The third pair was Brendan Guhle and Will Borgen. Scott Wedgewood went the route in goal.

Celebrity greeting: The teams arrived at the arena by bus and went through with their scheduled red carpet entrance despite a heavy rain. Volunteers made sure the players had enough umbrellas to stay dry while they signed autographs.

The Commish on Clinton: NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said he loves these annual affairs. "The intimacy this environment creates and the uniqueness of the opportunity for the fans in Clinton and similar towns to experience a professional game in their home rink almost defies description," Bettman said in a first intermission chat with The Buffalo News and the Athletic. "If you're a kid who stood out in the rain today at the red carpet, you're never going to forget it. Your emotional connection to the game and to this town has now been cemented for life."

Not your average morning: The teams pregame skates were attended by more than 1,000 fans, with a large number of them children from local schools. Many were partisan for the Sabres, chanting "Let's go, Buf-fa-lo" as the team took the ice.

"It was great," said Housley. "Tunes were blaring. Guys were moving the puck really well. Feeling it. This crowd was awesome. ... It just brings you back to your childhood memories."

Fast and furious: After a scoreless first period, the teams combined for four goals in the second. Nelson opened the scoring at 1:13 after a Nylander pass but Columbus tied it on an Anthony Duclair breakaway at 12:36. The Sabres went ahead, 2-1, as Reinhart tipped in an Eichel feed on a power play at 14:28 but the Jackets tied it again as Wheatfield native Adam Clendening crept down low to take a feed and score at 15:35.

First point for the first pick: Dahlin got his first point of the preseason, assisting on the Reinhart goal with a long pass up ice to Eichel.

New York State of mind: Bogosian grew up in Massena, three hours north of here and said his memories of the state's Central region were rekindled during the team's bus ride to the rink from Rome after its morning flight.

"I'm used to seeing the back roads of New York State," Bogosian said. "So it kind of brought back some memories of the long hockey trips on the weekend with my parents and brothers. It was cool reminiscing about my childhood. If this [game] was around when I was a kid, this is obviously something I would want to be at."

What's next: The Sabres flew home immediately after the game and the group that remained behind in Buffalo will comprise most of the roster for Wednesday night's game in Pittsburgh against the Penguins (7 p.m, Radio 550, no TV). The preseason concludes Friday night in Oshawa, Ont., against the New York Islanders.

It's a throwback morning skate for Sabres at Hockeyville rink

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2018

CLINTON – There were lots of youth hockey days flashbacks during the morning skate for the Sabres Tuesday in Clinton Arena, as they prepared for Tuesday night's game against the Columbus Blue Jackets in front of about 1,500 fans – including a few hundred screaming kids. Many of them were chanting, "Let's go, Buf-fa-lo" as the team took the ice.

"It was great," said coach Phil Housley. "Tunes were blaring. Guys were moving the puck really well. Feeling it. This crowd was awesome. It's going to be exciting tonight.

"It just brings you back to your childhood memories. All the guys are sitting in the locker room there all tight and we're doing our meeting. Actually it was a great feeling because you draw back from that when you were a kid playing with your buddies."

The teams arrived at the rink in a steady rain and signed autographs on a red carpet as volunteers with umbrellas kept the players dry. They then headed inside for their game-day work, after starting it with a team picture.

Clinton Arena is used for local high school and youth hockey, and Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt – who is only about 18 months removed from high school hockey in Eden Prairie, Minn. – said he felt right at home.

"The guys were making fun of me for saying it felt like high school," said a smiling Mittelstadt. "It was obviously cool to see all the fans and things like that. It makes it exciting and makes for a fun morning skate."

Defenseman Zach Bogosian, who grew up about three hours away in Massena, said his memories were rekindled on the Sabres' bus ride from Rome after their morning flight here.

"I'm used to seeing the back roads of New York State," Bogosian said. "So it kind of brought back some memories of the long hockey trips on the weekend with my parents and brothers. It was cool reminiscing about my childhood.

"If this was around when I was a kid, this is obviously something I would want to be at."

As for the game itself, the Sabres said ice conditions were good but a shorter-than-normal rink with tight corners should make for an interesting display of offense.

"Any shot will be a good shot today," Housley said.

"The corners are pretty square," Bogosian said. "It kind of reminds me of my junior days in Peterborough."

Housley confirmed he's tinkering with the lineup, starting Casey Nelson on defense with Rasmus Dahlin and moving Jake McCabe to his spot the last couple of seasons alongside Bogosian.

Mittelstadt, who has struggled defensively in the preseason, is going to be centering C.J. Smith and Andrew Oglevie. Jack Eichel and Patrik Berglund will be the top two centers. Scott Wedgewood will start in goal.

Sabres bring a star-studded lineup to Hockeyville

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2018

CLINTON – The Buffalo Sabres will give folks in this tiny Central New York village, as well as a national television audience, a glimpse of most of their big names Tuesday night when they meet the Columbus Blue Jackets in the annual Hockeyville USA exhibition game in Clinton Arena.

The Sabres are skating at 11:30 a.m. today but their lineup released early this morning pretty much represented what we saw in practice Monday. It features Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt and Jeff Skinner.

The game is at 7 p.m. on the NBC Sports Network. The Buffalo lineup:

Forwards: Justin Bailey, Patrik Berglund, Jack Eichel, Casey Mittelstadt, Alexander Nylander, Kyle Okposo, Andrew Oglevie, Danny O'Regan, Sam Reinhart, Evan Rodrigues, Jeff Skinner, C.J. Smith.

Defense: Zach Bogosian, Will Borgen, Rasmus Dahlin, Brendan Guhle, Jake McCabe, Casey Nelson, Lawrence Pilut (one will sit). Goalies: Scott Wedgewood, Jonas Johansson.

Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Why high expectations for Tage Thompson are legit

By Travis Yost

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2018

Travis Yost has been involved in the world of hockey analytics for a decade and is currently part of TSN's Hockey Analytics team. Prior to joining TSN, Yost was a contributor at the Ottawa Citizen, the Sporting News and NHL Numbers, and has been a consultant for an NHL franchise. He will be contributing breakdowns on the Sabres for The Buffalo News this season.

One player making a name for himself at Sabres training camp? Tage Thompson.

Thompson, acquired as part of the Ryan O'Reilly trade package on July 1, has been thrust into premium top-line minutes by head coach Phil Housley. For Thompson, it's a huge vote of confidence. Expectations are that the pairing of Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel will create a dangerous first line for Buffalo – the type of first line that the Sabres haven't had in some time. Consequently, there is going to be a ton of pressure on Thompson to produce right out of the gate.

In three preseason games, Thompson, 20, has delivered. He scored a highlight-reel goal against Toronto over the weekend and has consistently threatened in the offensive zone. He's averaging about 20 shot attempts per 60 minutes, which would have placed him in the top 10 in the league last season. Take that with many, many doses of salt – it's still preseason hockey, and most playing rosters are only half-reflections of actual NHL lineups.

But Thompson isn't a total unknown either. Last season, Thompson split time between the St. Louis Blues and their AHL affiliate, the San Antonio Rampage. With the Blues, Thompson saw 41 games, generally playing with Vladimir Sobotka, Dmitrij Jaskin, Paul Stastny and Patrik Berglund at even-strength. Scoring was limited – he amassed just nine points (three goals and six assists), and was generally kept away from the power play.

