



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*October 11, 2018*

## **Sabres look for first three-game win streak since January**

By Rachel Lenzi  
The Buffalo News  
October 11, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres have a chance to win their third game in a row Thursday when they play host to the Colorado Avalanche at 7 p.m. at KeyBank Center.

It may not seem like a monumental mark to most hockey teams, but it's an early-season benchmark for the Sabres.

The Sabres haven't won three games in a row since Jan. 22-25, when they notched their only three-game winning streak of the 2017-2018 season with victories at Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. They haven't won three consecutive games at home since Jan. 7-20, 2017, when they won four in a row at KeyBank Center.

Buffalo also has a chance for its best start since 2011, when it opened 5-1.

If a team stumbles early in a season, it leaves too much ground to be made up in the playoff chase, as the Sabres know quite well.

"You don't want to get yourself behind the eight ball early, which we did last year, and then you're trying to catch up," right wing Jason Pominville said Wednesday at KeyBank Center. "Most of the time, it's too late. You get off to a good start, you position yourself well, and we've got to make sure we keep it going. It's only been three, so we have to make sure that we keep playing the right way, and if you do, you usually get success out of it."

To do that, the Sabres have to sustain the momentum they've built in their first two games. Last fall, Buffalo opened the season 3-7-2, including a shutout loss in its season opener against Montreal.

Less than a week ago, it would have been hard to project the Sabres in this position after a lackluster showing in their season opener, a 4-0 home loss to Boston on Oct. 4. The output and the effort didn't match the enthusiasm the Sabres instilled in their organization during the offseason and in training camp in September.

But in the next two games, Conor Sheary scored a pair of power-play goals in a 3-1 win Saturday against the New York Rangers, and the Sabres got better puck movement from their defensemen and created more opportunities off transition in a 4-2 victory Monday against Vegas.

Carter Hutton's goaltending has buoyed Buffalo. He has a 2.06 goals-against average and a .943 save percentage. He is 5-1 in his career against Colorado, and went 3-0 last season when he played for St. Louis.

"It's really important that we don't get complacent," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We focused on that today, about getting back to work and executing. Certainly, Colorado's a very good hockey team. They're a playoff team and they've got tremendous speed. We've seemed to face some fast teams, so it goes back to what can we control?"

"I think our guys have handled that real well. But we've got a tough test (Thursday). It would be great to finish the homestand on a high note, but we're going to have to put in 60 minutes of hard work."

As the Sabres pursue a small benchmark, Pominville offers some advice to his teammates, especially the younger ones.

"Go out there and play and enjoy the moment and have fun with it," Pominville said. "Time goes by fast and you realize that you've played a lot of games, so you have to make sure you take advantage of it."

"Enjoy the moment."

## **Zach Bogosian, Vladimir Sobotka back on ice for Sabres**

By Rachel Lenzi  
The Buffalo News  
October 10, 2018

A few familiar faces were on the ice for the Sabres Wednesday morning during practice at HarborCenter.

Defenseman Zach Bogosian and center Vladimir Sobotka joined the Sabres in preparation for Thursday's 7 p.m. game against the Colorado Avalanche in KeyBank Center.

Bogosian skated for the first time since Sept. 25, when he sustained a lower body injury during the Sabres' exhibition game against Columbus in Clinton.

"I just had a shift where something happened and I wasn't feeling right, and instead of making it worse and powering through, I just tried to be smart about it," Bogosian said.

Bogosian, 28, doesn't expect to return to the lineup Thursday against the Avalanche. He didn't elaborate on the nature of his injury.

"I'm not getting into that," Bogosian said. "Everyone's going to speculate. Left side, right side, hip surgery, non-hip surgery. I was out and I'm making my way back.

"I'd like to get a few team practices in. I've been skating on my own, with Dennis Miller in the rehab skates. I'd like to get a few team practices in before I jump into the games. There are a lot of factors that go into it. Obviously, today was a step in the right direction, but I'm not ready to play again yet. Try to make sure we're being smart about it."

Sobotka, who sustained an upper-body injury in the final minutes of the Sabres' season opener, a 4-0 loss Oct. 6 to Boston, also returned to practice.

