



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*October 6, 2018*

## **Conor Sheary will get more top-line looks for Sabres**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 5, 2018

The sun did come up for the Buffalo Sabres Friday. That was exactly the message coach Phil Housley said he conveyed to his team when it reported to KeyBank Center for a video session.

The team then hit the ice for an hourlong practice and the workout featured interesting tidbits. There were some clearly grouchy players at times — never a bad thing — and Housley ran some of the forward lines he used in the third period of Thursday's season-opening 4-0 clunker against Boston.

Probably a good idea. The Bruins were just interested getting out of town with the win in their suitcases, but the final 20 minutes was where the Sabres clearly had the most offensive oomph to their game.

One reason was because Conor Sheary was on the top line on Jack Eichel's left wing (Sam Reinhart remained on the right side). That was, remember, the plan for much of the summer until the surprise acquisition of Jeff Skinner the first week of August. Through two periods of the opener, however, Eichel struggled mightily and Skinner was largely invisible.

The Sabres will likely use Sheary in that spot Saturday night in KeyBank Center, when they try to bounce back against the New York Rangers.

Sheary, 26, has plenty of experience on Sidney Crosby's wing the last two years in Pittsburgh and put up 41 goals and 83 points in that span. He's got speed and can grind along the wall. And he knows how to win, as his two Stanley Cup rings will attest.

"It's always good to play with a star player like that," Sheary said of Eichel. "Jack is obviously capable of finding you all over the ice. He's a really good passer. A lot of times you're just trying to find that open area because he'll see it. It was fun for a period to play with him and hopefully we can build something going forward."

Skinner moved down with Patrik Berglund and Kyle Okposo on Friday. Casey Mittelstadt centered newcomer Remi Elie and Tage Thompson as Vladimir Sobotka sat out practice with an upper-body injury suffered Thursday. The fourth line of Zemgus Girgensons, Evan Rodrigues and Jason Pominville remained intact.

Housley said he made the switch to try to move more balance through his lines. He didn't want to mess with his lines after one period of the season opener, even though the Sabres ended a dreadful first in a 2-0 hole. But after two periods, Housley wanted to try a different look.

"We've got to keep it fresh and change to try to push some buttons," Housley said. "I thought that change in the third period made a much better third period. Analytically and statistically, it looks like we played a good game. It's the start of the game I'm looking at. The first period, certainly, analytically, wasn't very positive for us."

Eichel's power game is quite a bit different than Crosby's shiftiness, but Sheary said you can't sell Eichel short on speed either.

"His biggest thing is that speed and deceptiveness," Sheary said. "It doesn't look like he's skating very hard but he's actually moving pretty quick. A lot of times he can beat defenders that way. If you compare him to Sid, it's really a completely different player. But playing alongside of them, you'll find yourself with a lot of good opportunities and good chances."

Sheary, of course, isn't used to losing after spending his entire career in Pittsburgh. One thing the Penguins did well was separate from one game to the next so losses didn't pile up.

"Just because we were good didn't mean we would never lose," Sheary said. "It's a long season. One game is not going to dictate where we're going to go this year. We have to make sure we're playing hard and doing the right things."

Sheary said the Sabres' lack of offense snuffed the life out of Thursday's crowd as Buffalo was blanked in its first home opener for the first time since 2013.

"If we would have gotten one, we would have gotten our crowd into it and gotten going," he said. "I just don't think we had a big momentum shift in that game at all. It was difficult for us to find that energy. That was a little surprising but it's not going to change overnight. We know we have a big task ahead of us."

## **Sabres got good offensive push from fourth line**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 5, 2018

The big guns were largely silent. The Buffalo Sabres' most consistent unit in Thursday's season opener was easily its fourth line.

Evan Rodrigues centered Zemgus Girgensons and Jason Pominville and the group did some fine work during the 4-0 loss to Boston. The trio combined for five shots on goal and regularly had the puck in the Bruins' end.