There is no doubt that St. Louis was underwhelmed with Thompson's production. Blues head coach Mike Yeo's frustration peaked in March, when he had this to say about the state of Thompson's game:

"The way I see it, you've got to bring more than potential. We know he has potential. We know he's going to be a guy that scores a lot of goals in our league and is a real solid, effective NHL player for a long time. But you have to bring something to the table."

Thompson was sold during his draft year as a skilled power forward type, and with such middling point totals in his debut season, you can sort of understand where Yeo was coming from last March. That said, I thought Thompson's rookie season was a fair bit better than what his counting numbers would suggest.

The chief issue with Thompson's first year had a lot to do with unfavorable luck. Moving away from simple point totals for more context, you can see that Thompson was much more active offensively than his scoring rates would indicate. Consider shot rates for Blues forwards last year, with 'quality shots' identified herein as scoring chances:

Other than an all-world talent in Vladimir Tarasenko, no Blues forward generated a higher volume of shots than Thompson at 5-on-5. We know that shot volume is a very strong indicator of offensive talent and, moreover, is strongly correlated with point production. So this is a hugely encouraging data point. If you are inclined to focus on higher "quality" chances – think shots generated from the interior of the defense or the low slot, for quick examples – Thompson still grades out as sixth best. I think you can say with some degree of confidence that Thompson traded a little bit of quality for quantity last season, but either way both numbers indicate a guy who was active in the offensive third.

Let's now move beyond Thompson and toward on-ice results. With Thompson on the ice last season, St. Louis managed to score just 1.2 goals per 60 minutes, which is dreadful. That said, we know the volume of the shots that line was taking and the quality of those shots based on components like shot angles and distances that are recorded in the NHL's official play-by-play sheet. Corsica has done the grunt work to provide an "expected goal"

value for every shot taken in the NHL last season, and from there, we can understand if "luck" had any role in suppressing Thompson's productivity and point totals.

Here are actual versus expected goals for Blues' forwards last season:

As you can see, Thompson (and Sundqvist and Paajari, too) were pretty unlucky last season. Based on the shots created, we should have expected Thompson and company to score about 1.9 goals per 60 minutes. Instead, they scored 1.2 goals per 60 minutes. That's the difference between being in the NHL's fourth percentile and the NHL's 30th percentile, and with that comes plenty of opportunity for additional points. Another way of saying this: That's the difference between fighting for an NHL job and entrenching yourself as a top-nine forward.

How do you manage to score just 1.2 goals per 60 minutes? Carry one of the lowest on-ice shooting percentages in the league. In the 400-plus minutes of 5-on-5 hockey they played last season, Thompson and company shot just 4 percent last year – mere decimal points ahead of Marcus Kruger, J.T. Brown and Josh Jooris for the lowest mark in the league. So it wasn't just Thompson who couldn't buy a goal. It was anyone who Thompson played with, too.

But again, the good news if you are a player in this bucket is that shooting percentages tend to heavily regress. It is the principal reason why teams and analysts pound their tables about the importance of shot volume and sustained attacks. The more opportunities to score, the more frequently the puck will find the back of the net. Thompson, in his rookie year, did an ample job of generating that type of volume. The goals didn't come. Even if we graded Thompson and his teammates out as poor shooters, we still would expect them to score on about 6.8 percent of chances – much closer to league norms.

In summary: It certainly appears that the Sabres smartly bought low on Thompson. His ceiling is still unclear, but I suspect his rookie season appeared a lot worse on paper than it actually was. Add that to the fact that he'll now be on the receiving end of work from Skinner and Eichel to start the year, and he has a great opportunity at a sophomore season redemption story.

Sabres' Bogosian was taken back to his childhood during Hockeyville USA

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 25, 2018

Clinton, NY (WGR 550) - Zach Bogosian grew up about three hours from Clinton, New York in Massena. The Sabres defenseman said he played against teams from Clinton, but never in the Clinton Arena.

The Sabres flew into Rome, New York so they had a bus ride through the small towns to Clinton. Bogosian said that brings back a lot of memories, "I'm used to seeing the backroads of New York State, so it brought back some memories of the long hockey trips on the weekends with my parents and my brothers, but it was cool reminiscing about your childhood and coming to an event like this and seeing a lot of younger kids. We talked about the games that we played and the friends that we met, it's cool."

That's what the game was all about on Tuesday, kids here for the red carpet when the teams got here, kids screaming and chanting throughout the morning skate and then kids and families getting to see a once in a lifetime event, a NHL game in their home arena. Bogosian said, "It's great because if this was around when I was a kid, I think it would be something that I would want to be at."

"It's fun, this is what it's all about, right? I think it's something that the kids really enjoy and we enjoy doing it, it's a good event that the NHL puts on."

Did the Sabres want to win, sure they did, they talked about after the morning skate, but there were also rewards from the excitement generated in the Hockeyville USA game.

Coming to the Clinton Arena reminded Bogosian about his rink, the Massena Arena. He said, "It's like any other minor hockey rink in the U.S., every kid every time you play in your hometown rink and for me seeing it for the first time as an adult going back, that was cool, you think about all the memories growing up, even when you come into a rink like this."

The Clinton Arena is smaller than a regulation NHL rink and has square corners, just like the old Boston Garden. Being a defenseman, Bogosian will meet those corners on a regular basis, "We'll see how it goes, the corners are pretty square, it reminds me of my junior days in Peterborough, so getting a few good shifts early on will probably be a big factor."

Many U.S. players were in the lineup for Buffalo including Bogosian, Jack Eichel, Casey Mittelstadt, Justin Bailey, Kyle Okposo, Jake McCabe, Casey Nelson, C.J. Smith, Andrew Oglevie and Will Borgen.

It was nice that the first goal of the game was scored by American Casey Nelson ripping home a nice one-time pass from Alex Nylander.

Blue Jackets double up the Sabres in Clinton, 4-2

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

September 25, 2018

A pair of third period power play goals helped the Columbus Blue Jackets pull away from the Buffalo Sabres, 4-2, in the annual Kraft Hockeyville USA game in Clinton, New York.

Both teams exchanged some good scoring chances through 20 minutes of action, but there was no score to be had. Jack Eichel had a glorious chance in the opening seconds of play, but was shut down by Blue Jackets goaltender Joonas Korpisalo. Buffalo goalie Scott Wedgewood had a strong opening period as well, denying Columbus on multiple occasions.

After the scoreless first, Casey Nelson blistered a sharp-angle shot by Korpisalo early in the second to get the scoring started. Alex Nylander and Patrik Berglund were there for the assists on Nelson's first goal of the preseason.

The Blue Jackets responded quickly after, nabbing a power play opportunity courtesy of a Berglund trip. It was Anthony Duclair who made the Sabres pay with a man-advantage goal to knot the score at 1-1.

Buffalo mirrored Columbus' scoring efforts just moments later. After getting a power play of their own, rookie defenseman Rasmus Dahlin fed Eichel with a nice lead pass to start the offensive rush. Eichel then lobbed a cross-crease pass to Sam Reinhart, who buried the puck past Korpisalo to reclaim the lead favoring the Sabres at 2-1.

The scoring did not stop there, as it was then journeyman Adam Clendening of the Blue Jackets getting in on the scoring party as he tied the score once more. When the dust finally settled on a wild second period, the score was as even as when the teams began; tied, but this time at 2-2.

Columbus grabbed their first lead of the night six-and-a-half minutes into the third stanza. A Kyle Okposo tripping minor set up a power play opportunity for Artemi Panarin, who was fed a pass from Duclair and he deposited it into the net past Wedgewood.