"Every day I'm getting better and better, and it was nice to get out and skate with the guys," Sobotka said.

Additionally, Johan Larsson continued to skate in practices. Sabres coach Phil Housley did not determine the status of Sobotka or Larsson for Thursday against the Avalanche.

"Both Larsson and (Sobotka) had really good practices, so we'll probably make those decisions tomorrow," Housley said Wednesday. "I still haven't talked to the trainers."

## **Sabres' Berglund is having no trouble fitting in**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 11, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Patrik Berglund, Conor Sheary and Tage Thompson had only worn one jersey in their whole NHL career before being traded to Buffalo. Berglund played 694 games with the St. Louis Blues and he said it took getting used to putting on the Sabres sweater, "It definitely was a different feeling, it was a big change obviously, but it's really exciting."

The Sabres looked awful in Game 1 and many were overreacting and calling for Phil Housley's dismissal. Berglund said to get better, all they had to do is believe in what they were doing in practice, "Everybody's in good shape and in the first game, everybody maybe was too excited and kind of fumbled the plays and then get out of place too often, but I think when we're sharp in execution, we'll definitely start building momentum."

I thought that it might have been easier for Berglund to get used to his new teammates because there were so many players from Sweden in training camp. On the roster now are Rasmus Dahlin, Johan Larsson and Linus Ullmark. The 30-year-old Berglund says it's not a big deal at all, "I think the Swedish part of it is, I mean it doesn't matter if they're Swedish or American or whatever, I've been over here a very long time, so I don't feel like I feel more comfortable when there's a lot of Swedes around. It doesn't really matter for me, but what is good is to see that Sweden is producing a lot of good talent and it's been nice to see."

It's different for Dahlin and many of the Amerks like Lawrence Pilut. They're spending their first season in North America and look up to Berglund, "For them, especially when they're very young, I bet they think it's nice to have an old Swedish guy to help them around, but I've been here such a long time I know how everything works and I don't have to speak the Swedish language to get around."

I've been told by more than one person that Berglund is the jokester in the room that keeps everybody loose. He turned and looked at me deadpanned and said, "I don't know! Who's been spreading that rumor?" Berglund then cracked a smile and said, "I might talk a lot, but I wouldn't say I'm that much of a jokester."

Zach Bogosian and Vladimir Sobotka returned to practice on Wednesday. Bogosian said he's progressing, but isn't quite ready for a game yet.

Wednesday's lines:

Sheary - Eichel - Reinhart

Skinner - Berglund - Okposo

Elie (Sobotka) - Mittelstadt - Thompson

Girgensons - Rodrigues (Larsson) - Pominville

Scandella - Ristolainen

McCabe - Dahlin

Beaulieu - Nelson

Tennyson - Bogosian

## **Hutton: 'We're taking some good steps early on'**

WGR 550

October 10, 2018

It has been quite the start of the 2018-19 season for new Buffalo Sabres goalie Carter Hutton.

The 32-year-old veteran is starting his first season with the Sabres after spending the past two seasons with the St. Louis Blues. The sixth-year veteran has performed very well to open the season for Buffalo, posting a 2-1-0 record in goal with a 2.06 goals-against average and a .943 save percentage.

Last season in St. Louis, Hutton appeared in 32 games playing primarily as a backup to Jake Allen, but put up some very impressive numbers with a 17-7-3 record, a career-high 2.09 goals-against average, a career-high .931 save percentage and three shutouts. This performance was part of the reason why Sabres general manager Jason Botterill rewarded Hutton with a three-year, \$8.25 million contract this summer.

In the first three games of the young season, Hutton has been the backbone of Buffalo's success with just six goals allowed on 106 shots faced, including a 43-save performance in Saturday night's win over the New York Rangers at KeyBank Center. The stable veteran will be looked to quite a bit this season as the Sabres develop 25-year-old Linus Ullmark behind him with the hopes that he can, eventually, ease into the starting role for the long-term. For now, Hutton will carry the team as he looks to make the most of his first starting job in the National Hockey League.

