



Buffalo Sabres

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Worst in NHL last season, Sabres are surging after 9-0 run

By John Wawrow
The Associated Press
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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres are on such a roll, captain Jack Eichel was having difficulty recalling the last time they lost.

“Um, was it Calgary?” Eichel said Monday, before being reminded the 2-1 overtime defeat to the Flames was three losses ago.

“Yeah, Rangers, in New York,” he said, finally recalling a 3-1 loss on Nov. 4 that dropped Buffalo’s record to 7-6-2.

Nine games — and nine wins — later, the Sabres are the NHL’s biggest surprise two months into the season.

A year after going 25-45-12 and becoming the league’s first team to finish 31st following the addition of the expansion Vegas Golden Knights, the surging Sabres (16-6-2) have 34 points and sit one back of league-leading Tampa Bay and Nashville.

“Just to think of where we came from a year ago, and to be winning games and doing this, obviously it’s great,” Eichel said.

Even Phil Housley could crack a smile when asked to reflect on the troubles he and his underachieving team endured last season, his first as coach.

“I try to tend to forget last year,” Housley said.

The Sabres were so bad a year ago, they didn’t register their 16th victory until Feb. 10, and won consecutive games four times, including a season-best 3-0 run in late January.

Buffalo’s nine-game streak is the NHL’s longest since Columbus won 10 straight in March, and it’s one short of matching the Sabres’ franchise record set twice and most recently when they opened the 2006-07 on a 10-0 run. The Sabres would match that if they beat San Jose on Tuesday night.

“Extremely proud of this team,” Sabres co-owner Kim Pegula wrote in a text to The Associated Press.

“Everyone is contributing in multiple ways, and when that happens anything is possible,” she added. “There’s still plenty of hockey left to play, but we are encouraged by the foundation that is being built and look forward to seeing the development continue.”

Buffalo’s turnaround is the result of a series of moves and soul-searching sessions that took place over the summer in a bid to spur a team that was the worst in the league in three of the past five seasons.

It began with Housley, who took action at the end of last season after center Ryan O’Reilly went public in saying a losing mentality had crept into the locker room. Housley challenged his leadership group with a summer-long series of frank discussions that allowed players to air their differences and raise concerns.

“I’ve said it once and I’ll say it again, I think the guys made a huge commitment in the summer. We talked about change,” Housley said. “It started with our leadership group leading in the right way.”

Forward Kyle Okposo credited everyone for buying in.

“It’s pretty powerful what you can do if you get everybody on the same page, and people are willing to admit what they have to do to be better and then actually do it,” Okposo said. “It feels like a team. It’s pretty amazing.”

General manager Jason Botterill followed by overhauling the lineup through a series of trades that included sending O'Reilly to St. Louis. He also acquired Conor Sheary from Pittsburgh and Jeff Skinner from Carolina, and upgraded his goaltending by signing Carter Hutton in free agency.

Skinner's 18 goals rank second in the league, while Hutton is third with 11 wins.

And then came the addition of rookie No. 1 draft pick Rasmus Dahlin , whose effortless skating and deft playmaking ability have energized what had been a plodding group of defensemen.

Dahlin's two goals and 13 points are tied for second among NHL rookies. And he's part of a defensive group that has already contributed 12 goals after managing just 19 last season.

The 18-year-old shrugs off the Sabres' hot start.

"Of course it's awesome to lead the league, but for me, I like to win, and I'm pretty used to it," Dahlin said. "I'm so happy that everyone is so glad in the locker room."

One major change has been the Sabres' performance in close games. Buffalo has a league-best 9-0-2 record in games decided by one goal, a year after going 11-11-12. The Sabres are also 9-6-1 when tied or trailing after two periods, a year after going 9-44-7.

During their nine-game run, the Sabres won after trailing six times, including overcoming a 4-1 deficit in a 5-4 overtime win at Pittsburgh on Nov. 19. And the game-winning goals have been scored by nine different players.

Forward Jason Pominville, in his second stint with Buffalo, is the lone holdover from the 2006-07 team that won 10 in a row. He's suddenly feeling rejuvenated.

"How can you not? It's been a lot of fun," said Pominville, who can recall the Sabres playing to loud, sold-out home crowds, as opposed to a sometimes half-empty building last year.

The next step for Buffalo: ending its franchise-worst seven-year playoff drought.

"It's nice for the guys that have been here for a while to finally see what this city is all about when you win," Pominville said. "Hopefully, they can get a chance to see the next level of this."

Sabres using subtle changes, goaltending to shut down power plays

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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The preparation begins with the Buffalo Sabres watching video of the opponent's power play and assistant coach Steve Smith delivering a game plan.

There's little ice time to practice adjustments, especially during a mid-season slog like the six-games-in-nine-nights stretch the Sabres finished Saturday in Detroit. With that in mind, Buffalo's penalty-killing units are sure to pay attention during pregame scouting meetings.

That's where Smith, who was hired by Phil Housley in July to work with the defensemen and the penalty kill, instructs the Sabres on subtle changes to stop opponents when shorthanded. The onus is on the Sabres to block shots, break up passes, make saves and keep the front of the net clear of forwards.