"I thought we kept things simple, worked pucks deep and kept it in," Rodrigues said after practice Friday. "There's a lot of big 'D' on that team and we wanted to work the corners, get bodies and pucks on the net. We just couldn't find way to put one in."

It wasn't for a lack of trying. Rodrigues had a golden chance with the game scoreless in the first period as Pominville found him in front but Boston goalie Jaroslav Halak made the save.

"It was a nice pass by Pommer," Rodrigues said. "I got good wood on it and Halak didn't really react to it. It just more hit him in the glove so it's one you want to put in the back of the net but you're not going to score all of them. You hope the next one goes in."

Coach Phil Housley said that scoring chance stood out but the line did a solid job much of the game.

"They kept it simple, they put the puck behind them," said Housley. "They had guys driving hard to the net. You usually saw two of our forwards at the net when it went low to high. I really like that line."

Rodrigues said the Sabres need to build on positive shifts in a game to generate more offense.

"Once we got down, we tried to force plays a little bit instead of keeping it simple and doing the right things," he said. "As a group, we didn't sustain pressure rolling over shift after shift."

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Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin played 22 minutes, 37 seconds in the opener, trailing only Rasmus Ristolainen (24:12) in ice time. Since the league began tracking ice time in 1997, the Sabres said Friday the No. 1 overall pick registered the highest ice time by a Buffalo rookie in his first game and the 21st highest by any NHL player.

"You can tell how smooth a skater he is," Boston forward Brad Marchand said after the game. "He's only 18 years old but the poise he has and the plays he made ... you can tell he's going to be a great player. He's only going to get better, a franchise player. He's going to be great for that team."

Boston captain Zdeno Chára, now 41 years old, said patience is going to be required with Dahlin because defense is a tough position to learn in the league.

"Some go quicker than others," Chára told NHL.com. "But when you can skate as well as he does, it's definitely an advantage."

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The Sabres may be without forward Vladimir Sobotka for Saturday's game. He sat out practice Friday with an upper-body injury, presumably suffered in a brief last-minute fight with Boston defenseman Charlie McAvoy.

Sobotka had the third-highest ice time among Buffalo forwards at 18:42, behind only Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. He went 8-6 on faceoffs.

Housley said Sobotka is considered day to day. Remi Elie, claimed on waivers earlier in the week from Dallas, could make his Buffalo debut in his place. Elie was a healthy scratch Thursday.

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Sabres goaltending prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen was named the Ontario Hockey League's second star of the day for Thursday after stopping 46 of 48 shots in Sudbury's 3-2 win at Niagara. Luukkonen is off to a fast start for the Wolves (3-0, 1.97/.942). He's fourth in the OHL in goals-against average and fifth in save percentage.

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Two former Sabres were named captains in the AHL Friday. Cal O'Reilly will wear the 'C' for Iowa (Minnesota) while defenseman Erik Burgdoerfer got the nod in Belleville (Ottawa).

## **Sabres prospect Jacob Bryson uses skill, smarts to thrive as undersized defenseman**

By Bill Hoppe  
The Buffalo News  
October 5, 2018

Longtime Sabres beat writer Bill Hoppe of BuffaloHockeyBeat.com, will be writing about Sabres prospects, the Rochester Americans and related topics this season.

In defenseman Jacob Bryson, Providence College coach Nate Leaman said he sees the qualities of an all-American guy.

"He's a hardworking kid, fun-loving kid, extremely well-liked, I would say," Leaman said of the Buffalo Sabres prospect. "He comes from a very good family."

But Bryson, 20, isn't from the United States.

"He's a Canadian," Leaman said.

Still, Bryson owns a different All-American status. A splendid sophomore season in which he compiled four goals and 25 points in 40 outings earned him second-team honors from the NCAA last year.

"He's a very, very good prospect," Leaman said.

Bryson, a Sabres' fourth-round pick in 2017, 99th overall, grew up in London, Ontario, rooting for some loaded London Knights teams.

