



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*November 8, 2018*

## **Jeff Skinner is smashing expectations and raising his price in fast start with Sabres**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
November 7, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres knew they were adding some speed to their lineup and were hopeful about putting a few more goals on the stat sheet when they traded for Jeff Skinner on an otherwise quiet August day a little more than three months ago.

At least in the season's first 15 games, they got a whole lot more than that.

Skinner has 16 points and a team-high nine goals, which was three off the NHL lead entering Wednesday. Eight have come since he joined Jack Eichel and Jason Pominville two weeks ago on what has suddenly become the franchise's most productive line in years.

Since Oct. 20, those eight goals have Skinner tied for tops in the league in goals with San Jose's Timo Meier and Montreal's Max Domi. Skinner and Domi go head-to-head Thursday night when the Sabres and Canadiens meet in Bell Centre.

After eight years with the Carolina Hurricanes, Skinner had no idea how things would go with a new team. At first, it was a struggle. He had no points in the first four games. Since then: Sixteen points and a team-high plus-10 rating over 11 games.

"The adjustment has gone pretty smoothly here," Skinner said after practice Wednesday. "The first three, four games didn't work out the way I wanted them to personally and not as a team, either. But individuals tend to feel their success like the team. All the guys here have been very welcoming and it's been a really smooth transition for me away from the rink as at the rink. And I'm happy we're going pretty well as a team."

The Sabres knew Skinner was a prolific goal scorer, with six 20-goal seasons for the Hurricanes and three that went more than the 30-goal mark. But they had to learn firsthand what a gnat the 5-foot-11 Skinner could be as well.

"Whether he's forechecking or backchecking on a guy, he strips a lot of people of pucks," Eichel said. "He gets the puck back in situations. It's good. He wants to get up and go and attack the other team."

"I can't believe how strong he is on his stick and on his feet," added coach Phil Housley. "He doesn't get bounced off pucks. The one thing that's intriguing is the way he's stripping pucks from behind. He never dies on a play and is always trying to find a way to get that puck back, whether it's on the forecheck or reloading back into our own zone."

To Skinner, that's always been a key aspect to his game. But it stands out now that a new organization is getting a close look.

"When I'm playing well, that part of my game is usually going," he said. "But that's still a lot to do with your linemates. It's tough to pressure guys in this league. If you are just pushing a guy one-on-one, usually he's going to move it by you."

"You need that guy forced into a situation where other guys are there to not give him many options and that's when you jump, when you can close to get him to turn pucks over and get back on offense quick."

Contract-year push?

When Skinner was traded for Cliff Pu and draft picks, new Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour raised a few eyebrows when he said, "It sends a message of what kind of Hurricane we're looking for."

Skinner won't bad-mouth the Canes, pointing out it was just a change of scenery needed for both sides after he played eight seasons and never made the playoffs. Skinner waived his no-trade clause to come to Buffalo.

"My focus is the fresh start," he said. "If you focus on what's in the past, those are the wrong reasons and it's counterproductive. I enjoyed my time and my memories there are good. I just wanted to get a good thing going in Buffalo."

So if Skinner isn't sending any sort of take-that message to the Hurricanes, that means contract-year production is probably a bigger motivation. As a pending unrestricted free agent, his price is seemingly going up and up by the game.

Remember, he enters Thursday's game on a pace that would land him with 49 goals and 87 points for an entire season.

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NHL goal leaders since Oct. 20

Player, team	GP	G
Jeff Skinner, Buffalo	8	8
Timo Meier, San Jose	8	8
Max Domi, Montreal	9	8
Ryan O'Reilly, St. Louis	7	7
Jason Pominville, Buffalo	8	7
Leon Draisaitl, Edmonton	10	7

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NHL point leaders since Oct. 20

Player, team	GP	Pts
Mark Stone, Ottawa	9	15
Brayden Point, Tampa Bay	10	14
Ryan O'Reilly, St. Louis	7	14
Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay	10	13
Jeff Skinner, Buffalo	8	13
Jason Pominville, Buffalo	8	13
Jack Eichel, Buffalo	8	12

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Skinner is currently at a cap hit of \$5.725 million. He'll be 27 in May. What might he be looking at going forward? What if Skinner has a 40-goal season to go with his three previous 30-goal campaigns?

