



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*December 1, 2018*

## **Barkov's overtime goal lifts Panthers past Sabres 3-2**

Associated Press

November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — The Florida Panthers had another dramatic outcome in a homestand marked by emotional highs and lows.

Aleksander Barkov scored at 2:26 of overtime to lead the Panthers past the Buffalo Sabres 3-2 Friday night.

It was the second loss in as many days for the Sabres, whose 10-game winning streak ended with a 5-4 setback Thursday in Tampa Bay.

Barkov took a cross-ice pass from Jonathan Huberdeau and made the most of a wide-open net against an out-of-position Linus Ullmark, who had stopped 40 of 42 shots before the game winner. James Reimer turned back 21 of 23 shots for Florida.

Barkov was relieved after the Panthers suffered a tough 3-2 loss to Anaheim late in regulation Wednesday, and an overtime loss to Chicago after the Blackhawks tied it with 1.8 seconds left in regulation before that over the first three games of the current eight-game homestand. Florida defeated the New Jersey Devils in yet another overtime thriller.

"It feels awesome . we've been losing games in the last minute and it's tough like that. But this game was huge for us," Barkov said.

Jared McCann and Evgenii Dadonov also scored for the Panthers, who have won six straight against the Sabres. McCann has three goals in the last four games.

"We definitely didn't win the zone-time war — that battle was won by Florida," Buffalo coach Phil Housley said.

Florida coach Bob Boughner said the team never stopped battling in the offensive zone, as evidenced by the 43 shots.

The Panthers have scored at least one power-play goal in 14 of their last 15 games.

"Special teams were good tonight and that really helped us. We stayed within our structure," Boughner said. "We just try to wear teams down, especially teams that come in here and played the night before."

Sam Reinhart had a goal and an assist, Jeff Skinner scored and Jack Eichel added two assists for the Sabres.

Buffalo struck first. Skinner went top shelf on Reimer off a feed from Reinhart on a 2-on-1 break 10:55 into the first period. It was Skinner's 20th goal of the season.

With just 1:29 left in the first, McCann tied the game with a one-timer from the top of the circle. McCann's fifth goal beat Ullmark to the glove side.

"We've had a lot of bad luck here as of late, and to get that (win) was awesome," McCann said, "Barky has been a leader for us on and off the ice the whole year."

The Sabres regained the lead early in the second period when Reinhart converted a tip-in on the power play for his sixth goal. It came off an assist from Eichel, who upped his total to 27 this season.

"I thought we sat back, maybe a little too much, and let them take it to us with speed," Eichel said. "I thought our willingness to skate with them and make plays was a little down. Obviously, it was a back-to-back and an emotional game last night, it's a tough one."

With just over eight minutes to go in the third period, Dadonov knocked in the rebound off an initial kick save by Ullmark in traffic near the crease, tying it at 2-all.

NOTES: Buffalo C Jeff Skinner continues to excel with his 12th goal in 15 games away from the KeyBank Center. He has five goals and an assist in the last six games against Florida. ... Sabres C Sam Reinhart has 13 points in his last 12 games against the Panthers. ... Lawrence Pilut made his NHL debut for Buffalo. ... Florida G James Reimer made his third straight start as Roberto Luongo continues to rehab from a knee injury suffered Nov. 24 against Chicago.

## **Dahlin Effect is helping Sabres' defense pump up their numbers**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 2, 2018

NASHVILLE – Rasmus Dahlin's influence is growing. The 18-year-old was named the NHL's Rookie of the Month on Saturday and it's no coincidence the Buffalo Sabres' defense corps has made a huge leap in productivity this year with the No. 1 overall pick in the lineup.

"I'm getting more comfortable with the puck and better in the D zone too," Dahlin said here Sunday. "I take steps every game. I think more offense because I'm more comfortable with the puck. If you're comfortable, it's easier to have confidence."

After a four-point October, Dahlin had 10 points in 15 games in November. He currently leads all rookie defensemen with 14 points this season (two goals, 12 assists).

"It's affected our group immensely," coach Phil Housley said after practice at Centennial Sportsplex near Vanderbilt University. "Not only so much from the scoring aspect, but just our breakouts are a lot cleaner. He can make a play in tight areas which allows us to get out of our zone quickly and that's the biggest thing I think this year is different from our defense."

The Sabres have gotten plenty of offense from their blue line. Heading into Monday night's game against the Nashville Predators in Bridgestone Arena, Buffalo defensemen have 14 goals and 61 points this season. They entered Sunday tied for fifth in the NHL in goals and eighth in points – after finishing dead last in both categories last year.

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### NO REST ON DEFENSE

Team leaders among NHL defensemen

(Not including Sunday)

#### Goals

Ottawa 23

Minnesota 20

Dallas 17

Toronto 15

Buffalo 14

St. Louis 14

Nashville among 6 at 13

#### Points

Nashville 71

Ottawa 70

Tampa Bay 69

Columbus 65

Washington 64

Minnesota 63

Toronto 62

Buffalo 61

Source: Buffalo News research, NHL.com

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"Night in and night out, the 'D' have been huge contributors, scored some big goals and ultimately helped win some big games," said Nathan Beaulieu, who has three goals to tie Rasmus Ristolainen for tops among the Buffalo blueliners. "Bringing in someone young like him has given us a spark, helps us forget about last year and not worry about making mistakes. We're all good offensively. Just go out and play with swagger."

The Sabres have gone slow with Dahlin. Housley and assistant coach Steve Smith have monitored his minutes, letting him go over 20 just four times in the season's first 18 games. Dahlin has exceeded 20 minutes eight times in the last nine.

"If I play good, I get more minutes," Dahlin said. "They had a plan and they've done a great job and I thank them."

"He's really adjusted well to the North American game," Housley said. "That's what we were thinking about when he came to development camp and training camp. He's done a good job playing with different partners, adjusting to that, playing on the left side and the right side. And it's good to get somebody from our team recognized, too. It's been well earned by him."

Getting Dahlin in the draft lottery was a boon for Housley, who had defensemen releasing to create goals at will when he was an assistant with the Predators and couldn't get much out of the Sabres last season. Even with the injured P.K. Subban out of the lineup, the Predators still lead the NHL this year with 71 points from their defense.

"We really wanted to improve in those areas and 'Smitty' has been a calming influence back there," Beaulieu said of Smith, a three-time Stanley Cup champion in Edmonton. "He played a long time and understands mistakes will be made. Now we're not so worried about making them. We're capitalizing on opportunities. We all skate so well and the game is so much about skating nowadays. He's had that influence on us and that's helped a lot."

"Mistakes will happen," Dahlin said. "If I make a mistake keep looking forward and it will get better."

Housley has liked how the defense has been breaking down the ice in the rush and even joining cycles down low in the offensive zone. Beaulieu has capitalized on open ice, getting right to the goalmouth for two of his goals. He burned San Jose on Tuesday, tapping home a pass from Sam Reinhart after streaking down the left wing from center ice all the way to the crease.

"I've been watching a lot of video and I just want to try to get my offensive flair back finding holes and seeing where opportunities present themselves," Beaulieu said. "Seeing that much ice ahead of me and knowing I'd be able to get there was great. You know what was going to happen from the neutral zone going wide. Breaking down video has been big for me."

## **Sabres Notebook: As Predators deal with injury bug, Jason Pominville added to Buffalo's list**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
December 2, 2018

NASHVILLE – There will be plenty of talent on the ice Monday night in Bridgestone Arena but who will be missing is going to be a major subplot to the Buffalo Sabres' game against the Nashville Predators.

The Predators are riddled with injuries. Both of their top-line wingers, Viktor Arvidsson and Filip Forsberg, are going to be out weeks with upper-body ailments while there's also no clear timetable for center Kyle Turris or defenseman P.K. Subban to return to the lineup. Forward Nick Bonino has also been out with an illness.

The Sabres, meanwhile, will be without winger Jason Pominville for Monday's game and will continue to be minus defensemen Marco Scandella and Jake McCabe. Lawrence Pilut is expected to make his second straight appearance in the lineup.

Pominville, who turned 36 on Friday, was hit from behind by Florida defenseman Alex Petrovic during the third period of the overtime loss to the Panthers and went into the boards. He appeared to brace his fall with his hand and arm and that was where the injury took place. Pominville quickly got up and skated briskly off the ice and down the tunnel favoring his arm. He has returned to Buffalo for evaluation.

"He went back to get looked it. That's as far as I know," coach Phil Housley said Sunday. "We'll get more in the next day or two."

Monday's game will be Pominville's first miss of the season and thus end his chance at a ninth career season of playing all 82 games. He did that last year, the sixth time he did with it Buffalo. He also played two full schedules with Minnesota.

Rasmus Ristolainen sat out practice here Sunday for what Housley termed a maintenance day. He's likely nursing a leg problem after blocking a Steven Stamkos shot Thursday at Tampa Bay. The one bit of good news for the Sabres is that winger Conor Sheary is likely to return after missing two games with an upper body injury. Sheary practiced fully Sunday and Housley expects both Sheary and Ristolainen to play Monday.

The Predators beat Chicago, 5-2, here Saturday night with a patchwork lineup filled with AHL callups. In fact, eight of their 12 forwards were making less than \$1 million on the cap and the five players who sat out counted more than \$29 million against it.

"It's part of the game. Obviously it's a big part right now," Predators coach Peter Laviolette said of the injuries after the win. "It's different when you lose one. When it was just (Arvidsson), it was 'All right, well, we'll juggle it up a little bit.' But I still think that there was a real belief that we were going to be successful."

"We've got to step up," added center Ryan Johansen, who has an eight-game point streak against the Sabres. "Guys need to step up, including myself, including (goaltender Pekka Rinne and defenseman Roman Josi). Throughout our whole lineup, we need everyone stepping up right now. That'll be motivation every game."

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The road team has won the last six meetings in the series, with the last home win a 3-0 victory by the Predators here on March 21, 2015. The Sabres have won three straight games in Bridgestone Arena, including a 7-4 victory on March 31 that marked Housley's return to the Music City after he served as an assistant on the Preds' 2017 Stanley Cup finalists.

The Sabres' 11-3-1 record in November produced a .767 points percentage, their best for a full month since they were 8-2-1 in October 2009 (.773). At 17-7-3 entering December, they're at their highest point this deep in a season since they were 19-3-2 (.833) in 2006-07.

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Sabres forward Jeff Skinner enters the game second in the NHL in goals with 20, one behind Winnipeg's Patrik Laine. He's also second to Laine in road goals with 12 while the Winnipeg sharpshooter has 15.

Skinner had 15 goals in November to join Rick Martin (1972-73) as the only Sabre to enter December with 20 goals. When Alexander Mogilny scored a franchise-record 76 goals for Buffalo during the 1992-93 season, he entered December with 16.

## Even without goals, Eichel's game keeps evolving to new levels

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 1, 2018

NASHVILLE — There was something unfair about seeing Jack Eichel sprawled on his belly unable to do anything about the overtime goal that beat the Buffalo Sabres Friday night in Sunrise, Fla.