Just over two minutes later, the Blue Jackets scored while up a man on the Sabres for the third time. This time, it was Kevin Stenlund taking advantage of an Alex Nylander neutral zone miscue. Stenlund and Panarin streaked up the ice after the turnover, and Stenlund buried the feed he was given to bury the Sabres in a two-goal hole.

From there, Korpisalo buckled down against some serious Buffalo chances in crunch time after the Sabres pulled Wedgewood in favor of an extra skater. The Columbus netminder denied Evan Rodrigues, Alex Nylander and Brendan Guhle in succession as he handled everything thrown his way to preserve the 4-2 victory for Columbus.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

CBJ: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 1:13 - Casey Nelson (1) (Alex Nylander, Patrik Berglund); 14:28 - Sam Reinhart (1) PPG (Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin)

CBJ: 12:36 - Anthony Duclair (1) PPG (Michael Prapavessis); 15:35 - Adam Clendening (1) (Liam Foudy, Artemi Panarin)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

CBJ: 6:31 - Artemi Panarin (1) PPG (Duclair); 8:55 - Kevin Stenlund (1) PPG (Panarin)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

CBJ: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 11:54 - Patrik Berglund (Tripping - 2 min.)

CBJ: 13:35 - Sam Vigneault (Tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 5:12 - Kyle Okposo (Tripping - 2 min.)

CBJ: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 33

CBJ: 26

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 for 1 (100%)

CBJ: 3 for 3 (100%)

Goalies:

BUF: Scott Wedgewood - 22 saves

CBJ: Joonas Korpi - 31 saves

What's Next:

The Sabres will travel to Pittsburgh to take on the Penguins on Wednesday evening from PPG Paints Arena. Hear all the play-by-play action from Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray on the home of the Sabres Radio Network – WGR Sports Radio 550. Puck drop from Pittsburgh is set for 7 p.m.

Making the case: Who makes the Sabres opening roster?

By Derek Kramer

WGR 550

September 25, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres wrap up their preseason this Friday night as the regular season is set to open on October 4 at home against the Boston Bruins.

The Sabres have already made a number of moves to send some players to the Rochester Americans and other minor league / junior teams, but some have been sticking with the team to get an extra look against NHL competition. There are plenty of jobs to be had for the youth of the franchise at forward, and the veteran presence on defense has created a logjam at the bottom of the roster.

Who has impressed enough to take a job from camp? Who was in the lineup last year that could get waived or sent down?

Here are five young players that have a case for taking a job from training camp:

1.) Tage Thompson - Forward

The case for Thompson to start in Buffalo:

Have you seen this man play so far? He's huge. Granted, the second Toronto game on Saturday was not a good performance, but Thompson had played so well that the team wanted to give him a look with Jack Eichel. Expect Thompson to have a top-nine role, at minimum, to begin the season. Thompson is a point per-game through three preseason games with a goal and two assists.

The case for Thompson to start in Rochester:

The way Thompson has played, there's a good chance he will lock down in a job in Buffalo. Injury may be the only way he does not start with the big club. However, he is one player that if he is sent down, he does not require waivers to get to Rochester. Just an added perk in case he loses out on a spot in Buffalo.

2.) Alexander Nylander - Forward

The case for Nylander to start in Buffalo:

Nylander has been playing with more intensity from the Prospects Challenge into the preseason as he tries to land a spot on the opening day roster for the first time in his young career. Nylander has always had the skill, but now he is combining it with an effort and a passion we haven't seen. Simply put, in three preseason games, he's earned a shot to start the year in Buffalo and may have a chance at a top-six role with the injury to Conor Sheary.

The case for Nylander to start in Rochester:

If Nylander is not going to have a spot in the top-nine, it would better suit him to be a top liner for the Amerks rather than a fourth liner for the Sabres. That's the only reason that can be seen where Nylander starts out in Rochester. He has plenty of competition from the likes of Thompson and C.J. Smith. The Sabres may only carry one extra forward, which makes cuts a bit tighter.

3.) C.J. Smith - Forward

The case for Smith to start in Buffalo:

Smith has been solid throughout training camp and the preseason with the versatility to play on the fourth line, which would help his case. Smith continues to show promise right from the day he signed with Buffalo as a college free agent. Smith is 24, so the time is now if he wants to be a solid NHLer.

The case for Smith to start in Rochester:

Phil Housley loves Zemgus Girgensons, who is one of those players on the bubble. Furthermore, the instant impression of Thompson and the elevated play of Nylander has clouded the chances for Smith to make the roster. If Smith is in Rochester, he'll play on the top line for the Americans.

4.) Brendan Guhle - Defense

The case for Guhle to start in Buffalo:

Guhle has NHL experience and looked very solid in his time with Casey Nelson last season. However, Guhle has not been that impressive heading into the season. If he can pick up his play this preseason, there is still a chance he can open the season in Buffalo. Perhaps the Sabres can see defense as a deep position now and deal a top-six defenseman to open a spot up. However...

The case for Guhle to start in Rochester:

That spot should go to Lawrence Pilut over Guhle at the moment. Guhle has been the opposite of Nylander in a sense that Nylander has dominated lesser competition and impressed in the preseason, whereas Guhle has underwhelmed. The 21-year-old looked pedestrian against prospects and not like a player who has played in parts of two NHL seasons. Guhle should start out in Rochester on the top pairing (likely with Pilut) and learn how to attack in more ways when he has the puck and wants to wheel. He can also use some more time to polish his play in the defensive end.

5.) Lawrence Pilut - Defense

The case for Pilut to start in Buffalo:

Pilut didn't look amazing in the Prospects Challenge, but he has stepped up in a big way in the preseason. Pilut is aggressive in the offensive zone, along with steady play defensively to add to it. The 22-year-old came over from Sweden as the Swedish Hockey League's top defenseman for a shot to play in the NHL, and he looks like he deserves that shot.

The case for Pilut to start in Rochester:

Despite his play this preseason, there are too many heads to count in the Sabres' defensive depth chart to get Pilut into a top-six role. Pilut will crack the NHL roster at some point, but the Sabres have gotten solid performances this preseason from Nathan Beaulieu, Casey Nelson and a healthy Zach Bogosian. When you add in Rasmus Ristolainen, Rasmus Dahlin, Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella, there is no room for Pilut (or Guhle) to make the roster on opening night.

The Sabres are having fun preparing for Hockeyville, USA

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 25, 2018

Clinton, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres arrived at Clinton Arena in a driving rain, but that didn't stop them from greeting all the young fans standing in the rain. The players all had umbrellas as they signed autographs.

Phil Housley said on Monday that he wanted to bring as many Americans as he could to the Hockeyville USA game. I'm sure the league wanted Buffalo to bring some front line players and they obliged with bringing Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin and Sam Reinhart.

The building was packed with kids as the Sabres had their morning skate and Housley loved it, "I think it's great, it brings you back to all of your childhood memories, guys are sitting in the locker room there and we're all tight and it was a great feeling because you draw back from that when you were a kid and playing with your buddies."

The corners are square like the old Boston Garden, which Housley said will be an adjustment, "The ice surface itself, the end zones are really small, so any shot is going to be a good shot.

"It was great, the tunes were blaring, we were moving the puck really well and feeling it. This crowd was awesome and with this atmosphere, it's going to be exciting tonight."

Scott Wedgewood will get his first start of the preseason. He played 20 minutes against Pittsburgh and has a 6.00 goals against and .833 save percentage.