Former Sabre Evander Kane, who turned 27 in August and has one 30-goal campaign — seven years ago — got seven years and \$49 million from the San Jose Sharks in May after three consecutive 20-goal campaigns in Buffalo.

It would stand to reason that would be a starting point for Skinner, who might have a pretty good case to be pushing the \$8 million mark annually on a long-term deal.

"For me as a player, you focus on the things you can control," Skinner said. "There are agents and management people, guys who are really a lot smarter than me, who deal with that kind of stuff. Fortunately for me, I focus on playing. That sort of thing will figure itself out in time.

"I'm happy with the adjustment that's taken place in Buffalo. I'm comfortable and happy here. I'm just focusing on getting better, going game by game and getting where we want to be."

During a regularly scheduled appearance last month on WGR Radio, General Manager Jason Botterill said there had been no negotiations with Skinner on an extension. That remains the situation.

The Sabres have some salary cap space to play with next season but will likely stay patient about Skinner, watching the mix of his personal success with the growth of the team in the standings before making any firm decisions.

"When Jeff came into our organization, we were clear about let's get a feeling-out process, let's get him acclimated to Buffalo," Botterill said. "Focus on that instead of having the distraction of are we talking, are we not talking. We can wait until later in the year for that."

"He's very competitive, you see him on pucks," Botterill added. "He's involved in the game and that's not just in the game situation. That's in practice too. I think our whole team has increased our intensity level. ... He's brought some life to our organization for sure."

A suddenly elite trio

Eichel's line has put up elite numbers in its eight games together, albeit consisting of a small sample size. Skinner and Pominville have 13 points in that time and Eichel has 12, including 11 assists.

Eichel has never had a left winger anywhere near as productive as Skinner, and Skinner was able to score in Carolina the last few seasons without a center remotely the caliber of Eichel. Now together, they're proving to be a deadly combination.

"He's predictable and he's unpredictable so you get a little bit of both sides," Eichel said. "It's good to be unpredictable for the other team but also to be a bit predictable for the guys you're playing with. We're still getting to know each other. It's only been a few weeks. Just trying to build chemistry and figure out what his tendencies are."

"You want to have success individually, as a line and as a team," Skinner said. "Obviously, it's a pretty small sample and for us we want to try to sustain it over a long period of time. It's a long season. We've had some success and now the key is to keep working every day to get better and keep improving."

As for Thursday's game, Domi burned Buffalo for two goals when the Sabres beat the Habs here, 4-3, on Oct. 25. The Bell Centre will be a good showcase for the Sabres to show off what's become the game's hottest trio up front.

"You have to be aware when Domi is out there with the confidence he's playing with," Skinner said. "Just as they are as a team. They're been playing well, playing fast and it makes it a good challenge for us."

"It's a pretty cool place to play, one of the louder rinks in the league. For us, it's a divisional game and that goes for me now too. That makes it a big game."

## Sabres' Skinner willing to be patient about starting talks on contract extension

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 7, 2018

Jeff Skinner has 16 points in 15 games this season for the Buffalo Sabres – and his eight goals since being put on the club's top line Oct. 20 is tied for the NHL lead in that span.

Skinner is proving to be the sniper the Sabres hoped for when they traded for him from Carolina in August, and is surprising his new team with his ferocity on the forecheck.

Lingering in the background: Skinner is an unrestricted free agent after the season and is likely going to get a long-term extension well over his current cap hit of \$5.725 million. The cost of a new deal is going up, seemingly by the day. So is fan angst about the topic.

Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill said recently on WGR Radio that the Sabres can "wait until later in the year" to talk contract with Skinner.

That's the same thought process Skinner has.

"For me as a player, you focus on the things you can control," Skinner told The Buffalo News after practice Wednesday. "There are agents and management people, guys who are really a lot smarter than me, who deal with that kind of stuff. Fortunately for me, I focus on playing. That sort of thing will figure itself out in time.

"I'm happy with the adjustment that's taken place in Buffalo. I'm comfortable and happy here. I'm just focusing on getting better, going game by game and getting where we want to be."

