



Buffalo Sabres

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Defenseman Lawrence Pilut hoping to help Sabres extend winning streak

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 22, 2018

Lawrence Pilut had just stepped off the ice at Bill Gray's Iceplex, the practice rink for the Rochester Americans, when he was pulled aside by his coach, Chris Taylor.

Pilut, a 22-year-old rookie defenseman, wasn't sure what to expect. Then, Taylor said that Pilut had been recalled by the Buffalo Sabres and he would need to be at KeyBank Center in time for Wednesday night's game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Pilut participated in warmups and headed to the press box, where he watched as a sold-out crowd cheered on a 5-2 victory, the Sabres' first seven-game win streak since 2006-07. Now, he's hoping for a chance to play in front of those fans, sooner rather than later.

"Here is where I want to be," Pilut said after an informal skate Thanksgiving morning at KeyBank Center. "Here is where I want to play. I'm just happy right now to be up here. Now I just want to get into the action."

It's unclear when he will get the opportunity. Pilut was recalled when Patrik Berglund was placed on injured reserve with an upper body injury, leaving the Sabres with 13 forwards and eight defensemen. Marco Scandella was scratched Wednesday night and remains day-to-day with a lower body injury suffered Monday in Pittsburgh, though he was one of 10 Sabres to participate in an informal skate Thanksgiving morning.

Nathan Beaulieu took Scandella's place in the lineup, skating alongside Casey Nelson on Phil Housley's third defensive pairing. Those two received the least amount of ice time among the Sabres' six active defensemen against the Flyers. If Scandella is unable to play, Housley could choose to see how Pilut fares against NHL competition either Friday afternoon at home against Montreal or Saturday in Detroit.

Pilut's skill set is an ideal fit for Housley's system, where defensemen need to join the offensive rush. Pilut was tied for the AHL lead with 22 points, including 19 assists, with a plus-16 rating in 15 games. He played in almost every situation, paired with Zach Redmond.

Pilut signed a two-year entry-level contract with the Sabres in May after spending nearly five seasons with HV71 of the Swedish Hockey League, and he was named the league's top defenseman last season. He impressed the Sabres in training camp but was sent to Rochester to adapt to the North American game.

"I felt good," Pilut said of his time in the Sabres' camp. "I had a good feeling coming into the season. It feels like I've been playing good down in Rochester. Everybody's been so good to me down there. They've really been helping me a lot. ... It's been a good feeling so far."

Housley wasn't available to the media Thanksgiving morning, so it's unclear when or if he plans to put Pilut into the lineup. Nelson and Beaulieu didn't play poorly against the Flyers. Perhaps Pilut was recalled as insurance in the event of another injury.

While adapting to the AHL, Pilut kept a close eye on the Sabres' resurgence. Buffalo, now 14-6-2 and tied for second in the Atlantic Division with 30 points, owns the NHL's longest win streak of the season despite playing six games in nine nights.

"They've been rolling pretty good up here," Pilut said. "It's a good feeling in the group, it feels like for these two days I've been here for so far. I want to try to be a part of it."

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Defenseman Shea Weber, the Canadiens' captain, participated in the team's practice Thursday afternoon at KeyBank Center. Weber has yet to play this season as he recovers from ankle surgery, and he isn't expected to return until next month.

Canadiens coach Claude Julien told reporters that backup Antti Niemi will start in goal Friday against the Sabres. Niemi allowed four goals on 42 shots in a 4-2 loss to Buffalo last month.

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Berglund was not present during the Sabres' skate. Beaulieu, Nelson, Rasmus Dahlin, Evan Rodrigues, Casey Mittelstadt, Jeff Skinner, Linus Ullmark and Remi Elie also participated.

Sabres vs. Canadiens: Five Things to Know

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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The sold-out crowd had yet to leave KeyBank Center late Wednesday night when Jack Eichel was already looking ahead to the Buffalo Sabres' next opponent.

He and his teammates planned to savor their accomplishments on Thanksgiving, most notably the franchise's first seven-game winning streak since 2006-07. They also woke up Thursday morning tied with the Toronto Maple Leafs for the second-most points in the Eastern Conference.

That 5-2 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers was the Sabres' 14th of the season. Remember, they didn't achieve win No. 14 until Jan. 25 last season. But Eichel made it clear their focus had already turned to the Montreal Canadiens, whom they'll host at 4 p.m. Friday.

The Canadiens, tied for fourth in the Atlantic Division with 26 points, were the first team to fall to the Sabres during this winning streak, a 6-5 overtime win for Buffalo at the Bell Centre.

"A big test for us," Eichel said.

Your five things to know about the game

1. Lineup update: Defenseman Marco Scandella (lower body) was among 10 Sabres to participate in an informal skate Thanksgiving morning at KeyBank Center. Scandella remains day to day, and it's unlikely he'll return to face the Canadiens.

