



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' McCabe said he's ready to return

By PAUL HAMILTON

WGR 550

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Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Jake McCabe missed Tuesday's game with an upper-body injury, but he won't miss Thursday's game, "I feel good. I think a couple of days did me good, so I'm feeling much better, so I'm ready to go for sure."

McCabe got a bird's eye view of Carter Hutton stealing a point for the Sabres against Calgary. McCabe said, "I saw that our goalie kept us in it for most of the game, He made big save after big save.

"Our penalty kill will awesome with Huts leading the charge back there as well. It's unfortunate the outcome with how Huts battled for us, but it's a learning experience."

The Sabres have points in five straight games. McCabe said, "We've been playing some good hockey. Even in Columbus, for a majority of the game we played a good game. In the second period we fell back and were very bad in the second period, but we came back in the third period and got a point. We need to take the positives and then focus on these areas that we need to clean up and keep moving forward."

McCabe has played with all of the defensemen currently on the Sabres roster. Recently, he's been on the top pair with Rasmus Ristolainen. McCabe started the season with Rasmus Dahlin and he said he doesn't change his game at all, "I think with everyone in this room, not only myself and the defensemen, there's different combinations maybe every game and you're going to be playing with someone else, every guy has a role to fill and trust that the next person's going to do their job, so it comes to going out there and doing your job no matter who you're playing with."

Young Rasmus Dahlin has also played with all the defensemen on the roster. You might think that's hard for an 18-year-old just learning the league, but Dahlin said he actually enjoys it, "It's been great, I like to play with different players, I learn new things and everyone is easy to play with, so it's going great."

Dahlin said they have 3-on-3 overtime in the SHL, so it's nothing new to him. Tuesday was the first time he played it in the NHL and he said, "We have 3-on-3 in Sweden too so I'm kind of used to it, it's a different style of hockey and I like it when you have the open space everywhere."

Housley had many partners in his Hall of Fame career. He said Dahlin is such a good player, different partners doesn't affect him, "It says a lot about the player in Rasmus able to adjust to certain characteristics of his partner and I really like that he's good at making those adjustments.

"I don't think it's hard for him, he has great instincts playing this game, he reads off his partner quite well.

Housley had Remi Elie playing on a regular line and it sounds like he'll play in Ottawa, "You look at it at a game-by-game basis and results influence your decisions.

"We have some rested legs and we have a lot of games in a short period of time, so we're going to make some changes when we don't get the results and we're going to make changes even if we do get the results because there are guys that do have fresh legs."

Wednesday's lines:

Skinner - Eichel - Pominville

Sheary - Sobotka - Reinhart

Berglund - Larsson - Girgensons

Elie (Rodrigues) - Mittelstadt - Okposo

McCabe - Ristolainen

Scandella - Bogosian

Dahlin - Nelson

Beaulieu – Thompson

Chemistry course is part of the education of young Sabres like Casey Mittelstadt

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

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BUFFALO, N.Y. — The start of the Buffalo Sabres' season has seen early success for two of the team's lines when it comes to scoring goals as well as creating and suppressing shots. The downside of having two lines doing that means having two lines that are still trying to figure things out and develop chemistry.

The Sabres have had tremendous play from the inarguable top line featuring Jack Eichel at center with Jeff Skinner and Jason Pominville on the wings. The other line that has done well is the so-called fourth line with Johan Larsson at center and Patrik Berglund and Zemgus Girgensons riding shotgun. Everything else in between has been a work in progress trying to find the right trio together to make things go.

"We know we've had some chemistry with Jack's line; (Vladimir) Sobotka, (Conor) Sheary, and (Sam) Reinhart when they were together. But again we didn't get the results, so you just try to tweak things here and there and try to find the chemistry," coach Phil Housley said. "I really liked the chemistry when we were controlling the play against L.A. and Anaheim. Even Montreal for that matter. But I think we got away from our game, and sometimes it's individual play. So, you just try to put little pieces together in what you think will fit and try to run with it."

Having two lines going well is better than having none of them working out at all. But if the Sabres are going to take that bold leap into the postseason for the first time since 2011, they'll need to get some secondary scoring and do better at driving possession. With eight forwards in the mix to try to find the key that unlocks the rest of the offense, there are many possibilities.

One of the key players involved in all of this is rookie Casey Mittelstadt. Mittelstadt has had a lot put on his plate in his first NHL season, which puts the coaches in the tough spot of having to work things out with him as the season goes along. Being 19 years old and playing center against the best players in the world is a big step up from playing the past two seasons in high school and college. As John Vogl wrote during the Sabres' West Coast trip, he knew the pressure was on to get his offense going.