South Buffalo's Patrick Kane, who scored a whopping 62 goals and 145 points in only 58 games in 2006-07, captured Bryson's imagination.

"He was so amazing as a little kid to watch him in juniors," he said of the Chicago Blackhawks superstar.

Bryson, however, wanted to attend college, so he spent one year at a prep school and another in the junior United States Hockey League before joining Providence in 2016.

"I thought that would be kind of a unique path for someone coming from Canada," said Bryson, who's majoring in finance. "I thought it'd be such a great idea to play hockey while you're here and get a degree."

The 5-foot-9, 177-pound Bryson has morphed into one of the NCAA's top defensemen, using a mix of skill and smarts to help him thrive as an undersized player.

"His hockey IQ is one of the tops of anyone I've ever coached," said Leaman, who won a national title with Providence in 2015. "He has really, really good mobility and good edge work."

Leaman said those qualities sometimes put Bryson "a step ahead of things."

Most defensemen, of course, are 6-foot-1 or taller. Bryson said as a 15- and 16-year-old, his coach played him at defense and up front as a winger.

"I don't think it's a big problem for me," he said of his size. "I ... feel like I'm strong, strong on my feet. If I can move guys off the puck and try not to get moved myself, then I think size doesn't matter that much."

Leaman said nothing seems to bother Bryson, who was named an alternate captain early last season.

"He's a very poised young man," Leaman said. "I haven't seen anything in my two years of being with him that's rattled him."

That bodes well for a future in pro hockey. If Bryson enjoys a strong junior campaign, he could have an opportunity to sign his entry-level contract.

"After the year ... once I finish college stuff, we'll see what happens," said Bryson, whose Friars open their season Saturday at home against American International University.

Bryson experienced a taste of the NHL and the program general manager Jason Botterill wants to establish during the Sabres' last two summer development camps.

"They keep it short," Bryson said. "I think they really get to the point of development. It's not a showcase and they try to work with us as the week goes on, just every day to get you to come to the rink and be a better player.

"I think Botterill and them have done a great job just of making that known as players, every time I go I know I'm going to become a better player when I leave. I think the Sabres are heading in a very good direction."

Bryson said he follows the Sabres through Twitter and watches some games with teammate Tyce Thompson, whose brother, Tage, joined Buffalo this season.

Occasionally, Bryson said he thinks about playing with Rasmus Dahlin, Rasmus Ristolainen or some of the Sabres' other top defensemen someday.

"That would be so cool to play with one of those world-class players," he said.

## **Sabres' Elie looking to make his mark**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 5, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Remi Elie had a whirlwind day after he was claimed by the Sabres. He got into town after midnight and then had practice in the morning.

Elie didn't play on opening night, but on Friday he skated on a line with Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson. Vladimir Sobotka has an upper-body injury and is day-to-day, so Elie could make his Sabres debut on Saturday against the Rangers.

Elie didn't know if he was going to get claimed and stay in the NHL or go to the AHL. He said, "It was a long 24 hours just sitting there waiting on who was going to pick me up and I'm happy and excited to be here and be part of the Sabres."

Elie is not a big scorer, but he's a heart and soul guy the Dallas fans didn't want to lose. He said he wasn't expecting to be waived, "Yes, it caught me by surprise for sure after I played a full season there and to go on waivers the next year, so I'm happy to still be in this league."

Elie scored two goals against Buffalo last season. Housley said the youngster is just a guy that works hard, "I like Remi, just the way he practices he's got an energy about him, he can skate, he can pass, he can shoot and he's going to get a look at some point."

Elie is only 23-years-old and Housley did his homework on his new winger, "I was watching his shifts from last year and I like the way he gets on the forecheck, he's a big body and he can finish checks, but when I see him play I think he can make plays."

"He knows what he's going to do with the puck before he gets it, he's got a terrific shot, so he'll get an opportunity at some point."

