



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin, teammates bond watching LeBron James

By Jason Wolf
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The last week and a half were chock-full of firsts for No. 1 overall pick Rasmus Dahlin.

The Buffalo Sabres' rookie defenseman experienced his first extended NHL road trip.

He scored his first career goal.

And the Swede enjoyed attending his first NBA game with a handful of teammates, watching LeBron James' home debut with the Los Angeles Lakers against the Houston Rockets on Saturday night at Staples Center, a game marred by a fight that left three players suspended and the sports world abuzz.

"Oh, that was cool. That really doesn't happen that much, right? So it was fun," Dahlin said Tuesday at KeyBank Center after the team's first practice since returning to Buffalo.

As for how the fracas compared to those in hockey, he was less than impressed.

"It was just one punch, so it wasn't a really good fight," Dahlin said. "But I don't think basketball is like that."

The Sabres believe the friendships built by sharing exactly these kinds of off-the-ice experiences during the 10-day, five-game Western road trip are critical to establishing a more cohesive group on the ice, especially for a team that had eight new players on the opening day roster. And they've even suggested the camaraderie contributed to their 3-2 record during the stretch.

Buffalo won its last two games, which included rallying from a two-goal deficit Sunday against Anaheim. They host the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday.

"It's never easy to go on a 10-day road trip to start the year, but it was great for us," Sabres center Jack Eichel said. "I thought for one, we got a lot closer as a group. We had a lot of good times together and I know I enjoyed it. There's a lot of new faces in this room, and it seems like we got to know each other pretty well and we spent a lot of quality time together.

"I think we're definitely closer now than we were before we left, so that's always a positive. You just want to keep getting closer as a group. I think that translates to on the ice. I think you maybe saw that there in the last two games."

Sabres coach Phil Housley said there was great value in a long road trip early in the season.

"Number one, it gets our guys to be able to bond, especially early," Housley said. "They've become a tighter group because of it. We went through adversity there on the trip and I think the guys rallied around it and got together and had a strong turnaround on the weekend, and I think that's because of the road trip.

"All you're doing is thinking about hockey, you're together a lot, you're on the bus, you're going to the rink. A lot of the things you're doing you're doing a lot together, so it was great to have a road trip early in our schedule."

Dahlin was among a group of five Sabres who attended the Lakers game, after Jeff Skinner and Kyle Okposo scored tickets and dragged a few rookies back to the arena after they'd defeated the Kings earlier that day.

Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson were also in the crowd.

Thompson posted a courtside photo of the group on Instagram, which showed he, Dahlin and Mittelstadt wearing James jerseys. Skinner wore a JaVale McGee jersey.

"I was actually going for a LeBron jersey but they were sold out of my size, so he was the closest guy I found that they had in my size," Skinner said, laughing. "I had to go with that one. I'm still happy with it, though. It's all right."

Thompson rolled his eyes about Skinner's explanation.

"I don't know where he was looking," Thompson said, "because I showed up a little after him and I found a LeBron jersey. I don't think there was too many shortages of them. I think he's just a really big McGee fan."

Skinner on fire

Skinner led all Sabres with five goals and two assists on the road trip. He scored four goals over the last two games, including a hat trick against the Kings, after Housley shuffled the lines.

Skinner joined a new top line with Eichel and Jason Pominville. Skinner, who is second on the team in shots with 26, had nine shots in the last two games, including six against Anaheim.

"He's getting himself to the net and he had a good game there in L.A.," Eichel said. "I thought that got him going. I thought he was just around the puck the whole game. I thought he's really good at his stick battles. He ends up on the right side of defensemen a lot of times offensively and he's tough to contain. I thought he played well there and I thought he played well in Anaheim. I thought he's been shooting, and obviously you can't score unless you shoot."

Skinner said he found instant chemistry with Eichel and Pominville.

"He's been around a long time, so he's pretty smart," Skinner said about Pominville. "He knows where to be. He's easy to read off that way, I think, and he's got some pretty good skills, too. It's a pretty good combo, I think, and with Jack down the middle, he was playing well too. When those two guys are playing that way, it's easy for me, I think."

Focus on fundamentals

The Sabres focused on fundamentals during practice Tuesday, returning to the ice at KeyBank Center for skills development drills with former Sabres forward Matt Ellis, now on the coaching staff at the Academy of Hockey at HarborCenter.

"It was good to have Matt Ellis and his crew out there today, sort of unlocking the bodies, doing a little skills session," Housley said. "Coming back from that road trip, it was a good time in our schedule that they could work on some skills."