Hutton took some time on Wednesday to talk with Jeremy White and Sal Capaccio on the Howard and Jeremy Show on WGR. The Sabres netminder talked a bit about the team's start to the 2018-19 season, as well as the play of young rookie defenseman Rasmus Dahlin and captain Jack Eichel.

Here is some of what he had to say:

Hutton on starting the season at home:

"It's always nice to start at home. You kind of get in a groove, and for most of the other guys we already know how to play in other rinks. We've done it before. For me, to come into a new team, it's nice to get started at home and get the fans used to my game and the way we're playing. Getting a few wins helps, so it's something that we can bank some points now before we head out on the road here."

Hutton on the team's play early on in the season:

"I think we're taking some good steps early on. We have a lot of young guys so they will take their bumps and bruises. It's a hard league to play in. There's a lot of teams that have the depth and the veteran guys that have played a lot of minutes. For some of the young guys, it's kind of learning what you can and can't get away with in this league. It's a [high-checking] league, there's not much time and space so I think the way we want to play is coming around. I think it just shows the commitment that these guys put into training camp to get into the system and develop that. I think it's [all about] building from here."

Hutton on his leadership role and the group in the Sabres locker room:

"To think of last year, obviously they had a tough start. I don't know how many games we lost to start - what was explained to me is that from there it kind of snowballed. Everyone starts gripping their stick a little too tight, trying to do too many things. Hockey is a hard game to play, but I think it's a lot easier when you're having fun and trying to relax. For me, I try to bring my personality and not try to change anything crazy."

"I think the leaders in here and the guys they brought in are awesome, and there's a good group of us here that have the right message. I think the main goal is to get guys to have fun. There's a lot to stress about in this league, but it's a lot easier to just have fun and play your game when you're having fun."

Hutton on Rasmus Dahlin:

"I think sometimes you have your first round pick and the expectations are so high. He's a defenseman, so sometimes when you don't notice him he's been playing well. And some of the stuff that he does is pretty impressive. I think what he's gonna learn as he gets more and more used to the league is what you can and can't get away from. He comes from Sweden where they're on the big rink where you can kind of do some different stuff. A NHL arena is a little smaller, there's a little less space, guys' stick skills are so good, but some of the skills and scoring chances he's created, stuff offensively, when he turns it on it's pretty impressive as an 18-year-old.

"I definitely think the sky's the limit for him. He's a great kid too on top of that. We're getting to know him more and more. He's quiet, but he's starting to open up now a little more and it's been a lot of fun here so far."

Hutton on Jack Eichel:

"He's so impressive with the puck. Even just a few of the plays like he scored that beautiful goal last game against Vegas, and even just the set up he made on one of the other plays. His skating is phenomenal, it's almost effortless with how fast he's going.

"I think as a leader, he's done a great job here. Obviously I wasn't here last year so I didn't really know what the culture was like and how things were, but he wears his heart on his sleeve, he's an emotional player, but he plays hard. He's our hardest-working player. He leads by example, and I think he's done a great job of taking over the captaincy. Some of the stuff that he says in the locker room and what he does as a player, guys are feeding off of that. He's our best player and he's our captain. It's one of those things that he's leading by example with everything that he does."

## **Sabres' depth has buoyed strong start**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 10, 2018

BUFFALO – Depth means coach Phil Housley can utilize his so-called fourth line for critical defensive zone faceoffs. It means the Sabres can replace former center Ryan O'Reilly's minutes by committee. It means it can often be hard to distinguish between the first and fourth trios.

Right now, for the first time in years, the 2-1 Sabres possess depth up front and the ability to roll four lines.

"We've been rolling them pretty good," center Evan Rodrigues said Wednesday after the Sabres prepared for tonight's home tilt against the Colorado Avalanche. "Every line's been contributing. I think it's had some success early on."

Housley said he likes that the Sabres can "push the pace and keep the tempo up."

"That's what we want to do, we want to be able to roll four lines," he said.

Depth has helped the Sabres, who are over .500 for the first time since January 2013, get off to their best start in years. In fact, a win tonight will give them their first three-game winning streak since last Jan. 22 to 25.