Housley put the team through its paces for an hour on Friday. He had to stop practice when he saw three straight turnovers and then you could hear the players.

Jeff Skinner started screaming when things weren't done right and there was quite a bit of chatter throughout. Housley said he liked the response he got, "A lot of times it's just teaching and telling guys where they need to be, so when you do stop practice it's not so much a point of emphasis on something that's getting broken, but I did like the reaction and we did talk about it."

There was one line that really played well against Boston and that was Evan Rodrigues centering Jason Pominville and Zemgus Girgensons. Housley said there is one reason why that line spent most of their time in Boston's end, "Because they kept it simple. When they were getting squeezed, they put it behind them, they had guys driving hard to the net, you usually saw two of our forwards at the net and they got a couple of good looks."

None of the injured players returned to practice on Friday.

The lines were:

Sheary - Eichel - Reinhart

Skinner - Berglund - Okposo

Elie - Mittelstadt - Thompson

Girgensons - Rodrigues - Pominville

Scandella - Ristolainen

McCabe - Dahlin

Beaulieu - Nelson

Tennyson

## **As season begins, Amerks players recognize the need to keep their focus in Rochester, even if their eyes are still on Buffalo**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

October 5, 2018

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – Justin Bailey has been here before. And we don't just mean Rochester.

Since turning pro in 2015, the forward has repeatedly made the 60-mile drive between the Sabres' arena and their minor-league rink. He hoped this was the season the shuffling stopped. The 23-year-old is on his second contract, which is usually when full-time NHL status becomes a reality.

Instead, he watched the Sabres open their season Thursday and started his year Friday with the Amerks. He knows what that means.

"It's an important time for me in my career," Bailey said. "It's kind of a make-or-break year for me, so I definitely want to make sure I have a good start to the season."

If there's one thing Bailey has learned during his time in the American Hockey League, it's that sulking accomplishes nothing. If he wants to get back to Buffalo soon, he has to fully embrace Rochester.

"Buffalo is the end goal for all of us," Bailey said in BlueCross Arena. "The NHL is the end goal for every guy in this league. But at the same time, if you're too worried about the NHL and not focused on down here, it's going to affect your play and you're not going to end up back there.

"I'm just trying to have fun, enjoy the guys that I became so close with last year and focus on my game here. That will help get me back to the NHL."

It's an attitude that has to permeate the Amerks' dressing room. For much of the past month, Buffalo was the sole focus for Bailey, Alex Nylander, Rasmus Asplund, Brendan Guhle, Lawrence Pilut, Will Borgen and Victor Olofsson. The focus has to change to Rochester in a hurry.

"Their focus should be here," captain Kevin Porter said, "and that's what we've been telling them."

Now is when the Sabres' increased attention on their minor-league club should come through. When Buffalo general manager Jason Botterill hired Randy Sexton to be assistant GM in 2017, he also named Sexton as general manager of the Amerks. He's at all the games. He's built the AHL depth, particularly with veteran leadership.

Porter is in his 11th pro season, and parts of the opening seven were spent in the NHL. Defenseman and alternate captain Nathan Paetsch is 35. He played four full seasons in the NHL, then spent the last nine in either the AHL or Germany. Coach Chris Taylor's 19-year playing career also alternated between the NHL, AHL and Europe.

As Sabres hopefuls trickled into Rochester following unsuccessful training-camp bids, the older guys made sure to let them know there are worse places to be.

"They're not putting their heads down and thinking, 'Oh, I'm down in Rochester and the minors,'" Taylor said. "It's a pretty good league. We talk about it as a group that 87 percent of NHL players come from the AHL. That's a big number.

"It's a tough league, this league, and it's tough to get out of this league and get up to the NHL. A lot of guys know that. We've got a lot of experienced guys who've been in the American League, gone up to the NHL and now they're back here. They're telling these guys how tough it is."