Housley said Ellis has the potential to become a head coach in the AHL or NHL.

"Number one, he's a very smart man," Housley said. "He really knows the skill element as far as practicing goes. He comes across really well to the guys. He does a lot for us in development camp and pre-training camp, so a lot of the things that they were doing out there, they were accustomed to. But yeah, I think there's a future."

Sabres prospect Danny O'Regan flies under the radar but effective with Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

October 23, 2018

ROCHESTER – With so many of his Rochester Americans teammates tearing up the AHL, Buffalo Sabres prospect Danny O'Regan often gets overshadowed.

O'Regan's linemate, rookie Victor Olofsson, has scored a league-best 14 points through the opening eight games. Another newcomer, defenseman Lawrence Pilut, has compiled 10 points in six contests. Veteran Zach Redmond's 12 points rank first among AHL defensemen.

Three Amerks are among the league's top five scorers.

Meanwhile, winger Alexander Nylander just had his career-long six-game point streak snapped. The former eighth overall pick looks like a top prospect again.

You get the idea.

The first-place Amerks, who had won five consecutive games before Saturday's 5-4 overtime road loss to the Belleville Senators, are stacked.

The versatile O'Regan, an older prospect at 24, easily gets lost in the shuffle on the AHL's highest-scoring team.

"That's kind of been my career my whole life, just kind of an under-the-radar guy," O'Regan said Friday after scoring two goals in Blue Cross Arena. "Maybe you look at the end of the year, I'll have some solid numbers. It's a blessing and a curse, getting a lot of the hype and attention. It creates some distractions sometimes.

"I know guys feel a little pressure to produce. I don't mind staying under the radar."

O'Regan, the AHL's Rookie of the Year with the San Jose Barracuda in 2016-17, owns some terrific numbers. The Boston University product has produced 40 goals and 104 points in 120 AHL games over three seasons, including four goals and six points this year.

"Danny's been a good two-way, solid player," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. "He's getting rewarded now with some points. He's got great vision, gets over pucks, he can make plays, he's very reliable on the defensive side of the puck. He kills penalties, he does faceoffs, power plays.

"He's a big person in our lineup that we tend to use a lot. He's very underrated."

In Friday's 5-4 shootout win against the Toronto Marlies, O'Regan opened the scoring by redirecting Redmond's pass as he got knocked down at the crease. In the second period, O'Regan spun around in the right circle and roofed in a backhander.

"I kind of blacked out for a little bit," O'Regan joked of the highlight-reel goal.

Still, following the game, two of O'Regan's defensive plays – clearing the puck from the defensive zone and tying up an opponent at the net following a rebound – stood out to Taylor.

"There's a reason why we put him in situations where we put him in," Taylor said. "He's very reliable, but he's also very sneaky offensively. He ... gets over pucks, he escapes guys in the corners and he's a really good passer. He's getting more confidence. When he gets confidence, he's a really, really good player.

"He gets to that next level, that's why he got recalled last year, because he was at that level."

O'Regan performed at a high level last season after the Sabres acquired him from the San Jose Sharks in the Evander Kane trade, compiling six goals and 15 points in 18 games with the Amerks.

The Sabres quickly rewarded O'Regan with a two-game recall. He had four points in 19 games with the Sharks earlier in the season.

"I played a bunch of NHL games last year, that definitely helped me getting used to what it's like playing up there," said O'Regan, who made 21 of his 24 NHL appearances last season. "I'd like to get another shot with the Sabres ... but I think I'm learning a lot here. I still got some stuff to improve on.

"It's nice having Tails around, he's great to talk to and he's really helpful with a lot of the little things."

The 5-foot-10, 185-pound O'Regan began the season centering Olofsson and rookie Rasmus Asplund before Taylor moved Asplund to the middle and O'Regan to the right wing.

While Asplund has only recorded one assist, the line has been one of the AHL's best.

"(There is) definitely a natural chemistry and I definitely think we're building and getting better every game, too," O'Regan said. "They're really good guys and unselfish players. I think we just keep talking off the ice and getting a little better and stronger every game."

Guhle streaking

Just over halfway through Friday's tilt, Amerks defenseman Brendan Guhle scored what Taylor called "an unbelievable goal" by jumping into the rush and backhanding winger C.J. Smith's pass in.

Guhle joined the forwards so seamlessly he looked like a center leading the attack. Taylor said Guhle's first goal this season showcased the prospect's best talents.

"He just kind of took off," Taylor said. "That's what we want from him, we want him to have confidence in what he does, his speed and how he utilizes it and makes offense, but also how he can come back after the play. ...