The game plan has played out almost flawlessly for the Sabres, who can achieve their third 10-game winning streak in franchise history Tuesday night when they host the San Jose Sharks at 7.

"Special teams are such a big part of the game these days," winger Zemgus Girgensons said. "If you have good penalty killing, you can win a lot of games. You really need to pay attention when we have those meetings about the other team. We have guys who are on the same page all the time."

Entering Monday's games, Buffalo's penalty kill ranked fifth in the NHL at 82.6 percent and has killed 24 of its last 26 penalties, including all four in a 3-2 shootout win over the Red Wings on Saturday night at Little Caesars Arena. The Sabres finished 22nd in the league last season.

Some of the personnel is the same, including Girgensons, Johan Larsson, Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella. Ryan O'Reilly is gone after receiving the fourth-most ice time shorthanded last season. Benoit Pouliot and Justin Falk also are gone.

Zach Bogosian is healthy after playing only 18 games last season, plus general manager Jason Botterill acquired Patrik Berglund and Vladimir Sobotoka, two capable penalty killers from St. Louis in exchange for O'Reilly. Most important, the Sabres have received outstanding goaltending from Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark.

When Smith was hired, he chose to change the Sabres' penalty-killing system to improve the team's ability to cut down shooting lanes. Opponents were getting too many open looks last season. There's also an emphasis on making subtle adjustments. For example, the Sabres made a concerted effort to prevent the Pittsburgh Penguins' Evgeni Malkin from setting up for a one-timer in either circle during the power play when the teams played last week.

That helped the Sabres hold the Penguins scoreless in two opportunities during a 5-4 come-from-behind overtime win. The Sabres now move together in a 2-2 box formation when down a player in their own zone, with forwards pressuring opponents from the blue line to the face-off circles.

One defenseman chases loose pucks in the corners and behind the net while cutting down passing lanes. The other clears the front of the net. The system isn't revolutionary, but it has helped limit scoring chances.

"They've done a terrific job through this stretch," Housley said of the penalty kill units. "Obviously your goaltender is your best penalty killer. ... Guys have put themselves in front of pucks. That's the price they have to pay. There's not a lot of recognition for it, but the guys realize it. They're standing up and cheering our guys on because they know that's a tough job."

Hutton, signed to a three-year contract in July, is second in the NHL with 11 wins while posting a .919 save percentage and 2.53 goals against average in 18 games. He's 7-0 with a .934 save percentage and 1.98 goals-against average during the win streak. However, Hutton has a .882 save percentage when shorthanded, allowing 10 goals on 85 shots.

Ullmark's save percentage is .920 when shorthanded with two goals allowed on 25 shots. Both have made saves at key moments to bail out teammates, but the Sabres have allowed the fifth fewest scoring chances when shorthanded and sixth fewest "high-danger chances," according to Natural Stat Trick.

They have allowed only two power-play goals during the win streak and neither occurred because of an egregious mistake by a forward or defenseman. The Sabres have succeeded with communication and choosing to keep a conservative approach. That has come at a cost with the Sabres having the fewest short-handed scoring chances in the league, but they're willing to take that trade.

"Preparation," Larsson said. "Good saves have helped. Everyone is on the same page out there. No one is trying to overdo it. That gives us a lot of confidence. We also had another win where we got a couple. We just have to keep it going."

Though the Sharks' power play ranks 15th in the NHL, three of their 16 goals with a man advantage came against the Sabres last month. Since 2013, only three defensemen have more power-play points than the Sharks' Erik Karlsson. His teammate, Brent Burns, has one fewer point during that span.

Over the past week, Buffalo's players have cautioned how quickly success can turn to failure. The two penalty-killing units echoed that sentiment. Their singular focus is to bail out any teammate in the penalty box, even if that means sacrificing themselves to block a shot.

"Any time you take a penalty, it's a tough feeling," Girgensons said. "You always feel for a teammate when that happens. You don't want the other team to score while you sit there for two minutes. You're praying they don't score."

Sabres Notebook: Evander Kane expects 'few more people in the stands' during return

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
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Evander Kane collected a pass near the Buffalo Sabres' logo at center ice, turned around and joined his San Jose Sharks teammates for a practice drill Monday afternoon. He was skating alongside defensemen Erik Karlsson and Brent Burns, as well as center Joe Thornton, during practice.

One year ago to the day, he and the Sabres had lost eight of their last nine games. Kane, a left winger, would be traded to the Sharks in February and the team he left behind finished in last place. He and the Sharks beat his former teammates, 5-1, in San Jose last month, but their 7 p.m. game Tuesday will be his first in Buffalo since the trade.

His return coincides with the Sabres' first nine-game winning streak since 2006-07, and they are one win away from their third 10-game winning streak in franchise history.

Kane was accustomed to losing in front of sparse crowds. Now, he expects to return to a packed arena.

"I can imagine it will be positive," Kane said when asked if he expects a positive response from Sabres fans. "I'm sure they're excited. I'm sure there will be a few more people in the stands than there have been in the past with how well they're playing and the win streak. Looking forward to the competition tomorrow."