Sure, Eichel lost Aleksander Barkov for just a split-second, and that was long enough for the Florida Panthers star to beat Linus Ullmark and hand the Sabres a 3-2 defeat. Eichel turned his head, took a bad route in front of the net and perhaps should have instead followed Barkov behind the goal.

"I thought I had him," said a down-in-the-mouth Eichel, still clad in his equipment late Friday night. "But [Jonathan] Huberdeau makes a nice pass and Barkov gets lost behind the net and scores a goal, so it's on me."

Fair. But it's nonetheless hard to indict Eichel for that goal given the way he's played this season.

In an odd year where Eichel seemingly can't put the puck in the net at all — with just five goals in the Sabres' 27 games — opinion both inside and outside the Buffalo dressing room is that this might be his most complete season to date.

"He's a special player. He keeps getting better and better. He's at a whole different level than he was even a year ago," San Jose Sharks coach Peter DeBoer said when he was in Buffalo last week. "Young players have a tendency to do that, to jump leaps and bounds kind of year to year at least early in their career. I think he's taken a couple big steps from when he first came in."

Eichel has 27 assists and 32 points in his 27 games this year. In his first year as Buffalo's captain, he entered Saturday tied with Washington's Nicklas Backstrom for ninth in the NHL in scoring and alone in fourth in assists, five shy of league leader Mikko Rantanen of Colorado.

"He's contributing. He's No. 1 on our team in ice times among forwards, playing in a lot of situations," said Sabres coach Phil Housley. "It says a lot about him and his maturity that the most important thing about him is winning right now."

No doubt. Eichel poured in 73 goals in his first three NHL seasons and the Sabres didn't win a thing. Lots of his numbers this year are eye-popping and they've helped the Sabres go 17-7-3, including a 10-game winning streak that turned heads around the league:

- With Jeff Skinner taking full advantage on the left wing, Eichel has already equaled his career high of 20 assists at even strength after just 27 games. He reached that number last year while playing 67 games.
- Eichel is averaging 6.2 shot attempts and 4.0 on goal per game, but is getting foiled by a career-low shooting percentage of 4.6 that almost certainly has to improve. Eichel has not shot below 9.6 percent in his previous three seasons.
- His Corsi rating, measuring his team's shots for and against while he's on the ice, is at a career high 50.5 percent at 5 on 5 — and just over 58 percent in all situations.
- Eichel's plus-minus rating was a combined minus-54 in his first three seasons, but is plus-5 this year.
- His faceoff percentage, which was 38.9 percent two years ago and 41.5 last year, is up to 47.7.
- He's even 2 for 3 in shootouts this year after entering the season just 1 for 9. That's one reason the Sabres are 3-0 in the skills competition, garnering three key extra points.

"There's been a lot of good in my games recently and I'm trying to become better all over the ice," Eichel said during a break in the Sabres' Florida roadie. "I'm taking more pride in the faceoff circle, being better in our own

zone. There's been so many guys that have stepped up, it's been a real effort. It's all about moving my feet skating."

There are times in games when opponents simply can't get the puck away from Eichel. The Sabres controlled it for the first 1:45 of overtime Friday night, largely with Eichel in charge. He's been strong down low, strong on the cycle and stronger than ever on the back check.

He simply overpowered San Jose's Tomas Hertl in the Buffalo zone during overtime Tuesday, stealing the puck and bursting down the ice for a scoring chance. In Friday's game, he made an ugly turnover in the neutral zone midway through the second period and powered back down the ice to dive and knock the puck away from Evgenii Dadonov in the slot.

"The more I have the puck, the better I am," Eichel said. "This stretch has been good. You want to see more goals go in. I'm getting the chances, creating a lot, but you just try to bear down when you're around the net. It's a tough league to score in. But you can't really complain. 'Skinny' has been cleaning up a lot and I'm just trying to distribute the puck."

The issue of Eichel's goals is a touchy one. He doesn't care and he probably shouldn't when you consider he's on a pace for 82 assists and 97 points. But the Sabres did throw an entire season to get him and are paying him \$10 million a season.

Given that, can they really afford to get only 15 goals from him? Strangely enough, the answer might be yes if Skinner remains on a 60-goal pace playing on Eichel's left wing and Eichel continues to develop his two-way game as rapidly as he has.

"Like anyone on your team, the more you see them practice, you get to be around them every day, you get to appreciate what they bring to the table," Skinner said. "Obviously he brings a lot with the skill he has. He's still pretty young, so he's going to get better."

Housley said Eichel's maturity has grown considerably in the 18 months he's been around him. Organizational insiders and media members who have been around Eichel since he arrived in 2015 can vouch for the dramatic transformation of his personality as well, from often-petulant teen to mature leader of the room.

It's what the Sabres hoped for and expected when Eichel was drafted and, frankly, is what you hope for when moving from 18-year-old to 22-year-old in any walk of life.

"He's really taken the captaincy to heart," Housley said. "He's done a terrific job leading by example. But the biggest thing for me is his 200-foot game at both ends of the ice. When he's down low defending and being tough to play against, he can kill [opponents'] cycles. He's attacking the game with his speed. ... When he's playing a 200-foot game, there's not many guys better than him."

The captaincy is an added layer to Eichel's game. Footage on NBC in the run-up to last season's Winter Classic showed Eichel as a veritable chatterbox in the dressing room between periods. That's continued this year.

"The player that he is, he demands that respect with what he brings on a nightly basis," said Sam Reinhart, again thriving on Eichel's right wing with five points in the last three games. "Some guys probably wouldn't be as vocal but lead by example. He's talking quite a bit in the room, which is good. Everyone leads in their own way but that's how we feed off him."

Eichel was a key cog in the players' leadership group meeting over the summer, with the team keeping a text network buzzing, and even with a golf meeting with Housley and some of the players in July in Minnesota.

Then Eichel came to Buffalo earlier than ever, with the calendar just past mid-August, to start skating at HarborCenter. He was setting a tone for the entire organization, from veterans to prospects.

"I just try to come in, work, have a good attitude every day. Be happy at the rink," he said. "If something needs to be said, maybe I say it, but other than that I think there's so many good leaders in the room, it's a pretty easy

job. I just usually bounce ideas off other guys and get their advice. It's coming to work, making sure I'm prepared every day to play and putting my best foot forward. That's the first step to creating a winning culture."

"It's the story of a kid who's bigger, faster, stronger than everybody his whole life and now you're learning to really play with other guys at this level," DeBoer said. "He's dominant, dangerous every time he's on the ice. You can't use one line or one 'D' pair to stop him."

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The Sabres were off Saturday. They'll practice here Sunday afternoon and meet the Nashville Predators Monday night at 8 in Bridgestone Arena. They'll then have a quick turnaround for a home game Tuesday against Toronto in KeyBank Center.

## **Inside the Sabres: Hutton, Ullmark adjusting to another NHL goalie equipment change**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
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Martin Biron would go to great lengths to make himself as big as possible on the ice. When a new piece of goalie equipment arrived, Biron would stand in front of the mirror to see how much of the net he could take up. He would add padding to address any possible weak spots.

Like goalies across the NHL, Biron, who spent nine years with the Buffalo Sabres, was searching for a competitive advantage. That constant on-ice arms race intensified thanks to the league's most notorious equipment offender, Garth Snow, who was loathed by Sabres fans and Ted Nolan for looking like the Michelin Man in net during the 1997 Stanley Cup playoff series against the Philadelphia Flyers.

The league has since cracked down with equipment regulations, beginning with wholesale changes after the 2004-05 lockout when the league decreased the size of goalie equipment by 11 percent.

That continued this season when it mandated all goalies use smaller chest protectors, a move that was met by criticism and backlash from players across the league.

Many have told stories of painful shots to the collarbone and arms. Neither Carter Hutton nor Linus Ullmark has expressed such concerns. Both Sabres goalies said they had no choice but to adjust to how the sport continues to evolve.

"I just think it's another thing to worry about," Hutton said. "Truthfully, I don't even stress over it. It is what it is. They're doing it whether you like it or not, so you just have to buy into it. I don't mind the way the game is going. It promotes better athletes. You eliminate guys that are just big and block. I'm OK with it as long as we're protected."

As part of the newest equipment regulations, the chest and arm protector worn by each goalie must be anatomically proportional and size specific. Elbow, bicep, forearm and shoulder pads were reduced in height by roughly an inch.

Hutton and Ullmark have noticed more goals allowed above the shoulders and between the arms. However, they spent part of the offseason and training camp getting used to the new equipment. That acclimation period made this easier than the change last February, when the NHL announced all goalies had to begin using slimmer pants more than halfway into the season.

Neither Hutton nor Ullmark were bothered by that change, though the latter appeared in only five games for the Sabres last season. The chest protector rule has players across the league saying publicly that safety needs to be prioritized. After all, goalies are hit by hundreds of pucks during practice game days. Some have experienced bruises or intense pain when struck in certain areas. Ullmark is not among them.

"I like it," Ullmark said. "Not too bad. Not too big of a difference. I was a little worried beforehand. I didn't want what we would be using to be too small or too thin. The only thing I don't want it to be dangerous for us guys to go out there. That's the only thing."

More drastic changes were made in the past. In 2003-04, the league specified leg pads could be no longer than 38 inches from the bottom mid-point to the top midpoint of the leg pad. One year later, the maximum width of leg pads was lowered from 12 to 11 inches, while blockers and gloves size were reduced. Any violation would result in a two-game suspension.

Goalies were outraged. Biron said the smaller glove was painful to use in practice. Most were stubborn and refused to switch brands, even if pads didn't fit properly. Biron, now a Sabres analyst for MSG, said it took him six months to find leg pads he was comfortable using.

In 2010-11, the league specified goalies must wear leg pads anatomically proportional and size-specific based on a player's individual physical characteristics. Three years later, the NHL ordered a goalie's leg pads could go no higher than 45 percent of the distance between the center of his knee and his pelvis. That change concerned Hutton. It dropped his pads from 36 to 34 inches.

The NHL's hockey operations department had discretion to determine the maximum height for goaltenders' pads based on the measurements they take. All equipment must be sent directly from the manufacturer to the NHL for approval. Gone are the days when goalies asked equipment managers to sew additional padding into chest protectors or pants.

"You didn't want to see if it was protecting you well or if it was comfortable," Biron said. "The first thing I wanted to see if I was big and filling up the net. I'd get geared up, walk in front of the mirror and see if I was filling it up. Everyone was doing it. My way of looking at it was if everybody had to adjust and change the size then I had to do the same thing."

The NHL's plan has worked. Shrinking the pants last season helped lead to the most goals per game (2.97) since 2005-06 and the lowest league-wide save percentage (.912) since 2012-13. Entering Saturday's games, save percentage this season had dropped to .904, while goals per game (3.07) was on pace for the most since 2005-06.

The Sabres' goaltenders have combined for the fifth best save percentage in the NHL, despite another equipment change.