"He's got to use that speed more but he's got to have that confidence when to jump and when not to."

Guhle scored again Saturday and has a five-game point streak.

Pilut update

An upper-body injury forced Pilut, 23, to miss both weekend games. The Swede is day-to-day, Taylor said.

Pilut was hurt in Wednesday's 6-1 road win against the Utica Comets. At first, Taylor said, Pilut thought he could battle through the injury.

"Long-term for him, if he has to miss one game or two, I'd rather that than two weeks or three weeks," Taylor said.

Pilut, who has a four-game point streak, ranks second among AHL defenders in points. The rookie has recorded seven of his 10 points on the power play.

Amerks bits

The five-game win streak was the Amerks' longest since April 2014. ... Redmond has a league-high eight power-play points and the Amerks are the first team in the league to reach double-digit power play goals. His seven-game point streak is the longest active run among defensemen and the second longest overall. ... Olofsson's six-game point streak ranks third. ... The Amerks host Utica on Friday and Laval on Saturday.

Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Proving Jeff Skinner is Buffalo's best skater

By Travis Yost
The Buffalo News
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Two weeks into the regular season, there should be little debate as to who has been Buffalo's best skater. That would be prized offseason acquisition Jeff Skinner.

On a team starving for offense on some nights, Skinner has been a big-time addition. That's particularly true at 5-on-5, where Skinner – predominantly playing with a combination of Kyle Okposo, Jack Eichel and Casey Mittelstadt – has helped create a true first-line presence.

It is early, but the goal differentials are impressive. With Skinner on the ice, Buffalo has scored nine goals while only conceding one. Not only does that give him the third-best goal percentage in the league (behind just Noah Juulsen and Sam Steel), but it has given Buffalo a plus-4.1 goal advantage for every 60 minutes of hockey played with him on the ice. That number is fourth best in the league, and he's leading some really talented players on some very quality hockey teams:

Like most favorable goal differential runs in smaller samples, Skinner's numbers are being heavily influenced by "the percentages." With Skinner on the ice, the Sabres are shooting 13.4 percent – median on-ice shooting percentage around the league, for context, is 8.3 percent. Goaltending has an even wilder deviation. Skinner's goaltenders are stopping more than 98 percent of shots with him on the ice. Median on-ice save percentage around the league, again for context, is 91.7 percent.

Every player at some point is going to go through a run where everything is working. His teammates are finishing scoring opportunities and no pucks are getting behind either Carter Hutton or Linus Ullmark. But the key piece for Skinner is that when these percentages wash away – on-ice shooting percentages and save percentages notoriously regress strongly toward league norms, with time – the production will still be there.

One of the best ways to combat future regression is to dominate the puck and play the majority of the time in the offensive zone. There are an awful lot of ways to do this – teams such as San Jose and Carolina prefer to lean on their skill players to gain and sustain the offensive zone through puck carrying, whereas other teams (such as Boston) prefer to play a bit more dump-and-chase, leveraging forechecking talent and working the boards on every shift.

Obviously this is an area in which Buffalo has struggled historically. In fact, since the 2014-15 season, no team has seen less possession of the puck than the Sabres (44 percent). The Sabres have shown improvement in the 2018-19 season though, getting about 48 percent of the shots through their first nine games. A trip to Southern California, where the Sabres out-attempted the Ducks and Kings 88 to 67 (57 percent), certainly helped.

That's another area in which Skinner has made inroads. Consider two alternative measures to goal differential here, including shots and scoring chances. The beauty of these measures is they are a bit more predictive of future performance, largely because they happen in much higher volumes than goals and tend to be far less susceptible to volatility and randomness.

The below snapshot shows all Sabres forwards by both measures. In each area, Skinner is at the top of the class:

No player has seen more favorable shot differentials than Skinner, at least to date. You can see that the majority of the team is clustering right around that 48 percent mark, though you do have a couple of outliers across Buffalo's depth forwards. That's an area of concern and probably worth a future post – the key to being competitive is having a couple of reliable attacking units, but it's awfully difficult to win in today's NHL without three or four lines that can push play with consistency. More on that another day.

What if we disregarded all shots, though, and only isolated to those that came from more dangerous scoring areas – the types of shots that have a better than league average chance at finding the back of the net? Again, Skinner is quality here.

Generally the same story for Skinner (57 percent of dangerous shot attempts in Buffalo's favor with Skinner on the ice), though the shuffling around him is certainly interesting. I actually think this graph does an even better job of spelling out some of the depth issues the Sabres have – seven guys less than the 50 percent break-even mark, with four of those really getting cleaned out to start the season.