Skinner is tied with San Jose's Timo Meier and Montreal's Max Domi for the league goal lead since joining Jack Eichel's line for the Oct. 20 game in Los Angeles. Skinner and Domi go head-to-head Thursday night when the Sabres and Canadiens meet in Bell Centre.

"You have to be aware when he's out there with the confidence he's playing with," Skinner said of Domi, who scored two goals in the Sabres' 4-3 win over the Habs here on Oct. 25. "Just as they are as a team. They've been playing well, playing fast and it makes us a good challenge.

"It's a pretty cool place to play, one of the louder rinks in the league. For us, it's a divisional game and for me now, too, so that makes it a big game for us."

Coach Phil Housley said former Montreal defenseman Nathan Beaulieu is getting back into the Sabres' lineup after a run as a healthy scratch. He will replace Casey Nelson and partner with Rasmus Dahlin.

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Jason Pominville, Buffalo 8 13  
Jack Eichel, Buffalo 8 12  
Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ Jeff Skinner

## **Sabres' Jack Eichel scoring points, not worried about goals**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
November 7, 2018

BUFFALO – It's hard to quibble with Jack Eichel's torrid start. In the last eight games, the slick Sabres captain has compiled a hefty 12 points. Right now, he's pivoting perhaps the NHL's best line between scorching wingers Jeff Skinner and Jason Pominville.

Through the first 15 contests, Eichel has scored a team-leading 17 points. At his current pace, he would have 93 points over a full season, the most since Daniel Briere had 95 in 2006-07.

But despite his strong offensive output, Eichel hasn't done much goal scoring, at least by his standards. The center has scored just one goal in the last 12 games and only four overall entering tonight's road tilt against the Montreal Canadiens.

Of course, Eichel, 22, isn't exactly fretting. After all, he's producing offense. As long as the Sabres are scoring goals, he said he's excited.

"I love when other guys score, too," Eichel said Wednesday inside KeyBank Center. "I don't care if I'm scoring, if someone else is scoring. ...

"I'm not looking at it like, 'Oh, I have this many (goals),' whatever. (It's) however I can try to help this team win, whether it's scoring goals or setting other guys up."

Eichel, who averaged 24 goals over his first three seasons, said he considers himself "a pass-first, distributor guy."

Still, Eichel acknowledged he "probably could be more selfish at times." He possesses a lethal wrist shot and one-timer. He knows the Sabres signed him to an eight-year, \$80 million contract extension to also score goals.

"I want to score goals because that's who I am and I want to start finding the back of the net more," said Eichel, who utilized his wicked one-timer to score his last goal Oct. 30. "I think it'll help our team as well. I think I've had a couple opportunities in situations to score some goals that might've helped our team, but I'm not losing sleep at night because I have five goals right now.

"Should I have more? Yeah. Have I had my opportunities? Yeah. I'll start burying them."

Sabres coach Phil Housley wants Eichel to shoot more often. So far, he has averaged 3.9 shots on goal a game this season, up from 3.7 a year ago. His shooting percentage is just 6.8, down from 10.2 last season.

"(If) you ask him, he'd like to score more," Housley said. "I think he can have a little bit more of a shot mentality and be a little bit more selfish in that area sometimes. Because he's such a terrific passer, he's looking for Skinner, he's looking for Pommer, who's going to the net really well. I really like the way Jack's playing."

So how does a playmaker get rid of his penchant for passing first?

"It's just a matter of repetitions, getting the repetition of shooting pucks, and then when you get in those areas, it'll come naturally for you," Housley said. "I feel that Jack has got such a terrific shot, you saw that one against Calgary (on Oct. 30), his one-timer. I would like to see him shoot more pucks when it's time to shoot the puck."

But it can be hard to shoot the puck when your linemates are converting so many of your adroit passes into goals.

When the Sabres acquired Skinner, a three-time 30-goal scorer, from the Carolina Hurricanes on Aug. 2, many observers believed playing beside Eichel could elevate his game an extra level.

So far, Skinner has already scored nine goals and 16 points, putting him on pace for a whopping 49 goals and 87 points. Eichel has quickly learned Skinner's dogged pursuit of the puck – he forechecks and backchecks ferociously – buoys his success.

"Something that stood out most, I feel like the puck finds him," Eichel said. "Whether he's forechecking or backchecking on a guy, he strips a lot of people of pucks, gets the puck back in situations."