Through the first month of the season, Mittelstadt has had a host of different linemates, which has given him a lot of different looks. Through the first 12 games, here's how he's started each game:

10/4 vs. BOS: Sobotka-Mittelstadt-Kyle Okposo

10/6 vs. NYR: Girgensons-Mittelstadt-Tage Thompson

10/8 vs. VGK: Remi Elie-Mittelstadt-Thompson

10/11 vs. COL: Larsson-Mittelstadt-Thompson

10/13 @ARZ, 10/16 @VGK, 10/18 @SJ: Skinner-Mittelstadt-Okposo

10/20 @L.A., 10/21 @ ANH : Evan Rodrigues-Mittelstadt-Okposo

10/25 vs. MTL: Rodrigues-Mittelstadt-Okposo

10/27 @ CBJ: Thompson-Mittelstadt-Okposo

10/30 vs. CGY: Sheary-Mittelstadt-Reinhart

At practice on Wednesday before the Sabres headed to Ottawa, where they'll face the Senators on Thursday night, Mittelstadt skated with Elie and Reinhart. If that ends up being the trio, that'll be the 10th different line that he has played within 13 games.

"It's been interesting," Mittelstadt said of having a wide variety of linemates. "It's been nice to learn to play with all different kinds of players and learn to play different ways, different roles. I've enjoyed it."

Taking a peek at NaturalStatTrick.com, among forwards, he's gotten the bulk of his 5-on-5 time with Okposo (72:10), Skinner (40:09), Rodrigues (30:19) and Thompson (29:34). Speaking in terms of shots attempted for and against, he's had his best success with Rodrigues and Skinner and was average with Okposo.

"I just think he's so smart; he's got such good instincts," Okposo said of Mittelstadt. "He's going to find his way here quick. He's created some chances, and I've liked the way he's played. Just the puck's not going in right now. He's going to get there soon, for sure."

When Mittelstadt has played with Thompson, however, the results have been all over the place. But the past two times, home against Vegas on Oct. 8 and at Columbus on Oct. 27, things did not go very well.

In a 4-2 win against Vegas, Mittelstadt's 5-on-5 CorsiFor Percentage was 7.1 percent (one shot attempt for, 13 against) and Thompson's was 25 percent (three for, nine against). Against the Blue Jackets, a game the Sabres lost 5-4 in overtime, Mittelstadt had a power-play goal and was at 33.3 percent (five for, 10 against) while Thompson was at 16.7 percent (three for, 15 against). Mittelstadt didn't play any 5-on-5 time in the third period and, of his 9:43 time on-ice, 4:07 of that came on the power play.

The Sabres, of course, want to get all of their players going in the right direction, but it's vital to have young guys like Mittelstadt and Thompson, who turned 21 on Tuesday, not get frustrated by not putting up more points and not generating opportunities. Finding the right combinations to make it work out is the trick, but the keys to finding the right chemistry vary depending on whom you ask.

"I think the more you talk, the easier it is," Rodrigues said. "When you don't talk off the ice maybe, or on the bench and let each other know where you're going to be, I think that's when it's hard. You've got to be able to make plays when not looking. You've got to be able to make plays knowing the guy's going to be there. When you talk to each other a lot and tell each other (where you'll be), you trust that you'll make a play and the guy's going to be there. That's when the chemistry builds."

For Mittelstadt, he knows that when it starts to work, the points will come, but he's comfortable skating with whomever Housley puts with him.

"Stringing shifts together, I think that's the most important part," Mittelstadt said. "I think when you start stringing shifts together and can make a difference every shift, have the puck, I think that's the biggest thing. I think when that happens, you start making plays and trusting each other a lot. And at that point, it gets a lot easier."

Finding that sweet spot feels good, as he recalled from his time playing for the United States team at the 2016 U-18 World Junior Championship, where the U.S. won bronze and his line was among the top scorers in the tournament.

"I remember at World U-18s, it was me, Logan Brown and Kailer Yamamoto, and we all three played with the puck and we made plays and were always handling it and now we call ourselves the 'Dream Line' as a joke," Mittelstadt said. "I think any chance you get to play and play with someone and someone new and learn new things, it's important, and I think that taught me that lesson."