It bears worth repeating that these are not just high-end numbers, but numbers that Sabres skaters haven't realized in some time. For example: The last time the Sabres had a full-time skater get more than 53 percent of the shots over the full season was 2010-11. And just for fun, those names include Jochen Hecht, Tim Connolly, Nathan Gerbe and Tyler Myers. Certainly another era of hockey.

The jury is still out on this era of hockey, but early signs specific to Skinner are very encouraging. He's made a considerable impact on the Sabres attack, and it's kept them afloat early in the season.

Housley: 'We found a way to win' to close out the western road trip

WGR 550

OCTOBER 24, 2018

It was a solid weekend for the Buffalo Sabres as they closed out their five-game Western Conference road trip with wins over the Los Angeles Kings and Anaheim Ducks.

The Sabres ended up out-scoring their opponents 9-3 in the two games, and got to the 5-4-0 mark as they return home to face the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday night at KeyBank Center. Buffalo ended up playing a pair of solid 60-minute efforts, and got some clutch play from everyone in both ends of the ice. The team played maybe its best even strength hockey in a while, as well as getting some goals on the power play.

On the road trip overall, the Sabres got three wins and earned six of a possible 10 wins along the way. Buffalo's start to the 2018-19 season is the team's best start to a season since the 2011-12 season when they went 6-3-0 in its first nine games.

Sabres head coach Phil Housley joined Howard Simon and Jeremy White on Tuesday morning for his weekly appearance on WGR. The second-year bench boss was very pleased with his team's overall effort, and looks to continue their strong play over to Thursday night in front of their hometown faithful.

Here is some of what Housley had to say with Howard and Jeremy:

Housley on his team's weekend performance:

"It was a valiant effort by our guys, especially [after] losing that third game in San Jose, which I thought we played really well 5-on-5. It was just the special teams [that put us] behind the eight ball. To come back against a pretty desperate opponent - L.A., getting beat by the [New York] Islanders 7-2 the day before, we knew they were going to come out pretty strong, but our guys really controlled the play and did the little things well. We found a way to win, and then to end the road trip the way we did in Anaheim and the way we played, I was really proud of our guys for the way they played in those back-to-back games.

Housley on what was working for his team against the Kings and Ducks:

"Our execution was very high in both of those games, but it's five guys coming back together to help each other. It's the forwards getting in the way of the opposition when they're trying to forecheck and buying time for the [defense] and those little plays of 5-10-foot passes coming out of our zone. It just seems like when we're a block of five back there and we get the easy exit, we have this push up ice. When we're not connected and our forwards are up too high, there's no support coming back into our zone. I think in our neutral zone, we're thinking a lot faster.

"We're trying to transition quickly, and when you have good puck movement and everything's on the tape and crisp, it seems like we're a faster team and we execute that way."

Housley on Jack Eichel's strong play in the two wins:

"It started this summer when Jack really made a big commitment, along with our leadership group, to get together and really hash some things out. I think with his maturity this summer leading in the camp, he's really leading by example and taking his game to another level. I'm not saying just in the offensive side of it, but his all around play and his buy in playing away from the puck. He's been very strong down in his own end. He's a very powerful player and when he makes his mind up to play a 200-foot game, he's pretty dominant. It's shown in his last two games."

Housley on Jeff Skinner:

"Jeff Skinner is the truest pro in every sense of the word because he comes to work, approaches the game the right way, and it's just been a joy to have him as part of our team. He works hard in practice, he competes every shift, and it was great to see him get rewarded."

Housley on finding line combinations when the times get rough:

"Everybody had a big contribution in the last two games. It took four lines. When you get the back-to-back games, you try to balance out those minutes, and I thought our guys did a terrific job throughout our lineup."

Housley on Rasmus Dahlin's play this season:

"He just goes about his business. He wants to learn, he wants to win, he's a tremendous competitor and every game he's getting better. I think the biggest thing for him that I've seen is just learning the opposition and the characteristics of other players. That's going to take some time in itself because there's a lot of very good players. He has poise, he can find the open man as good as anybody, but I just like that he was able to score his first goal in Arizona and get that off his plate. I'm sure that is always a big moment in a young player's career. He's been great in both ends of the ice."

Housley on Thursday's matchup with the Canadiens:

"We're going to have to manage our game. I'm just glad we're able to get two days off because, a lot of times, you get that one day and a practice, then you're playing the next day. We can get adjusted to the Eastern time zone now in the couple days here and get ready for Montreal. It is a very important game. It's our second divisional game this month, and Montreal is playing some good hockey."