"I think they just eliminated extra material that you actually weren't using," Hutton said. "It's one of those things that can be more of a mental thing sometimes. There is so much to worry about. When things aren't going your way it's the first thing guys complain about. Honestly, I think you have to play. It is what it is. It's going that way whether you like it or not. It's out of your control. "

## **Inside the NHL: A long winning streak doesn't guarantee a big finish to a season**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 1, 2018

NASHVILLE — We have no idea how history is going to write the rest of the Buffalo Sabres' season in the wake of their 10-game winning streak. One thing we already know the run did was awaken a sleeping giant of a fan base, probably guaranteeing several more full houses in KeyBank Center the rest of the season.

But what kind of success down the road does the streak foreshadow? If you look at NHL history, it doesn't automatically mean big things for the rest of the season.

The NHL record for a winning streak is 17 by the 1992-93 Pittsburgh Penguins, who were coming off back-to-back Stanley Cups. But they were upset in overtime of Game 7 of the second round of the playoffs that spring by the New York Islanders.

The most consecutive wins in a season by an eventual Cup champion is 15, set by the 1981-82 New York Islanders en route to their third straight Cup. They broke the then-NHL record of 14 in a row that had stood since the 1929-30 Boston Bruins on a John Tonelli goal with 47 seconds left to produce a 3-2 win over the old Colorado Rockies in an era where ties at the end of regulation snapped winning streaks. The only other Cup winner to get to 12 straight wins during their season was the 1967-68 Montreal Canadiens.

Sabres fans, however, should feel good about their team's playoff chances. The only team in history to run off 10 in a row and not make the postseason was the 2016-17 Philadelphia Flyers, who only finished the season with 88 points in a year where three Metropolitan Division teams were at 108 or more.

The Sabres have built up quite a cushion in the playoff hunt already and have performed well in the Atlantic Division to date.

Recent history is rough on teams with long streaks. The 2016-17 Columbus Blue Jackets won 16 in a row but still lost in the first round of the playoffs to Pittsburgh. In fact, the Jackets were relatively ordinary outside of their streak, going 34-24-8 in their other 66 games.

The only other 15-gamer was in the 2013 lockout season by Pittsburgh. The Dan Bylsma-led Penguins were 36-12 that season and played to a 123-point pace but were swept in the East final by Boston.

According to NHL.com, there have been 48 streaks of 10 or more wins in NHL history, dating to 1917. Boston is the leader with six streaks. Pittsburgh and Montreal have five and Philadelphia has four. The Sabres now stand as the only team with three, and thus rank fifth all-time in streaks of 10 or more wins.

This Buffalo streak was the 23rd to end at 10 games, just like its previous ones in 2006 and 1984. Had the Sabres swept their two-game Florida trip to get to 12, they would have been up to the top 17 all time.

More streak chatter

- Not many Sabres have experiences in teams growing into winners but Kyle Okposo went through the process with the Islanders. They went five straight years without making the playoffs before qualifying in the 2013 lockout year, and had back-to-back 100-point seasons in 2014-15 and 2015-16, winning their first playoff series in 23 years in 2016.

"The lockout season was pretty special for us but it's different too," Okposo said. "That one we didn't really know what we were doing and all of a sudden we started winning games. This year, we really put the work into doing it starting in the summer. Our season now feels a little more like two years later on the Island with 101 points. We're still in the beginning stages of that but you have to like where we are."

- Sabres legend Danny Gare joined Gilbert Perreault and Rene Robert in watching Buffalo's horrible loss last month in Vegas. Two days later, the Sabres lost in San Jose. Three days later, coach Phil Housley completely blew up his lineup, sparking a 14-3-3 run after a 3-4 start.

Said Gare: "It was a lousy game in Vegas. Then after they went to San Jose. Same thing. So Phil said, 'The heck with it, I'm going to make this move' and he's done it. Changed all the lines, all the (defense) pairs, everything. That's what you like to see about him and the coaching staff. They all have a feel."

- Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper: "Tip your cap to Jason Botterill for bringing the guys in and Phil Housley has got them playing as a unit. It's not been fun for the Atlantic Division, but it has sure been fun for the city of Buffalo."

Wilson skates away

Capitals headhunter Tom Wilson is darn lucky to still be playing this season after his hit on Devils forward Brett Seney on Friday night. Wilson got a match penalty for intent to injure Seney after a hit from behind, but the Department of Player Safety ruled the hit was not a head shot and more of a glancing blow, deeming the penalty enough of a foul. Seney also returned to the game uninjured.

It's ridiculous. Wilson is a serial offender. He has no idea where to draw the line on hits and Stanley Cup champion/NHL Network analyst Alex Tanguay ripped him on the air Friday night for seeing Seney in his sights for several feet prior to the hit.

The ultimate lunacy came from rookie Caps coach Todd Reirden, who completely embarrassed himself, his organization and the league during his press conference Friday night. Reirden said Wilson wasn't even intending to make a hit and the play was "incidental contact" as Wilson tried to get out of Seney's way.

That's mind-bogglingly embarrassing. No way the league bought that. One issue is that this was not a severe hit and Wilson, as a serial offender, is supposed to get ascending penalties with each offense. Perhaps the league felt it could not go 20 or 25 games on this hit — and risk another reduction by an arbitrator — so it went with nothing at all.

No worries. Wilson has no idea where the line is, has no respect for opponents. He'll be back in front of Player Safety soon enough.

- With All-Star balloting open, the Sabres figure to have more than one player in the game for the first time since Daniel Briere, Brian Campbell and Ryan Miller all went to the 2007 game in Dallas. The Atlantic Division goalies almost certainly will be Carter Hutton and Toronto's Frederik Andersen. It's hard to imagine Jeff Skinner not being on the team and Jack Eichel certainly has a chance to go as well. So does coach Phil Housley, if the Sabres can get a lead in the division standings by the close of voting.

- The NHL Board of Governors meet Monday and Tuesday in Sea Island, Ga., and it figures to be an historic meeting with Seattle likely to be awarded the league's 32nd franchise sometime Tuesday. Will we see a debut date set? While the folks in the Pacific Northwest are hopeful for 2020-21 to have Key Arena renovation, there's lots of talk it may not be until 2021-22.

- Three-time Canadian Olympic gold medalist Jennifer Botterill, the sister of Sabres GM Jason Botterill, has joined MSG Network as a studio analyst for New York Islanders games. Botterill is working with former Harvard teammate AJ Mleczko as an analyst along with studio host Shannon Hogan, giving the Isles an unprecedented three women as on-air personalities.

All of them are ultra-respected in hockey circles. Mleczko did such a good job for NBC last year on the Olympics in South Korea that she joined the network for the Stanley Cup playoffs last year and was asked to work some games this season. She did the Sabres' game against Tampa Bay in KeyBank Center on Nov. 13.

- When snow hit Cleveland last week, the city's police Twitter got its point across in an unusual way by tweeting, "NASA sent a space ship from Earth THREE HUNDRED MILLION MILES to Mars and landed it perfectly. You guys can drive in the snow. #SlowDown"

## **Four Sabres on All-Star ballot for Atlantic captain vote**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 1, 2018

Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Rasmus Ristolainen and Rasmus Dahlin are all on the ballot representing the Buffalo Sabres as fan voting has opened for the divisional captains for the NHL All-Star Game, slated for Jan. 26 in San Jose.

Fan balloting determines the captain for each division and the Buffalo representatives figure to have a tough time outpointing the likes of Boston's David Pastrnak or the Toronto duo of Morgan Rielly and Auston Matthews in the voting for the top slot. Fans can vote up to 10 times a day at [NHL.com/vote](https://www.nhl.com/vote) or the NHL app.

The All-Star Game will once again be a three-game tournament played in a 3-on-3 format. Each team will consist of players from the four divisions. Fans can vote for one player per division, with no regard for position. Voting concludes at 11:59 p.m. ET on Dec. 23, with the top vote-getters by division regardless of position named captain.

Skinner entered Saturday's play with 20 goals, one behind NHL leader Patrik Laine of Winnipeg. Eichel is fourth in assists with 27, five behind Mikko Rantanen of Colorado. Dahlin is fourth among rookies in points with 14 and tops among first-year defensemen. Ristolainen is in his annual slot of the team's ice time leader, playing 25:27 per game.

## **Sabres' Dahlin named NHL Rookie of the Month**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 1, 2018

NASHVILLE — Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, who led all rookie blueliners in scoring in November, was named the NHL's rookie of the month Saturday.

Dahlin had 10 points in 15 November games, with a goal and nine assists to help the Sabres to an 11-3-1 record and the 10-game winning streak that tied the franchise record. He's the Sabres' first NHL rookie of the month since Marcus Foligno earned the honor in March, 2012.

Dahlin was chosen over Vancouver center and October winner Elias Pettersson (6-6-12 in 14 games), Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk (6-4-10 in 11) and Colin White (5-5-10 in 14) and Los Angeles goaltender Cal Petersen (4-4, 2.41 GAA, .929 save percentage, one shutout). Petersen was a Sabres draftee in 2012 who didn't sign with Buffalo after completing his career with Notre Dame and signed as a free agent with the Kings in 2017.

Dahlin, the NHL's No. 1 overall draft pick last June, logged an average of 19 minutes, 54 seconds of ice time per game in November. He ranked second among rookies in the month with a plus-9 rating. He was a minus player in only three of 15 games.

Dahlin, who has two goals and 12 assists for 14 points on the season, played a season-high 25:51 in the Sabres' loss Thursday at Tampa Bay that ended the winning streak.

## **Post-streak letdown results in Sabres' OT loss to last-place Panthers**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Fla. — There wasn't a playoff atmosphere inside BB&T Center and no win streak was on the line. The Buffalo Sabres were playing a last-place opponent while surrounded by thousands of empty red seats on the second night of back-to-back games on the schedule.

It was in stark contrast to what they encountered one night earlier in Tampa Bay. The result was an ugly letdown that Phil Housley planned to use as a lesson for a team that no longer catches anyone by surprise. Buffalo blew another lead in the third period and lost in overtime, 3-2, to the Florida Panthers on Friday night.

Backup goalie Linus Ullmark made 40 saves to help the Sabres, 17-7-3, steal a point and move into a tie for first place in the Atlantic Division with the idle Lightning. This is only the second time this season they have lost back-to-back games; however, the third 10-game win streak in franchise history raised the standard.

Buffalo didn't have the same relentless attack that allowed it to come back twice in a 5-4 loss to the Lightning Thursday night. It started slow and was on the defensive throughout the game, and Aleksander Barkov's game-winner 2:26 into overtime made the thrilling win streak a distant memory.

"They know about the streak now," Housley said of opponents. "They see where we are in the standings, and we're going to get everybody's best game. ... They came out with a purpose, and I think going through this, our guys are learning we're going to get their best game, and we've got to be a little more desperate in our game, especially on the road here."

The Panthers, still in last place at 10-10-4 with 24 points, attempted 40 more shots than the Sabres and had the puck in the offensive zone for much of the night. Yet, the game never seemed in doubt for Buffalo. Jeff Skinner's 20th goal of the season, a wrister on a 2-on-1 breakaway 10:55 into the first period, gave the Sabres a 1-0 lead.