As Jason Pominville prepares for his 1000th NHL game, teammates and coaches reflect on his legacy

By John Vogl

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Benoit Groulx was out of the loop. He'd spent the past decade playing in France, so the only thing he knew about the Quebec junior league was he wanted to coach there.

He landed an interview with Shawinigan. Head coach Denis Francoeur needed an assistant, so he tested Groulx's eye by handing him tape of a recent game. Groulx had never seen or heard of any of the players.

"My comment was, 'I really like that Pominville kid,'" Groulx recalled. "He said, 'Really?'"

It would have been a stretch to call Jason Pominville even a fringe prospect in that spring of 2000. He was 12th on Shawinigan in scoring, putting up four goals and 17 assists in 60 games. Yet on a team with 50-goal scorers and 100-point guys, Pominville was the one who stood out to Groulx.

"I said, 'Well, I like the way he moves,'" Groulx said this week. "I like his hockey sense. I like the way he's playing with audacity out there. He wants to make plays, so he's the kind of player I like."

Groulx got the job and a front row seat for the blossoming of Pominville. The winger scored 46 goals the next season and finished his junior career with a 57-goal, 121-point outing. Since then, he's appeared in 999 NHL games while becoming a vital part of Buffalo Sabres history.

"Would I predict back then that Jay Pominville would play 1,000 games in the NHL? Never," said Groulx, who is head coach of the AHL's Syracuse Crunch. "But I really liked him."

Groulx was among the first to buy into Pominville, but he was hardly the last. Even though Pominville's teammates have possessed more skill and size, the right winger has managed to stand out during a pro career that's going strong in its 17th season.

"He just kept playing the game the right way," says Lindy Ruff, his first NHL coach in Buffalo.

Nothing changed when Pominville moved on to Minnesota.

"He does things the right way," former teammate Zach Parise said.

And Pominville has proved that you can indeed go home again.

"He just plays the game the right way," Buffalo coach Phil Housley said.

There's consistency in those quotes because there's consistency in Pominville's game. As he hits the 1,000-game milestone, being a reliable player and respected teammate is an obvious source of pride.

"I've had to work for everything pretty much," Pominville said. "You grew up wanting to play in the NHL and play a game. That's all I had in mind as a kid, and to get rewarded with all these things is pretty overwhelming, for sure."

It's fitting that Pominville will reach 1,000 games Thursday in Ottawa. It's the site of his greatest hockey moment, a series-clinching, short-handed goal that sent the upstart Sabres to the 2006 Eastern Conference final. The moves around Daniel Alfredsson and Ray Emery are in every franchise highlight package.

But the 35-year-old sees a bigger picture. He's watched enough retirement ceremonies to know that relationships, not individual games, are what linger longest. Pominville treasures his connections with teammates, coaches, fans and media.

"Sometimes it's a little bit overlooked when you meet so many cool people and make so many cool friends," he said. "You have these bonds when you're playing that are like, 'This is just normal.' But when you're done you hear a lot of guys say that's the first thing that they miss, you know?"

"It's important to communicate and reach out and have fun with your teammates because once it's over, it's definitely something that a lot of guys have been missing."

It can safely be argued that no teammates in Sabres history were tighter than Pominville, Thomas Vanek, Ryan Miller and Derek Roy. Pominville and Miller became pros in 2002-03 and were teammates for 11 seasons. Vanek and Roy joined them for nine seasons.

By comparison, the famed "French Connection" of Gilbert Perreault, Rick Martin and Rene Robert was together for parts of eight seasons. It's why Pominville's milestone resonates across the country.

"I came all the way up with him, watched him grow up," Miller, who plays for Anaheim, said during the Sabres' recent visit. "To see him reach 1,000, it's nice for me, too. He's somebody that I go a long way with."

Miller's not kidding. He and Pominville are well-traveled family men now, but they knew little about the real world when they arrived in Rochester in 2002. If it weren't for older teammate Andrew Peters, Pominville wouldn't have had a phone, bank account or bed.

"He got me a mattress," said Pominville, smiling at the memory. "You're 18, 19 coming in, so it was nice to have a veteran guy help you out."

The group bonded in Rochester with no pressure of the big leagues weighing them down. A lockout wiped out the 2004-05 NHL season, so the players learned to win and compete in the AHL. Vanek scored 42 goals, Pominville hit 30 and Miller went 41-17-4 in net.

"I still believe the lockout helped a lot of us out," Pominville said. "The Sabres' staff was there every game, every practice. They were able to see us play, and when we came into the league, we came in ready to play and ready to take on some roles. We weren't forced in early."

