



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Dahlin ready to face former teammate, fellow top pick Pettersson

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 9, 2018

The story of the Canucks' first season without the Sedin twins is far different than anyone around the NHL anticipated. Rather than rebuilding, they arrived in Buffalo late Thursday night with the second-most points in the Western Conference, led by the league's top rookie.

Elias Pettersson, a 19-year-old center, was drafted fifth overall in 2017 and missed six games last month because of a concussion, yet he's already feared by opponents. So much so that it's a story when Pettersson doesn't score.

Though he had an assist in a 8-5 victory over the Bruins on Thursday night, failing to score prevented him from becoming only the fourth player since 1920-21 to score 11 or more goals through his first 11 career games.

He was only the fifth player to score 10 goals in his first 10, and his immediate impact has surprised many across the league.

That historic impact has surprised many across the league. Not Rasmus Dahlin.

Chosen first overall by the Sabres this past June, the 18-year-old defenseman was a teammate of Pettersson's for Sweden at the World Junior Championships the past two seasons, including last year's tournament in Buffalo. Now, the two will face each other at KeyBank Center on Saturday when the Sabres host the Canucks at 1 p.m., a matchup that will be broadcast live in their home country.

"I know he's skilled," Dahlin said with a grin. "It's going to be fun to see him play. Of course he's had a great start. I'm not surprised. It's going to be fun."

Not surprised? That comment raised a few eyebrows after the Sabres' practice Friday afternoon, yet few in the league knew Pettersson's game better than Dahlin. The two faced each other in the Swedish Hockey League last season, when Pettersson led all scorers with 56 points in 42 games and led Vaxjo to the championship with 19 points in 13 playoff games.

The lightning-quick release on his left-handed shot wowed NHL scouts, and his play at his country's highest level earned him the reputation of being a complete player. But his stock began to rise months earlier when he and Dahlin helped Sweden reach the finals at the World Junior Championships.

Dahlin was named an All-Star for the tournament and given the title of best defenseman, and Pettersson also left a lasting impression on his opponents. Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt represented Team USA at the tournament and still marvels at Pettersson's go-ahead goal against him in the semifinals.

"I think the thing that really stood out to me was how he shot the puck against us," Mittelstadt recalled. "Obviously he moves well. He's silky with the puck, but I think his shot is pretty impressive. Obviously it's great to see a young guy doing that in the league. I think we saw a little bit of it last year at World Juniors, and now you guys get to see it full time in North America. It's good to see."

The Sabres don't want to see that shot in their first meeting with the Canucks. Despite the departures of Daniel and Henrik Sedin, Vancouver is atop the Pacific Division and second in the Western Conference with 21 points in 17 games.

Pettersson's the talk of the league, as his assist Thursday night gave him eight more points than any rookie. Dahlin, meanwhile, has a plus-4 rating with one goal and four assists in 16 games.

This will be their first meeting in the NHL and though they're not close, there's a mutual respect between them.

"It's more fun to have him on the same team," Pettersson said of Dahlin following the Canucks' practice at KeyBank Center on Friday. "He's good defensively and sometimes he plays like a forward. ... He brings a lot to his team, and of course it's harder to play against him than to have him on the same team."

Dahlin isn't producing at a historic pace, but Pettersson pointed out his countryman's seamless transition to facing the sport's best, lauding Dahlin's quickness and ability to carry the puck through the neutral zone.

While both expressed excitement for their first meeting in the NHL, neither wanted their matchup to cast a shadow over an important game for their respective teams. The Sabres' 6-5 overtime win over the Canadiens on Thursday lifted them into a three-way tie for fourth in the Eastern Conference.

Make no mistake, though, their home country will be watching closely when either one is on the ice. It's the first marquee matchup of what many called one of the best draft classes in recent memory, and Sabres coach Phil Housley understood why there's hype.

"They're very good hockey players," Housley said. "They're smart; they're instinctive. They use their ability and their instincts on the ice. That's what makes them special players."