Reality will kick in right away. The Amerks are carrying 15 forwards and nine defensemen. That means three forwards and three blue-liners are going to watch from the press box every game.

"That internal pressure is going to be good because, win or lose, we evaluate everybody," Taylor said. "Guys have got to know that they're not just in the lineup to be in the lineup. They have to make sure they perform and bring high energy."

The Amerks are likely to start with the following group:

Left wing	Center	Right wing
Nylander	Porter	Wayne Simpson
C.J. Smith	Kyle Criscuolo	Andrew Oglevie
Olofsson	Danny O'Regan	Bailey
Eric Cornel	Asplund	Tyler Randell
Left defense	Right defense	
Guhle	Borgen	
Zach Redmond	Pilut	
Taylor Fedun	Brandon Hickey	

Nylander, who lost out to Tage Thompson for the Sabres' final spot, gets an immediate chance to show he can come back up. Bailey is with a sniper in Olofsson and a good passer in O'Regan. Asplund, who is in his first season in North America, will ease in with fourth-line minutes.

That's how it will start, anyway. The players will determine how long they stay in their respective roles.

"Everyone's in a position where we want them to succeed," Taylor said. "We want them to feel comfortable on the ice."

The Sabres made an Amerks-centric trade this week, sending forward Nick Baptiste to Nashville for defenseman Jack Dougherty. The 22-year-old blueliner will practice a few more times with the Amerks before getting thrust into action.

"You see trades happen all the time, and you never think it's going to be you until you get that phone call," said Dougherty, a second-round pick by the Predators in 2014. "I'm just a steady, two-way defenseman. I'm not going to get 60 points a year, but I like to think I'm reliable and consistent – just not flashy, but get the job done."

Like Bailey, Baptiste was stuck on the Rochester-Buffalo carousel. The Sabres drafted Bailey 52nd overall in 2013, then took Baptiste with the 69th pick.

"It's obviously difficult to see one of your good buddies go," Bailey said. "At the same time, it's a good opportunity for him. That's part of the business. Six years with one guy is a long time in professional sports. I know he'll succeed. Sometimes a change of scenery is the best thing for you."

Cliff Pu was just sitting down to an early August dinner with his parents when the phone rang. He saw Botterill on the caller ID, so he quickly excused himself from the table.

"When I came back I was like, 'Hey, I just got traded,'" said Pu, a 2016 third-round pick of the Sabres who was sent to Carolina as part of the Jeff Skinner deal. "You don't expect to get traded in pro hockey, at least not right away, so it was definitely surprising."

The Sabres liked Pu, keeping him in training camp longer than any other junior player in 2017-18, but teams have to give up something to get something. Pu was the only player sent to Carolina, which also received a 2019 second-round pick and third- and sixth-round picks in 2020 in exchange for Skinner.

The 20-year-old can always say he was traded for an NHL All-Star who was named Rookie of the Year.

"Obviously, it's nice to get traded for a good player, but I don't look at it as a one-for-one thing," Pu said. "Buffalo wanted him, and I guess Carolina needed a prospect in that trade. It's good that they wanted to include me in it, so I'm just excited for the opportunity."

Before the trade, Pu was scheduled to start his professional career in Rochester. He did, though he was wearing a uniform of the visiting Charlotte Checkers.

"It's pretty weird playing Rochester the first game," Pu said. "I definitely got to know a bunch of those guys at development camp through the years. I still talk to a few of them, and it's nice to see them again."

## **Phil Housley to Sabres after loss: ‘The sun came up’**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 5, 2018

BUFFALO – Coach Phil Housley’s firm voice cut through the din of Friday’s practice every few minutes.

“He was definitely vocal,” winger Kyle Okposo said after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s home tilt against the New York Rangers. “I think we got the message.”

Actually, Housley relayed multiple messages Friday morning, hours after an embarrassing 4-0 loss left him seething. He delivered his first before practice.

“I walked in this morning to the group and said ... ‘The sun came up,’” Housley said inside KeyBank Center.