They were 12-0-2 this season when scoring first, and Ullmark was at his best early. But the same problems that halted the win streak one night earlier followed the Sabres across the Sunshine State. Again, they took too many penalties. Florida hit the post moments after Rasmus Ristolainen's interference penalty midway through the first, and tied it, 1-1, with Jared McCann's slap shot from the point while Rasmus Dahlin was in the penalty box.

The Sabres looked tired. They were without two of their top six defensemen, as Jake McCabe is day-to-day and Marco Scandella was placed on injured reserve. Winger Conor Sheary, a catalyst on the second line, missed his third straight game. This was the team's ninth game in 15 days, including six on the road.

None were as taxing as Thursday night in Tampa Bay, an emotional, gut-wrenching loss where the Sabres led in the third period, only to allow two unanswered goals.

"There was a long stretch there," Skinner said. "It was a pretty emotional game last night and back-to-back. It's always a challenge, I think. We've got enough guys in here that have been around that you get ready for the next game, whether you win or lose. Whether you go on a streak or not."

Despite the lack of shots, Sam Reinhart's whack at a bouncing puck for a power play goal regained the lead 2:41 into the second period. The Sabres were 8-0-1 this season when leading after two periods, and the third was often their best. On the other hand, Florida entered Friday with a negative-11 goal differential in the third period of games this season.

The Panthers still outplayed the Sabres for the final 20 minutes of regulation. Ullmark did his part by preventing rebounds, making the task easier for a blue line that had Lawrence Pilut making his NHL debut. But Buffalo defenseman Casey Nelson was penalized for high sticking, and Florida capitalized when Evgenii Dadonov shot a rebound past Ullmark to tie it, 2-2, with 8:04 remaining in regulation.

"I always think I can do something on all the goals," Ullmark said afterward. "I lost my seal there on the second one."

The Sabres seemed to be playing to protect a lead, rather than attacking. They weren't using their speed to create pressure in the neutral zone and were outshot, 43-24. Their defensemen were trying too hard to make the perfect pass, which led to turnovers and odd-man rushes the other direction. The game went into overtime — Buffalo's 10th in its last 17 games — and Jonathan Huberdeau set up the winner when he passed to Barkov, who caught Ullmark by surprise and shot into the open net.

"Obviously with the back-to-back, we had an emotional game last night," Jack Eichel said. "It's a tough one."

## **The Wraparound: Panthers 3, Sabres 2, OT**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Fla. — Backup goalie Linus Ullmark couldn't save the Buffalo Sabres from a post-win streak letdown, as they lost to the Florida Panthers, 3-2, in overtime Friday night at BB&T Center.

Aleksander Barkov scored the winning goal 2:26 into overtime, and the Sabres lost back-to-back games for the first time since they were defeated in Las Vegas and San Jose on Nov. 16 and 18, respectively. Buffalo, 17-7-3 with 37 points, gained ground in the Atlantic Division despite playing poorly for much of the game.

The Sabres didn't have the same energy that helped them roar back to take the lead Thursday night against the Tampa Bay Lightning, only to have the streak halted with a 5-4 loss. Sam Reinhart and Jeff Skinner scored to back Ullmark, who made 40 saves. Evgenii Dadonov tied the score, 2-2, with 8:04 remaining in the third period, when he shot a rebound past Ullmark.

The Panthers, last place in the Atlantic Division at 11-10-4 and 24 points, outshot the Sabres, 42-24, including 14-6 in the first period. Florida hit the post twice in the first 20 minutes and had 12 more scoring chances than Buffalo during that span.

Skinner's 20th goal of the season, a one-timer on a 2-on-1 pass from Reinhart, gave the Sabres a 1-0 lead 10:55 into the game. The Panthers answered almost eight minutes later with Jared McCann's power-play goal on a slap shot from the right point.

Buffalo regained the lead when Jack Eichel, who has a team-high 27 assists this season, set up Reinhart's go-ahead power-play goal 2:41 into the second period. Reinhart shot a bouncing puck over Panthers goalie James Reimer's shoulder.

Pominville leaves: Winger Jason Pominville left the game in the third period, when he was hit from behind by Florida defenseman Alexander Petrovic, who was called for a boarding penalty.

Goalie point: With an assist on Reinhart's goal, Ullmark became the 21st goalie in Sabres history to record an assist.

In the box: Housley wanted to avoid taking too many penalties. After all, that was the Sabres' undoing Thursday in Tampa Bay. The Sabres were called for two in the first period. Though they were able to kill off Rasmus Ristolainen's interference penalty, Florida capitalized after Rasmus Dahlin went to the box for hooking. Panthers defenseman Mike Matheson passed to the high right circle, where McCann shot a one-timer that deflected off a stick and over Ullmark's shoulder at 18:31.

27-7: The first period was Buffalo's worst in some time. The Panthers had 20 more shot attempts. Florida hit the post twice, and Evgeni Dadonov nearly deflected a puck past Ullmark moments before Skinner's go-ahead goal.

20: Tyler Ennis led the Sabres with 20 goals in 78 games during 2014-15. Skinner's achieved that milestone in only 27 games and joined Rick Martin (20 in 1972-73) as the only players in franchise history to score 20 goals before December. He's also the fifth player in franchise history to require 27 or fewer games to score 20, joining Martin, Danny Gare, Dave Andreychuk and Alexander Mogilny.

Injury updates: Prior to puck drop, the Sabres placed defenseman Marco Scandella (upper body) and winger Conor Sheary (upper body) on injured reserve. Additionally, forward Patrik Berglund was activated from injured reserve and defenseman Matt Tennyson was recalled from the Rochester Americans.

Defenseman Jake McCabe, who was limited to 7:29 against the Tampa Bay Lightning because of an injury Thursday night, is day to day, according to Phil Housley. As a result, defenseman Lawrence Pilut made his NHL debut against the Panthers, and Tennyson skated during warmups as insurance in the event of an injury.

Next: The Sabres have Saturday off in Nashville and will practice Sunday. They'll play the Predators at Bridgestone Arena on Monday at 8 p.m.

## **Sabres defenseman Pilut to make NHL debut; Sheary, Scandella on IR**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Fla. – Lawrence Pilut's family and friends have been told to prepare for a late night. Pilut, a 22-year-old defenseman, will make his NHL debut for the Buffalo Sabres against the Florida Panthers tonight at 7 p.m.

Pilut, recalled from the Rochester Americans on Tuesday, will be inserted into the lineup after defenseman Jake McCabe suffered an "upper-body" injury Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning. His family in Tingrasyd, Sweden planned to stay awake to watch his debut at 1 a.m. local time.

The Sabres also placed winger Conor Sheary and defenseman Marco Scandella on injured reserve, while forward Patrik Berglund was activated from injured reserve and defenseman Matt Tennyson was recalled from Rochester. Pilut, signed to a two-year entry-level contract in May, is unlikely to be eased into action since the Sabres' defensemen were taxed during a 5-4 loss to the Lightning at Amalie Arena.

"Yeah, it's going to be fun," Pilut told reporters at BB&T Center on Friday. "It's going to be a dream come true tonight to get on the ice and play my first game. I'm ready for it."

McCabe's injury and a 10-minute misconduct for Nathan Beaulieu against the Lightning forced Rasmus Ristolainen to play 28:52, while Rasmus Dahlin and Zach Bogosian logged 25:51 and 25:05 on the ice, respectively, Thursday night.

Pilut was tied for third in the AHL with 22 points in 16 games for the Americans at the time of his promotion. He spent four-plus seasons with HV71 of the Swedish Hockey League, which named Pilut its top defenseman in 2017-18. Sabres coach Phil Housley told reporters Sheary (upper body) is day-to-day and skated Friday morning.

"He seems to get more comfortable each day," Housley said of Pilut. "I know we haven't had a lot of quality practice time because of our schedule, but he's done a terrific job. He's earned the right to play tonight."

Sheary has six goals among 12 points and a minus-2 rating in 24 games this season. Berglund will play against the Panthers, while winger Remi Elie is expected to be a healthy scratch, Housley said. Berglund has missed the past five games with an upper-body injury and has two goals among four points in 19 games.

Scandella has not played the past two games with what Housley called an upper-body injury, unrelated to the injury Scandella suffered on a blocked shot against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Nov. 19. With Scandella unavailable, Tennyson was recalled in the event of an injury during warmups.

Tennyson, 28, has one assist in seven games with the Americans this season and appeared in 15 games with the Sabres in 2017-18.

## **Mike Harrington: Sabres' new reality is a major challenge**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Fla. — The streak is over and one of the Buffalo Sabres mostly responsible for the franchise's best run of hockey in more than a decade got a richly deserved night off here Friday.

But goaltender Carter Hutton was still bubbling with enthusiasm at what it all means.

"I don't think we're going to sneak up on anybody anymore and that's OK. The days of taking the Buffalo Sabres lightly have come and gone," Hutton said pointedly in BB&T Center.

There was no way for Hutton to know how prophetic those words would be. The Florida Panthers were blase during their loss here to Anaheim on Wednesday and just 1-3-1 in their last five games. But they were dynamic during Friday night's 3-2 overtime win over Buffalo, with a 43-24 advantage in shots on goal and a whopping 80-40 bulge in attempts.

Every opponent will be like that from now on. The Sabres' 10-game winning streak ended with Thursday's 5-4 loss at Tampa Bay, and Friday's game was certainly a mental and physical challenge.

There was the letdown factor of the streak being over and the fatigue factor of playing a back-to-back on the road. The Sabres weren't nearly good enough for long stretches in this one, and only the work of goaltender Linus Ullmark, who made 40 saves, got them a point.

"You guys see it. We've got ultimate confidence when either of these guys go in the net," said Jack Eichel. "He steals a point for us tonight. 'Hutts' has been so good all year and Linus the same."

The Sabres got a boost from plenty of Blue-and-Gold-clad fans in the building making a weekend out of it with the Bills playing the Miami Dolphins not far from here on Sunday. The fans are back now, with KeyBank Center sold out three straight times and turning into a howling cauldron of noise during climactic moments of games during this run.

"One thing we've really established now is that coming to KeyBank Center to play is going to be a tough place for you and we're going to give you a tough game," Hutton said. "We wanted to create that with our hockey and we wanted to create that with our fan base and now we have. Our fans were amazing in this run here."

So was Hutton. He went 8-0 during the streak, posting a 1.97 goals-against average and a .936 save percentage. He's already got 12 wins on the season, third in the NHL.

"I felt solid," Hutton said. "Even building off last year, I've felt my game has been solid. I try not to get too caught up in the run, how things were going. You start thinking too far ahead and it catches up with you. Take it minute by minute, stay focused in the moment and control the mental side."

Ullmark is 5-0-2 as the backup and has a .927 save percentage, even better than Hutton's .917. There's no issues when Hutton needs a night off.

"You see the league now. You never know when you're going to have a 7-5 game or 1-0 game," Ullmark said. "It's how it goes. You've got to be humble every time you step on the ice, every time you get the call."