"Lindy trusted me on the power play, playing defense and penalty kill. Those were situations that we all felt comfortable with, and he was able to put us out there. We arrived ready to play."

Well, not quite. The Sabres waived Pominville at the end of training camp in 2005-06. He wasn't claimed and came to Buffalo for good after potting 19 goals in 18 games with Rochester.

"I remember him when he was just breaking in, and our scout Mike Racicot told me one time, 'Lindy, this guy has hands of a surgeon,'" Ruff said. "He had an unbelievable shot and just turned out to be a guy you could play in every situation. That's the reason he's lasted 1,000 games."

Though Pominville had hands that could slice through defenses, stardom was far from guaranteed when he joined the organization. He was the third of three second-round picks in 2001, going 55th overall in the draft. With 282 goals, 424 assists and 706 points, he's the most accomplished No. 55 pick in NHL history. Here were the numbers entering the season.

Pominville is also one of just three members of his draft class to reach 700 points, hitting the milestone Oct. 20 in Los Angeles to join Ilya Kovalchuk and Jason Spezza. Pominville is ahead of higher picks such as Mikko Koivu, Ales Hemsky, Mike Cammalleri, R.J. Umberger and Tuomo Ruutu.

He's steadily pulled away. Pominville scored 18 times in 57 games as a rookie and set a career high with 34 goals during his first full season of 2006-07. He reached 30 goals two more times and is a four-time 20-goal scorer. He's been in double digits every season.

He's well on his way this year. Pominville enters his 1,000th game on a hot streak. He has points in five straight, running his season totals to five goals and 10 points in 12 games.

"I was lucky enough to play a lot of those 1,000 games as a teammate with him and as a linemate," Vanek said. "With Pommer, you know what you're going to get, you know? I love playing with him just because his hockey IQ is so high, so we were on the same page a lot. He knew where I was without even looking at it."

"That's what I'll always remember: the chemistry. Chemistry is tough to get, and when you can get it where you know exactly where the other guy is without even looking, that's pretty fun."

Pominville figured his fun in Buffalo ended in 2013, when the Sabres traded the captain to Minnesota. It didn't take long for the Wild to learn what they were getting on and off the ice.

"He's the definition of a pro's pro," Parise says. "He never rocks the boat, you know what I mean? I think that's why all the coaches love him. He's just one of those guys that does what he's told and plays in any position that he's told to be in. He comes in happy every day."

There was one day he came in scared.

The Wild were on a road trip to Nashville during the 2015-16 season when Parise and Chris Porter decided to prank their pal. After the team bus arrived at the hotel, the duo went to the table where all the room keys were laid out. There were two keys in Pominville's packet, so they took one and hurried to his room.

"We were probably sitting there for literally 10 minutes, just sitting there waiting for him to get in the room," said Parise, who notes that Porter went shirtless. "All of a sudden, we hear the door. You're just walking into a room – no big deal – and Chris goes, 'Jason,' and I've never seen someone jump like that."

"Two guys in your room? We scared the shit out of him. It was awesome."

The players still send the video to each other, another sign that those teammate bonds mean so much.

"They got me good there," Pominville said. "You spend so much time together that sometimes I do feel like you take it for granted. You just show up every day, and everyone's there. You don't realize how cool it is and how fortunate we are."

Pominville embraces every part of being a pro. That includes interaction with the media. During a recent visit by Montreal, he talked to a group of French reporters, spoke to all the Buffalo folks and then did another round in French.

The 30-minute session wasn't just because he can speak two languages. It was because people who hadn't seen him in a while wanted to catch up. They were genuinely excited to talk to him.

"I've always embraced that role since I've been here," Pominville said. "I think you guys have been good to me. I feel like I've been good to you guys, honest and available when you needed me. I think that kind of goes both ways."

"It's part of the job. We have a responsibility to send our message to the fans and let them hear what we think."

The chats go on behind closed doors, too. Since being traded back to Buffalo in June 2017, Pominville has tried to show his teammates how much every day means.

"He's been here when things were going well and he's played so long in the league," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said. "He's seen a lot. He's been through a lot. For us, we're able to use him for that experience of what it's like to be good in Buffalo and win here."

The winning, hard work and engaging personality have endeared Pominville to Western New York. The three biggest cheers during opening-night introductions went to Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin and Pominville.

"I was gone for 4½ years, and I came back and it almost felt like I never left," he said. "It's pretty neat, pretty unique. It's a cool feeling to feel appreciated like that.