That was the only time they put together three straight wins last season.

Through three games, it can be argued the line Rodrigues pivots between wingers Zemgus Girgensons and Jason Pominville has been the Sabres' best.

On paper, it's their fourth combination. But on the ice, Housley has been unafraid to throw the line out in any situation. The players have rewarded their coach, outplaying a line featuring first-round picks Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson.

In the season opener, Rodrigues, Girgensons and Pominville created most of the Sabres' offense early. On Saturday, Housley replaced Girgensons with newcomer Remi Elie. But on Monday afternoon, the trio was reunited and produced Pominville's 278th NHL goal.

"You need ... every line going, every line's in the game, keep your shifts short and roll over every line," Pominville said. "A lot of the good teams are doing it and they've had success doing it. It's a long season. You can't overplay some of your other guys."

Sabres captain Jack Eichel was on the ice too long – a career-high 25 minutes, 45 seconds – in Saturday's 3-1 win against the New York Rangers.

Don't expect the slick center to approach that mark again soon. He skated 19:11 in Monday's 4-2 win against the Vegas Golden Knights inside KeyBank Center.

"A little bit had to do with special teams," Housley said of Eichel's ice time Saturday. "He would admit to it he's out there a little bit too long. He's got to monitor and manage his shift length.

"We're going to look after that a little bit better. But sometimes you're in the zone for a minute and a half. You have pressure, those things always arise. Certainly, we don't want him playing that much."

Eichel said: "The shorter your shift, the more fresh you are. I'm also on the ice to perform, so when I go over the bench I got to help our team do something."

Housley, of course, still plans to lean on Eichel, who has been centering Conor Sheary and Sam Reinhart.

"He's 21 years old," Housley said of Eichel. "He's got young legs. I think he can handle 18 to 20 minutes a night, depending if it's a back-to-back. But he's ready to go. He's a true competitor."

So far, Eichel's ice time is up (22:09 compared to 20:09 last season). While that average will likely go down, he should absorb some of the nearly 21 minutes O'Reilly skated each contest a year ago.

The Sabres have also relied on veteran Patrik Berglund to fill the void left by trading O'Reilly. Berglund, 30, has been centering Jeff Skinner and Kyle Okposo on the second line.

"It's kind of going to be by committee," said Rodrigues, who skated 17:04 on Monday, the fourth-highest total of his career. "The guys that are going I'm sure will be relied upon to play more minutes. I think that just speaks to our depth this year on our team."

"We can go to anyone in the lineup and any one of the four lines and know that we'll all play the right way, we'll all do the little things."

## **Sabres' Zach Bogosian practices, staying positive through injury**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 10, 2018

BUFFALO – Zach Bogosian wouldn't get into specifics. For the past two weeks, including the Sabres' first three games this season, a lower-body injury has sidelined the defenseman.

Bogosian refused to say if his current ailment is related to the season-ending hip surgery he underwent a year ago.

"Everyone's going to speculate," Bogosian said today after practicing with his teammates for the first time since getting hurt Sept. 25. "Left side, right side, hip surgery, non-hip surgery – I was out, and I'm making my way back."

Injuries, of course, have stymied Bogosian, 28, over the years. Last season, he played only 18 games.

So the Sabres have dealt with Bogosian cautiously. Early in training camp, they held him out of some practices. Now, they're bringing him back slowly.

"We've just been really cautious about Zach and where he is," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "(He had) a good progression skating on his own. Getting back in to practice is good sign."

Bogosian hasn't played something "wasn't feeling right" during a preseason shift, he said.

"Instead of making it worse and powering through, I'm trying to be smart about it," said Bogosian, who's officially day-to-day.

Bogosian would like to get a few more team practices in before he plays. He had been skating on his own with rehab coordinator Dennis Miller.

"There's a lot of factors that go into it," Bogosian said. "Obviously, today was a step in the right direction, but I'm not ready to play a game yet."

The affable Bogosian has embraced a positive outlook on his career. He said he tries to contribute when he's not playing.