Goaltending is no issue for the Sabres this year. Certainly, there are areas of concern in the wake of the streak.

Injuries are cropping up, with Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella out of the lineup Friday and Jason Pominville knocked from the game in the third period when his arm/wrist hit the boards as he was drilled from behind by Alex Petrovic.

The Sabres' shot yields have taken a dramatic spike in recent games as well. They got outshot, 80-46, the last two nights and have given up at least 37 shots on goal for four straight games.

Eichel lost Aleksander Barkov on the game-winning goal and probably deserved a better fate because he was a beast during the first 1:49 of OT, when the Sabres had the puck virtually the entire time. And he had assisted on both of Buffalo's goals too.

But the special teams battle troubled the Sabres, as they gave up two power-play goals, including Evgeni Dadonov's tying tally with 8:04 left. It came eight seconds after Casey Nelson took a careless high sticking penalty.

The Sabres will be off Saturday. They will practice Sunday. They will play Monday at Nashville (gulp). They will host Toronto on Tuesday (double gulp).

They're not sneaking up on anybody anymore. They better buckle down. Everyone in the NHL will be waiting for them.

"They know about the streak now," coach Phil Housley said of every future opponent. "They see where we are in the standings and we're going to get everybody's best game."

## **The Sabres get back to the practice ice in Nashville**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 2, 2018

Nashville, TN (WGR 550) - After a day off in Nashville, the Sabres were back on the ice with many missing. Marco Scandella and Jason Pominville have been sent back to Buffalo to have their injuries evaluated, while Jake McCabe is here, but still not practicing. Rasmus Ristolainen missed the workout due to a maintenance day. Phil Housley expects him to play on Monday.

Conor Sheary returned to practice and things sound good for him, Phil Housley said, "I'll have to go talk to the trainers after today, but I would expect him to be in the lineup tomorrow."

Rasmus Dahlin was chosen as the NHL's Rookie of the Month in November. Housley said, "I think he's adjusted well to the North American game because that was a thing we were thinking about coming into Development Camp and he's done a good job and he's done a good job playing with different partners, but it just says a lot about him and it's great to get somebody recognized on our team and it's been well earned by him."

Ever since Dahlin's game in Winnipeg, Housley has increased the rookie's ice time by quite a bit. Dahlin was eased into the NHL, but the coaches feel he's ready for more, "You want to put him in places where he's going to succeed first and I think he's handled it pretty well and let's face it, our younger players are going to make a lot of mistakes and we've had patience through that, but I think he's gotten better and gotten used to the more minutes, I think he feels comfortable playing a lot more, so it was just something that he earned."

Dahlin was of course happy to be honored. He said, "It gives confidence and it's easy to play on this team because they help me out a lot, so a big thanks to my teammates."

"I think more offense, I'm more comfortable with the puck and overall it's been better in the D-zone too, so I take a step every game."

Dahlin loves playing a lot of minutes, but he knew how the Sabres were going to use him, "When I play good I get more minutes than when I play bad, but they had a plan and they did a great job and I will thank them."

With all the injuries, Housley had to shuffle things for practice. The lines were:

Skinner - Eichel - Reinhart

Thompson - Mittelstadt - Okposo

Sheary - Sobotka - Rodrigues

Berglund - Larsson - Girgensons

Dahlin - Bogosian

Beaulieu - Nelson

Hunwick - Pilut

Elie - Tennyson

## **Sabres' Dahlin wins NHL rookie honors**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 1, 2018

Nashville, TN (WGR 550) - It only took Sabres' prized rookie Rasmus Dahlin two months to earn his first NHL honor. Dahlin is NHL Rookie of the Month for November.

Dahlin averaged close to 20 minutes per-game in ice-time and had a goal and nine assists in 15 games.

In the middle of the month, Dahlin had points in 7-of-9 games.

Others in contention were Vancouver's Elias Pettersson, who had 12 points in 14 games, Ottawa's Brady Thachuk, who had 10 points in 11 games, the Sens' Colin White, who had 10 points in 14 games and the Kings', and former Sabres draft pick Cal Petersen, who went 4-4-0 with a 2.41 goals against and .921 save percentage in nine games.

Dahlin is the first Sabre to win the award since Marcus Foligno turned the trick in 2012.

The All-Star ballot has been announced and Dahlin is on that too. Teammates joining him are Rasmus Ristolainen, Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner.

The Sabres are off Saturday in Nashville and then will practice on Sunday before facing the Predators on Monday.

## **Time for a turnaround**

By Jeremy White

WGR 550

December 1, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres just finished out the month of November a staggering 11-3-1, and oddly enough, it's time to turn things around.

The Sabres' record looks good. Their odds to make the playoffs look very good too, but there are indicators that if things don't start to change, they could squander all that they've built to this point.

Sean Tierney of [chartinghockey.com](http://chartinghockey.com) has tons of wonderful visuals that can illustrate just what a hockey team is made of... and this morning I retweeted his chart that shows a five-game rolling average of expected goal differential.

Simply put, this indicates how many goals you should expect to score, and how many you should expect to give up, based on how you've been playing. I'm no analytics guru, but this stuff does matter to me. I, like many of you, value it and feel like I have a fairly good handle on what some of the entry-level stuff spells out.

Let's take a peak at some of Buffalo's rankings from [naturalstattrick.com](http://naturalstattrick.com):

Shot share at 5-on-5 - 21st

Shot share 5-on-5 within one goal - 24th

High Danger Chances For - 28th

High Danger Chance % - 28th

High Danger Save % - 4th

This team is living on the edge... The Sabres give up an awful lot of high danger chances, and they don't get too many of their own.

11-3-1 is a fun month, and it's done wonders for the team both in the standings and in the hearts and minds of fans that have been dying for some good times. With that in mind... I can't help but stay true to something I would say about any other team doing what the Sabres have done. I'm a big time proponent of the 3-2-1 point system, which rewards team the most for regulation wins.

Spun another way, the Sabres played 15 games in November, and came away the winners in regulation... four times. Yes, there was the New York Rangers game that they lost, but they appeared to be the better team. There were a couple where things were pretty even like San Jose and Detroit along the way too. Again, we're looking a little big picture here.

Regulation wins are the true testament to how good you are. 3-on-3 overtime and shootouts can get you to the playoffs, but once you're there... that path to victory is toast.

You want to see how you stack up with the Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning?

The Leafs had nine regulation wins in November. Tampa had eight.

All that confidence, and momentum, and learning to win, and swagger, and never-give-up stuff is all well and good...They're in good shape. Heck, great shape. Belief can be a powerful thing and I'm happy to hear that the Sabres have some of that on tap these days.

The day the streak started, I wrote a piece at [WGR550.com](http://WGR550.com) to point out just how average the Sabres were at that point. Since then? Their playoff chances are strong and healthy, but their vital signs... not so much.

After a span of 15 games in 30 days of November, they'll get a bit of a break with 13 games in December (29 days from the Nashville game to the end of the month). Perhaps a somewhat lighter load, and some softer opponents mixed in can bring the Sabres back up a bit in how they play. We're looking for wins, of course, but

we should also be looking for a better share of the shots, and a better quality of shot, while also shoring things up in front of the goaltenders.

If not, those standings we keep pointing to, might not look as good when this team hits 2019.

## **Sabres' Pilut does well in his first NHL game**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 30, 2018

Sunrise, FL (WGR 550) - Lawrence Pilut didn't seem nervous at all as he made his NHL debut with the Sabres on Friday. In the first period, almost all of Pilut's 4:09 was spent in his own end, but except for one play he was under control.

On his first shift, he hit a breaking Kyle Okposo with a perfect pass to get out of the zone. On the one shift, he got into the offensive zone sure enough, he rotated right to the slot making himself available and looking for a pass.

Some other highlights of the first period saw him break up a pass and immediately go into transition to lead the attack out of the zone, and he did a good job of scooping up a rebound from in front to get the puck to safety.

The one negative play is he started to get out of the zone too quickly, leaving two Panthers behind him.

In the first period, Pilut had one hit, one giveaway and one blocked shot and was plus-1.

As the game went on in the second period, Pilut tried even harder to get up in the play. With that came a couple of mistakes. Pilut went behind the net only to get blown up by Nick Bjugstad. In the third period, he did a great job of out battling Evgenii Dadonov only to throw the puck right up the slot, forcing Linus Ullmark to make a huge save on Frank Vatrano.

Jason Pominville couldn't score on a 2-on-1, but it was created by Pilut at the Buffalo blue line.

Pilut played 12:48 in the game and had two blocked shots. He was given credit for four giveaways, but I only remember two.

For his first game, I thought Pilut looked right at home. I was curious to see how things would go in the defensive zone and I thought he competed well. He didn't get a chance 3-on-3, but I would think that's coming soon.

## **Panthers upend Sabres 3-2 in overtime**

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

November 30, 2018

The Florida Panthers scored two unanswered goals, including the game-winning goal in overtime to defeat the Buffalo Sabres 3-2 on Friday night at the BB&T Center.

Jeff Skinner scored his 20th goal of the season that gave the Sabres a 1-0 lead midway through the first period. Sam Reinhart made the cross-ice pass in the offensive zone that helped open up the net for Skinner. Reinhart and Jack Eichel were credited with the assists on the game's first goal.

The first penalty of the game was taken by Rasmus Ristolainen. Buffalo's rear guard was called for interference. The blue and gold were able to kill off the minor to preserve their one-goal lead. Later in the period, Rasmus Dahlin was called for a hooking minor, sending the Sabres back to the penalty kill.

However, a Jared McCann shot on the power play was tipped on the way to the net and was able to reach the net to tie the game at 1-1. McCann's shot hit the stick of Zach Bogosian on its way into the net with Dahlin in the penalty box. Michael Matheson and Frank Vatrano assisted on the special teams goal.

Reinhart notched his second point of the night early in the second period, scoring his sixth goal of the year to give Buffalo a 2-1 lead. It came after Eichel chipped the puck to the front of the net. He and Linus Ullmark were given assists on the score.

The Panthers, once again, drew even with Buffalo thanks to a power play goal, this time in the third period. Evgenii Dadanov was able to sweep a rebound chance into the net for his 11th goal of the season, making the score 2-2. Jonathan Huberdeau and Keith Yandle assisted on the goal that came with nearly eight minutes to go in regulation.

In overtime, Florida used tic-tac-toe passing to create the game's last score. Huberdeau made a pass in the offensive zone in the 3-on-3 session to Aleksander Barkov. The Panthers' captain did not miss on the opportunity to give the team the 3-2 win. Huberdeau and Aaron Ekblad assisted on the goal.

Buffalo had two shots on goal in the overtime, while Florida scored on their lone shot.

### GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 10:55 - Jeff Skinner (20) (Sam Reinhart, Jack Eichel)

FLA: 18:31 - Jared McCann (5) PPG (Michael Matheson)

Second Period:

BUF: 2:41 - Sam Reinhart (6) PPG (Jack Eichel, Linus Ullmark)

FLA: NONE

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

FLA: 11:56 - Evgenii Dadanov (11) PPG (Jonathan Huberdeau, Keith Yandle)

Overtime:

BUF: NONE

FLA: 2:26 - Aleksander Barkov (9) (Jonathan Huberdeau, Aaron Ekblad)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 11:48 - Rasmus Ristolainen (Interference - 2 min.); 16:40 - Rasmus Dahlin (Hooking - 2 min.)

FLA: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 18:19 - Patrik Berglund (Holding - 2 min.)

FLA: 2:04 - Nick Bjugstad (High sticking - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 11:48 - Casey Nelson (High sticking - 2 min.)

FLA: 2:29 - Aaron Ekblad (Tripping - 2 min.); 13:11 - Alex Petrovic (Boarding - 2 min.)

Overtime:

BUF: NONE

FLA: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 24 (6, 9, 7, 2)

FLA: 43 (14, 12, 16, 1)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 40 saves

FLA: James Reimer - 22 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 for 4 (25%)

FLA: 2 for 4 (50%)

Three Stars:

Aleksander Barkov - FLA

Linus Ullmark - BUF

Evgenii Dadonov - FLA

What's Next:

The Sabres will close out their three-game road trip on Monday night in Nashville. Buffalo and the Predators will drop the puck at eight o'clock on the flagship home on the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pre-game coverage with Brian Koziol starts our coverage at 7 p.m.

## **The Sabres look to start another winning streak against Florida**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 30, 2018

Sunrise, FL (WGR 550) - The Sabres don't have a lot of time to think about having their 10-game winning streak broken as they're right back at it against Florida on Friday. With the loss, the Sabres are now 13-3-2 in their last 18 games and are 6-2-1 in their last nine road games.

With the win over the Sabres, Tampa Bay is back into the No. 1 spot in the NHL with a .712 point percentage. Buffalo is tied with Toronto for second at .692.

For the first time this season, injuries are starting to pile up for this team. Scott Wilson and Matt Hunwick have been out for the season, Patrik Berglund has missed five games, but he's been activated from injured reserve which means he's likely ready to play. Conor Sheary has been out for two, Marco Scandella has missed two straight games and Jake McCabe got hurt in Tampa Bay and will not be available for the Panthers game.

That means Lawrence Pilut will make his NHL debut. Before his two call ups from Rochester, Pilut led the AHL in scoring with three goals and 19 assists for 22 points in 16 games. Pilut played five years in the SHL before signing with Buffalo. He'll turn 23 at the end of December.

Hunwick is skating for the first time with his new teammates. He started working out about a month ago after hurting his neck working out before training camp. There's no timetable for his return. The defenseman said it was great to finally be on the ice with the team, but he wishes it could've been earlier, "It's a little weird to start the season in almost December now. I felt like I had a great summer and then to have an injury to come up late in the summer and not being able to participate in the new organization.

"You want to come in and put your best foot forward, but it's been a slow process."

When players are out for so long, they begin questioning if their season might be over, especially when the injury is in the neck area. Hunwick admitted it crossed his mind, "There was some haziness to what the outcome would be. I think when you give stuff time to heal, you just hope that it does."

Hunwick was a seventh round pick who started his career in Boston. After that, he went to Colorado, the Rangers, Toronto and Pittsburgh. Last season, he only appeared in 42 games for the Penguins and is glad to be in Buffalo, "I was really excited. I think I was looking for a fresh start, a new opportunity and I was part of a young team when I went to Toronto and you can see how fast that turned around and with the start we've had this year, I think it's been fairly similar, so I'm real happy to be a Buffalo Sabre."

Hunwick was starting fresh, but when you can't even work out, it's hard to get to know your new teammates. That process is happening now, "Lately I've been at the rink a lot more, so that's been good, but anytime you're not in the lineup, you don't want to be a distraction, so I try to be around the team as much as I can whether it's dinners or Thanksgiving, but with this being my first road trip with the team, it's the most integrated I've been."

It wouldn't shock me if Linus Ullmark is between the pipes against the Panthers. He's 5-0-1 with a 2.52 goals-against and .926 save percentage. Ullmark has won his last two starts, stopping 37 of 39 shots in Minnesota and 35 of 37 shots in Detroit.

Tage Thompson has points in three straight games and five out of six games. In that time, the winger has four goals and an assist.

Rasmus Ristolainen has points in five of six games scoring a goal and five assists.

Jack Eichel is ninth in league scoring with 30 points in 26 games. He's tied with Evgeni Malkin and John Tavares. His 25 assists are fourth in the NHL.

Eichel has 105 shots this season, which is third in the league.

Buffalo is 2-7-1 in its last 10 games in Sunrise.

The Panthers have one win in five games and two victories in their last eight games.

Many expected better from Florida than 25th in the NHL with a .478 points percentage.

Roberto Luongo has missed three games with a lower-body injury. James Reimer has played in six straight games, going 2-2-0 with a 3.83 goals-against and .888 save percentage.

High scoring winger Vincent Trocheck has missed five games with a lower-body injury.

Jonathan Huberdeau leads Florida in scoring with five goals and 19 assists for 24 points in 23 games. Newly acquired Mike Hoffman has 12 goals and 23 points.

The Panthers have won each of its last five games against the Sabres and the last four in a row here.

Join Schopp and the Bulldog for the pre-game starting at 6:00 when they'll be joined by Phil Housley, Lawrence Pilut and one other player.

## **The Sabres recall Tennyson**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 30, 2018

Sunrise, FL (WGR 550) - The Sabres have recalled Matt Tennyson from Rochester ,which, to me, almost assures that Lawrence Pilut will make his NHL debut on Friday.

Marco Scandella has missed the last two games with an upper-body injury and goes on injured reserve to make room for Tennyson. Tennyson is here in case somebody gets hurt in warmup.

Jake McCabe only played 7:29 in Tampa before leaving with an undisclosed injury. Pilut will become the first player from Rochester to dress for a game with the Sabres this season.

Tennyson started the season in Buffalo, but never got into a game. He has one assist in seven games with the Amerks this season.

The Sabres got to Sunrise late from Tampa, so there was no morning skate on Friday.

Join Schopp and the Bulldog for the pre-game starting at 6:00 when they'll be joined by Phil Housley, Lawrence Pilut and one other player.

## Shift-by-shift look: Pilut's NHL career takes flight with active night

By John Vogl

The Athletic

November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Fla. — When Rasmus Dahlin made his NHL debut in October, a full building in Buffalo and a good portion of the hockey world were watching.

The Sabres had another Swedish defense prospect play for the first time Friday. There were maybe 9,500 people in the arena. Only a fraction of those even knew Lawrence Pilut was debuting.

Despite the disparity in audiences, Buffalo is expecting big things from both of them. Pilut showed why.

The defenseman held his own during a 3-2 overtime loss to Florida. He was active defensively and showed his much-lauded offensive instincts. He was feisty despite a modest 5-foot-11, 180-pound frame. He made a few mistakes, but none cost the Sabres.

"It was an OK debut, I would say," Pilut said.

His coach went a step further.

"I really liked Lawrence stepping in in this situation," Phil Housley said. "He handled himself really well."

It was obvious Pilut had played professionally before skating on the Panthers' ice. While Dahlin is an 18-year-old wunderkind drafted first overall, Pilut turns 23 at the end of December and signed as a free agent after five seasons in the Swedish Hockey League.

"The experience I've had over in Sweden helps me out a lot," Pilut said. "I'm ready for it."

Here's a shift-by-shift look at Pilut's first NHL game, which won't be his last.

First period

Shift No. 1: Pilut was in the action immediately. He broke up a pass intended for Troy Brouwer along the left boards, but he gave the puck back to the Florida forward. Pilut later gained control in the Sabres' zone and carried the puck out, hitting Kyle Okposo with a cross ice pass.

At the end of the shift, Pilut blocked a shot by Frank Vatrano.

"I was a little nervous in the beginning, but it felt like I got into it pretty good," he said.

No. 2: Pilut wanted to get his first goal right away. As Okposo circled the Panthers' net, Pilut pinched to the left circle and raised his stick for a one-timer. Okposo elected to feed Pilut's defense partner, Casey Nelson, on the far side for a shot.

No. 3: Before the puck was dropped for a neutral-zone faceoff, Pilut chatted with Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel.

"I always like to go in and see what my centers are thinking," Pilut said. "I like to see what they say and what play we want to do. I just want to keep talking to everybody out there."

It was just a 10-second shift as goalie Linus Ullmark covered a Panthers shot and Housley pulled Pilut and Nelson from the defensive-zone draw.

No. 4: Pilut showed his feisty side as the Panthers dumped the puck into Buffalo's zone. Rather than give chase, Pilut stepped up and hit Colton Sceviour. After Pilut carried the puck out of the zone along the right boards, Sceviour returned the favor with a check of his own.

No. 5: It was already time to celebrate — not that Pilut had much to do with Skinner's goal. Defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Zach Bogosian changed just as Skinner scored on a two-on-one pass from Sam Reinhart. Pilut turned and pointed to the bench as Buffalo fans cheered.

"It was Bogo and Beaulieu coming off, and I gave them a little clap and everything," Pilut said. "It was nice of them."

No. 6: After talking with Eichel before the faceoff, Pilut charged at Jonathan Huberdeau to jab the forward with his stick. As he did, the Panthers slipped behind him for a shot. He later cleared the puck from the zone by bouncing it off the boards to Eichel.

No. 7: As the Panthers controlled the puck in Buffalo's zone, Pilut moved to the top of the slot to cover Jared McCann.

"He doesn't give a lot of time and space to player he's defending," Housley said. "It's a good step."

Second period

No. 8: It was an eventful shift as the feistiness and hit absorption continued for Pilut. As Huberdeau watched the play, Pilut came from behind with a cross-check to the back.

"That's part of my game," he said. "I like to get into it and do something extra like that."

The defenseman then held up Dryden Hunt on a Florida dump-in. He later picked up a puck just over the Panthers' blue line, but carried it in offside. Florida again dumped the puck into the Sabres' zone, and Pilut gave chase with Nick Bjugstad. The 6-foot-6, 215-pound Bjugstad flattened Pilut in the corner.

"He is big," the defenseman said with a smile.

No. 9: Pilut did a nice job tying up Evgenii Dadonov in the Sabres' zone, which allowed the defenseman to dump the puck out of a danger area and into the corner.

No. 10: Pilut misplayed a puck in the Sabres' zone, and the Panthers responded with extended possession, but no scoring chances. When Buffalo finally broke up ice, Pilut joined the drive by following puck-carrier Tage Thompson.

No. 11: Sometimes players skate for 32 seconds and nothing happens.

No. 12: An active stick helped generate a prime scoring chance. Pilut knocked the puck away from Dadonov near the Buffalo blue line, and the Sabres wound up with a two-on-one. Reimer stopped a slap shot from Jason Pominville.

"I felt like I had my stick game going," Pilut said. "I felt pretty good in that way."

No. 13: As the Sabres established zone time, Pilut kept the puck in at the left point and dumped it behind the Florida net.