Kane insisted he's not sour over the Sabres' decision to trade him. Now 27, he was sent to a playoff contender in exchange for two conditional draft picks and prospect Danny O'Regan.

After recording five points in nine playoff games, Kane chose to re-sign with the Sharks for seven years, \$49 million. Meanwhile, Sabres general manager Jason Botterill continued to overhaul his roster and drafted defenseman Rasmus Dahlin first overall.

Jeff Skinner, Carter Hutton, Conor Sheary, Vladimir Sobotka, Patrik Berglund and Tage Thompson were among those added. Ryan O'Reilly was traded. Following the Sharks' practice, Kane was quick to point out the number of moves Botterill made and wanted to clarify that it was his choice to stay in San Jose.

"I had all the power in terms of picking where I wanted to play, if I chose to do so," Kane said. "For me, it was a situation that's obviously worked out for myself and they've -- I don't know, you tell me -- made eight or 10 different moves and got eight or 10 different players, so there's been a lot of changes other than myself."

Kane, acquired from Winnipeg in 2015 when the Sabres finished last and earned the right to draft Jack Eichel second overall, had 68 goals in 196 games with Buffalo. Kane had at least 20 goals in each of those three seasons, and had 20 goals and 20 assists at the time of the trade.

San Jose was a popular preseason pick to win the Stanley Cup this season after it acquired Karlsson to join a roster that includes Kane, Thornton, Burns, Joe Pavelski, Logan Couture and Tomas Hertl.

Entering Monday's games, the Sharks were second in the Pacific Division at 12-8-4 and lost to the Las Vegas Golden Knights, 6-0, Saturday night. Meanwhile, the Sabres (16-6-2) surpassed the Tampa Bay Lightning and Nashville Predators for the NHL lead in points, though Buffalo has since fallen into third.

"I wish during my time here it would have been the way it is now, obviously," Kane said. "Nobody wants to lose consistently and have the building half-empty. That's never fun. It's never what you want as a player. But at the same time, I'm happy where I am, and I'm enjoying my time in San Jose."

Kane has seven goals among 15 points with a minus-4 rating in 24 games this season. He spoke fondly of his time in Buffalo and said the camaraderie inside the locker room last season was "pretty good," calling on-ice results the problem.

"It's 25 games in," he said. "A quarter of the way through the season. A lot of hockey left to be played, but it seems like they've turned it around. I'm looking forward to tomorrow."

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Sheary is expected to play Tuesday night but will be a game-time decision after leaving practice early Monday at KeyBank Center. Sabres coach Phil Housley said Sheary "tweaked something."

Sheary, 26, has six goals and six assists with a minus-2 rating in 23 games. If he's unable to play, Remi Elie likely would be in the lineup for a second consecutive game.

Defenseman Zach Bogosian didn't practice as a "maintenance day," according to Housley, and is expected to play against the Sharks. Berglund, who was placed on injured reserve Wednesday, skated on his own prior to practice.

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In partnership with Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, the Sabres tonight will hold a Hockey Fights Cancer night.

As part of an NHL-wide initiative to raise money and awareness for cancer research, the Sabres will host events throughout the game in support of local cancer patients and charitable organizations. With a \$20 donation, fans can receive an autographed hat.

Volunteers from Roswell Park will sell raffle tickets at the 100 level near the HarborCenter bridge until second intermission for chances to win Sabres experiences and autographed items. An online auction will be held at Sabres.com/auctions beginning at 8 p.m. and ending at 9 p.m. on Dec. 9.

The Sabres also will set up a fundraising page on Facebook to encourage fans to donate to Roswell Park. In conjunction with the event, the Sabres will wear purple jerseys during warmups, which will be available during the online auction.

Sheary a game-time decision after leaving Sabres practice early

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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Buffalo Sabres winger Conor Sheary will be a game-time decision Tuesday against the San Jose Sharks after leaving practice early Monday at KeyBank Center, coach Phil Housley told reporters.

Defenseman Zach Bogosian also missed practice for a "maintenance day," but is expected to play against the Sharks. Patrik Berglund, placed on injured reserve last Wednesday, skated on his own before practice as he recovers from an upper body injury.

Sheary left the ice shortly after line rushes and didn't return. The 26-year-old winger has six goals and six assists with a minus-2 rating in 24 games this season. Unless the Sabres make a roster move, Remi Elie would replace Sheary when puck drops against the Sharks at 7 p.m.

Elie, a 23-year-old winger claimed off waivers from the Dallas Stars, played 10:38 against the Detroit Wings on Saturday after being a healthy scratch for 10 consecutive games. He also had two shots on goal, one of which nearly crossed the goal line after he forced a turnover near the Red Wings' net.

Sheary's absence would break up the Sabres' second line, which also includes center Casey Mittelstadt and winger Kyle Okposo.

"Yes, he did," Housley said, acknowledging Sheary left the ice early. "Just a little tweak."