"Any time you go through what I've been through, there's good days and bad days," he said. "But being around the guys has been great. I've had a lot of help with my family and just being around the guys, making me smile. It's not an easy thing to go through, its not a fun thing to go through.

"I don't wish anyone to go through it. But I continue to grow from it."

In other news, Housley said center Johan Larsson (lower body) and winger Vladimir Sobotka (upper body) both "had really good" practices today inside HarborCenter. Housley said a decision will be made Thursday.

Larsson hasn't played since blocking a shot Sept. 26. Sobotka was hurt late in Thursday's 4-0 loss to the Boston Bruins.

"It felt good," Sobotka said. "Every day I get better and better."

The Sabres host the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday, the end of a four-game home stand.

## **Sabres aim to end homestand with win over Avalanche**

Yahoo! Sports

October 10, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres have one more home game before they hit the road for the first time this season.

They would like nothing better than to make it three wins in a row Thursday night when they host the Colorado Avalanche at KeyBank Center.

It will conclude a four-game homestand that opened the Sabres' season. They will play their next five games on the road.

After hearing boos when they dropped their season opener 4-0 to the Boston Bruins on Oct. 4, they have defeated the New York Rangers 3-1 on Saturday and the Vegas Golden Knights 4-2 on Monday.

Jack Eichel, 21, the Sabres' newly appointed captain, scored twice Monday to give Buffalo (2-1-0) more wins than losses for the first time since the third game of the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season. It had been 457 games, dating to Jan. 24, 2013, since Buffalo had more wins than losses.

"The things you can control are your compete, your attitude and your work," Eichel said. "If we do that and stick together and compete for each other, I think there's a lot of good things that can happen. ... I like the direction in which our group is going right now."

The Avalanche (2-1-0) lost 5-2 to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday in their first road game of the season. Colorado will try to come out with more jump from the start at Buffalo.

"I don't want to take anything away from Columbus, because they had a good first period," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "But we stood around. We weren't ready to start. So, when you stand around, it's pretty easy to move the puck around you. It's also the reason why we had three penalties in five, six minutes of the first period. When you're not moving your legs, and not skating, teams are going to move it around and you're going to take penalties. That's what happened."

Philipp Grubauer made his first start in goal for Colorado, with Semyon Varlamov, who had started the two wins, backing up. Varlamov is likely to start Thursday.

After falling behind 2-0 in the first period Tuesday, the Avalanche tied the game before the Blue Jackets regained control with three third-period goals, including one into an empty net.

"Second period was great," said Grubauer, who allowed four goals on 34 shots. "First one and third one, that's where we ran into some trouble. You play the right way in the second (but) you have to play the right way for 60 minutes, not one period."

The Avalanche must be prepared to play a Sabres team that is willing to work with Eichel leading the way.

"He's made a commitment to do it every day, not just when we're under the bright lights," Sabres right winger Kyle Okposo said of Eichel. "He's done a really good job in practice of setting the tone and setting the pace. He's the best player on our team and if he's the hardest worker every day, the team is going to follow him."

"It's really, really early but we've put in the work throughout the summer and in training camp," Sabres right winger Jason Pominville said. "It's a different vibe, a different atmosphere. It's definitely nice to be able to get the start that we have had for sure."

Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian (lower-body injury) skated with the team Wednesday for the first time since he was injured Sept. 25 and will need more practice time before he returns to the lineup.

Centers Vladimir Sobotka (upper body), who was injured in the season opener, and Johan Larsson (lower body), who has not played this season, have returned to practice but coach Phil Housley said their status has not been determined for Thursday.

Avalanche defenseman Patrik Nemeth (upper body) will return to the lineup Thursday and center Vladislav Kamenev will probably make his season debut. Nemeth was injured in the season opener Oct. 4 against the Minnesota Wild.

Kamenev was recalled by the Avalanche Sunday after playing two games with the Colorado Eagles of the American Hockey League. Kamenev has five games of NHL experience, three with the Avalanche last season after being acquired in a trade with the Nashville Predators Nov. 5. He missed 50 games in 2017-18 with a broken arm.

"It is a good time to give him an opportunity," Bednar said. "He's played a couple games over the weekend, he's been up and practiced for a few days and is energized and ready to go."