"I don't know if it's because of the work and because of the habits and the way I play, but it's definitely something that I feel very, very fortunate to have. It's pretty cool to see people with your jersey out there."

The fans who wear No. 29 see a player who simply does the right things. On his third goal of the season, the habits he's built since childhood kicked in. He took a pass in the crease and stopped rather than coast past the goal. It allowed him to bury the rebound after Montreal's Antti Niemi stopped the first chance.

"Habits are something that I was taught pretty early," Pominville said. "Our coaches when I was younger were pretty good at saying 'stop at the net, go to the net, play the puck' and those type of things. In the short term you probably don't realize the effect that it can have, but in the long term and the older you get, you're like, 'Oh, that makes a lot of sense,' and you understand why.

"It's funny because I'm trying to tell my son now those kind of things, and he's probably like, 'Uhhhh, what is he talking about?!' But in the long term he'll probably realize more what it means."

In Pominville's case, those habits mean 1,000 NHL games for a 5-foot-11, 180-pounder who has never been the fastest skater, hardest shooter or most talented player on his team. He's just been the most honest and diligent.

"I've been fortunate to stick in the league," he said. "I've had to work hard."

It hasn't gone unnoticed.

"When you play in the NHL, it's quite an accomplishment," Groulx said. "When you stick there, it's another accomplishment. But when you play 1,000 games, it means that you're not only a good player but you're durable and people think you can help your team. I'm very proud for him."

Sabres' Jason Pominville experienced unique road to 1,000 games

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Of all the places it could've been played, it turns out Jason Pominville will hit the prestigious 1,000-game mark tonight in Ottawa, the site of the winger's signature moment, the dynamic short-handed overtime goal against the powerhouse Senators that pushed the underdog Sabres into the 2006 Eastern Conference final.

"(I) had some great, great moments there, probably my best moment as a player there," Pominville said earlier this week inside KeyBank Center. "The odds of it being there is crazy."

So were the odds Pominville would score a huge NHL goal that season. He had cleared waivers months earlier, meaning every team passed on him, and quietly returned for his fourth season with the Rochester Americans.

At that point, Pominville had played one NHL game.

In an organization loaded with prospects following an NHL lockout, nobody talked much about Pominville, a former second-round pick with two 30-goal AHL seasons. Rookies Ryan Miller, Derek Roy and Thomas Vanek all overshadowed him.

"He was a great player and he did a lot of nice things, but he wasn't one of the top guys," former Sabres goalie Martin Biron said of Pominville. "When the next year started, you knew he was close, but ... you didn't think he's one of the top guys from Rochester that's coming in that's going to get a job."

But by late that November, after scoring 19 goals in 18 AHL games, the Sabres promoted Pominville for good.

"He's dominating Rochester, confident, ready," said former Sabres winger Andrew Peters, Pominville's roommate in Rochester.

Pominville compiled 18 goals and 30 points in 57 regular-season NHL outings before former Sabres coach Lindy Ruff utilized Pominville and Roy for a defensive zone faceoff barely two minutes into the extra session May 13, 2006.

How many rookies kill penalties in overtime of a road playoff game against the NHL's highest-scoring team?

After the Senators won the draw, Roy grabbed the puck in the left circle and one-handed it to Pominville, who took off down the ice seconds away ending the Eastern Conference semifinal.

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Pominville's father, Jean-Marie played goalie professionally and met his wife, Deborah, during his stint with the United States Hockey League's Green Bay Bobcats in 1977-78.

At first, Jason wanted to follow his father, who attended two NHL training camps with the Oakland Seals, and tend goal.

"When he was young, he wanted to be a goalie, but I told him, 'You're not going to play goalie,' because he was a good skater," Jean-Marie said.

So Jean-Marie told his son to play forward on the ice and he would buy him a pair of street hockey pads.

"I said, 'I'm not going to go watch a game and one game you're on the bench and one game you play,'" Jean-Marie recalled.

Hockey consumed Pominville as a child growing up in Montreal. Jean-Marie said Jason never had many other interests. He and Deborah tried to explain to Jason he needed something else if hockey did not work out.

But Pominville kept developing into an NHL prospect. In 2000-01, he scored 46 goals and 113 points in 71 games with the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League's Shawinigan Cataractes. After the Sabres drafted him 55th overall in 2001, he compiled 57 goals and 121 points in 66 games in his final junior season.