Casey Mittelstadt will center two Americans in C.J. Smith and Andrew Oglevie. Housley and his coaching staff are spending a lot of time in trying to improve the rookie's defense. Housley said, "He just needs to get more comfortable, his defensive zone, that's the one thing that I'm worried about, he's got great skill and speed in the way he attacks the game, it's just his defensive reads, make sure he collapses down in the defensive zone and every shift, you're not going to get what you want and if you play good defense and have good checking detail, the rest will come into play."

The Sabres' lines for the Hockeyville game are:

53 Skinner - 9 Eichel - 23 Reinhart

92 Nylander - 10 Berglund - 21 Okposo

49 Smith - 37 Mittelstadt - 52 Oglevie

95 Bailey - 71 Rodrigues - 65 O'Regan

45 Guhle - 8 Nelson

19 McCabe - 4 Bogosian

26 Dahlin - 33 Borgen

There will be about 2,000 fans in this cozy venue for the game. Brian Koziol gets you started at 7:00 and then Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray take over for the play-by-play.

Sabres game notebook: Trio of Eichel, Reinhart and Skinner serving notice

By John Vogl

The Athletic

September 26, 2018

CLINTON, N.Y. — It's been six seasons since the Sabres had a player rank in the top 40 in scoring. Buffalo's top line has the potential to end the skid.

While five periods is hardly an ample sample size, the trio of Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Jeff Skinner are elite. They've combined for two goals and five points in their short time together, including an Eichel-to-Reinhart goal during Tuesday's 4-2 loss to Columbus in the Kraft Hockeyville showcase.

Eichel and Reinhart have shown chemistry during their three seasons together. The Sabres have 38 goals in which each player got a point, a respectable number considering Reinhart had Ryan O'Reilly as his center more than Eichel.

Adding Skinner as the left winger has brought more skill and scoring chances.

"We're getting our chances, which is good," Eichel said in Clinton Arena. "There's definitely some things we want to clean up. I think we can be a little cleaner on our possessions in zone, but we've only played together for five or so periods. It's important for the next week we just keep working in practice, making sure we're making the most of every rep we get together, trying to build off of what we've done and continue to build chemistry."

Against the Blue Jackets, Reinhart finished a power-play pass from Eichel at the top of the crease.

It was far from the only time they were near the net. During the first period, Skinner tipped a point shot from defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, and Reinhart fed Eichel for a deflection. With the Blue Jackets focusing on Reinhart deep in the zone midway through the third period, the right winger was able to find pinching defenseman Jake McCabe for a scoring chance that hit the crossbar.

"Hopefully," Reinhart said, "we can keep skating with each other."

Skinner, Eichel and Reinhart lead the Sabres' depth chart at their respective positions. Loading them on the same line certainly causes problems for the opponents, but it dilutes the Sabres' other trios.

Still, it'd be nice for Buffalo to have a bonafide No. 1 line, guys who can push each other toward the top of the NHL scoring list. The last time the Sabres had a player in the top 40 was 2012-13, when Thomas Vanek finished with 41 points in 38 games during the lockout-shortened season.

Since then, Cody Hodgson finished 116th in 2013-14, Tyler Ennis was 107th in 2014-15 and O'Reilly was 41st in 2015-16. Eichel finished 53rd two seasons ago and 52nd last year.

It took Buffalo's defensemen two months to score last season. They've got three goals in the opening five exhibition games.

"It's a good start, for sure," said blueliner Casey Nelson, who scored Tuesday to join Nathan Beaulieu and McCabe on the scoring list. "We were playing fast at that point. We made clean breakouts. ... When we play fast, we're able to get up and our forwards can always cover for us. I think we've got a lot of D that are capable of it."

An in-stride outlet pass from Dahlin to Eichel started Buffalo on its rush for the Reinhart goal.

"You look at all the best teams, they get a lot of contributions from their defensemen," Eichel said. "We're going to need the same."

Coach Phil Housley juggled his defense pairings against the Blue Jackets after using steady duos early in camp. He liked what he saw from Dahlin-Nelson, McCabe-Zach Bogosian and Brendan Guhle-Will Borgen.

"I really liked Nelson's game," Housley said. "Borgen was really solid and physical. McCabe and Bogo were in control most of the night, could have played a little faster, though. When we played fast, you could see our transition game was working."

Alex Nylander was about to make a stellar play. While killing a Sabres penalty, he forced a turnover in the Blue Jackets' zone. Teammate Evan Rodrigues was streaking toward the net for a scoring chance.

Nylander, however, spun away from the play and over the blue line. With Rodrigues in deep, Nylander froze to avoid going offside.

Columbus stole the puck, rushed down the ice and scored to make it 4-2 with 11:05 left. It was the third power-play goal allowed by Buffalo on the night.

"He's trying to make something happen," Housley said of Nylander. "We gave up two goals on the PK where we had total control and possession of the puck. It's unfortunate because those are things you've got to learn. You've got to be smart, especially when you're on the PK. You can't turn the puck over like that. It's going to kill you."

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman has gotten to know Terry and Kim Pegula well during the last seven years. He's continually impressed by the Sabres' owners.

"I can assure you, nobody wants to win more than they do, and they want to win for the fans of Buffalo," Bettman said during the first intermission in Clinton Arena. "That's something that I remember Terry saying from the very first time I met him."

Winning, of course, has been a problem. The Sabres are in a seven-year playoff drought, which is the longest in franchise history by four seasons. But after the additions of Dahlin, Skinner and others this summer, there's legitimate hope in Buffalo for playoff contention.

"By all appearances, the team is on an upward spiral," Bettman said. "You look at the young talent they have and you look at the moves they made over the summer, among those acquiring Skinner, I think the team's being rebuilt in the right way. But it starts with the fact Kim and Terry are passionate about the Sabres."

"You've heard me say repeatedly in a variety of contexts, there is nothing more important to the stability and success of a franchise than ownership, and Buffalo is more than fortunate to have the Pegulas so committed to the Sabres and to the Bills and as importantly to the city of Buffalo with all of the things that they've done in the city that positively impacts the quality of life."

The Sabres and Blue Jackets started the day by signing autographs in the rain. They finished it by presenting lucky local kids with jerseys at center ice.

"I just want to thank the Clinton community for putting on a great show here," Housley said. "It was a great atmosphere. Our guys loved being a part of the Kraft Hockeyville game."

Bettman loved being in attendance, too. He sat in the stands behind one of the nets, mingling with fans and posing for pictures.

"It's such a special, unique experience," the commissioner said. "No other sports league does this. The intimacy that this environment creates and the uniqueness of the opportunity for the fans of Clinton and similar towns to experience a professional game in their own rink almost defies description.

"This is all in support of growing the game at the grassroots level and giving the fans a special and unique connection that is rare if not non-existent other than this in professional sports."

'This is what it's all about, right?' Sabres arrive in Hockeyville for day of childlike fun and nostalgia

By John Vogl

The Athletic

September 25, 2018

CLINTON, N.Y. — Inside the Alexander Hamilton Institute, a gorgeous three-floor mansion built in the Federalist style of the 1820s, scholars and kindred spirits study the meaning of capitalism. Just a quarter mile down the road Tuesday, capitalism was on full display.

On one side of the street was a car shaped like a hot dog, the company logo slathered across the frank as if it were a condiment. Across the road was a truck shaped like a peanut. It, too, featured a conspicuous brand stamp.