Sabres Notebook: Evan Rodrigues makes case to stay at center

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 9, 2018

A late flight back to Buffalo roughly 12 hours earlier led Sabres coach Phil Housley to make one change to his lines during Friday's practice at KeyBank Center.

Tage Thompson, scratched in seven of the past nine games, joined Johan Larsson and Patrik Berglund on the fourth line, with Zemgus Girgensons rotating in. Housley said the change was made since a few of his players are "banged up," and added that any lineup changes will be game-time decisions before the puck drops Saturday against the Canucks.

However, Housley stuck with the third line that sparked the Sabres' 6-5 overtime thriller in Montreal on Thursday: Evan Rodrigues at center, Vladimir Sobotka on the left side and Sam Reinhart on the right.

After all, Rodrigues had two assists and a team-high five shots on goal against the Canadiens, a performance he called his best this season.

"I got early touches and when you do that you kind of feel more comfortable," Rodrigues said following practice Friday. "You start wanting the puck on your stick more and more as the game goes on. That's what I was trying to do. "

The speed of Rodrigues' line took advantage of a few ill-advised rushes by the Canadiens' defensemen, sparking three odd-man rushes, two of which led to goals. First, Rodrigues froze Carey Price by faking a wrister on a two-on-one and passing to Sobotka, who one-timed a shot into the open net for a 1-0 lead.

Sobotka scored his second of the game and third of the season at 14:04 in the first after Price failed to control a rebound from Rodrigues' wrister, giving the Sabres a 2-1 lead. Though the Sabres saw four leads disappear, Rasmus Ristolainen's overtime winner put them in a three-way tie for fourth place in the Eastern Conference.

Still, the Sabres left Montreal unsatisfied, Rodrigues included. He and Larsson are the lone regulars who have yet to score. Rodrigues has six assists in 13 games, but none of his 28 shots have gone in.

He's still waiting for a bounce or deflection to go his way, yet he expressed confidence that "the flood gates will open" once he finally scores. Moving back to the middle has helped.

Rodrigues began the season as the fourth-line center, playing alongside Jason Pominville and Girgensons, but Housley tweaked his pairings with the bottom-six failing to produce much offense. Another change was made Thursday night, this time to spark Rodrigues and Sobotka.

It appears neither will be moving again after their performance at the Bell Centre.

"I look at the opportunities he had last night and he had some really good looks," Housley said of Rodrigues. "Maybe we're talking differently if those go in, but I just like the way he plays the game in the middle of the ice for us, the way he disperses the puck. ... I just like the way he's playing in that position."

Thompson was the first player on the ice Friday, firing shot after shot into an empty net, and proceeded to finally join one of the Sabres' four lines during rushes. That doesn't mean the 21-year-old will be in the lineup against the Canucks.

Housley told reporters that some players are dealing with "bumps and bruises." That included Patrik Berglund, who was in pain after blocking a shot Thursday night. Berglund and Girgensons both practiced, as Housley saw this as an opportunity to get Thompson involved.

"I just wanted to get him in the regular rotation because we got in a little bit late last night," Housley said. "He just got more reps."

Housley wasn't ready to name his starting goalie for Saturday, either. Linus Ullmark was pulled after allowing five goals on 32 shots in two periods Thursday, and Carter Hutton proceeded to stop all five shots he faced in the third period and overtime.

The Sabres announced Friday a program that allows season ticket holders to trade tickets they cannot use for points that can be spent in the team store.

The amount of points received will depend on the opponent, day of the week and seat location. Tickets can be traded at SabresTicketExchange.com up to seven days prior to each game, but there is a limit on the number of seats that can be exchanged each game.

Hall inductee Alexander Yakushev has vivid memories of 12-6 loss to Sabres in 1976 exhibition game

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
November 9, 2018

TORONTO -- Alexander Yakushev was standing in the corner of the Esso Great Hall of the Hockey Hall of Fame Friday with his interpreter. There were crowds nearby around Gary Bettman, Martin Brodeur and Martin St. Louis. Yakushev, still a massive man at age 71, was with a couple of Soviet reporters when The Buffalo News chimed in.