In 2002, he joined the Amerks and moved into a basement apartment in Brighton with Peters, a tough guy in his third AHL season.

"You had two different personalities living together, I can tell you that much," Peters said.

While both are affable, Peters possesses a much larger personality. Back then, their routines couldn't have been more different.

"Pommer is a creature of habit and detailed," Peters said.

Pominville was regimented, preparing the same way for each game.

"I was just a nonchalant guy," Peters said. "I just played hockey, I didn't do a pregame nap, I didn't care what time I ate."

He added: "That same routine is what has kept him playing so long."

Looking back, Peters, who retired in 2011, wishes he had adapted Pominville's routine.

"I might not have necessarily been a better player, but I might've played longer," Peters said.

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Pominville, 35, possesses one of the most impressive resumes in Sabres history.

In 2006-07, he scored a career-high 34 goals. The next season, he compiled a career-high 80 points. He was an NHL All-Star in 2011-12, when he had the Sabres' last 30-goal season.

In Tuesday's 2-1 overtime loss to Calgary, Pominville recorded an assist, his 500th point with the Sabres, tying him for ninth in franchise history with Danny Gare.

Imagine if his only appearance with the Sabres had been Dec. 27, 2003, his NHL debut. Pominville said he probably wanted to get claimed when the Sabres waived him.

"But thank God I didn't and it ended up this way," Pominville said. "I never really envisioned myself for playing for any other team."

Overall, counting his time with the Minnesota Wild, Pominville has scored 282 goals and 706 points in the NHL.

Pominville's skills won't wow you. Think of him as being above average in all facets of the game. Combine that with his supreme smarts and you have perhaps one of the NHL's best two-way forwards of the last 10 or 15 years.

"I'll never be the strongest guy, I'll never be the biggest guy, I've never been the fastest guy, I never had the hardest shot," Pominville said. "I think I can do everything well and my hockey sense and smarts is something that can help me play a role."

Biron said: "He doesn't have great size (about 5-foot-11), but he's strong on the puck. He doesn't have blistering speed, but he'll turn it on just enough to be like a burst he can keep up."

Pominville's smarts have helped him adjust over the years and thrive at an age when most players have left the NHL.

"Any situation, I've been able to adjust because of that," Pominville said. "Hockey sense is a big part of that, an asset to have. It's not something you really teach, it's mostly a tool you can have and develop."

Biron believes Pominville's shot is his most underappreciated asset.

"He doesn't have the big slap shot ... but his shot is so deceiving, it's kind of like a little slap to the puck with a straighter blade. There's a release that's really quick."

He added: "It's not hard, it's not like spectacular."

Biron said Pominville's shot "is really significant to what he is as a player."

"Very underrated, very surprising, understated," Biron said. "But it's so efficient and it's so good, and that's been a tool of him for a long time."

Pominville has occasionally shown signs of slowing down in recent seasons. In 2016-17, his fourth full year in Minnesota, the Wild occasionally scratched him. Minnesota traded him back to the Sabres on June 30, 2017.

Last season, despite scoring 16 goals, he sometimes endured long droughts.

But right now, Pominville is a first-liner beside Jack Eichel. The veteran has five goals and 10 points through 12 contests, including four goals and nine points during his current five-game point streak.

There's another reason Pominville, who captained the Sabres for almost two years, has played 14 seasons and will become the 327th NHL player to reach 1,000 games.

"He's just a nice person, classy, very high character, good morals," Peters said. "But he's a good person. I think that, too, played into the longevity of his career."

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As Pominville roared through the neutral zone that night inside Scotiabank Place, he cut to his left and heard his bench yelling he was approaching a forward.

"Forward, forward, forward, forward, because a lot of time when you kill a penalty, you pick up the puck and you don't really look up," Biron said.

That forward was Daniel Alfredsson, one of the NHL's biggest stars.

"If he didn't already know the guy in front of him was Daniel Alfredsson, he realized quickly and decided to turn on the jets," Biron said.

Pominville kept skating, burned past Alfredsson in the left circle and cut to the net.

To this day, Pominville said he doesn't know why he approached the play so aggressively.

"Most times when you're killing penalties ... you don't go for it, especially in the playoffs when you're in overtime," Pominville said.

When Pominville reached the net, he tucked the puck past goalie Ray Emery's glove along the ice to give the Sabres a 3-2 victory.

"(I went) kind of blank after that until I saw Jay McKee hopping out of the penalty box," Pominville said. "The whole team jumping together was pretty cool."