Companies were getting warmed up inside Clinton Arena, as well. A teenage boy climbed into a ketchup costume. A similarly aged girl wiggled into an oversized mustard bottle. Representatives from a coffee company began placing their blue cans in the corner of the rink, eager to offer a free cup as advertisement.

On the surface, the Kraft Hockeyville game between the Buffalo Sabres and Columbus Blue Jackets looked like nothing but a commercial affair. Even Columbus coach John Tortorella, a hockey lifer who once played in this town of less than 2,000, wasn't feeling the preseason game.

"I'll be honest with you," Tortorella said. "You start thinking about the travel. You've got work to do with your club. ... We're involved in the middle of our camp. As a coach, you want to keep the business attitude."

But then the people started coming. Kids in maroon Clinton hockey jerseys. Adults in black jackets emblazoned with their names and patches from the volunteer fire department. They lined the outside of the 70-year-old arena with hoods up and umbrellas open, doing what they could to fight off the brisk morning rain.

As the team buses pulled up and players walked toward the smiling residents, the hot dog and peanut mobiles faded to the background. As the locals sat in the old blue seats and welcomed the skaters with cheers and chants, the coffee and walking condiments became an afterthought.

The event showed its true colors. It was the NHL coming to an appreciative town, one that had been waiting five months for its moment on the sporting stage.

"You get here, and I'm glad we're here," Tortorella said. "You come here and see all the kids, just the excitement that it's bringing this area."

"This is what it's all about, right?" added Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian. "It's something the kids really enjoy, and we enjoy doing it."

"If this was around when I was a kid growing up, it'd be something that I'd obviously want to be at. It's great that the NHL puts this on. It's great for the village and town of Clinton to be host of it. Honestly, it's a great event all around."

Hockeyville started in 2006 as a joint venture with Kraft, the NHL and the NHL Players' Association. Small towns enter a contest and explain why they should get a preseason game and a \$150,000 prize, which goes toward renovations at the community rink.

The Sabres are playing in their fourth Hockeyville, with Clinton joining Roberval, Quebec; Dundas, Ontario; and Marquette, Mich. It hasn't gotten old.

"It was great," Buffalo coach Phil Housley said after the morning skate. "The tunes were blaring. The guys were moving the puck really and feeling it. This crowd was awesome. It was a great atmosphere."

The arena seats about 2,000 with its six-row configuration. The building was packed with schoolkids who got an excused absence, a bagged lunch and popcorn from the snack bar.

The town is three hours from Buffalo, so there was a slant toward the Sabres. Before dancing to Drake, the kids chanted, "Let's go, Buffalo," as the "home team" took the ice.

"Obviously, we had a great reception when we came in," said Bogosian, who grew up three hours north of Clinton in the town of Massena. "I never played in this rink, but I played against their minor hockey team growing up, so it's pretty cool to be here."

Bogosian particularly enjoyed the bus ride to the arena. The Sabres flew into Griffiss Air Force Base and drove the remaining 20 minutes. They passed churches, family markets and pumpkin stands along the two-lane roads.

"I'm used to seeing the back roads of New York State," Bogosian said, "so it kind of brought back some memories of going on long hockey trips on the weekends with my parents and my brothers. It was cool reminiscing about your childhood."

For some players, childhood wasn't long ago. Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt, 19, remarked how the cramped locker room reminded him of high school.

"They were making fun of me for saying it," said Mittelstadt, who is less than two years removed from his scholastic days.

The visit by the Sabres and Blue Jackets will last just a few hours, but the Hockeyville legacy will remain. Clinton will use the prize money for upgrades to the roof, locker rooms and seating. The townsfolk will keep their ticket stubs and autographs, which held up to the rain through the magic of permanent ink. The event's magic made the commercial aspect disappear.

"It was awesome when we got here on the bus," Columbus defenseman Seth Jones said. "Everyone was lined up, and we got to sign autographs for the kids. It was a great turnout. It's a great experience."

Clinton had hockey history long before Sabres arrived for Hockeyville

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 25, 2018

CLINTON – This village of about 1,900 has some hockey history, you know.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, long before Tuesday's Kraft Hockeyville NHL preseason tilt between the Buffalo Sabres and Columbus Blue Jackets, the 2,000-seat Clinton Arena housed a pro team in the Eastern Hockey League called the Clinton Comets.

Eddie Giacomin, a Hall of Fame goalie, played for the Comets prior to his days starring for the New York Rangers.

Hockey arrived in Clinton 100 years ago, according to Andy Burns, who organized a centennial celebration of the sport here earlier this year. Albert Perryman, the athletic director at nearby Hamilton College, wanted his son to play hockey, and soon it became part of the fabric of the community.

In the 1920s, an outdoor rink was built. By the 1940s, the local men's team became so successful Clinton constructed an indoor facility. When the rink burned down in 1953, it was rebuilt on the same plot in four months, Burns said.

The Clinton Comets, whose roster comprised some players who were on their way up or down from the NHL, joined the EHL in 1954, according to hockeydb.com.

Burns sounded nostalgic – "Fantastic hockey," he said – recalling his childhood memories of the Comets.

"These are guys that would've been in the NHL today with so many teams," he said. "There's smoke and beer and fights and no glass on the sides."

The Comets left in the early 1970s, but the hockey presence in the area is still strong. The Utica Comets, the Vancouver Canucks' AHL affiliate, play about 15 minutes away.

When Burns, who now lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, put together the 100-year celebration, he said 1,000 former players from Clinton College and the local high school participated.

"We just partied, had a great time," he said.

Then it dawned on him Clinton should push for Hockeyville, which awards an NHL exhibition game and \$150,000 in arena upgrades to the winner of an online voting contest.

"Let's go win this damn Kraft Hockeyville," he said. "So we had all that enthusiasm."

It looked like nearly everyone in town showed up to the morning skate Tuesday. Fans greeted players in the rain as they entered the building and watched the teams practice as music blared.

Outside, an NBC television truck was parked, probably a first in the rink's long history.

"I think it's great," Sabres coach Phil Housley said of playing in such a unique place. "It just brings you back to your childhood memories. Guys are sitting in the locker room there and they're all tight, we're doing our meetings. It was a great feeling, because you draw back from that when you were a kid playing with your buddies."

Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian grew up in Massena, about a three-hour drive north. While he had never played in Clinton Arena, he skated against teams from Clinton growing up. Riding the bus from the airport in Rome took him back to his childhood.

"I'm used to seeing the back roads of New York State," Bogosian said. "It kind of brought back some memories of long hockey trips on the weekend with my parents and my brothers. It was cool kind of reminiscing a bit about your childhood."

On Tuesday morning, Burns felt that watching the Sabres prepare for the game.

"It's absolutely unbelievable," Burns said of seeing NHL players on the ice in Clinton. "This is what it is was like when I was kid watching the Clinton Comets, except these guys are a lot bigger."

The spartan arena probably doesn't look much different today than it did in the 1950s. The original scoreboard, an odd-looking clock made of plywood and pinball machine parts, according to Burns, still hangs, although it is not used for games.

Burns said the prize money could be used for the roof and to hire an architectural firm to plan renovations for a large project that would require fundraising.

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Winger Artemi Panarin scored the go-ahead goal 6:21 into the third period in the Blue Jackets' 4-2 win.

Defenseman Casey Nelson and winger Sam Reinhart scored for the Sabres, who blew two leads.

First overall pick Rasmus Dahlin assisted on Reinhart's power-goal goal, his first preseason point.

Wheatfield's Adam Clendening tied it at 2 late in the second period. The defenseman signed a one-year, two-way contract with Columbus worth \$700,000 in the NHL and \$300,000 in the AHL on July 1.