Sabres' Dahlin enjoyed his first NHL road trip

By PAUL HAMILTON

OCTOBER 23, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres finally returned home for practice after a five-game western road trip. The trip was the first ever for Rasmus Dahlin and he celebrated by scoring his first NHL goal. The young defenseman said, "I was really not expecting that type of goal, but it was fun when it went in."

When the goal was scored in Arizona, it was 4 a.m. in Sweden. Dahlin said despite it being the middle of the night, his family saw the goal, "My brother saw it and I think my parents saw it too, but everybody else, it was the morning after."

The trip was a first for Dahlin and one he'll never forget, "It was long, it was really fun to experience new cities." Dahlin had been to Las Vegas and Los Angeles as a young child and said he really didn't remember much, but this time, the trip to Vegas was his favorite spot, "Vegas of course, that was a pretty cool city. They have everything like all the stores, the cool hotels and great arena, so it was great."

There are a lot of new players on this team, so this was the first chance they got to get to know each other. Dahlin said, "It was awesome, I got to know the guys more. We were great on the ice too, so it was all positive.

"I got to know them very good now, we're building a team and I really feel it."

Every season, the veterans hold a rookie dinner on the road where they buy the most expensive things on the menu and the rookies like Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt, Linus Ullmark and Tage Thompson have to pay for it. Dahlin said he had a great time with his teammates, "It was good and a lot of fun. I got to know all the guys even better that night so it was all good." When I asked Dahlin how expensive it was he laughed and said, "It was fun, its fine."

Zach Bogosian was very noticeable on this trip. It was more than the three fights he got in. Bogosian played fast, he leads the team with 15 blocked shots, he had a goal and an assist and he was plus-three. Dahlin said he's learned a lot from Bogosian, "He's a vet so he knows how to play this game. He's learned me a lot and it's good to see some fights from him too. I like that he can fight and play."

Dahlin has played four games in Buffalo and five games on the road. He said as far as his game goes, it doesn't change anything.

In Los Angeles, the Sabres played at 12:30 p.m. and then the basketball floor went down and LeBron James made his home debut with the Lakers. Dahlin stayed and took in his first NBA game. He said, "It was really fun, something new and it was awesome."

During the game with the Rockets, there was a brawl involving Brandon Ingram, Rajon Rondo and Chris Paul. Dahlin is used to hockey fights and said, "That was cool, that really doesn't happen much, right? Compared to fights on the ice, it was just one punch so it wasn't a really good fight, but I don't think basketball is like that."

Phil Housley had Matt Ellis and his staff put the team through a skills practice on Tuesday. Housley said Ellis is a very good coach and teacher and thought his players got a lot out of it, "I wanted Matt Ellis and his crew to unlock the bodies, do a little skill session coming back from that road trip. It was a good time in our schedule that they could work on some skill.

"It's the movement, the footwork and the touches with the puck and just get the guys coming to practice and give them a different light and a different angle."

Housley thinks that Ellis is a good communicator and very knowledgeable about the game. Housley agreed that Ellis has a future as a coach in the AHL or NHL.

Nate Beaulieu returned to practice after taking a shot flush on the elbow. He said he's close to 100-percent.

Sabres' Zach Bogosian providing spark after return from injury

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 23, 2018

BUFFALO – When Zach Bogosian was informed he leads the NHL in fighting majors, the Buffalo Sabres defenseman responded with some self-deprecating humor.

"I'm just a meathead, huh?" Bogosian joked following Tuesday's practice inside KeyBank Center.

Bogosian, of course, isn't a goon. Over his first 10 seasons, he fought only 16 times, according to hockeyfights.com, an average of one scrap every 35 games. He hadn't fought three times in a season since 2009-10.

But Bogosian has fought in three straight games after keeping his gloves on in his season debut in last Tuesday's 4-1 road loss to the Vegas Golden Knights.

"They're not something I really go looking for, but if the opportunity arises, yeah, it just kind of happened that way," said Bogosian, who hadn't played since Jan. 9 after undergoing season-ending hip surgery. "I don't think I'm playing any differently or looking for anything differently. It just kind of happened that way."

Still, Bogosian, 28, thrives on contact. When the Massena native is healthy, which hasn't been much in recent years, he can be a slick-skating, physical presence.

Since returning from a lower-body injury he suffered Sept. 25, Bogosian has been one of the Sabres' catalysts, showcasing an edge and providing some offense as they closed a five-game road trip with two wins.