"Buffalo!" Yakushev said, breaking into a big smile and waving his index finger in my direction. He knew what was coming.

Yakushev at the Hall on Friday. (Mike Harrington/Buffalo News)

Many fans these days are too young to remember but one of the Sabres' most momentous days in franchise history came on a Sunday afternoon in Memorial Auditorium on Jan. 4, 1976. It was an exhibition game against the Soviet Wings and Yakushev was their star. By now, he was well-known as an Olympian and as the leading scorer for the Soviets in the legendary 1972 Summit Series against Team Canada.

The Russians were in town for a couple of days after a 7-4 win in Pittsburgh. They watched the Sabres blunder through a 9-6 loss to the Los Angeles Kings on New Year's Night. They were more worried about their game on Jan. 7 game in Chicago.

Big mistake. The Sabres won, 12-6, stunning an international television audience by handing the Russians their worst defensive beating ever in international competition. It's a record that still stands.

"I remember the game very well," Yakushev said through the interpreter. "We saw the game before, Buffalo vs. Los Angeles. Your team was really bad. They were all crouched on the ice and we were very relaxed. We were thinking, 'We're going to beat them easily.' We were going to have a very good day."

Didn't happen. The Sabres outshot the Russians, 46-21, and 10 players scored. Rick Martin had two goals in the first period and Danny Gare was the only other player with two.

"We were smashed by your team," Yakushev said. "They were really tough. They played very well. It was very surprising the game went that way. There were four games that year and the only game we lost was in Buffalo."

The Sabres played the Montreal Canadiens the next night in the Forum. In the wake of the victory, Montreal fans broke decorum when Buffalo came on the ice for warmups. The crowd rose into a standing ovation -- for the visiting team.

If you've never seen the highlights of this one, it's worth spending the 10 minutes to give a gander to this YouTube video below. It's a CBC broadcast with Bill Hewitt on play by play and Brian MacFarlane on color.

Dreger - Skinner is going to earn a big paycheck

By DEREK KRAMER

WGR 550

NOVEMBER 09, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres seem to have a dynamic first line with Jack Eichel centering Jeff Skinner and Jason Pominville. With Skinner on a torrid points pace this season on the final year of his deal, plenty of fans want to see Skinner re-signed as soon as possible. TSN's Darren Dreger joined The Instigators to talk more on Skinner's potential contract range, goaltender interference in the NHL and the Hockey Hall of Fame Class of 2018. Here is some of what Dreger had to say with Andrew Peters, Craig Rivet and Matry Biron:

On if the Sabres have spoken with Skinner's agent yet on a new deal:

"I'd be surprised if they haven't already engaged, to be fair. That's just common practice, you have your preliminary discussions and then they get a little more aggressive on both sides. It's in Jeff Skinner's interest to just focus on what he is doing because he's been terrific for the Buffalo Sabres."

On if Skinner needed a change in scenery:

"(Skinner) is the classic example for me of, sometimes players needing a fresh start. Now, it's not like he was toiling in Carolina or falling into an abyss there, but every time his name would come up in a trade rumor, there was always that lingering history: 'What about his history with concussions? Is his health going to be sustainable...' all of those things."

On if Skinner could be looking at a deal similar to San Jose's Evander Kane (7 years, \$49 million):

"They might be looking at a similar payday, I don't think they're the same type of player. What you have is the pretty obvious chemistry that exists particularly on that line with Eichel and Pominville. That 5-5 goal last night (in Montreal), it was a tap-in for Jeff Skinner... Things are going well for them. Jeff Skinner, as long as he continues to play the way he's playing, he's going to earn a big paycheck."

"Is it in the vicinity of Evander Kane, is it slightly higher than that? I think it's a little too soon to say, but if you get to the midway point of the season for the Buffalo Sabres, and his production hasn't dropped a little bit, maybe the number is a little bit higher than that."

You can hear more from Dreger on The Instigators below, in Hour 2 of the show.

Sabres' Rodrigues is hoping to build on his last game

By PAUL HAMILTON

WGR 550

NOVEMBER 09, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Evan Rodrigues was moved back to center in Montreal and responded with his best game of the season.