That could lead to Lawrence Pilut making his NHL debut either Friday or Saturday. Pilut, a 22-year-old defenseman signed to an entry-level contract in May, was tied for the AHL lead in scoring with 22 points in 15 games, capped by a seven-game point streak.

He was called up Wednesday when Patrik Berglund was placed on injured reserve and also skated with the team Thanksgiving morning. With Scandella out, Nathan Beaulieu skated alongside Casey Nelson on Phil Housley's third defensive pairing.

2. Hutton likely in goal: Though backup Linus Ullmark was on the ice for the skate, it's unlikely he'll start Friday against the Canadiens. Ullmark allowed five goals on 32 shots before being pulled against Montreal on Nov. 8. Also, Carter Hutton's on a remarkable run. He's now won six straight starts while posting a .933 save percentage and 1.99 goals-against average during that span.

3. Special teams: While the Canadiens have skilled players such as Max Domi and Jonathan Drouin, their power play ranks 28th in the league at 13.8 percent, scoring only four times in their last 46 opportunities. Meanwhile, the Sabres have killed off 19 of their last 20 penalties. Montreal isn't doing much better on the penalty kill, either. It ranks 19th at 78.9 percent and has allowed a power play goal in each of its last four games.

4. Another difficult test: Montreal is 7-3-3 this season when scoring first and 5-1 in one-goal games. It's been outstanding in the first period, outscoring opponents by 30 goals in the first 20 minutes of its 22 games. However, the Canadiens have been terrible late in games. Though they've won three times when trailing after two periods, they've been outscored by 27 goals in the third.

These two teams combined for six first-period goals earlier this month, but the Sabres were the far better team in the third period of both wins over Montreal this season. Phil Housley will urge his players to start fast again. After all, the Canadiens have enough talent to take advantage of silly mistakes.

Domi has 11 goals and 15 assists; Drouin's second on the team with 19 points; and Tomas Tatar and Jeff Petry both have 17. The Sabres are still searching for consistency. They had only nine shots on goal after the first period Wednesday.

"I think it's a big lesson we have to learn," Sabres winger Evan Rodrigues said. "We'll continue to grow, continue to build as a team. Learn how to have good puck possession when we have a lead."

5. Home ice advantage: The Sabres experienced two of the more difficult road arenas when they escaped with victories at Winnipeg and Minnesota. Prior to puck drop Wednesday, players spoke of wanting a similar advantage when in front of their fans at KeyBank Center.

That's exactly what they received during the annual Thanksgiving eve game, when 19,070 watched Buffalo beat Philadelphia. The Sabres are 7-2-1 at home, their best 10-game start to the home schedule since 2009-10, after winning only 11 games at home last season.

Buffalo Sabres get huge local TV rating for win over Philadelphia Flyers

By Alan Pergament

The Buffalo News

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The Buffalo Sabres' 5-2 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers Wednesday night had a local rating on cable's NBCSN that very few prime-time broadcast network programs get in Western New York these days.

The Sabres' seventh straight victory had a 13.8 rating in Buffalo, which was more than 40 percent higher than the 9.7 rating for the Sabres' exciting, come-from-behind 5-4 overtime win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Monday that had tied the team's season-high rating up to that point.

The rating Wednesday was almost double the Sabres' season average rating of 7.0 before the Flyers' game.

Wednesday's game also was the higher-rated regular season game ever on NBCSN in Buffalo. However, Versus only became rebranded as NBCSN in 2012 and the Sabres have been pretty bad in most of the seasons since then.

In the days of streaming and DVRs, very few entertainment programs get a double-digit live household rating.

Sabres goalies Carter Hutton, Linus Ullmark forming strong tandem

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – After earning his 10th win this season, the scorching Sabres will likely turn to goalie Carter Hutton again for Friday afternoon's tilt home tilt against the Montreal Canadiens.

Right now, having registered six victories during the Sabres' seven-game winning streak, Hutton is enjoying a career-best stretch. In his first weeks as a regular NHL starter, the affable veteran has morphed into one of the league's hottest netminders.

But considering the Sabres also play Saturday in Detroit, goalie Linus Ullmark could also be an option for coach Phil Housley for the Canadiens.

Whatever happens, each goalie will almost certainly receive a start this weekend. Housley should feel comfortable in whomever he chooses.

A lot of factors have contributed to the Sabres' torrid start and their longest winning streak since opening the 2006-07 season with 10 consecutive victories.

Goaltending ranks at the top of the list.

Very quietly, Hutton, 32, and Ullmark, 25, have become one of the league's best tandems in their first season together.

"We're two fun-loving guys that don't take things way too serious," Ullmark said Thursday inside KeyBank Center. "We know when to relax, we know when to push each other, kind of the same mentality when it comes to hockey."