"He brings a physical element," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I'm not talking about just dropping your gloves, I'm talking about being hard to play against in front of our net and in the corners. But I like his offensive side of the game. He can jump in the play, he reads the play well defensively, his passing's really good."

In Thursday's 5-1 loss to the San Sharks, Bogosian blocked a career-high eight shots before fighting Joakim Ryan after the buzzer. In the second period of Saturday's 5-1 win against the Los Angeles Kings, he fought Kyle Clifford and scored his first goal since March 27, 2017.

"I haven't had that feeling in a while," Bogosian said of scoring. "It was definitely a little bit of a monkey off the back. It's been a while since I've seen the puck go in the back of the net. Definitely that was a good feeling."

In Sunday's 4-2 comeback victory over the Anaheim Ducks, Bogosian fought Ryan Kesler and recorded an assist.

"I hadn't seen NHL-caliber speed in nine, 10 months, right?" Bogosian said. "But I felt better in San Jose, I felt better in LA, keep feeling better and better every game. There's going to be times where there's ups and downs, but I'm happy with how I started."

Bogosian believes the fights are simply a product of the passion he plays with. The injuries – he has missed 119 games since the Sabres acquired him on Feb. 11, 2015 – have limited the physicality he can showcase.

"I haven't played a lot of hockey, so I think that's something that people maybe don't see," Bogosian said. "I'm not looking to do it all the time. It's just kind of spur-of-the-moment, sticking up for yourself, your teammates is kind of what I've always done my entire career."

"How I look at it (is) I don't just go out there looking ... to fight every night. I want to play some hockey. I can help out while I'm on the ice."

Bogosian also helps out off the ice. His teammates often talk about how he is one of the most popular Sabres in the dressing room.

"When he speaks, they listen," Housley said.

Bogosian's strong desire to overcome his run of injuries has earned him respect.

"I live close to him in the summer (in Minnesota) and I know how hard he worked," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "I know what he did for his hips, his groins, his body. To start the way he did, it would've broke a lot of people. He stayed with it."

Okposo said the criticism Bogosian has received for being injured is "unfair."

"People that don't know him might not know his impact or how big a role he plays on our team, but we do in here," Okposo said. "He's a valuable piece of our team and we're a better team with him in the lineup."

Slow start against Sharks set stage for Sabres' terrific weekend

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 23, 2018

BUFFALO – If the Sabres eventually morph into a playoff team, remember the significance of the five-game road trip they just completed, especially the back-to-back wins they closed with in Los Angeles and Anaheim.

The Sabres went 3-2-0 on the 10-day trip, starting with a 3-0 victory over the Arizona Coyotes before suffering consecutive losses.

While they fell behind 2-0 in Thursday's 5-1 setback to the San Jose Sharks, they got back in the game, setting the stage for what might've been the team's best weekend in years.

On Saturday, they demolished the Kings 4-1, winning their first game in LA since 2003. On Sunday, they rallied from a 2-0 second-period deficit, beating the Ducks 4-2.

Right now, the Sabres are 5-4-0, off to their best start since October 2011.

"Those two games, we never got away from our game the whole time," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said this afternoon following a skills practice inside KeyBank Center. "Everybody was composed, calm and doing their job. Everybody just did what they were supposed to. We didn't do anything special."

Coach Phil Housley said the Sabres' response in San Jose carried forward. They outplayed the Ducks early on, yet got stymied by goalie Ryan Miller.

"That was a valuable lesson," Housley said. "That's what I told the guys, that I like the way we responded. So we were in that position again in Anaheim, and I thought we were playing some terrific hockey carrying the play.

He added: "I think it's because of the road trip and the experiences they had together. They knew they deserved to win the game the way they were playing."

Housley said experiencing a long road trip so early allowed the Sabres to bond and become "a tighter group because of it."

"They went through some adversity on the trip," said Housley, whose team also lost 4-1 to the Vegas Golden Knights. "I think the guys rallied around it and got together and had a strong turnaround on the weekend. I think that's because of the road trip.

"All you're doing is thinking about hockey, you're together a lot, you're on the bus, you're going to the rink."

Check back later for more on the Sabres, who host the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday.

Sabres return from West Coast trip with strong bond

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

October 23, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Sabres returned to KeyBank Center Tuesday for their first practice since their West Coast road trip. The team walked away with six points, including two wins to finish it out. Along with gaining confidence over the course of the trip, they say they grew a lot closer.