Yes, Thursday’s loss was ugly. Still, it was the first of 82 games. The Sabres have time to work things out.

“Don’t carry what happened yesterday to today,” Sabres winger Jason Pominville said.

With so much roster turnover – the Sabres dressed seven new players against the Boston Bruins – it could take time to work out the kinks.

So Housley directed perhaps his most vocal practice as Sabres coach. At times, he stopped the session to give more instructions.

“A lot of guys that are new, we can’t assume they know it, so we just go over it and make the corrections and go forward,” Housley said. “So when you do stop practice, it’s not so much a point of emphasis on something that’s broken. We’re trying to fix it but learn from it. But I did like the reaction when we did talk about it.”

Housley, whose Sabres finished in 31st place last season, was so upset following Thursday’s game, he said, “We are not going through this again.”

“He’s holding us accountable out there,” Okposo said. “We did some things not very well in the last game that he pointed out, and then we continued to do some of those things in practice, and he held us accountable for it. That’s what he’s supposed to do.”

Housley has already tinkered with his lines, moving newcomer Jeff Skinner, a two-time 30-goal, to left wing beside Okposo and center Patrik Berglund. Meanwhile, Conor Sheary, another offseason acquisition, replaced Skinner beside top center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

It could be a short-lived move.

“We want to try to get Jeff back up there with Jack,” Housley said.

Sheary spent much of his first few seasons skating with Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby, so he’s used to playing on a top scoring line.

The Sabres started generating more offense against the Bruins after Housley switched up some lines.

“The lines in general played a lot better in third period,” Housley said. “It was one of those things where you don’t want to jump the gun and panic after the first period. I try to let them work through.”

Only the fourth line, the Sabres’ best trio throughout the opener, stayed intact Friday. Housley said simplicity buoyed the combination of Pominville, center Evan Rodrigues and winger Zemgus Girgensons.

“They were our most consistent line,” Housley said. “They got the most pressure, they didn’t face too much D zone because they worked hard to get back and supported our defense.”

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Sabres winger Vladimir Sobotka is day-to-day after suffering an upper-body injury, Housley said.

Sobotka briefly fought Boston defenseman Charlie McAvoy, although neither received a major penalty.

If Sobotka can't play tonight, winger Remi Elie, a waiver claim from the Dallas Stars, will likely make his Sabres debut.

Elie, 23, practiced at left wing Friday beside center Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson.

"I like Remi, just the way he practices, he's got an energy about him," Housley said. "He can skate, he can pass, he can shoot. He's going to get a look at some point."

Elie said: "They just want me to ... be a power forward, get on the forecheck, use my speed to my advantage."

## **Sabres regroup after ugly loss; Vladimir Sobotka day-to-day**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 5, 2018

BUFFALO – Fresh off Thursday's ugly 4-0 season-opening loss, coach Phil Housley relayed a straightforward message to the Sabres.

"I walked in this morning to the group and said ... 'The sun came up,'" Housley said following practice inside KeyBank Center.

The setback to the Boston Bruins, of course, was just one of 82 games. But given the Sabres' sorry history in recent seasons, the loss triggered some anger in fans, who booed the home team off the ice following the second period.

After undergoing a slew of changes during the offseason, the Sabres resembled last year's awful squad.

So Housley, who spoke passionately following the loss, was vocal during today's practice. At one point, he stopped the session to instruct his players.

"A lot of the times it's just teaching and telling guys where they need to be, what they need to do in our systems and structure," Housley said. "A lot of guys that are new, we can't assume they know it, so we just go over it and make the corrections and go forward.

"So when you do stop practice, it's not so much a point of emphasis on something that's broken. We're trying to fix it but learn from it. But I did like the reaction when we did talk about it."

Check back later for more on Housley holding the Sabres accountable.

"We did some things not very well last in the game that we pointed out, and then we continued to do some of those things in practice, and he held us accountable for it," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "That's what he's supposed to do. So he was definitely vocal. I think we got the message."