No. 14: A bit of indecision cost Pilut. He hesitated briefly before going for a puck at center ice, and the Panthers turned toward the Buffalo zone. Nelson covered Pilut's left side and pointed for his partner to take the driving player. Pilut did, taking away any pass possibilities.

The next time Nelson went on the ice, he was partnered with Dahlin as Pilut sat.

Third period

No. 15: It was Pilut's worst shift, though it didn't start that way. He tied up McCann on a defensive-zone draw and shielded the puck from Dadonov. But Pilut then fired a pass onto the stick of Vatrano in the slot, and Ullmark needed to make a stellar glove save.

"That maybe comes with a little nerves," Pilut said, "but I've got to keep playing my game there, keep being the puck mover that I am."

No. 16: With a delayed penalty coming to the Panthers, Pilut shot into traffic, drawing a whistle.

No. 17: Once again, Pilut's active stick was evident. He knocked the puck away from a driving Bjugstad to halt a Florida rush.

"You see a lot of confidence in his game," Housley said. "Really good stick-on-puck detail, especially in our defensive zone. He leads with it. He's on the puck."

No. 18: Florida, which finished with a 43-24 shot advantage, was parked in the Sabres' zone. Pilut got a whistle by charging the point and blocking Mike Matheson's shot up and out of play.

No. 19: Pilut was on the ice just 17 seconds because of a high-sticking penalty by Nelson.

No. 20: Sometimes a player skates for 27 seconds and nothing happens.

No. 21: Pilut chased down a loose puck and passed to Bogosian, allowing the Sabres to leave the zone.

The final stat line featured two shot attempts, two blocked shots, four giveaways, one hit and a plus-1 rating in 12:48 of ice time.

"It was fun," Pilut said. "A solid game. A couple of passes I want to get back, but otherwise I feel like I just need to get a little looser and play my game. I felt like I was aggressive in the D-zone and made a couple good plays on the wall.

"I just want to keep developing on this game and keep being me out there."

## **Stimson: A deep dig into the film and statistical details from the Sabres' streak-ending loss in Tampa**

By Ryan Stimson

The Athletic

November 30, 2018

The Sabres went down to Tampa with a chance for a franchise record 11th consecutive win. Instead, they got a up-front-and-personal look at the most complete team in the Eastern Conference. The Lightning dominated from start to finish, racing out to a 8-1 advantage on the shot counter and finishing with 60 percent of the shots in the game. They did this through strong forechecking and activating their defense to sustain offensive zone pressure.

All data is from NaturalStatTrick.

Here is the shot heat map at 5v5. The Sabres trailed 19-33 on 5v5 shots heading into the third and made a push about halfway in the period, but never really were able to take over when they needed a goal. They did get to some decent areas, but were just woeful in defending the Lightning attack. The worst culprits? The line of Evan Rodrigues, Jason Pominville, and Vladimir Sobotka.

This unit saw mostly Steven Stamkos, Yanni Gourde, and Mathieu Joseph (a little over four minutes against them) and did not go as Phil Housley might have hoped. We've seen Pominville have mixed results when off the top line this season. In fact, when he's away from Jack Eichel, his shot share drops almost 10 percent. Sam Reinhart doesn't seem a huge change (Two percent improvement away from Eichel) and those are the two right wingers that have played with Eichel for most, if not all, of the season so far. I'm a broken record at this point, but loading up a top line has a devastating effect on the depth performance of the team, especially against a team like Tampa.

The top line certainly held their own going power on power against the Nikita Kucherov line, but the team cannot have this kind of drop off when the top two lines are doing their best to just break even. The team's depth was boat-raced last night.

One line that also held their own a bit was Casey Mittelstadt's line. Mittelstadt, Kyle Okposo, and Tage Thompson all were above 50 percent in the shot share department (11 for, 10 against). They spent over half of their minutes against the Dan Girardi and Braydon Coburn pairing, so that definitely helps.

Speaking of matchups, Housley is either trusting Rasmus Dahlin a bit more, or Jon Cooper got what he wanted. Dahlin spent eight of his 22 minutes at 5v5 matched against Nikita Kucherov's line. The rookie drew even in shot share, which definitely is a win for the young back. The top overall pick spent most of his minutes against Joe Thornton's line a few nights ago, so we may finally be seeing Dahlin being deployed like a number one.

### The Lightning Forecheck

In this clip, you can see how aggressive the Lightning are at pressuring the puck. Five seconds into this clip, the Lightning have four players all in one small area to not allow a route through to break the puck out. However, even as the Sabres attempt to wheel around the net and escape out the other side, Alex Killorn takes a pursuit angle that forces Okposo to the boards. The Lightning force a dump out and then head back into the zone. They did this all night.

### Faceoff Plays

Early in the game the Lightning ran this high cycle play off a faceoff win. The purpose in doing so is to pull players out of the slot and defend high in the zone to open up space down low. It's playing High-to-Low in the offensive zone. You can see the left back activate into the slot, something we'll see a lot of in the follow clips. In drawing players up into the top half of the zone and then playing the puck down low, the Lightning are able to manufacture 1v1 situations and then attack the net after winning those battles. Similarly, once the puck is moved down low, all the Sabres turn to watch the puck and the puck is won to a wide open Lightning player for a chance.

This is something else I saw a lot of last night – the Lightning would often release a forward into the middle, close to the blue line. The Sabres rarely went with the player and so it was another passing option in the zone. Whether this is something the Lightning do a lot of, or something they wanted to do after scouting the Sabres, I'm not sure, but it will be something to take note of how the Florida Panthers circulate possession in the offensive zone on Friday.

This is a continuation of the above faceoff play. The puck is worked back to the point and the left back, Victor Hedman, activates across the slot again. The run depresses coverage into the slot and prevents additional players from moving out to the high slot area. Tampa's left winger could curl higher into the zone and present for a pass into the slot as Hedman's movement opens some space there. Instead, Girardi shoots.

Tampa goes Low-to-High again and Hedman activates again to pick up the puck down low for another chance.

The conclusion of this play results in the first goal of the game. Killorn creates separating using his edges and returns behind the net. Girardi activates as Hedman returns. Having players who can move in opposite directions like this is generally a good tactic. This is a horrible sequence by Remi Elie, who doesn't get his head around to track Girardi until it's too late.

### Transition Play

The Lightning were especially effective in transition last night, scoring two goals directly off of entries. This first one comes on some cross and drop interplay and we are able to see how the Sabres defend in transition. Dahlin goes with his player as Mittelstadt has to continue chasing his. I'm not a fan of players sticking with their man on transition defense – had Dahlin let Killorn go, this play is likely blown up at that moment. They may not have realized Mittelstadt was there and it was an even situation, but whenever teams cross like this, it's designed to create openings just like this.

On this rush goal for Kucherov, I saw some folks on Twitter lamenting Dahlin's pinch. Our eyes always remember the mistakes like this, but rather remember all the possession that's kept from the same type of play. This play is more on Eichel than Dahlin. When a back pinches, the weak side forward needs to rotate up to cover the point. Eichel doesn't do that and then the team has the bad luck on the pinch. Maybe Eichel doesn't stop the goal from being scored, but maybe his presence helps the team defend a 3v2 rather than a 3v1.

Later in the game, a similar situation presents itself. Watch Thompson, who is making a beeline for the point that Bogosian vacates. This is proper rotation to ensure the team is still in a good position defensively when activating. Tampa does this well and it's the little things that make a difference.

Some less obvious plays the Lightning were running in transition were on their regroup. If a team wants to scheme open a player to get the puck in transition, they'll often swing them away from the back with the puck and build speed through center. Here you'll see Kucherov do just that and get the puck after bypassing the first forechecker. He doesn't make the right tread as he has support for an easy entry at the top of the screen, but it was there.

Later on they run a similar play and you can see how Kucherov's movement creates a wide open lane for Tyler Johnson, but the pass is a bad one. Even when players aren't on the receiving end of a pass, their movement through center can open areas for teammates. The Sabres were victimized here quite a bit Thursday and it needs to tighten up tonight against another team with skilled forwards.

### Containment is Bad Policy

Not only was it bad foreign policy during the Cold War, but it's an equally poor defensive zone coverage approach on cold playing surfaces. Both teams took advantage of defenders looking to contain rather than regain possession. Observe Mittelstadt's best sequence of the night.

Mittelstadt jumps the pass in the neutral zone and carries in for a shot. He recovers the puck, circles behind the net, and then drops it and runs a little interference for Thompson to cut in and shoot. The Lightning are content with letting the play develop, keeping Mittelstadt to the outside, but just as we saw earlier when Girardi

activated, when teammates start to move against the flow of play, it can put a defender on its heels when they switch off. Girardi shouldn't chase this as much as he does.

However, the Sabres were also guilty of this, specifically Bogosian on the game-winning goal by Cedric Paquette. Mikhail Sergachev enters the zone and it is a 2v4 for the Lightning when he does. Bogosian and Beaulieu simply seek to contain here and keep everything in front of them. The trouble is again that they are flat-footed and Paquette is able to walk down the lane and shoot this puck. Should Carter Hutton have saved this? Possibly. Should this shot have never happened and should have Bogosian stepped up on Sergachev when he entered the zone since the Sabres had numbers? Likely.

Also, Evan Rodrigues could have acquitted himself better than he does. He's up pressing in the neutral zone, but coming back into the zone, he's late to the action. As the last player into the zone for the Sabres, he's supposed to pick up trailers. Paquette qualifies since Sobotka is on the weak side with Ondrej Palat.

### Special Teams

Containment on the penalty kill is a different story. There's one less player to back you up and so it's definitely the smarter approach to keep players and pucks to the outside. When you get aggressive in poor situations (not 50/50 pucks), breakdowns can happen. On the penalty kill, the team did a decent job on the double minor to Johan Larsson. The Lightning only took six shots in six minutes of power play time, but scored on a blast from Stamkos when the team was slow to set up after a faceoff loss, and almost gave up another in the above play.

Casey Nelson sees J.T. Miller appear to fumble this puck, and so he jumps out to challenge him. You'll see teams tell their penalty killers to be aggressive on loose pucks, but does this qualify? If Miller had been forced to turn to the boards to retrieve it, that might be a better spot to be aggressive, but he keeps himself in position to pass it and is facing the play. This creates a lane down low and the rest is almost history. Discipline is paramount on the penalty kill. Nelson needs to be smarter about when to be aggressive.

### Conclusions

While the top half of the Sabres lineup acquitted themselves against a top team in the league, their lack of depth was exposed and the Sabres were soundly beaten despite the flattering score line. Tampa got the benefit of several penalty calls, but when you don't have the puck, it's difficult to draw penalties. This was a measuring stick and while you don't want to overanalyze one game, Tampa Bay is in another class than the Sabres right now. The team will continue to have nights like this if the lines aren't properly balanced, however it was encouraging to have Mittelstadt's line stay above water and Dahlin's continued emergence is the best thing going for this team.