"There's a lot of new faces in this room," said Jack Eichel. "It seems like we were able to get to know each other pretty well, we spent a lot of quality time together. I think we're definitely closer now than we were before we left and that's always a positive. You just want to keep getting closer as a group and I think that translates to on the ice, I think you maybe saw that there in the last two games."

"Playing good road games is something you can build off I think," added Jeff Skinner who scored five goals in the five games. "Especially at the end of the road trip, the shift at the end sort of stands out with all five guys kind of selling out, blocking shots. That's something as a team you can kind of grab onto and come together around."

"There's a ton of room for us to grow as a group," said defenseman Zach Bogosian. "This past trip was one step in the right direction but we have to keep building off that. Again we finished the road trip off on the right foot, the right direction and just keep that thing going."

Even with five wins on the month, Eichel said the team's hungry for more. The Sabres look to go for their third straight win and 6th win of the month when they host Montreal on Thursday.

Jack Eichel on Sabres' changes, Dahlin, life as a top pick (PHT Q&A)

By Sean Leahy

Pro Hockey Talk

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When Evander Kane was dealt last February, the door was opened for Buffalo Sabres forward Jack Eichel to return to his roots and switch from No. 15 to No. 9.

"For a long time, the number nine has always been a part of my identity as both a person and as a player," the now Sabres captain said in a July statement. "The opportunity opened up to switch and I felt it was the right time to make the change as I begin the next phase of my career as a Sabre."

Eichel wore No. 9 during his one year at Boston University and when he represented the U.S. as a youth international. The legendary Maurice "Rocket" Richard also played a role in why he chose the number.

"He played a lot a long time before me, but my dad was a big fan and my uncle, who was a diehard Canadians fan," Eichel told NBC during the NHL Players Media Tour last month. "I wore 9 as a kid. That's the 9 I think about when I think about the number 9. So I just think it's a really good forward number, fast skater, skill guy, shoots the puck, makes a lot of plays, I think it's just a great hockey number."

Eichel and the Sabres are off to a good start in 2018-19, taking 10 out of a possible 18 points through nine games. The captain leads the team in scoring with three goals and nine points. He's enjoyed his time recently centering Jeff Skinner, who was acquired over the summer as part of general manager Jason Botterill's continued roster reshaping.

We spoke with Eichel about the changes in Buffalo, Rasmus Dahlin and USA Hockey.

Enjoy.

Q. What will it take for the Sabres to make the playoffs this year?

EICHEL: "I think more than anything just consistency. You gotta bring it every night, so it's that consistency, it's that coming together as a group, trusting each other, believing in what we're doing, and I think we can accomplish that."

Q. Has the culture changed over the last little while?

EICHEL: "It has. I think it's changed more so from the end of last season to now. I think whenever you have little success as we did last year, you're gonna have to step back and look at what you've been doing, probably change some things with the team itself and the culture, and change some things. [They] have done a good job of bringing some new guys in that will kinda get rid of that sour taste that we had the last few years, that haven't been there before. They are excited with that. You bring in the first overall pick, excitement around the team, and I think just starting a new culture, it should be a winning culture; culture where nothing else is accepted other than the best, and it's something that doesn't just happen. It's accomplished over time."

Q. What strikes you about Rasmus Dahlin, his maturity?

EICHEL: "I think a lot of things. I think his game speaks for itself. We all know how good a player he is, he's a very polite, no ego to him, he's a really nice kid. I enjoy being around him and we're very lucky to have him."

Q. You've been through a similar situation as a top of the draft guy. Did you talk to him about it? The expectations?

EICHEL: "Not so much expectations. I've spoken to him a bit, but more so how to handle yourself, what to expect. It's a bit of a change for him. He's never lived in the United States before, so he's going through a lot of new things, and on top of that he's being asked to play in the NHL, as an 18-year-old defenseman. It's not easy,

but I think the easiest thing for him will be the hockey, everything else will take a little bit of time, but I know he'll do a great job."

Q. What has the USA Hockey National Team Development Program meant for hockey in this country?

EICHEL: "I think it's been probably one of the most important pieces in the United States' success the last few years in terms of internationally and producing good players. I think the entity would be an amazing program, and [I'm] so fortunate that I was able to go there. If you go there with the right mindset it's just amazing what they can do for you. You look at some of the players that come through there and it speaks for itself. And it's not easy by any means, it's definitely a pretty tough thing to go through. There's a lot of adversity as a young 16-year-old to go there and go through the things you go through, and I think majority of the people by the end of it would say it was a great experience. To get so close to your teammates, you learn so much about growing up and you're really prepared well for the NHL and, ahead after that, business or hockey life. Wherever you're going, it teaches you a lot of life lessons."