In other news, Sabres winger Vladimir Sobotka missed today's session and is day-to-day after suffering an upper-body injury, Housley said. Sobotka briefly fought Charlie McAvoy on Thursday, although neither received a major penalty.

If Sobotka can't play Saturday against the New York Rangers, winger Remi Elie, a waiver claim from the Dallas Stars, will likely make his Sabres debut.

Elie, 23, practiced at left wing today beside center Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson.

"I like Remi, just the way he practices, he's got an energy about him," Housley said. "He can skate, he can pass, he can shoot. He's going to get a look at some point."

## **Sabres fans are done being patient**

By James O'Brien

Pro Hockey Talk

October 5, 2018

With some sensational rookies in the mix and Jeff Skinner replacing Ryan O'Reilly, this is a new-look Buffalo Sabres team. Still, during an opening night 4-0 loss to the Boston Bruins, there were familiar sounds: the boos of their home crowd.

It's tough to blame Sabres fans for being frustrated, even if it was just the first of 82 games (and 41 at home).

After all, this is a team that hasn't made the playoffs since 2010-11, and hasn't won a series since 2006-07. The Sabres haven't just gone through the growing pains of a stilted rebuild; they've been an absolutely agonizing team to watch, finishing with 62 or less standings points in three of their last five seasons.

For all the hope ultra-hyped top pick Rasmus Dahlin brings, Thursday carried the "same old, same old" feel.

Consider how easy it looked for Zdeno Chara on the first goal Buffalo allowed in this young season:

Fans are beyond the point of losing patience with a lack of progress with this Sabres team, and players seem to know it.

"When you aren't giving them the product that they want, that they deserve ... tonight it just wasn't there for the whole game," Kyle Okposo said, according to The Athletic's John Vogl. "It's something that has been all too common here. It's our job to change that."

Jack Eichel also recognized that "their fuse is a bit short for us, and rightfully so."

When you consider the struggles of the Panthers and Hurricanes, it's not as if the Sabres are the only team that hasn't seen the postseason in quite some time. That said, it's the sheer depths of failure that really stings, as fans rarely get much of anything to cheer about. Buffalo couldn't even muster a token goal in their season opener, and they've peaked with 81 standings points since the last lockout.

The swiftness of fans booing the Sabres not just in the first game, but after the first period says a lot about how frustrated they've become. Dahlin's debut ended up being a mere afterthought last night.

This is far from the first time that there's been a cascade of boos in Buffalo during this putrid stretch. Consider this brief history of Buffalo boos:

Eichel seemed a bit peeved – though "not opinionated" – about fans boos the team before an eventual comeback win last season (in February 2017).

This team's relationship with "tanking" hit what might have been a new low in 2014-15, as Sabres fans cheered the Coyotes and booed their team, as both squad was better off improving their lottery odds in March 2015.

This Pierre LeBrun tweet is pretty amusing considering its timing (October 2015), and how well it would have fit in October 2018. Woof.

Late in the 2012-13 season, Steve Ott found Sabres fan booing "completely ridiculous." Little did he know ...

## **Buffalo fans boo Sabres in home opener after poor performance**

Sportsnet

October 5, 2018

Over the course of a long 82-game NHL season, there will probably a moment for every team when the home fans decide to rain a few jeers and boos at their own squad.

But on Game 1 during the home opener when everything is supposed to be bright, shiny and optimistic?

Welcome to the state of the Buffalo Sabres in 2018.

Falling to the Boston Bruins — who were coming off a crushing defeat at the hands of the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals the night before — by a score of 4-0 Thursday night, the Sabres faithful were giving it to their team early and often.

Following the contest, Sabres captain Jack Eichel addressed the boos he and his teammates received.