With Bogosian not practicing, Nathan Beaulieu skated alongside Rasmus Dahlin, while Casey Nelson was paired with Marco Scandella. The Sabres, 16-6-2, will try to extend their winning streak to 10 when they host the Sharks, 12-8-4.

Sharks' Kane wishes things were different while in Buffalo

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

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Evander Kane spent parts of three seasons with the Buffalo Sabres after the team acquired him from the Winnipeg Jets on February 11, 2015. After sitting out the last half of the 2014-15 season, Kane ended up scoring 68 goals and put up 118 points in 196 games in Buffalo.

With his contract set to expire at the end of the season and the team near the bottom of the basement, the Sabres decided to trade Kane to the San Jose Sharks in exchange for a conditional 2019 first round pick, a conditional 2019 fourth round pick, and forward Danny O'Regan. During the offseason, the 27-year-old winger re-signed with the Sharks to a seven-year, \$49 million deal, which gave the Sabres the first round pick, which can become a 2020 first round pick if the Sharks miss the playoffs.

This season through 24 games played, Kane has seven goals and eight assists for a Sharks team that currently sits in second place in the Pacific Divisions with a 12-8-4 record and 28 points.

As for the Sabres, they currently sit third in the NHL with a 16-6-2 record and 34 points, and are currently in the midst of a nine-game winning streak. The best season the Sabres had when Kane was part of the organization was during the 2015-16 season, his first full season with the team, where the team finished with a 35-36-11 record and missed the playoffs by 12 points.

Kane wishes that things were different during his tenure in Buffalo, but knows that Tuesday night is just another game.

"I wish, during my time here, it would have been the way it is now," said Kane after practice on Monday at KeyBank Center. "No one wants to lose consistently and have the building half empty. That's never fun. That's never what you want as a player, but at the same time, I'm happy with where I am and I'm enjoying my time in San Jose. So far it's been fantastic."

While with the Sabres, Kane was part of a locker room that was stacked with exceptional talent, but often times had no team chemistry and could not string together any consistency. Kane knew that things did not click well for guys on the team before he was traded to the Sharks.

"The comradery was pretty good. In terms of the on ice culture or play that we had was inconsistent," Kane said. "They've made a lot of moves in the last number of years in each offseason..."

"I've definitely noticed a difference in terms of team atmosphere and team environment, especially when I got traded at the deadline. I think just the winning culture more so than the guys' age on the team. I think definitely having guys like [Joe Thornton]... we're just coming off a big loss in Vegas and the team is as upbeat as ever. I think those kind of little differences can have a real positive effect throughout the course of the season. It's real nice to be a part of that."

If there was one thing that Kane always did while with the Sabres was, whether it was a practice or a game, he would give 110-percent effort on every shift. That was one thing that his current head coach, Pete DeBoer, was looking to add to his roster.

"In a league where everybody is looking for speed, a back you off type speed, he brings that. That's probably the best asset. The second best asset, to me, that I think he's given us is a physical presence in the lineup every night where guys really think twice about taking liberties," said DeBoer after practice on Monday. "The change I saw, in that, from when he showed up and started playing for us to the week prior, even where he wasn't in our lineup was quite significant. He gives us a presence in our lineup that teams have to think twice about doing that, and I think the whole group appreciates that. He's a goal scorer, and he plays the right way. He plays a 200-foot game, he doesn't cheat for his offense, we use him on the [power play], the [penalty kill]. He's been a real good player for us."

The Sabres are set to play their second and final game of the regular season against the Sharks on Tuesday. In the first matchup of the season, the Sharks got a hat-trick from Logan Couture en route to a 5-1 win at the SAP Center in San Jose. Since then a lot has changed for the Sabres. At that time, the Sabres were 3-4-0 after the loss. Since then, Buffalo has gone 13-2-2 and are on pace to finish the season with 114 points. DeBoer noticed the change in the team's chemistry right after the first game in San Jose, but has taken note of the team's success since then.

"I think last year was a tough year for them, but they went out in the summer and made some really bold and aggressive moves, and added some pieces that have made a difference. Obviously one of is the young kid in the draft (Rasmus Dahlin), but Skinner and his contribution, scoring every night," DeBoer said of the Sabres. "This is a one-goal league most nights, and if you get a guy that you're adding to your lineup that's scoring almost at a goal a game [pace], that usually gives you a margin of winning or losing. They've done a good job of that."

"They seem to be playing with a lot of confidence, and they're firing on all cylinders right now," Kane said. "That's how you win nine games in a row. We're looking forward to the challenge, and looking forward to hopefully ending that tomorrow night."

Despite the losing that took place when Kane was here, he took notice of the fans in Buffalo and their support of this team. He knows that KeyBank Center will be energized on Tuesday night, and will be filled and hyped more than usual with the success the Sabres are having.

"I can imagine that it will be positive, and I'm sure they're excited," Kane said. "I'm sure there will be a few more people in the stands than there have been in the past with how well they're playing and the win streak. Looking forward to the competition tomorrow."

As for the Sabres, they went back to work on Monday after a day off on Sunday. Buffalo was without Zach Bogosian for Monday's session as head coach Phil Housley gave him a maintenance day. Housley does expect Bogosian to be in the lineup on Tuesday against the Sharks.