The goal also turned into one of legendary Sabres play-by-play man Rick Jeanneret's most famous goal calls: "Oh, now do you believe, now do you believe? These guys are good, scary good!"

In the press box with Jeanneret, a stunned Peters, a scratch that night, couldn't believe what he had just watched.

"Jason Pominville had just put our team on a platform that nobody expected us to be on," Peters said.

Watching the goal still gives Pominville chills.

"You're just going out there and making a hockey play, hockey read, something that you see," Pominville said. "But, yeah, I mean, now with a step back you realize how big a goal it was for the team and the organization.

"I mean, R.J. probably helped out, too, with the call of it. But, yeah, it's probably a goal that we'll see running around for a little while."

Sabres finish October in solid spot

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – If you had told Phil Housley prior to the season the Sabres would finish October a solid 6-4-2, the second-year coach said he would've been pretty happy.

The Sabres, of course, hardly enjoyed a perfect month. They suffered some blowout losses. Right now, they've lost two straight games in overtime.

Still, the Sabres have a five-game point streak (3-0-2) entering Thursday's tilt in Ottawa. They're clearly a much better team than last season, when they finished dead last.

This Sabres just finished their best October since they started 6-4-0 in 2011-12 and their best month overall since going 7-4-4 in March 2016.

Naturally, Housley said "you always want more."

"But when you look over the body of work, I really like the way we played maybe since the game in San Jose (on Oct. 18)," he said following today's practice inside KeyBank Center. "Even though it was a lopsided loss, I liked the way we played five-on-five, and that carried through to Los Angeles and Anaheim and even Montreal.

"So if you're asking me if I had to evaluate October, we've met our expectations moving forward, but we can't rest on our laurels."

Following Tuesday's 2-1 overtime loss to Calgary, a game in which, the Sabres blew a 1-0 lead in the final minute, Housley switched up his lines today.

Remi Elie, a healthy scratch nine times this year, moved beside center Casey Mittelstadt and Sam Reinhart. Elie is from Cornwall, about an hour away from Ottawa.

"He's sitting out, he's fresh," Housley said of Elie. "He's going to bring some tenacity and physicality on the forecheck, his speed of the game is going to be important. His background ... I think will give us a spark. He's going to get an opportunity.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Sobotka centered Conor Sheary and Kyle Okposo.

Defenseman Jake McCabe, out with an upper-body injury Tuesday, practiced beside Rasmus Ristolainen today. Rookie Rasmus Dahlin went back beside Casey Nelson.

Weissbach becoming a student of the game at Wisconsin

By Jourdon LaBarber

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It's not uncommon for Tony Granato to show up to work and be asked to go over a play from an NHL game. The University of Wisconsin coach might be asked if he saw a play made by Johnny Gaudreau the night prior, or if he can pull up a clip from the Chicago Blackhawks game.

The one doing the asking is Linus Weissbach, a sophomore forward for the Badgers and Buffalo's seventh-round pick in 2017.

"What I've really enjoyed watching is the amount of time he watches hockey when he's away from the rink," Granato said over the phone Tuesday. "He comes in in the morning and he's telling me, 'Hey, did you see last night's game? Did you see Gaudreau's goal?'"

"He is one of those kids that it's 24-hours-a-day hockey. That's him."

After scoring 26 points (10+16) in 34 games and earning a spot on the Big 10's All-Rookie Team as a freshman last season, Weissbach came into his sophomore year knowing he'd be counted on offensively. That meant a top-six role and heavy power-play minutes.

His response, so far: eight points (2+6) in six games this season, including a four-point weekend in the Badgers' most recent series against Michigan Tech. His point total is tied for second on the team and fifth in the Big 10.

What's impressed his coach is that Weissbach hasn't let the other aspects of his development slip in the process.

"Sometimes you get in a scoring role and you're asked to do a lot offensively, you focus on that part of it and you take for granted the other part of the game that you need to stay polished on and work on to continue to develop," Granato said. "That part's been fun for me to watch, because I think he's working at becoming a more complete player."

"I think offensively he's a dynamic player, he's got great speed, he's a natural scorer. Now he's got to finetune his defensive stuff. I think he's committed to that. He's shown great strides and a great commitment to working on that part of the game."

It's no accident that Weissbach favors Gaudreau highlights. He's listed at 5-foot-8, 161 pounds, making him about the same size as the Calgary Flames All-Star forward.

Granato - who was listed at 5-foot-10 during his own 13-year career - emphasizes that it took more than offense for Gaudreau to become who he is.