Hutton has compiled a 1.99 goals-against average and a .933 save percentage during his six-game run. His overall numbers – 10-6-1, 2.57 and .917 in 17 games – are strong. He's tied for second in the NHL in wins with Vegas' Marc-Andre Fleury.

Ullmark, meanwhile, has transitioned into the No. 2 role nicely following three seasons as the Rochester Americans' starter.

While the Swede got yanked from the Sabres' 6-5 overtime win Nov. 8 in Montreal, the triumph that ignited their streak, he has subbed splendidly for Hutton.

In six appearances, Ullmark is 4-0-1 with a 2.65 goals-against average, a .922 save percentage and one shutout.

In just two months together, Hutton and Ullmark have developed a strong relationship that has helped them thrive in their new roles.

"You're around each other a lot, so you get to know each other pretty quickly," Hutton said. "You obviously have to share that common ground because you're kind of in your own little world practicing and doing your own drills."

The goalies have a mutual respect for one another.

"He's a really good dude," Ullmark said of Hutton. "That kind of speaks for itself. First of all, he's a wonderful teammate (to) each and every one of us. That kind of says it all."

Hutton said the loquacious Ullmark is a "good kid" who's "unique."

"He's not like your typical hockey player, a little more outgoing," said Hutton, who made 23 saves in Wednesday's 5-2 win over Philadelphia. "He's funny. ... I get along with him really well. He's got his little quirks and stuff like that, but what I like about him is you know each day what you're getting with him.

"He's got an upbeat attitude, he's really positive and he's a fun guy to be around."

What are Ullmark's quirks?

"Goofy stuff he says," Hutton said. "He's kind of a goofball, I think you can tell that from his interviews. He's quirky in that sense, but he's such a great guy, so we're always joking around. ...

"We dissect the game well together, too. We analyze each other's play and help each other out, so it's always good to have eyes in each other's corner."

Hutton, a backup his first five seasons, understands how difficult Ullmark's job can be. Most NHL goalies play regularly growing up and in the minors.

When they finally reach the big leagues, action can be sporadic.

"What he does a good job (at) is just his preparation in practice, he works really hard," Hutton said of Ullmark. "I think having me as a partner sometimes you set that example, too, because that was kind of how I learned, too.

"My partner that I played with when I was younger (Nashville's Pekka Rinne) was a really hard worker. You learn what it takes to play and be consistent at this level."

Ullmark, of course, respects the dues Hutton paid to reach the NHL. The undrafted Hutton spent four years in the minors and even played 14 games in the ECHL.

"I know where he comes from, I know what he's been through ... and kudos to him, not a lot of people in this world would've kept with it and stuck with it for such a long time," Ullmark said.

He added: "He's earned every single piece of it."

Pilut eager for opportunity with Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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While the Buffalo Sabres earned their way to a seventh straight win in front of a sellout crowd at KeyBank Center on Wednesday night, Lawrence Pilut was taking it all in from the press box.

That atmosphere? He could get used to it.

"Hopefully one night," the defenseman said following an optional skate at KeyBank Center on Thursday. "I'm ready for it. Be calm and just keep going."

Pilut was recalled as insurance after it was determined that Marco Scandella would be unable to play Wednesday due to a lower-body injury. He joined the team on the ice for warmups, donning the No. 24 he wore throughout training camp.

The 22-year-old defenseman was tied for the AHL lead with 22 points in 15 games for Rochester at the time of his recall. His plus-16 rating was tied for second. He thrived playing on a defense pair with veteran Zach Redmond, who leads the team with 12 goals.

The Amerks, meanwhile, sit atop the North Division with 24 points at 11-4-2.

"We had a lot of fun down there, the whole group," Pilut said. "I think that's a big thing to have. If you have that you can have success."

Pilut's league-leading totals might have been hard to predict coming into the season, but it wasn't hard to envision the defenseman finding success as a rookie. He came to Buffalo with five pro seasons already under his belt.

He won a Swedish Hockey League championship in 2016-17 and was the league's Defenseman of the Year last season, when he scored 38 points (8+30) in 52 games.

The one adjustment for Pilut was the smaller North American ice surface, but he quickly figured it out as the preseason progressed. He stood out at camp not only for his skating and skill with the puck, but for his poise in his own zone. It kept him around through the final game of the preseason.

"I feel good now," he said. "Of course, I have some details I still have to work on and I feel like I can work on. I keep working on those things and then I just keep playing my game."

Whether he cracks the lineup during this recall remains to be seen. Scandella took part in the skate on Thursday and is considered day-to-day.

If he does get his chance, he'll be ready.

"They've been rolling pretty good up here," he said. "It's a good feeling in the group, it feels like for these two days I've been here for so far. I want to try to be a part of it."

Up next

The Sabres will look for their eight win in a row when they host the Montreal Canadiens on Friday evening. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 3:30 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 4.

Until then, Happy Thanksgiving.