The Blue Jackets are Clendening's seventh NHL organization.

Sabres goalie Scott Wedgewood played the entire game. The Sabres dressed a strong lineup, most of their American-born players, including star center Jack Eichel, who assisted on Reinhart's goal.

"It was cool," Eichel said of Tuesday's experience. "I think just being able to do this, it's a unique experience. Obviously, really cool for the people of Clinton."

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NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, speaking during the first intermission, on the Sabres: "By all appearances, the team is on an upward spiral. You look at the young talent they have and you look at the moves they made over the summer, among those acquiring Skinner, I think the team's being rebuilt in the right way. But it starts with the fact (owners) Kim and Terry (Pegula) are passionate about the Sabres."

Notes: The Sabres play a road game tonight against the Pittsburgh Penguins. ... Nelson said Clinton Arena reminded him of old school hockey. "We watched 'Slap Shot' today, so it was pretty similar.' Some scenes from the classic hockey movie were filmed in nearby Utica. ... Housley said Buffalo's dressing room had a window.

Hockeyville in Clinton provides unique experience for Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 25, 2018

CLINTON – When center Casey Mittelstadt told some of his teammates skating this morning inside tiny Clinton Arena this felt like high school, he said they starting making fun of him.

But Mittelstadt, 19, is less than two years removed from playing high school hockey. Memories of skating in old rinks like the 65-year-old barn the Sabres will face the Columbus Blue Jackets in tonight are fresh.

“It makes for a good morning skate,” Mittelstadt said after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s Kraft Hockeyville preseason tilt.

This village of about 1,900 in Oneida County, which won the game and \$150,000 in rink upgrades, is clearly jazzed to be hosting an NHL exhibition game. It looked like nearly everyone in town showed up the morning skate. Fans greeted players as they entered the building and watched the teams practice as music blared.

Outside, an NBC television trucked was park, probably a first in the rink’s long history.

“I think it’s great,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said of playing a game in such a unique place. “It just brings you back to your childhood memories. Guys are sitting in the locker room there and they’re all tight, we’re doing our meetings. It was a great feeling, because you draw back from that when you were a kid playing with your buddies.”

Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian grew up in Massena, about a three-hour drive north. While he has never played in Clinton Arena, he played against teams from Clinton growing up. Riding the bus from the airport in Rome took him back to his childhood.

“I’m used to see the back roads of New York State,” Bogosian said. “It kind of brought back some memories of long hockey trips on the weekend with my parents and my brothers. It was cool kind of reminiscing a bit about your childhood.”

The ice surface, of course, isn’t exactly regulation. Housley said the ice was good but a little bumpy. The corners are square, so players will have to adjust.

“Any shot is going to be a good shot tonight,” Housley said.

The Sabres, who flew here this morning, brought a strong lineup. The game being on national television might have something to do with that.

Here’s the lineup:

Forwards

Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart

Alexander Nylander, Patrik Berglund and Kyle Okposo

C.J. Smith, Mittelstadt and Andrew Oglevie

Justin Bailey, Evan Rodrigues and Danny O’Regan

Defense

Bogosian and Jake McCabe

Rasmus Dahlin and Casey Nelson

Brendan Guhle and William Borgen

Scott Wedgewood will start in goal and be backed by Jonas Johansson.

Columbus skates by Buffalo in Hockeyville NHL game in Clinton

By Marquel Slaughter

Utica Observer-Dispatch

September 25, 2018

CLINTON — Experiencing an NHL game at Clinton Arena was hard for LeeAnn Chesebro to describe.

Chesebro, a 2016 Clinton Central grad currently studying at Morrisville State, watched the 69-year-old rinks' Kraft Hockeyville USA grand prize culminate Tuesday night with an NHL preseason game between the Buffalo Sabres and Columbus Blue Jackets.

Watching from the sixth row in her brother's Clinton Comets bantam jersey, Chesebro joined less than 1,800 others to witness Columbus defeat Buffalo 4-2.

While many in attendance cheered for the Sabres, Chesebro was less concerned with the final score. Instead, she was awestruck by the dedication shown by her village of less than 2,000 to earn the right to host an NHL game in the same rink she's skated on for 14 years.

"I can't even describe it, honestly," said Chesebro, 20, who also worked at the cash register at Clinton Arena for four years. "It's such an honor for us to have this. ... For us to come together as a community again and embrace the fact that our history is so important to us, and to come back and reflect on that, I think that this just made it more enjoyable."

Many more watched the game live on the NBC Sports Network with former Utica Comets broadcaster Brendan Burke providing the play-by-play.

The pregame ceremony was emotional. Former Observer-Dispatch sports editor and current Waterville Times publisher Patty Lousie joined lead Hockeyville organizer Andy Burns and Town of Kirkland town supervisor Bob Meelan at center ice, where they were presented the Hockeyville trophy before a loud standing ovation.

Burns, a Clinton Central and Hamilton College grad who now lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was the spark in Clinton Arena's Hockeyville USA grand prize victory — which also includes \$150,000 toward rink renovations — by organizing the "Thank You, Albert Prettyman" celebration in February, where many Clinton Central and Hamilton College alumni gathered to commemorate 100 years of hockey in the village.

Prettyman is a Greater Utica Sports Hall of Famer who iced over a Clinton tennis court in 1918. Not only was he a hockey coach and athletic director at Hamilton College, he also coached the 1936 USA Olympic hockey team to a bronze medal in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Following the singing of the national anthem by selected members of the Clinton Central choir, Town of Kirkland Parks and Recreation official Mike Orsino, who oversees Clinton Arena and has worked at the rink since 1971, received a thunderous applause when he did the ceremonious puck drop with Jack Eichel of the Sabres and Boone Jenner of the Blue Jackets.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman also attended the game at Clinton Arena.

Plenty of reminders of Clinton Arena's 2018 Hockeyville USA grand prize win were sprinkled around the building in the form of banners, signs, and even painted steps. The red and silver Kraft Hockeyville logo with "Clinton Arena" surrounding it now engulfs center ice.

Fans with Buffalo, Columbus, Clinton Central and Hamilton College hockey gear waved their Hockeyville towels as they filled the arena once home to the professional Clinton Comets team famous for skating in the Eastern Hockey League for 19 years.

The seating arrangements were intimate. The length of the rink had six rows of seats. On one end, a sixth row was created on the lowest level with folding chairs practically right up against the glass.

"I love playing on an ice like that," Buffalo right winger Sam Reinhart said. "It's a little bit different. It's more like the size I grew up playing on with my club at home. It's a cool experience when the fans are that close, as well, and they're that passionate. It's people like this that drive the game of hockey and make it so popular. I don't take opportunities like this for granted, coming to a town like this and being able to play in front of them."

Sabres defenseman Casey Nelson said he enjoyed the "old-time hockey" feel Clinton Arena presented. He even mentioned watching "Slap Shot" — the 1977 hockey film that was shot less than 10 miles from Clinton Arena at the Adirondack Bank Center at the Utica Memorial Auditorium in Utica — with his teammates earlier in the day.

Buffalo coach Phil Housley was even amused by the locker room setup.

"I don't know how many locker rooms have a window in it," Housley said, laughing. "We had windows in our locker room. It brought flashbacks from the past."

NHL-related activities took over Clinton since Saturday. Events such as an NHL Alumni Q&A, a Clinton Central alumni game, a fundraiser gala featuring former NHL player and current analyst Jeremy Roenick and Clinton Comets as honorary guests helped turn Clinton into Hockeyville. The Stanley Cup even made multiple visits around the village on Monday.