"It's not easy," Eichel told reporters of the hostility of the Sabres fans after the game. "Obviously we want our fans to appreciate our effort, but in the same sense we've gotta be better for them and put a better product on the ice. We've gotta bear down, we've gotta score goals, we've gotta bring it for them.

"I think that their fuse is a bit short for us, and rightfully so. We haven't played well for the last few years and that's on us to put a better product on the ice. You appreciate the fans selling the place out tonight and for us not to score a goal, it's disappointing. But we're not gonna hang our heads here. It's a long season."

Though the impatience of Sabres fans seems rather ridiculous given the timing of this incident, they aren't entirely unjustified in it, either. Buffalo hasn't reached the post-season since 2011 and hasn't sported a record of .500 or above since the lockout-shortened 2012-13 campaign.

Worse yet, despite his talent, the best finish Eichel has seen in his career was a seventh-place ranking in the Atlantic Division in his rookie season, 2015-16.

The Sabres have been bad for quite a long time and it appears their fans are fed up with the lack of results. As Eichel said, it's a long season. But that might also mean a long season of crushing negativity from their staunchest supporters if their Game 1 performance was any indication of how things will go for the 2018-19 Sabres.

## **Elie awaiting chance to crack lineup with Sabres**

By Jourdon LaBarber

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Remi Elie was the first skater to glide onto the ice for practice at KeyBank Center on Friday morning, jumping out a few minutes early to get some shots in on the goaltenders.

It's safe to say he's itching to get out there in a more formal setting.

"I'm excited to be here," Elie said. "I'm excited to get this season started with this team."

Elie, claimed off waivers from the Dallas Stars on Tuesday, was a scratch for Buffalo's season opener against Boston. He's managed to make an impression in practice, however, and Sabres coach Phil Housley said it won't be long before he gets his chance in a game.

"I like Remi, just the way he practices, he's got an energy about him," Housley said. "He can skate, he can pass, he can shoot. He's going to get a look at some point."

Elie, 23, was a second-round pick by the Stars in 2013. He scored six goals and 14 points in 72 games with Dallas last season, his first full campaign in the NHL. Two of those goals came against the Sabres.

Defenseman Jake McCabe said Elie left an impression as an opponent in those games, too.

"Yeah, I mean he's a big body," McCabe said. "He protects the puck well, he can skate well, he's got a good shot. When you combine all those things, he's a dangerous player there down low, for sure."

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The Sabres have asked Elie - listed at 6-foot-1, 215 pounds - to bring a power-forward presence to their lineup. Housley has praised his physicality and ability to win battles on the forecheck.

"They just want me to play my game," Elie said. "Be a power forward, get on the forecheck, use my speed to my advantage and just play the game the right way."

That's not to say he can't contribute offensively, too. Housley went back and watched video of Elie from last season and came away impressed with the forward's playmaking ability.

"I like the way he gets on the forecheck," he said. "He's a big body, he can finish checks. When I see him play, I think he can make plays. He knows what he's going to do with the puck before he gets it, he's got a terrific shot. So, he'll get an opportunity at some point."

Friday's practice

The Sabres got back to work following their 4-0 loss to the Bruins with their sights set on hosting the New York Rangers on Saturday, the second game of a four-game homestand.

"I walked in this morning to the group and said exactly that, 'The sun came up,'" Housley said. "We showed them some video that we need to learn from. We have a lot of new players. But I think we have to get better each and every day.

"We may not get the results we want, but we know we have to get better. Today was a really good practice focusing on some areas we need to improve on. I thought there was some good energy."

Housley stuck with lineup changes he made in the third period against Boston, with Conor Sheary assuming the left-wing position on a line with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. Jeff Skinner skated alongside Patrik Berglund and Kyle Okposo.

Vladimir Sobotka was on the ice for the very beginning of practice but went to the dressing room due to an upper-body injury. His status for Saturday has not been determined. Elie filled in for Sobotka on a line with Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson.

Here's how the full lineup appeared 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

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

40 Carter Hutton  
35 Linus Ullmark