"I think he's got the right mindset, mentality to understand that being an undersized player, there's some things he has to do and commit to doing," Granato said. "He's on his way to trying to be that player. Johnny Gaudreau's the kind of player that he admires and likes, and he has some of Johnny Gaudreau in him."

"That dynamic part in how he plays, he's going to have to play like Johnny Gaudreau. But he's going to have to learn that Johnny Gaudreau gets on the ice so much because of all the little things he does without the puck consistently. Linus is still learning that process, but he's certainly committed to learning to develop that way as a player."

Of course, learning is nothing new to Weissbach. He left Sweden to play in the USHL in 2016-17, his only North American season before going to Wisconsin. There were cultural adjustments, sure. But at the end of the day, it was hockey.

"I like to say to people that ask that hockey is a puck and two nets," Weissbach said. "I just try to play my game out there. I love to play hockey and that's what I do out there."

PK Pekar

Matej Pekar (2018, fourth round) posted three points over the weekend including two shorthanded goals for the Barrie Colts of the OHL.

Pekar has nine goals on the season with four of them coming on the penalty kill. He's third on the team in scoring.

The Colts are in Sarnia on Thursday and in Oshawa on Sunday.

McCabe says he's 'ready to go' following full practice

By Jourdon LaBarber

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Jake McCabe is ready to go.

The defenseman was a full participant at practice on Wednesday, back on a pair with Rasmus Ristolainen after being scratched for the Sabres' game against Calgary on Tuesday with an upper-body injury. He said he expects to be ready to play in Ottawa on Thursday.

"[I'm feeling] much better," McCabe said. "Ready to go, for sure."

McCabe sustained his injury during the team's game in Columbus on Saturday, limiting his second-period ice time to 3:23 before he returned to skate 7:15 in the third. He had skated 20-plus minutes in each of his three games prior, including a season-high 23:04 against Montreal last Thursday.

With that opportunity came production. He's scored at least a point in five of his last six games, with a goal and six assists over that span. His average of .64 points per game is triple his career average coming into this season (.22).

"You're more involved with the game," McCabe said of the uptick in ice time. "Every game brings on a different scenario, whether it's penalty kills, power plays, and each guy has their roles. But bottom line, the more you get out there, you're feeling the puck a little bit more, you're just more engaged out there."

McCabe was also an instrumental part of a penalty kill that is 12-for-12 in its last four games, averaging 2:10 of shorthanded ice time per outing.

"I think we're working in unison of four and guys are blocking shots," he said. "We're pressuring in the right areas and our goaltenders are making huge save after huge save. And we're not giving up a ton of second opportunities if they do have a good chance in front. I think we're doing a good job of clearing sticks and not allowing that second opportunity."

The Sabres were 5-for-5 on the penalty kill against Calgary in McCabe's absence, with Johan Larsson clocking in at 6:44 of shorthanded ice time.

"I think we work really well as a unit out there and we're well-prepared," Larsson said. "We've got key blocks and key saves at the right moments."

Coverage of Buffalo's game in Ottawa on Thursday begins at 7 p.m. on MSG-B with the GMC Game Night Pregame Show. You can also listen live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7:30.

Wednesday's practice

The Sabres finished the month of October with a 6-4-2 record, marking their best opening month since 2011-12 (6-4-0) and their best full month since March 2016 (7-4-4). They're currently on a five-game point streak for the first time since earning points in nine straight contests in March 2012.

At the same time, they've lost their last two games in overtime, prompting coach Phil Housley to make changes at practice on Wednesday.

"If you asked me if we were 6-4-2 after the month of October, we'd be pretty happy with that and where we sit right now. In saying that, you always want more," Housley said. "... If you're asking me if I had to evaluate October, we've met our expectations. Moving forward, we can't rest on our laurels."

With McCabe back, Nathan Beaulieu skated on an extra defense pair alongside forward Tage Thompson. Remi Elie replaced Thompson up front, skating on a line with Casey Mittelstadt and Sam Reinhart. Elie has been a healthy scratch for the team's last five games.

"He's sitting out, he's fresh," Housley said. "He's going to bring some tenacity and physicality on the forecheck, his speed of the game is going to be important. ... He's going to get an opportunity."

Here's how the Sabres lined up in full on Wednesday:

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

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Marco Scandella - 4 Zach Bogosian
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 8 Casey Nelson
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 72 Tage Thompson*

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

*Extra forward skating on defense