## **Luukkonen off to scorching start with Sudbury**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 10, 2018

One lesson Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has learned during his introduction to the Ontario Hockey League: You need to be ready for anything.

Luukkonen and his Sudbury Wolves were already trailing 2-0 on Sunday when he found himself face-to-face with Kitchener Rangers forward Rickard Hugg, sent in alone on a breakaway. With little time to react, the 6-foot-5 goaltender stayed patient as Hugg flipped the puck to his backhand, then quickly dropped to the butterfly to make the pad save.

The save proved to be a turning point. The Wolves scored their first goal less than three minutes later, added another before the end of the period and broke the 2-2 tie in overtime.

"There's lots more bounces," Luukkonen said over the phone on Tuesday. "You never know what's going to happen. You have to be ready all the time. I think that's something you learn in pro hockey, that you have to be ready for all 60 minutes."

It's hard to imagine a better start to Luukkonen's junior career than the one that's transpired in Sudbury: wins in his first five starts, including a trio of road victories that earned him OHL Player of the Week honors. He made 99 saves in those games, good for a .952 save percentage.

Luukkonen ranks third in the OHL with a 1.78 GAA and fourth with a .944 save percentage. The number he's proudest of, however, is the 12 sitting next to Sudbury's name in the point column, good for first in the league.

"Of course, it's surprising. I didn't expect it," Luukkonen said of his scorching start. "But we have a good team and our team has been playing really well. It's easy to play behind those guys. So yeah, it's been a great start for the whole team. Maybe there's some guys who are surprised by it, but when we play like this, it's no surprise."

Sudbury selected Luukkonen third overall in the CHL Import Draft in June, prompting the goaltender to make a decision on his future. He could continue his career in Finland, where he played his first pro season a year ago, or make his first venture to North America.

The decision to play in Sudbury was made with input from the Sabres and HPK, his club in Finland, who agreed that playing No. 1 minutes would be the best course for his development.

With that decision comes change: new teammates and a new style of play, not to mention a new country. After living on his own in Finland for two years, having the support of a billet family has eased the transition.

"It's smaller than I thought," Luukkonen said of his new home. "It makes it easier when you have your billets and you live with a family. It's just one thing less to worry about it. It makes playing easier."

Making big saves doesn't hurt, either.

"Especially when you're with a new team and new environment, you have to prove yourself a little," he said. "It helps to make big saves and help the team win."

**Pekar's strong start**

Luukkonen isn't the only Sabres prospect making a splash in the OHL. Matej Pekar (fourth round, 2018) is tied for ninth in the league with 10 points (5+5) in his first seven games playing under Dale Hawerchuk with the Barrie Colts.

Pekar tallied points in his first six games before being held off the board in a 4-2 win at Kingston on Sunday. It's a promising start for the forward, who opted to play junior hockey in favor of beginning his collegiate career at Miami (Ohio).

"I went there for a visit and I was kind of still on the edge, I didn't know what to decide," Pekar said during the Prospects Challenge. "I just kind of realized that I want to focus on hockey, I want to face the best players I can and get pushed right now ... That should help me develop into hopefully an NHL player."

Pekar and Luukkonen will square off when Barrie visits Sudbury on Friday night.

Laaksonen playing top minutes

After getting his first taste of Liiga action last season, defenseman Oskari Laaksonen (third round, 2017) has been playing on Ilves' top pair en route to a 7-3-1 start.

Laaksonen ranks third on the team with six points (1+5). He scored his first career goal with a point shot through traffic on the power play in a 6-2 win on Sept. 21.

Laaksonen's average ice time of 19:01 ranks third on the team, second amongst defensemen.

Back to school

College hockey will be in full swing this weekend, including a series between Boston College and Wisconsin that will pit Sabres prospects Christopher Brown (sixth round, 2014) and Casey Fitzgerald (third round, 2016) against Linus Weissbach (seventh round, 2017) and Phillip Nyberg (fifth round, 2016).