Rodrigues set up Vladimir Sobotka twice for goals and had three two-on-ones in the first period alone. Rodrigues said, "I played center growing up, but hadn't played it six or seven years before that, but I like playing wing cause it's more freedom on the offensive side of things, but as a center, you have the puck way more on your stick and are able to make plays, so I can compete at both and am good at both, so wherever the coach needs me, that's where I'm going to play."

Rodrigues has not scored a goal this season, but he's on a pace for 38 assists. He thinks there is more offense to come from him, "Yes, definitely, I feel like the more chances I get, the more I'm able to prove and if I get the chance, I can really show my offensive instincts."

Rodrigues has 12 goals in 93 NHL games and none this year. He's still confident that can change, "I think as soon as I get the first one, the flood gates will open. I got robbed the second game of the year and since then, it seems I can't catch a bounce, but you can't get frustrated and I have to shoot the puck more and have the mentality to go to the net."

Rodrigues has just one goal in his last 26 games. His right winger is awfully happy that he's on a line with Rodrigues. Sam Reinhart worked strong on the wall to help spring Rodrigues on those outnumbered rushes. Reinhart said, "It's the skill he possesses, his speed and the thing I look at is the way he thinks the game. I think we think the game alike and it helps because we're on the same page out there."

Housley wanted to give that line a different look in Montreal so that's why Rodrigues wound up at center, "I like the way he plays the game in the middle of the ice for us, the way he disperses the puck, the way he creates speed and we get this push through the neutral zone."

On Friday, Tage Thompson was on the right wing with Johan Larsson and Patrik Berglund during line rushes. Housley wouldn't commit to if Thompson was play Saturday against Vancouver, but he did say, "We've got a lot of guys that are banged up with some bumps and bruises, so that will be a game-time decision. I just wanted to get him into a regular rotation and because we got in late last night, he got some more reps."

Berglund blocked a shot on Thursday and is one of those guys with bumps and bruises, but he did practice.

It was a short practice on Friday with a lot of power play work. Housley kept telling the units that it's not fast enough. He didn't want them holding onto the puck in between passes.

Sabres' Evan Rodrigues wants to keep showcasing offense

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 9, 2018

BUFFALO – Evan Rodrigues won't deny the drought is on his mind. While it might not be eating the affable Sabres center up, he's aware he hasn't scored a goal yet this season.

"Second game of the year I get robbed on an unbelievable save," Rodrigues said Friday inside KeyBank Center. "It seems like I can't get a break since. It's going to go in one of these days."

If New York Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist hadn't slid across the crease and stacked his pads to deny Rodrigues' backdoor shot Oct. 6, he would've had his 13th NHL goal.

"One of these days it's going to go in and then the floodgates are going to open," Rodrigues said after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's tilt against the Vancouver Canucks. "I know that. Instead of getting frustrated, you have shoot the puck even more, keep it simple, put pucks on net."

The Boston University product did all of those things in Thursday's 6-5 overtime win in Montreal. In one of his best NHL games, he registered two assists and pumped five shots on Canadiens goalie Carey Price, tying his career high.

Rodrigues, who was shifted to center Thursday morning, showcased his speed all night.

"I got in some good situations where I could build some speed and get up in the play and make things happen, the ice was good and (I) just seemed to get the bounces, feet were moving," Rodrigues said. "Just really got to pop one one of these days."

Still, while Rodrigues hasn't scored a goal since March 29, he has been generating offense. He has six assists this season and 11 in 18 outings since scoring his last goal.

Rodrigues created both of linemate Vladimir Sobotka's first-period goals, displaying strong chemistry beside the newcomer and Sam Reinhart. Rodrigues fed Sobotka on a two-on-one 6:08 into the contest before the Czech buried his rebound at 14:40.

"It's easier to build speed as a center when you're coming from underneath," Rodrigues said. "I thought I was able to do that. Reino made some great plays on the wall to get the puck to me in the middle.