Here's how lines looked to start practice:

Skinner-Eichel-Reinhart

Sheary-Mittelstadt-Okposo

Thompson-Sobotka-Pominville

Rodrigues-Larsson-Girgensons

Elie

McCabe-Ristolainen

Beaulieu-Dahlin

Scandella-Nelson

Shortly after the team's first line rushes, Conor Sheary left practice and did not return, which left Remi Elie skating the rest of practice on the line with Casey Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo. However, Housley did not seem too concerned with the winger's status for Tuesday.

"It's just a little tweak, but it will be a game-time decision tomorrow," Housley said. "I expect him to be in the lineup."

Housley also said that forward Patrik Berglund was skating this morning separately from his teammates, and he is making progress in his recovery from his upper-body injury. Berglund was placed on injured reserve last Wednesday.

The Sabres will return to the ice on Tuesday for the morning skate at around 10:30 a.m.

Recipe for success for Sabres defensemen? Mixing familiarity with their new phenom

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

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The early success of the Sabres has allowed us to examine a lot of factors as to how it's happened. We've looked into how chemistry factors in making choices with lines, how development on the fly helps others, as well as just how special this start is, but when looking at the defense corps, there's something else at play.

Yes, there's the addition of rookie Rasmus Dahlin, the 18-year-old phenom and No. 1 pick in the 2018 Draft. He's been as advertised and is gaining more confidence as the season rolls along. One player can make a world of difference, but despite all the changes to the Sabres roster, the defensive personnel is otherwise essentially unchanged from a season ago. That lack of turnover is what's helping them out now because they're as tight-knit a group as you'll find in the locker room.

It's been mentioned often how the Sabres room and the culture within it is a lot better than it's been in the past. When there are big, dominant personalities in any room they can take things over whether intended or not, but with the defensemen they've got the common bond of being the guys responsible for both how the forwards can attack and how the goalies fare between the pipes. If they're not functioning as a unit, the team falters.

"I think that's kind of our team motto, the fact that we stick together and how we play our team system is that everyone's got to do their job to make it work and I think that's been our success this year, everyone is doing their job," defenseman Nathan Beaulieu said. "When guys are not pulling their weight, there's someone there to help you out and pick you up. I think it's just the fact the whole team is tight and that's a big thing we preached, how we have to be there for each other and I think we've done a good job of that so far."

Having a team that sticks together the way the Sabres have so far this season could be fodder for a deep-dive into sports psychology. Or maybe it's just something really simple.

"Winning, really. Winning makes everyone's life a lot easier, your confidence is a lot higher, you're playing better while you win," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "Everyone's been on the same page throughout this little streak here, but even before this little streak we've had going, everyone was on the same page here and everyone bought into their role and what we want to do here. That was the biggest thing to start the year, everyone bought in right away."

That's really all it takes to make it work?

"It is, winning is everything," Beaulieu said. "It's so hard to do and it's so satisfying when you do it and, I hate to bring up last year, but it's tough. It's not easy coming to work when things aren't going your way. That goes for any job. Now that things are starting to turn, the tides are turning; it's easier to come to the rink. It's fun, it's more fun to work hard, and you see results. Winning brings out the best of everyone and we're on a great stretch here and that's a huge part of it."

Although Dahlin is new to the team and organization, the way he's been introduced to the situation in Buffalo has him beaming.

"We are a very tight group," Dahlin said. "Everyone takes their role and it's a lot of fun guys on the D squad. It's real fun to come to the rink every day and see all the guys."

Dahlin's impact plays a big role in how the defense has played as well. That's a very "Captain Obvious" way to put it, but among this group of defensemen he's also the kid brother. Zach Bogosian and Marco Scandella are the "old guys" at 28 and have been instrumental in bringing the group together and getting Dahlin to feel at home.

"They've been very helpful," Dahlin said in talking about his six defensemen teammates looking out for him. "They're old so they shouldn't like to do it, but they've done it and I'm thankful and I appreciate it a lot."

Age and being old, in this case, is a very relative thing.

"I feel like one of the older guys and I'm 25," Beaulieu said. "It's weird, I've always played with, I mean in Montreal, with (Andrei) Markov, (Sergei) Gonchar, (Shea) Weber was there and these were big, old, wily vets. Here it's a lot of young kids that are full of piss and vinegar; they just want to go and have fun and just play the game with no worries. That's what makes us good, we're not thinking too much and we're just rolling with the punches."

When looking at the performance difference between last season and what they've done through the first 24 games this season, a few things stick out. As shown by NaturalStatTrick.com (2017-2018; 2018-2019), the even-strength CorsiFor percentages are slightly lower this season than last for minute-eaters like Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella, but McCabe and Nelson's numbers are up and Beaulieu's are about the same. Dahlin is already above 52 percent and he's just getting started.

What is notably different is the number of high-danger scoring chances and goals for and against. While the rate of chances is in the same ballpark as last year, the pucks aren't winding up in the back of the net.