Pominville, meanwhile, has scored eight goals and 14 points, often looking dynamic around the net.

While Housley knows the line has performed splendidly since he put it together last month, he doesn't want to heap too much praise on the players yet.

"The way they've played in a short amount of time, they've earned the right to be praised, right?" Housley said. "But an 82-game schedule, it gets to be a grind. ... We can't get ahead of ourselves, we just got to stay in the moment right now."

## **Sabres pumping loads of shots on net**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
November 7, 2018

BUFFALO – How rare is the Sabres' current streak of 40 or more shots on goal in three straight games? Well, before pumping 40 on New York Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist in Sunday's 3-1 road loss, they hadn't done it since March 2009.

Prior to Sunday, they generated 41 shots in Saturday afternoon's 9-2 win against the Ottawa Senators and a season-high 48 in Thursday's 4-2 loss in Ottawa.

So in Thursday's road tilt against the Montreal Canadiens, the Sabres can make a little history. If they hit the 40-shot mark, it will be only the second time they've ever done it in four consecutive games, according to researcher Mike Haim.

The Sabres peppered 40 shots on net in four straight contests from Jan. 19 to 26 in 1975, according to Haim, about halfway through the first season they reached the Stanley Cup final.

Thanks to Haim for the research.

In other news, Sabres coach Phil Housley said defenseman Nathan Beaulieu will return Thursday after sitting out three straight games as a healthy scratch.

Beaulieu, who played for the Canadiens, practiced beside rookie Rasmus Dahlin today.

"His attitude and his work level has risen the last week," Housley said of Beaulieu. "That's why he's getting an opportunity."

## **Skinner leads Sabres into matchup vs. Domi, Canadiens**

Yahoo! Sports

November 7, 2018

Two of the hottest scorers in the NHL will face off when the Montreal Canadiens host the Buffalo Sabres at Bell Centre on Thursday.

Max Domi of the Canadiens and Jeff Skinner of the Sabres each have eight goals since Oct. 20, tying Timo Meier of the San Jose Sharks for the most in the league in that span.

Both squads were lottery teams last season, but they found themselves holding down the two wild cards in the Eastern Conference entering games Wednesday. The Canadiens (8-5-2) are in the first wild-card position while the Sabres (7-6-2) were in the second spot.

Both teams are coming off losses to the New York Rangers. Montreal lost 5-3 to the Rangers on Tuesday and Buffalo dropped a 3-1 decision Sunday.

The Canadiens will be looking for forwards Domi and Tomas Tatar to continue to show hot hands. Domi scored his team-leading ninth goal (tied with Brendan Gallagher) while Tatar had two goals, including his first 23 seconds into the game in the loss to the Rangers.

The Canadiens, playing the second half of a back-to-back against the Rangers, couldn't hold a 3-1 lead in the third period at Madison Square Garden.

"I don't care what anybody says, we had a 3-1 lead so we weren't that tired," Montreal coach Claude Julien told NHL.com. "At the end of the day, we made a lot of individual mistakes, mental mistakes. Whether it's focus, whatever it is, it was self-inflicted."

"I thought our jump was pretty good off the start of the game," Canadiens goaltender Carey Price told NHL.com. "I think just as the game went on, we just allowed ourselves to become fatigued. I don't know if that's the reality of it, but it's what it seems to me."

Domi has already equaled his goal output from last season with the Arizona Coyotes. He was obtained in a trade that sent Alex Galchenyuk to the Coyotes.

Montreal lost forward Joel Armia after a knee-on-knee hit with Rangers defensemen Brendan Smith in the second period Tuesday. The Canadiens called up forward Kenny Agostino from their American Hockey League farm team in Laval on Wednesday.

Agostino, 26, leads The Rocket with four goals and six assists in 12 games this season.

Like the Canadiens with Domi, the Sabres are benefiting from an offseason acquisition with Skinner, obtained in a trade for prospect Cliff Pu and three draft picks from the Carolina Hurricanes. He has scored his eight goals since he was put on a line with Jack Eichel and Jason Pominville.

Skinner got off to a slow start with no points in his first four games, but has been on fire. He has 16 points in his past 11 games.