"It just seemed like after that first couple shifts of getting some good chances I was feeling it, wanted it more and more on my stick. I wanted to make things happen and that's the mentality I got to have going into every game."

Rodrigues grew up playing center before becoming a winger in college. But two years ago, the Sabres moved him to the middle. He has moved back and forth since then.

This season, Rodrigues started as the Sabres' fourth-line center between Zemgus Girgensons and Jason Pominville.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he flipped Rodrigues and Sobotka on Thursday "for some more balance."

"I just felt that Evan did a really good job previously when he was with Zemgus and Pominville," Housley said. "I think that was our most consistent line, he was in the middle."

Playing center, Rodrigues said, offers him more freedom offensively.

"You have the puck way more on your stick and you're able to make plays, almost be a passer out there," Rodrigues said. "That's what I'm trying to do. I feel like I can compete at both and I'm good at both, so wherever the coach needs me, that's where I'm going to play."

Housley said: "I just like the way he plays the game in the middle of the ice for us, the way he disperses the puck, the way he creates speed and you get this push through the neutral zone."

Rodrigues, a healthy scratch three straight games recently, will keep playing center if he produces points. He quietly compiled seven goals and 25 points in 48 contests last season. Over 82 games, that's a 43-point pace.

Offensively, Rodrigues, who scored 61 points in 41 games as a college senior, believes he possesses a higher level.

"It's definitely something I'm working toward and definitely something I have in me," Rodrigues said. "I feel like the more chances I get the more I'm able to prove. I'm just trying to continue to show that day in and day out. I think if get the chance, I can really show my offensive instincts."

Sabres' Tage Thompson could play against Canucks

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 9, 2018

BUFFALO – Technically, Sabres winger Tage Thompson is a game-time decision for Saturday afternoon's home tilt, coach Phil Housley said.

Still, it seems like Thompson, a healthy scratch the last four games, could return against the Vancouver Canucks. Thompson practiced at right wing beside center Johan Larsson and Patrik Berglund this afternoon. Meanwhile, Zemgus Girgensons, a regular on the fourth line, rotated in.

Thompson, 21, a scratch seven times this season, hasn't played since Oct. 30.

"We got a lot of guys that are banged up or some bumps and bruises, so that'll be a game-time decision," Housley of Thompson's status. "I just wanted to get him in a regular rotation because we got in a little bit late last night."

Girgensons, however, isn't one of the banged-up Sabres, Housley said. The team arrived home about 2 a.m. following Thursday's 6-5 overtime road win against the Montreal Canadiens.

Housley said he hadn't spoken to the trainers yet about his sore players.

"A lot of guys blocked a lot of shots. Our penalty kill did a terrific job last night," Housley said inside KeyBank Center.

Sabres offer new program for season ticket holders to swap tickets

WKBW

November 9, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Are you a Buffalo Sabres season ticket holder and want to swap some tickets? There is now a way to do just that.

The Season Ticket Exchange Program will allow season ticket holders to trade in tickets for games they are not going to for points to use in the Sabres store.

The amount of points a season ticket holder could receive will depend on the opponent, day of the week and seat location.

To do the exchange, ticket holders are supposed to create an account on SabresTicketExchange.com by entering and verifying the email address associated with their Sabres season ticket account.

Tickets can be traded in up to seven days prior to a game, but there will be a limit on the number of seats that can be exchanged each game.

It's important to know that each seat will have a limit of seven exchanges during the 2018-19 season and all ticket returns are final.

Points can be redeemed in the store for merchandise and experiences.

Sabres to play military appreciation game

By Evan Anstey

WIVB

November 9, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres will have their military appreciation game this Saturday.

The game, which starts at 1 p.m., will be played against the Vancouver Canucks at the KeyBank Center.

Several tributes will be featured throughout the day.

Starting at 2 p.m. that day, and lasting until November 18 at 9 p.m., special camouflage jerseys worn by the team will be auctioned off at Sabres.com/auctions. Proceeds will go toward the Buffalo Sabres Foundation.

Children of military families will be able to meet Sabres players after the game.