"The puck movement is where it starts, especially coming out of our own end," coach Phil Housley said. "Our transition, the passes have been on the tape; we look like a really fast team when we can execute at a high level. But I give a credit to our forwards coming back, working to get back, and also trying to get to the net. Obviously it's a focus for us getting in the zone and we continue to work on that, but it's been a mix of everything."

Scoring goals helps the defense out as well. Last season the Sabres didn't get a goal from a defenseman until Dec. 5 and got 19 goals in all from defensemen. This season, all seven defensemen who have played have at least one goal and have 12 total goals from blue liners.

"We were obviously extremely disappointed after, I don't know how many games it took us to score last year, and we took that personally, too," Beaulieu said. "We're just a more motivated group on the back end."

If the Sabres are going to continue riding high and make an honest to goodness push for the playoffs, using their current level as a base line to improve from will go a long way to doing that.

"I think we're all working so damn hard, there's not really words for it," Casey Nelson said. "We're all doing the right things on and off the ice."

Sabres' 10-game winning streak in 2006 still holds special memories

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Martin Biron said he remembers it like it happened yesterday. After the Sabres' stunning run of 10 consecutive wins to open the 2006-07 season ended, coach Lindy Ruff walked in the dressing room, looked around and grabbed a marker.

"Everybody's heads were down, everybody was mad, everybody was angry that we had lost a game, right?" the former goalie said of the 5-4 shootout loss to the Atlanta Thrashers on Oct. 28, 2006 inside what was then called HSBC Arena.

Ruff often left his players alone following games, but on this occasion he wanted to laud one of the greatest accomplishments in franchise history. So he wrote "10-0-1" on the white board.

"Then he turned around and he goes, 'That's pretty darn good,' almost to say, 'Hey, there's nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be mad about, this is an unbelievable feat and we're just going to keep it going,'" Biron said Monday.

How unbelievable was it? In the Sabres' 48-year history, they've only won 10 consecutive games one other time, about halfway through the 1983-84 season.

The upstart Sabres, who finished dead last a season ago, can rattle off their 10th straight win tonight against the San Jose Sharks inside KeyBank Center.

"We're going into games not scared to lose," said Sabres winger Jason Pominville, the only player left from the 2006-07 team. "We expect to win. That's a big thing for me. Last year, when things probably weren't going our way, we would get into our shell.

"Now we're fighting back, we're trusting our instincts, trusting the system, sticking to what has led to us having success so far. It's paid off."

The Sabres' nine-game streak has brought back special memories of 2006, when that torrid run kicked off a rollicking 53-win, 113-point season in which they earned the Presidents' Trophy and returned to the Eastern Conference final.

"It's no different this time," Pominville, who returned to the Sabres in 2017 after more than four years with the Minnesota Wild, said of the current streak. "I think, as a team, we've found a lot of different ways to win. We've come back, we've had leads, we've had great goaltending. Special teams have won us games. It's been a complete team effort.

"It's nice for the guys that have been here for a while to finally see what this city is all about when you win."

These days, the Sabres are emerging from a seven-year funk and a 31st-place finish in 2017-18. They haven't made the playoffs since 2011. The streak has vaulted them to the top of the NHL again and given them relevance in the hockey world.

Twelve years ago, Buffalo went gaga over the Sabres, a potent team led by co-captains Daniel Briere and Chris Drury. Nothing eclipsed the Sabres' popularity. Their new blue "slug" jerseys were the hottest item in town. The rink was raucous most nights as the wildly entertaining team piled up wins and goals.

"To get a ticket for a game for a family or an evening was the most exciting thing you could possibly do at that time," former Sabres defenseman Brian Campbell said.

He added: "The people, they couldn't get enough of it."

Campbell remembers players couldn't go around town unnoticed.

"Sometimes you're just walking around trying to wear a hood just so you could go grab some groceries," Campbell said.

Just four months before the Sabres roared out of the gate, they had completed a thrilling run to the Eastern Conference final. Their slick style seemed to be the blueprint for success in the post-lockout NHL.

While the Sabres fell to the Carolina Hurricanes in seven games, the season felt like the beginning of something special. If the Sabres hadn't lost most of their regular defensemen to injury – only Campbell and Toni Lydman played Game 7 – they might've competed for the Stanley Cup.

"There was a sense of we can do great things here, we can really take it a step further and win it all," Biron said. "So we didn't go into the summer kind of, 'Hey we achieved so much and it was so great, let's party all summer.'"

"I think the feeling going into the summer was, 'Man we were so close, and if it hadn't been for all of our defense getting hurt, we would've had a Cup. Let's really hunker down in the summer so we don't skip a beat next year.'"

So by October 2006, the Sabres' confidence was soaring.

"It was business as usual almost," Biron said of winning. "We were feeling like, 'Hey, we should've been 10-0 to start the season, we're that good.' It wasn't out of the ordinary."

He added: "We were pretty much like, 'We could go 72-10.' We had that belief that we could do it."

Campbell said: "We kind of expected it, or felt like we had a good team kind of heading in so we kind of kept rolling, felt like we had unfinished business."

Pominville said the start "was pretty surreal."