But the grand finale was the Buffalo Sabres (2-3-0) vs. the Columbus Blue Jackets (2-4-0) NHL preseason game on Tuesday night at the historic Clinton Arena.

"It's an opportunity for us to see professional hockey players on the same ice where our son learned to skate on 20 years ago," said Herm Lehman, who lives in Clinton with his wife, Nancy. "You get to see it come full circle. It's very cool."

The first period was scoreless, but fans saw four goals scored in the second.

Nelson netted the first goal of the game 1:13 into the middle frame for a 1-0 Buffalo edge. Columbus tied it with an Anthony Duclair power-play goal with 7:24 left in the second.

Buffalo fans got a sneak peak of the future when No. 1 overall pick Rasmus Dahlin and Eichel each assisted on Reinhart's power-play goal with 5:32 left in the second, receiving enormous cheers from the local crowd.

Former Utica Comet Adam Clendening responded with a Columbus goal to tie Buffalo at 2 entering the second intermission.

Power play goals by Artemi Panarin and Kevin Stenlund stretched Columbus' lead to 4-2 in the third period.

Despite the outcome, Columbus and Buffalo were given standing ovations when the final buzzer sounded at Clinton Arena. Fireworks at Clinton Elementary School soon followed to end the night, and the village's four-day long Hockeyville celebration.

"I just want to thank the Clinton community for putting on a great show here," Housley said. "It was a great atmosphere. I loved being a part of the Kraft Hockeyville game."

‘A big time’ in Clinton as Hockeyville comes to village

By Joseph Labernik

Utica Observer-Dispatch

September 25, 2018

CLINTON — The buzz before the Kraft Hockeyville USA NHL preseason game Tuesday was palpable.

Whether the amount of people, the numerous Hockeyville signs around town or the chatter in local businesses, residents of Clinton — and visitors who came to the Mohawk Valley — knew that the preseason NHL game between the Buffalo Sabres and the Columbus Blue Jackets was something significant.

“It’s been a revolving door for us,” said Francis Alteri, the owner of Alteri’s Restaurant in Clinton. “People are excited; the rink was packed today for the practices ... there’s been a buzz in town, for sure.”

That buzz, Alteri said, progressively built up to Tuesday night’s game. He said there were people already in Clinton over the weekend for the numerous Clinton hockey alumni events, including an alumni game Sunday.

“The whole community is benefitting,” Alteri added. “It’s not just (Alteri’s Restaurant). People are getting gas, people are going to the coffee shop ... everybody has a chance to be successful.”

The day of hockey started at 9 a.m. with a red carpet event that allowed the community to meet the players of both teams. That was followed by hour-long practices by both teams.

Later in the day, a pep rally at the Clinton Central School gym allowed fans to meet and take pictures with Mr. Peanut, Heinz ketchup, mustard and BBQ mascots, and Audie, the Utica Comets’ mascot. There were also competitions for the best dressed fan and the loudest cheering section in the gym.

In the bleachers, hockey fan Jennifer Waskiewicz said she just wanted to stop by and see what was going on. She wasn’t going to the game in person, she said, but planned on watching on TV.

Compared to other major Clinton events, Hockeyville, Waskiewicz said, brought in “way more people” over the weekend.

That attention was perhaps the result of a campaign by the NHL to build the momentum of the event, said Steve Grimm, the Clinton School District superintendent. He was one of the many people who worked with the NHL to set up the rally and other similar events around Clinton.

The organization “looked at them as opportunities for the community to celebrate,” Gramm said, especially for a community that loves hockey.

“We’re excited for Clinton, but we also know it’s a regional love for hockey that has built hockey in this area,” Grimm said. “It’s not just about Clinton; it’s ... a great thing for the Mohawk Valley.”

The rally was followed by a parade led by the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile and the Planter’s Nutmobile, which brought fans to the Clinton Arena around 6:30 p.m.

Some fans already were in the arena, while others were outside watching players from the Sabres pass a soccer ball between one another.

The different hockey jerseys fans were wearing reflected a unique fan base. Sabres jerseys, New York Islanders jerseys and a few New York Rangers jerseys were mixed in with Clinton hockey jerseys and sweatshirts.

And there were both children and adults in attendance, like Meghan Jackson and her family, who live “right down the street from the arena.” She was wheeling two kids on a wagon to the game, while her other child was walking.

She said her family is a hockey family — her husband grew up and played in Clinton. To have the arena the site of a preseason hockey game, and to have news outlets like NBC there to broadcast it, was both cool and exciting, she said.

“A lot of the local businesses are getting work from this event,” Jackson added. “From the restaurants to even the gas stations, it’s really exciting. It’s just a big time.”

Sabres, Blue Jackets reminisce at Clinton Arena

Rome Sentinel

September 25, 2018

CLINTON — Players and coaches alike reminisced on their time in rinks like the one they practiced in this morning in preparation for tonight's Kraft Hockeyville NHL preseason game between the Buffalo Sabres and the Columbus Blue Jackets at Clinton Arena.

Puck drop is at 7.

The rink was filled with students and music was blaring this morning as the two teams practiced. The Blue Jackets came out for an hour, with eight players in white practice jerseys and eight more in dark blue, as well as two goalies. Then the Sabres took their hour, half in dark blue and half in yellow.

It was a bit different than the rinks these two teams usually play in. KeyBank Center in Buffalo seats 19,070. Columbus plays in Nationwide Arena, which seats 18,144.

Columbus Blue Jackets head coach John Tortorella was impressed with the facility and recent renovations. He stressed that while the team has a job to do in preparing for the regular season, the event is "what it's all about," making the NHL experience fun for the fans. He said it was good to see "all the kids and the excitement it's bringing the area." He continued: "Once you get here you're glad you're here. That's why you play. We're entertainers." He noted that even the bus ride to the rink was memorable. "We came in to the village. It's beautiful."

As for the rink itself, Tortorella said it reminded players of some of the places they played in the minor leagues as juniors, with low ceilings and less forgiving boards.

While Tortorella said there was no special plan for which 16 players and two goalies dressed for the Hockeyville game, he noted that Artemi Panarin needed some extra time after returning from injury and he wanted to start Joonas Korpi in goal. Star goalie Sergei Bobrovsky and team captain Nick Foligno are not among those who will participate in the Hockeyville game tonight.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he did have a plan for the uniqueness of the Hockeyville game. "We wanted to dress as many American players as possible." Like Columbus, Buffalo did not dress its starting goalie for the game. Carter Hutton was not one of the two goalies chosen, rather Scott Wedgewood will start and Jonas Johansson is also dressed for the game.

"It was great," Housley said of the morning skate. "Tunes were blaring. The crowd was awesome." He said the crowd in the rain "hung in there and our guys stayed out there and signed (autographs)." The arena itself, he said, "brings you back to your childhood memories." The Sabres, technically the home team tonight, also got a little reminder of their home rink when the crowd chanted "Let's go Buffalo!" during the morning skate.

"It's been awesome," said Blue Jackets defenseman Seth Jones this morning. He called it "a great turnout" by fans who stood outside the arena to welcome the players and get autographs even in the rain.

Jones, the son of Ronald "Popeye" Jones, who logged time with six NBA teams in 11 seasons, had his own small rink memories. He said the experience is fun, getting "out of the box," to "change it up a bit." He said he "grew up in a rink like this," and looked forward to the game in a place where "the energy is more intimate," where the low roof makes it a loud place to play.