Veterans and active military members can get tickets for the Buffalo Creek 300 level of the arena for \$25. The tickets can be ordered at Sabres.com with the promo code "military."

Military members will also receive a 25 percent discount at the Sabres store during the day of the game.

Can Jason Pominville keep this up for the Sabres?

By Ryan Lambert

Yahoo! Sports

November 9, 2018

Jason Pominville recently played his 1,000th career game, making him one of only 300-plus players to reach that plateau.

Pretty surprising given that most NHL fans probably couldn't pick him out of a lineup, but it's also easy to forget that this guy was once really, really good.

Hell, between the two most recent lockouts — it's fun to think about the NHL that way, for sure! — Pominville scored 0.8 points per game, tied for 40th in the league, right in the same neighborhood as Patrice Bergeron (0.78), Shane Doan (0.79), and Corey Perry (0.81).

But the reason this guy is grabbing headlines lately is that after some early-season experimentation, he was the throw-in right winger on Buffalo's top line, mostly for lack of better options on that side of the ice. And he has been fantastic in that role. After a slow start on other lines, he's got 14 points from his last nine games because playing with Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner gives you the opportunity to be on the ice for plenty of goals for. Altogether, he's averaging almost a point a night for the season but seems poised to keep surging past that number because of how things have gone since Oct. 20.

This guy, who turns 36 at the end of the month, could be en route to the best season of his career, or at least his best since he was in his mid-20s. But it's worth noting how he got here: Even last season at age 35, he scored 16-18-34 with relatively power play time on a horrendous Buffalo team, and while I don't think anyone believes this guy is going to keep shooting 21 percent with Eichel and Skinner, the fact is that for as much as he's along for the ride with those two, he's going to keep producing points.

They've played almost 108 minutes together at 5-on-5 so far this season and their numbers are off the charts: 60 percent of the attempts, 63 percent of the shots on goal, 62 percent of the scoring chances, 69 percent of the high-danger looks, and more than 76 percent of the goals.

Obviously they're not going to keep outscoring opponents at a more than 3-to-1 clip; they're both shooting almost 16.5 percent and until the last two games were getting .930-plus goaltending behind them. But this is a line that can't be called a bargain-basement Bergeron line, because all those numbers are all about as good as what the Best Line In Hockey has done for much of the past two seasons. It's only 108 minutes, like I said, but there's little reason to believe these guys aren't going to keep it up for at least the foreseeable future.

Among all lines with more than 100 minutes together in all situations, Skinner-Eichel-Pominville scores more goals per hour than anyone in the league, and it's a pretty wide margin. They check in at a tick over eight goals per hour, while the next-closest trio (Gourde-Point-Johnson in Tampa) is at about 6.7. The top lines in Winnipeg, Colorado, and Boston — all legit contenders for Best In The League — all score about six goals an hour. And by the way, six an hour is insane.

And you say, okay well, it's unsustainable. And that's true to an extent. They're outperforming their expected-goals number by about 2.9 an hour. But even so, they still have the second-highest expected-goals per 60 in the league behind only Giroux-Couturier-Voracek, so there's no reason to think they won't keep scoring at a slightly-lower-but-still-quite-high clip for some time.

The thing with Buffalo adding Skinner this summer was that he was the exact kind of player Eichel needed to play with: One who could finish at a near-elite level. There's plenty of evidence to suggest Eichel brings up the quality of chances for all his linemates over the course of his career. So one who, like Skinner, could put the puck in the net consistently when playing with, like, Derek Ryan was always going to produce a fruitful partnership.

Switch to center sparked Rodrigues in Montreal

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 9, 2018

Evan Rodrigues admits it's uncharacteristic for him to shoot on a 2-on-1 rush, as he did in the first period in Montreal on Thursday night. The chance came on Rodrigues' first shift of the game, his shot swallowed by Canadiens goalie Carey Price.

When Rodrigues found himself on an identical rush a few shifts later, he decided to switch things up. This time he faked a shot as he neared the Montreal net before sliding a pass across to Vladimir Sobotka, who buried the team's first goal of the night.