"We got that buzz right away where, from the year before, it carried over," Pominville said.

The Sabres won their first two games in shootouts and each of their opening four contests by one goal.

The NHL's highest-scoring team, of course, throttled some opponents. The Sabres beat the New York Rangers 7-4 on Oct. 14, barely a day after a surprise snowstorm wreaked havoc in and around Buffalo

"You feel like nobody's going to show up," Campbell said. "The whole building was completely packed."

Three days later, the Sabres annihilated the Philadelphia Flyers 9-1. The Flyers fired their coach, Ken Hitchcock, the next day.

Biron said the Sabres' eighth win, a 6-2 road triumph against the Boston Bruins, was "probably the most nerve-racking game I've played in."

"You're the backup goalie, you don't play every game," Biron said. "You don't want to be the one who loses the game and the streak, right?"

The current streak has caught Campbell's attention. He seems sold on the Sabres and hopes he can watch them up close later this season.

"I don't want to jinx it, but one comment I had was I told my wife the other day, I said, 'When they make the playoffs, I want to ... go back to Buffalo and see a game to see the electricity in the building,'" Campbell said.

Brian Campbell wants to watch Sabres up close in playoffs

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 26, 2018

Brian Campbell understands what a special place Buffalo can be when the Sabres are winning.

The popular former defenseman experienced consecutive runs to the Eastern Conference final in the rollicking post-lockout days of 2006 and 2007.

Back then, nothing in Buffalo eclipsed the Sabres' popularity. KeyBank Center, then known as HSBC Arena, was raucous most nights as the wildly entertaining team piled up wins and goals.

"To get a ticket for a game for a family or an evening was the most exciting thing you could possibly do at that time," Campbell told the Times Herald by phone this afternoon.

Campbell, who retired in 2017, has been watching the Sabres from his home in suburban Chicago during their nine-game winning streak.

"I don't think it's surprising they're in a playoff spot," he said.

Of course, like most others, he did not expect the Sabres to be first in the 31-team NHL, a spot they briefly held after Saturday's 3-2 shootout win in Detroit.

Still, Campbell, who was a part of the 2006-07 club that won its first 10 games, seems sold on the Sabres. He hopes he can see them up close later this season.

"I don't want to jinx it, but one comment I had was a told my wife the other day, I said, 'When they make the playoffs, I want to ... go back to Buffalo and see a game to see the electricity in the building,'" Campbell said.

Check back later for a full story on the Sabres' memorable start 12 years ago.

Phil Housley on Sabres' winning streak: 'We don't talk about it'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 26, 2018

BUFFALO – In their 48-year history, the Sabres have won 10 straight games just twice, so if you did not already know, their current nine-game run is a big deal.

The streak that vaulted the Sabres to the NHL's top spot on Saturday has made them relevant in the hockey world for the first time in years. The Sabres, the league's laughingstock a season ago, have quickly morphed into a legitimate contender.

Their success has also reinvigorated a fan base beaten down by years of losing.

Everyone in town might be talking about the streak except the Sabres.

"We don't talk about it," said Housley, whose team hosts San Jose on Tuesday. "We just focus on the next game and focus on the San Jose Sharks, because they just went through a tough game (lost 6-0 to Vegas) and we know the hair is going to be up on the back of their neck and we're going to have to be ready."

That narrow focus has probably been critical to the Sabres' progress. If Housley has a short memory – "I try to tend to forget last year," he joked about the last-place finish – his players might follow suit.

Check back later for more on the Sabres' streak and a look back at their incredible 10-0 start to the 2006-07 season.

Back then, long before a seven-year run of losing, the Sabres were the biggest thing in town.

"I'm happy for our fans," Housley said. "Last year was a very difficult year for them, especially at home here. But we've done a really good job of just staying on the course. I'm excited for our fans to see some winning hockey up to this point."

In other news, Housley said winger Conor Sheary left this morning's practice with a "little tweak" and will be a game-time decision Tuesday. Housley expects him to play.

Housley also said defenseman Zach Bogosian had a maintenance day today.

Meanwhile, Housley said forward Patrik Berglund skated on his own today and is "making strides" to return from an upper-body injury.

Pominville reminisces on past and present as Sabres search for 10th straight win

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

November 26, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Jason Pominville is the only player on the Sabres roster who knows what it's like to win nine straight games.

He was a part of the 2006-2007 team that was 10 straight to start the season. That year the Blue & Gold advanced to the Eastern Conference finals.

But, this run, this year, with this team, he says has rejuvenated guys after everything the franchise went through a year ago.

"It's been a lot of fun. We've had to put so much work," the veteran winger said. "It hasn't been easy. It's been a grind, it's been tough, but to get rewarded with winning it's great for me, for sure. But, for the guys that haven't been here for a while, for them to finally see what it is and the atmosphere in the building is pretty cool."

"It's sort of what we want to get back to," captain Jack Eichel said when talking about the history of the '06 team and this year's squad. "I think we've gotten a taste of it now because we've been winning and I think people are excited about this streak that we're on."