Bogosian put passion on display during West Coast road trip

by Jourdon LaBarber

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Asked if he knew which player leads the NHL in fights this season, Nathan Beaulieu looked toward the end stall in the Buffalo Sabres dressing room and laughed.

"Probably Bogo," he said.

Zach Bogosian hadn't played in a game this season before the Sabres embarked on a five-game road trip out west on Oct. 12. He returned for practice at KeyBank Center on Tuesday with an NHL-leading three fights, a team-high 15 blocked shots and a goal under his belt.

All in all, it was a pretty busy road trip.

"There's going to be times where there's ups and downs, but I'm happy with how I started," the defenseman said. "I just got to keep building off that. I think there's so much room to grow and so much room for our team to improve. I'm looking forward to just getting back in the swing of things. It feels nice to be back."

Tickets for Thursday vs. Montreal

Bogosian's had a long road back since undergoing hip surgery in January, which ended his season after just 18 games. He was forced to miss the first five games of this season after sustaining a lower-body injury in camp, which the Sabres handled with caution.

He admitted the pace of the game felt fast when he returned to the lineup in Vegas last Tuesday, but he's been more comfortable with each passing night. He registered five hits and blocked eight shots in his second game, in San Jose on Thursday.

The sacrifice wasn't lost on his teammates.

"You love it," Beaulieu said. "The way he boxes guys out and gets in shots lanes - I remember I used to hate playing against him because as a D-man, you're always trying to get it past that winger to get it on net and trying not to worry about the second layer, but he's always there.

"I mean, this guy will throw his face in front of a puck if he needs to. It's great to see him being back and having fun and playing hockey. It's been a long road for him, so it's great to see him have a smile on his face."

That game in San Jose ended with Bogosian in the middle of a scrum, with Kyle Okposo scrapping on his left and Jake McCabe engaging on his right. The defenseman shook off his gloves and searched for an opponent, ultimately settling for Joakim Ryan.

Bogosian added Kyle Clifford to his fight card in Los Angeles on Saturday, then fought Ryan Kesler in Anaheim on Sunday. His three fights in four games have already matched a career-high, according to hockeyfights.com.

"He's a very emotional player," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He tends to read how the game's going and if we need a spark or if somebody's taking liberties with one of our younger guys, he steps up. He plays an important role for our team."

Bogosian chalked his fight streak up to a matter of circumstance.

"I think it's just the passion that I play with," he said. "I think over the last few years I've been hurt quite a bit. I haven't been in the lineup to maybe do some of those things. So, it's (not) a new mentality for me, it's just those three situations happen.

"... I'm not looking to do it all the time. It's just kind of spur-of-the-moment. Sticking up for yourself, your teammates is kind of what I've always done my entire career, how I look at it. ... I'm not looking to fight every night. I want to play some hockey. I can help out while I'm on the ice."

To only mention Bogosian's fighting wouldn't do his impact justice. He's hasn't been on the ice for a five-on-five goal against despite a 60.6 defensive-zone start percentage, the highest mark among Sabres defensemen (according to hockeyreference.com).

He's been active along the boards in the offensive zone, too, helping to create a Jeff Skinner goal in Los Angeles and later scoring one of his own.

"I think he brings a physical element," Housley said. "I'm not talking about just dropping your gloves, I'm talking about being hard to play against in front of our net and in the corners. But I like his offensive side of the game. He can jump in the play, he reads the play well defensively, his passing's really good."

"Also, his experience in the room. Guys, when he speaks, they listen. He's done a terrific job since he's been back in the lineup."

Tuesday's practice

Beaulieu was back on the ice for the first time since he sustained an injury on a blocked shot in San Jose. The defenseman said he feels close to being game-ready.

"[I feel] good," he said. "Obviously a little sore from that shot, but today's actually the first day I've skated in four days, so it basically feels pretty close to where it needs to be for me to get out there."

The Sabres held a skills-based practice coached by former forward Matt Ellis and his staff at the Academy of Hockey. They'll practice again at Harborcenter on Wednesday in preparation of their matchup with the Montreal Canadiens at KeyBank Center on Thursday.

"Matty Ellis, he's doing a great job with the program over there," Beaulieu said. "I got to skate with him before the season for about a week. He works on a lot of stuff that you work on during the summer and kind of forget about during the winter, so it's nice to have this in our schedule where we can kind of sit back for a day. It was an emotional road trip. You just kind of get your feet and your hands back. I thought it was a really good day and I thought we managed it really well."