"Honestly, I usually like to pass on two-on-ones almost every time," Rodrigues said. "I've been trying to shoot more and have more of a shooting mentality. So, the first one, I just let it rip. The second one, I knew from the second we got the puck I was doing what I did."

Rodrigues is applying a shot mentality in search of his first goal of the season, but his game in Montreal was an example of how he's already been able to contribute offensively. He tallied two assists, bringing his total to six in 13 games, and was a part of three odd-man rushes in the first period alone.

Sabres coach Phil Housley made the decision to return Rodrigues to center for that game, moving Sobotka to the left wing. The move paid off, as the responsibility of playing low in the defensive zone allowed him space to build speed in transition.

"It's easier to build speed as a center when you're coming from underneath," Rodrigues said. "I thought I was able to do that. ... It just seemed like after that first couple shifts of getting some good chances, I was feeling it, wanted it more and more on my stick. I wanted to make things happen and that's the mentality I got to have going into every game."

Both Rodrigues and Sam Reinhart expressed excitement about playing as linemates in the days leading up to the game. The two built chemistry last season, sharing the ice for 116:53 at even strength and posting a Corsi-for percentage of 52.41 (according to naturalstatstrick.com).

While it was Rodrigues and Sobotka gliding up the ice on 2-on-1 rushes in the first period, it was Reinhart who created those opportunities with slick plays along the wall. Both times, he found Rodrigues as he was building speed in transition.

Here's the play that led to the first rush, on which Rodrigues shot:

And here's the second, which led to the Sobotka goal:

"It's been something since we started playing with each other, it started even in the first prospects camp that we had," Rodrigues said. "We have a chemistry, we talk to each other a lot on the bench and we seem to know each other are going to be without looking."

"I think we both respect each other's games a lot. We're always trying to find the open areas, because we both know we can make a play, make a pass, find the guy that's open."

Rodrigues was Buffalo's leader in points-per-60 at 5-on-5 last season (2.05), when he scored seven goals and 18 assists in 48 games. Both were career-highs for the 24-year-old.

Although he's still waiting for the floodgates to open in the goal column, he's confident he can take that production to another level.

"It's definitely something I'm working toward and definitely something I have in me," he said. "I feel like the more chances I get the more I'm able to prove. I'm just trying to continue to show that day in and day out. I think if get the chance, I can really show my offensive instincts."

Game-changer

Somewhat lost in a game that included a combined 11 goals and five surrendered leads was the fact that the Sabres were able to kill off two 5-on-3 power plays while only allowing one shot on goal in Montreal on Thursday.

It certainly wasn't lost on the Sabres bench.

"One-thousand percent," Rodrigues said. "Our first goal comes off of a huge PK, go down and score. I think that built momentum for us throughout the whole game. ... I think that was actually a game-changer for us. There were some parts in the game where if they score a goal, they bounce back, it kind of puts us on our heels. We have a huge PK, a couple five-on-threes and after that, we got rolling."

While the rest of the team got excited about the result of the penalty kills, Zach Bogosian - who skated 4:40 shorthanded and blocked three shots - admitted that he was excited when he hopped over the boards to kill Montreal's two-man advantage.

"Do you want your team to be in that position? No. But as a competitive penalty killer, you like those situations because it's time for the PK to step up," Bogosian said. "I think we did a good job of that. It's not an easy thing to do, standing in front of those shots, blocking shots. But it's the right thing to do, and the penalty killers who have been out there have done a great job."

Friday's practice

Tage Thompson rotated on the fourth line with Zemgus Girgensons and could join the lineup on Saturday, depending on the health of other players. While there were no new absences at practice, Housley said the team does have bumps and bruises coming off Thursday's game.

"Well, we've got a lot of guys who are banged up, a lot of bumps and bruises, so that'll be a game-time decision," Housley said. "We were just trying to get him in the regular rotation because we got in a little bit late last night."

The rest of the lineup remained the same:

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

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Marco Scandella - 4 Zach Bogosian
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 26 Rasmus Dahlin
81 Remi Elie* - 8 Casey Nelson

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

*Extra forward skating on defense