"We're going into games not scared to lose, expecting to win and that's a big thing for me," added Pominville. "Last year when things probably weren't going our way we would get into our shell and now we're fighting back. We're trusting our instincts, we're trusting the system, sticking to what has led us to having success so far and it's paid off."

We'll see if the Sabres can match the mark they set 12 years ago when they welcome former Sabre Evander Kane and the Sharks to town on Tuesday.

The Buffalo Sabres Ride A 9-Game Winning Streak To The Top Of The NHL Standings

By Carol Schram

Forbes

November 26, 2018

Do not adjust your set — though you may have to blink twice before you're convinced you aren't seeing things. At the conclusion of a busy night of NHL action on Saturday, the Buffalo Sabres held down the top spot in the entire league.

Sam Reinhart's shootout winner on Jimmy Howard at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit gave the Sabres their ninth-straight win — their third in the shootout to go along with three in overtime and three in regulation. That pushed Buffalo's record for the season to 16-6-2.

It has been just over 10 years since the last time the Sabres led or were tied for the lead in the NHL standings anytime after the first week of the season (October 23, 2008), though Buffalo's weekend moment in the penthouse was short-lived. The Tampa Bay Lightning and Nashville Predators, one point back after Saturday's games, both overtook the Sabres when they made up their games in hand with wins on Sunday.

Sabres face Sharks seeking to tie Buffalo record with 10th straight win

By Mike Zeisberger

NHL.com

November 26, 2018

BUFFALO -- Rasmus Dahlin was informed that he was 6 years old when the Buffalo Sabres previously won nine consecutive games, in 2006.

So what's it feel like to be part of a Sabres team that has duplicated that feat?

"For me, it's awesome to be part of it," the rookie defenseman said on Monday. "But for me, I like to win and have won, so I'm pretty much used to it."

The Sabres have the opportunity to match the longest winning streak in their history when they go for 10 in a row against the San Jose Sharks at KeyBank Center on Tuesday (7 p.m ET: SNE, SNO, SNP, MSG-B, NBCSCA, NHL.TV).

Buffalo had 10-game winning streaks in 1983-84 and 2006-07.

The Sabres' success (16-6-2) is a far cry from the struggles of 2017-18 when the Sabres finish 31st in the NHL with 62 points (25-45-12).

Buffalo's new upbeat attitude is evident the moment you walk into the locker room.

On the far wall side sits Dahlin, 18, the No. 1 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft who oozes a quiet confidence. For the young Swede, Buffalo's struggles in recent years are irrelevant because he wasn't part of them.

"I want to win," he said. "Winning's fun."

Several cubicles away, captain Jack Eichel, 22, couldn't agree more. The Sabres have never reached the Stanley Cup Playoffs in his three previous NHL seasons.

"Just to think of where we came from a year ago, and to be winning games and doing this, obviously it's great," Eichel, the No. 2 pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, said.

A frustrated Eichel took each and every loss to heart last season. There have been so few of them this season, he can't even remember them. He was asked after practice Monday to recall their most recent loss.

"Ah, was it Calgary?" he asked.

Eichel was referring to a 2-1 overtime defeat to the Calgary Flames on Oct 30. He was informed that the Sabres lost two games since then - 4-2 against the Ottawa Senators on Nov. 1, then 3-1 to the New York Rangers on Nov. 4, a defeat that left Buffalo with a 7-6-2 record.

"Yeah, Rangers, in New York," he agreed.

Jason Pominville, 35, is amused by the scene in front of him. The rookie with the winning pedigree. The captain who forgets defeats.

"Rasmus is a big part of the team right now and him and other guys saying we expect to win, that's great," the veteran forward said. "That's a big thing for me. Last year, when things weren't going our way, we'd go into a shell. Now when things go bad, we're trusting our instincts, we're trusting our system, sticking to what has led us to having success."

Pominville was on that Sabres team that started the 2006-07 season with 10 consecutive victories. He can sense the same excitement starting to snowball in Buffalo.

"It's nice for the guys that have been here for a while to finally see what this city is about when you finally win and see the reaction of the fans," Pominville said. "The atmosphere in the city is great.

"It's early but it hasn't been easy. And there's still work to be done. Still, winning 10 games in a row, that's hard whether you're the best team or not. And we're just one game shy of that right now."

The Sabres did not win their 16th game until Feb. 10 last season. They reached that mark with a 3-2 shootout win against the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday.

"I try not to think about last year," coach Phil Housley said with a modest smirk.

Many of the players the Sabres acquired during the offseason are paying instant dividends.

Forward Jeff Skinner, acquired in a trade with the Carolina Hurricanes, has 18 goals, tied for second in the NHL with Alex Ovechkin, one behind Patrik Laine and David Pastrnak. Goalie Carter Hutton, signed as a free agent, is third in wins with 11. Dahlin's 13 points (two goals, 11 assists) are tied for third among NHL rookies.

"It's awesome to see how we are getting better and better," Dahlin said. "And it's great to see how the city is behind us."

For a rabid fanbase that has not seen its team reach the playoffs since 2010-11, there finally seems to be reason for excitement.