"This is what it's all about right?" said Sabres alternate captain Zach Bogosian. "Seeing it for the first time it all came back," he said of the small rink feel. "The corners are pretty square so it kind of reminded me of my junior days." But, he said, the goal is still to win the game and prepare for the season.

Blue Jackets alternate captain Boone Jenner said he's "never been a part of something like this." He said the "passionate crowd" was a real sight. "It's the whole experience: getting off the bus, seeing the kids."

Casey Mittelstadt, a 19-year-old who played six games for the Sabres last year, said his teammates were amused when he said the experience in the rink "felt like high school. It makes for a fun skate. It was definitely fun and good to see," he added of the crowd outside and inside the rink this morning.

Jeremy Roenick, part of the NBC Sports broadcast team, was in the building as well. The retired 500-goal scorer said he has enjoyed the days in Clinton. "I didn't know anything about Clinton. The history of hockey here has been really interesting to learn." He said he would have loved to have the chance to play in a place like Clinton in an event like Hockeyville. "It would be amazing."

5 Observations: Blue Jackets top Sabres 4-2 in Hockeyville showdown

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 25, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - After starting the preseason with two wins the Buffalo Sabres have dropped three straight, falling to the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-2 on Tuesday in the Kraft Hockeyville game in Clinton, New York. Casey Nelson and Sam Reinhart scored for the Sabres, who have only two preseason games remaining.

Five observations from Tuesday's loss:

Dahlin dishes

In his three preseason appearances, 2018 No. 1 pick Rasmus Dahlin has had his fair share of ups and downs. With a national audience watching, Dahlin had his most impactful game thus far, pinching into the play on several occasions and tallying his first assist.

Undoubtedly the play that stands out the most was his aforementioned assist on Sam Reinhart's second-period goal. While on the power play, Dahlin fired a perfect pass to a streaking Jack Eichel, who found Reinhart camped in front of the net. If Dahlin's pass is off the mark or a second later, the Blue Jackets would have been in a position to block the passing lane. There will be mistakes but there will also be awesome plays like the one we saw on Tuesday.

Room for improvement

Brendan Guhle is going to be a solid NHL hockey player. But on Tuesday he struggled and with the current players on the Sabres roster, I wouldn't be surprised if he started the year in Rochester.

Look at it this way...

These players will almost certainly be on the Sabres opening night roster if they are healthy next week:

- Rasmus Ristolainen
- Rasmus Dahlin
- Marco Scandella
- Zach Bogosian
- Jake McCabe

That leaves Casey Nelson, Nathan Beaulieu and Brendan Guhle likely competing for two spots. Of the three, only Guhle can be sent to Rochester without having to clear waivers. While Beaulieu certainly struggled last season -- I don't see the Sabres waiving him right away. Nelson, who was impressive last season in Buffalo, would almost certainly be claimed if the team tried sending him to Rochester.

While it may be disappointing to some fans, a bit more time developing for Guhle in Rochester isn't the worst thing. Remember, he just turned 21-years-old.

Top Trio

For the second straight game the Skinner - Eichel - Reinhart trio was the Sabres best combination. It seemed like every scoring chance the Sabres had happened when this line was on the ice. At this point, I'd be very surprised if this line was broken up in the next week. Chances are, they'll be the first line you see on the ice when the Sabres open the regular season next week.

I'll be missing you

It was noticeable that the Sabres were without Tage Thompson. After his impressive debut this preseason I don't see a scenario where he isn't on the Sabres opening night roster. I could certainly be wrong but his size and creativity were missed on Tuesday evening.

Avoiding injury

Escaping the preseason without any significant injuries is imperative for every NHL club. While the severity of the injury remains unknown, Blue Jackets defender Seth Jones left Tuesday's game early with a lower-body injury. If nothing else, this should be a reminder to the Sabres to give the rest of the preseason off to some of the more established players on the roster. No need to risk injury, especially for the players who have already secured a roster spot.

Hockeyville USA: Pep Rally, NHL Preseason Game Tonight in Clinton

WKTV

September 25, 2018

CLINTON – It's a big day for local hockey fans as the Buffalo Sabres and Columbus Blue Jackets get ready to face off tonight at the Clinton Arena.

Back in April, the Clinton Arena was named the 2018 winner of the Kraft Hockeyville USA contest, and as a result they're receiving \$150,000 worth of renovations to the arena and they get to host an NHL preseason game. The Stanley Cup was also on display at the arena over the weekend.

NHL players arrived in Clinton for a red carpet event from 9-10 a.m. on Tuesday, and celebratory events are taking place this evening leading up to the big game.

At 1:05 p.m., the National Hockey League Players' Association will host a Goals & Dreams Equipment Donation, followed by a Q&A session with several Buffalo Sabres players at 1:30 p.m.

From 5-6:15 p.m., a pep rally will be held at Clinton Central School, located at 75 Chenango Ave. S. in Clinton. Anybody from the public is welcome to attend, even if you don't have a ticket for the game.

The game between the Buffalo Sabres and the Columbus Blue Jackets will begin at 7 p.m., and it will be broadcast on NBC Sports.

Tune into WKTV NEWSChannel 2 at 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. for live coverage and interviews with fans, officials and some of the players.

Fans, Players Ready For Hockeyville USA Game in Clinton

WKTV

September 25, 2018

CLINTON – Clinton celebrates 100 years of hockey this year, and tonight the icing on the birthday cake is an NHL preseason game to be played on local ice.

In April, we were excited to announce that Clinton Arena had made it to the final four in Kraft's annual contest, and thanks to your votes, Clinton is Hockeyville USA tonight.

Clinton beat out communities in South Dakota, Vermont and Louisiana in the final round of the contest. Hundreds packed the Clinton Arena to hear the announcement that Clinton had won, and after that a parade through town broke out to celebrate the big news.

In addition to hosting the preseason game between the Buffalo Sabres and the Columbus Blue Jackets, the Clinton Arena also won money for renovations - \$150,000 from the contest, and another \$250,000 from the state. This helped bring the rink up to NHL standards. Renovations included new glass and nets, updated locker rooms and fixing the refrigeration system for the ice.

The pro hockey players arrived Tuesday morning to get a feel for the ice and they had some time to talk about the big day ahead with our sports team.

Both the Sabres and Blue Jackets held their pre-game morning skates in front of a packed house of fans ranging from young school kids who actually got out of school for the day's events, all the way up through fans who have watched hockey in Clinton since the original Comets played there.

Both practices were up tempo and really showcased the speed that people can expect to see tonight between the two NHL teams, especially on a smaller ice surface than the regulation NHL rink.

Fans got to see both the superstars of the game and also players who are trying to make the NHL and make a name for themselves.

One established player from the Sabres actually has a connection to Clinton that he spoke about today.

"It's great, I'm from three hours north of here so I played a lot against Clinton growing up," said Zach Bogosian, a defenseman for the Buffalo Sabres. "I never played in this rink but I played against their minor hockey team so it's pretty cool to be here. This is what it's all about, I think it's something that the kids are looking forward to, we enjoy doing it and it's a good event that the NHL puts on."

At Clinton Central School, fans are gathered for a pre-game pep rally to celebrate before they head over to the Clinton Arena.

For more on this story, watch the video above, and tune into NEWSChannel 2 at 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

You can watch the game between the Sabres and the Blue Jackets at 7 p.m. on NBC Sports.