"The adjustment has gone pretty smoothly here," Skinner told The Buffalo News on Wednesday. "The first three, four games didn't work out the way I wanted them to personally and not as a team, either. But individuals tend to feel their success like the team. All the guys here have been very welcoming and it's been a really smooth transition for me away from the rink as at the rink. And I'm happy we're going pretty well as a team."

Skinner had six 20-goal seasons for the Hurricanes.

"I can't believe how strong he is on his stick and on his feet," Sabres coach Phil Housley said, according to The Buffalo News. "He doesn't get bounced off pucks. The one thing that's intriguing is the way he's stripping pucks

from behind. He never dies on a play and is always trying to find a way to get that puck back, whether it's on the forecheck or reloading back into our own zone."

The Sabres have won one of their past five games, a 9-2 blowout of the Ottawa Senators at home on Saturday. They are 1-2-2 in that span.

## **Mittelstadt, Okposo have bonded over common background**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 7, 2018

There's an inside joke in the Buffalo Sabres' dressing room about the guys from Minnesota. We'll let Casey Mittelstadt explain.

"I think if you're from Minnesota, you love Minnesota more than anything," Mittelstadt said after practice on Wednesday. "It's pretty much what it comes down to. All the guys make fun of us, but we talk it about how good it is. It's kind of a joke in the locker room but I think we're serious."

It's a sentiment shared by Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo, two natives of the St. Paul area who just happen to sit next to each other in the Sabres room. Both players attended the University of Minnesota under coach Don Lucia. Both were top-10 picks who came into the NHL as 19-year-olds.

Come to think of it, maybe their arrangement in the dressing room isn't just a matter of coincidence. The Sabres resituated the locations of players' stalls prior to this season, spreading their veteran leaders out and placing them alongside younger players. Okposo fell between Mittelstadt and Evan Rodrigues.

They certainly have no shortage of things to talk about. Okposo laughed when asked what he's learned about his young teammate.

"He's just a fun-loving guy," Okposo said. "He's got a good head on his shoulders. He's confident in his abilities, which makes him really good. He's really slippery as a player. Just as a person, he's young, he's a young guy. He's got a lot of growing up to do."

"Playing in the NHL at 19, that's not easy. I was right there in the same position. He's going to come into his own, but he's got a lot of guys around him to help him do that."

Okposo recalls how helpful it was to have veterans at his side when he broke into the league with the New York Islanders. Guys like Richard Park, Doug Weight and Bill Guerin helped him learn to deal with the highs and lows of an 82-game season.

Mittelstadt credits Okposo with having that same kind of presence.

"I think he's been through a lot of the same things I have," Mittelstadt said. "He's been really good. I think overall as a group, all the veterans have been really good, but I think he's definitely gone out of his way to check on me and make sure I'm doing OK, help out with things."

"Playing with him helps too. We're different players but coming from the same area it seems like you always think the same or play a little bit similar to those guys. It should be good. Obviously, he's a great guy and he's been great to me so far."

Mittelstadt is expected to center a line with Okposo and Conor Sheary in Montreal on Thursday. Sabres coach Phil Housley said it's been common in the games Okposo's played with Mittelstadt to see the two talking on the bench between shifts.

"I talk to him quite a bit," Okposo said. "I know how passionate he is. I love it. I tell him all the time, don't discount your instincts. He's such a powerful offensive player in what he can do, and you can never discount your instincts."

"At the same time, that play away from the puck and being good defensively, he's definitely committed to it. He's going to be a really good player."

Wednesday's practice

Housley said that Nathan Beaulieu will return to the lineup against his former team in Montreal on Thursday. The defenseman has only appeared in one game since Oct. 18 but has spent the last two practices skating on a pair with Rasmus Dahlin.

"I think it's time," Housley said. "I think he's been really working hard. He's had a great attitude the last week and he's come to work and he's trying to get better. ... I just think his attitude and his work level has risen the last week, and that's why he's getting an opportunity."

Here's how the full lineup looked on Wednesday:

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville  
43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 21 Kyle Okposo  
71 Evan Rodrigues - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 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  
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 82 Nathan Beaulieu  
81 Remi Elie\* - 8 Casey Nelson

40 Carter Hutton  
35 Linus Ullmark

\*Extra forward skating on defense