Brown is coming off a two-goal performance in B.C.'s exhibition win over New Brunswick on Saturday, in which Fitzgerald tallied an assist. Weissbach scored a goal and an assist in Wisconsin's exhibition win over Victoria on Sunday.

The Eagles and Badgers will meet in Wisconsin on Friday and Saturday, with both games set to begin at 8 p.m.

## **Bogosian, Sobotka return to practice**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 10, 2018

Zach Bogosian led the stretch at center ice to conclude practice at Harborcenter on Wednesday, his first skate with his Sabres teammates since late September.

He'll need a few more practices before making his season debut, but it was a step in the right direction.

"I felt nice to be back with the team," Bogosian said. "It's been a little bit. It felt good."

Bogosian has been out since sustaining a lower-body injury during the Sabres' preseason game in Clinton, N.Y. on Sept. 25. Phil Housley said the team is being cautious with the defenseman, who had season-ending hip surgery in January.

"I thought he looked really good being his first practice back with our group, a pretty good upbeat, up-tempo practice," Housley said. "A good sign he's able to get through it."

Bogosian admitted the delay has been difficult given the amount of time it's been since he's appeared in a regular-season game. The silver lining is that the Sabres began their season with four home games, which allowed him to be around his teammates.

"Mentally I feel good," he said. "That's one thing I can control, is what I think about and how I stay positive and how I can contribute as a teammate when I'm not in the lineup. I think any time you go through what I've been through, there's good days and bad days.

"But being around the guys has been great. I've had a lot of help with my family and just being around the guys, making me smile. It's not an easy thing to go through, it's not a fun thing to go through. I don't wish anyone to go through it. But I continue to grow from it."

Tickets for Thursday vs. Colorado

Vladimir Sobotka and Johan Larsson also practiced on Wednesday. Sobotka has been out since sustaining an upper-body injury in the season opener against Boston last Thursday. Larsson returned to practice on Sunday but remains on injured reserve with a lower-body injury.

Housley said that the forwards' status for Thursday's game against Colorado has not been determined.

"Smooth is fast"

The Sabres made a point of adding speed to their lineup during the offseason, which came in the form of additions like Conor Sheary and Jeff Skinner at forward and Rasmus Dahlin on defense. But that's not the only reason they've looked faster in their last two games.

Buffalo's ability to move quickly up the ice begins with clean passing from the defensive zone, which has been markedly improved from a season ago.

"If you start off with a bad pass, everyone has to wait for it," defenseman Marco Scandella said. "Being crispy is fast. Smooth is fast. I feel like we're more detailed with that in practice and it's translating to games."

Take Rasmus Ristolainen for example. Of the 21 outlet passes he attempted in a 4-2 win over Vegas on Monday, 19 were successful (per MSG statistician Ray Orange). He echoed Scandella in saying that the improvement has stemmed from everyday habits in practice.

"When you're executing with the passing - flat, hard passes on the tape - the game is going to be quicker," Ristolainen said. "We can still work on it, but at this time of the year it's better than it was last year."

The onus isn't only on the defensemen. Ristolainen and Housley both mentioned how advantageous it's been to have a puck-moving goaltender in Carter Hutton, but success is also dependent on the work by forwards to make themselves available.

"We call it a block of five guys, getting back in the zone," Housley said. "It also helps that your goalie can handle the puck, because it gives our D an opportunity to get themselves turned up and facing up ice. But I think the forwards have done a really good job of coming back harder on the breakouts so they're available and we're connected as a five-man unit, so we're able to make those 10-foot passes and break down forechecks.

"It's a credit to everybody that's on the ice. We've really focused on coming back into our own end trying to get some picks for our D and even in our transition game, it's about working back and giving support to our defensemen."

#### Lines at practice

43 Conor Sheary - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart  
53 Jeff Skinner - 10 Patrik Berglund - 21 Kyle Okposo  
81 Remi Elie - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 72 Tage Thompson  
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville  
17 Vladimir Sobotka - 22 Johan Larsson

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
19 Jake McCabe - 26 Rasmus Dahlin  
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 8 Casey Nelson  
5 Matt Tennyson - 4 Zach Bogosian

40 Carter Hutton  
35 Linus Ullmark