They finish one win short of a new team record for consecutive wins, but it was an enjoyable ride that helped breathe life into the early part of the season. This team has the talent to contend for a playoff spot, but they need to focus on process over results and rebalance the lineup. If Housley continues with loading up the top line, this could become a familiar result – and when the goals start to dry up, there might be some ugly score lines in there.

## **Q&A: Donald Audette on the bond of the '90s Sabres teams and the feeling of playing for a Buffalo contender**

By Lyndsey D'Arcangelo

The Athletic

November 30, 2018

Donald Audette loves hockey. Even after the former Buffalo Sabre retired from the NHL in 2004 and took some time away from the game, he knew he'd eventually find a way to get back into it.

That came in 2012 when he joined the Montreal Canadiens, where he played three NHL seasons, as an amateur scout. The role allows him to be involved with the game as much as possible — driving around Quebec, Canada, where he grew up, and keeping his eyes peeled for the next up-and-coming hockey talent.

Audette knows just the types of players he's looking for. Before his 14 seasons in the NHL, he was a standout young player himself. While playing for the Laval Titan in the QMJHL, he scored 76 goals in a single season, amassing 161 total points in 70 games. Although Audette turned heads with his quickness and scoring ability, his 5-foot-8 and roughly 190-pound frame made teams overlook him. The Sabres didn't end up drafting him until the ninth round (183rd overall) in the 1989 NHL Draft.

Still, Audette's penchant for scoring carried over into his first AHL season, when he netted 42 goals with the Rochester Americans and was named AHL Rookie of the Year, and then into his rookie year with the Sabres, when he racked up 31 goals. Despite having to overcome a handful of knee injuries, he went on to have a lengthy NHL career, most of which was spent in Buffalo.

Audette, 49, spoke with The Athletic on Thursday about his breakout rookie season with the Sabres, what it's like playing for a Buffalo contender as the city is buzzing, and whether he was behind his son, Daniel, getting drafted by Montreal in 2014.

What do you love most about being an amateur scout with Montreal?

Well, it's still in the hockey business and when I retired 14 years ago, I didn't do much for the first five years except for trying to be a good parent, a good father. And after a while, you miss the game. I kept watching it and it's nice to be back in it. Hockey is all we know. We grew up playing hockey and it's what we love. It keeps me enjoying it.

You were drafted by the Sabres in the ninth round of the 1989 NHL Draft. Do feel you should have been drafted earlier?

The time I was drafted, the NHL was different. The game has changed over time. Back then, it was more the bigger guys and the physical game — all those things. So all the smaller guys had problems getting the real value on them. But there's always something that happens for a reason, and I'm glad I was drafted by the Sabres in the ninth round. It doesn't really matter if I went in the first round or not. It just gave me a chance to be there. After that, it was up to me to show what I could do.

The Sabres made the playoffs in the 1989-1990 season and you were brought up for two games of the division semifinals against the Canadiens. How did that feel getting called up under those circumstances?

I ended up having a pretty good season in Rochester, I was piling up goals and points. And when I got the call about the playoffs, my first game was in Montreal where I grew up. I had a lot of emotions, I was nervous. But it was a good nervous. It was very special, especially because we won that game.

You were brought for a handful of games the following season. At that point, did you feel you were ready for that next level?

I showed up at camp and I thought I had a pretty good camp, but we had some veteran guys there — it's about opportunity, too. We had Mike Foligno, Pierre Turgeon, Alex Mogilny. We had some good players. So they sent me back to Rochester and it kind of took me a week or so to adjust my mindset because I felt I did belong at the

next level. When they called me up, I regrouped and was ready to step in. In Buffalo during those years, we had good centers like Turgeon and Dale Hawerchuk and it made life pretty easy when I'd go up and play with those kind of players.

You had a breakout season with 31 goals when you played your first full year as an NHL rookie. How validating was that and what was it like to shoulder those expectations for the following season and beyond?

I felt confident. I felt like I could play with those guys. And you could not ask for a better player to play with than Dale. He had this vision and I'm the type of guy where I like to get the puck, I'm more of a scorer than passer. Dale loved to pass. So I just had to get open and be ready for the puck. That's what I did. And I had a good year.

I didn't really feel any expectations. I wanted to score every game. The pressure or the expectation didn't bother me. I was harder on myself more than anybody else. I love scoring goals and helping the team win. If the game is tied and you get the game winner, it was such a good feeling.

Early on in your career, the Sabres had some success but from '96 to '98 you really hit a stride. What was it like playing for Buffalo during a stretch like that and feeding off all the hockey buzz?

It's special. We were lucky enough to have some really good players, you know — Pat LaFontaine, Dominik Hasek, Mike Peca and all those. We had a group of guys that were really tight. Rob Ray, Brad May, Matt Barnaby. We were tough to play against. We were a bunch of guys that weren't scared to go out there. We always stuck together and that's what I think our strength was. No matter what, we were always together — on the ice, off the ice. So the bond of the teammates was really strong. When we had those good seasons, the buzz of the city and the fans, you know everywhere you go that's what people are talking about. And it puts a smile on your face when that happens.

That buzz was missing in Buffalo for the past few years, but it's back and the Sabres seem to have turned a corner. What's the impact on the locker room when that happens?

The main thing, you know, the player doesn't change much. The confidence they have in themselves changes. A lot of time when you lose your confidence, you start second-guessing about how you're playing on the ice. And right now the Sabres are playing with a lot of confidence. It's good for them. Bad for us, but good for them.

You were eventually traded to the Los Angeles Kings in 1998 and the Sabres went to the Stanley Cup Finals that following season. Looking back, how did that trade go down and do you regret not staying?

At that point in my career, it was more business than anything else. I was up for a contract and after being here for nine or ten years or so, I had a chance to become a free agent. My first choice was to say in Buffalo. It was my home. But you have a short career and you have to make the best of it. And the contract they were offering wasn't even close. So I knew at that point I needed to go. It was more about the business side of it.

You've had some serious knee injuries during your playing career and yet you played for 14 seasons. How were you able to keep bouncing back?

I think it's determination and facing adversity. I went through a lot earlier in my career. It's funny because after my last surgery, they told me I probably only had three years left to play. And I played another eight years after that. But I can tell you when I wake up in the morning now, I feel a lot of pain. But it's worth it. I wouldn't trade it.

Your son Daniel was recently drafted by Montreal ... did you have anything to do with that?

No, not really (laughs). I'm pretty hard on him. In this business, you have to be good enough to be drafted. And when they were talking about taking Daniel, I wasn't in the room and I wasn't involved. He's making it on his own and I just wish him the best. It's special when your kid gets drafted. And he beat me by four rounds.

## **Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin named NHL's top rookie for November**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
December 1, 2018

Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, who led all first-year defensemen with 10 points in 15 games during November, has earned NHL rookie of the month honors, the league announced today.

Dahlin, 18, average 19 minutes, 52 seconds of ice time as the Sabres went 11-3-1 during November, jumping to second place in the NHL standings with 37 points (17-7-3). His plus-9 rating also ranked second among all rookies.

The Swede compiled one goal and nine points during the Sabres' franchise-tying 10-game-winning streak, which ended with Thursday's 5-4 road loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The first overall pick is the Sabres' first rookie of the month since winger Marcus Foligno in March 2012.

Dahlin beat out Vancouver center Elias Pettersson (six goals and 12 points) and Ottawa forwards Brady Tkachuk (six goals and 10 points) and Colin White (five goals and 10 points) and Los Angeles goalie Cal Petersen (4-4-0, 2.41 goals-against average and a .929 save percentage) for the award.

In other news, four Sabres – Dahlin, center Jack Eichel, defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and winger Jeff Skinner – are on the online ballot for Atlantic Division captain for the NHL All-Star Game ballot the league released on its web site.

## **Sabres recall Matt Tennyson from Amerks with Jake McCabe hurt**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 30, 2018

Is Buffalo Sabres defense prospect Lawrence Pilut going to make his NHL debut tonight?

The Sabres recalled defenseman Matt Tennyson from the Rochester Americans this morning, meaning Jake McCabe, who left Thursday's 5-4 road loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning with an undisclosed injury, likely won't play tonight against the Florida Panthers.

Update: Pilut will play, according to reports out of Florida.

In addition, the Sabres activated forward Patrik Berglund from injured reserved today and played winger Conor Sheary on the list.

Berglund will replace Remi Elie, according to reports. McCabe is day-to-day.

Sabres coach Phil Housley had no update on McCabe following the game.

Pilut, 22, has been a healthy scratch four times since last week. The Swede has performed dynamically in his first season in the AHL, scoring three goals and 22 points in 16 games with the Amerks.

The Sabres recalled him again Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Tennyson, 28, has compiled one assist in seven outings with the Amerks. He began the season with the Sabres but did not play.

Tennyson had zero points in 15 games with the Sabres last season.

To create roster space for Tennyson, the Sabres placed defenseman Marco Scandella on injured reserve.

## **Rasmus Dahlin named NHL Rookie of the Month**

By Anthony Reyes

WKBW

December 1, 2018

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) - Buffalo Sabres defenseman and first-overall pick Rasmus Dahlin has been named the NHL's "Rookie of the Month" for November.

Dahlin led rookie defenders and finished fourth among all rookies with a goal and 9 assists for 10 points in 15 games.

Dahlin receives the distinction over Elias Pettersson, Brady Tkachuk, Colin White, and Cal Petersen.

The rookie defender played an average of 19:54 a game for a Sabres team that finished the month of November 11-3-1, which included a 10-game winning streak.

He currently has 2 goals and 12 assists for 14 points in his first 27 career games.

## **5 Observations: Panthers top Sabres 3-2 in OT**

By Matt Bove

WKBW

November 30, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Despite having a lead in the third period the Buffalo Sabres lost for the second consecutive night, falling to the Florida Panthers 3-2 in OT. Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart scored for the Sabres, who slip to 17-7-3 on the season.

5 Observations from Friday's loss:

Tough loss

With Nashville and Toronto on the horizon, this felt like a game the Sabres needed. There is no denying this team has played some great hockey but dropping back-to-back games after rattling off 10-straight wins isn't a good look. Now the blue and gold will have to steal a game in Nashville or they'll be looking at an oh-so-dreaded three-game losing streak. They deserve a sliver of credit for at least snagging a point but blowing leads in consecutive games can't happen if the Sabres are going to contend for a playoff spot.

Elite company

With his 20th goal of the season, Jeff Skinner becomes only the second player in Sabres franchise history to reach the 20-goal mark before December. So who was the other? Rick Martin in the 1973-1974 season.

The goal also makes Skinner one of only seven players to tally his 20th goal in less than 27 games.

Check out the company he joins:

Alexander Mogilny [23 games]

Richard Martin [24 games]

Dave Andreychuk [26 games]

Danny Gare [26 games]

Pat Lafontaine [27 games]

Thomas Vanek [27 games]

Based on his production and the aforementioned list, it would likely be a good idea to extend Skinner.

Red-Hot Reinhart

After a pretty slow start to the season, Samson Reinhart has started to really produce for his team. On Friday evening Reinhart assisted on Skinner's first period goal and found the back of the net for the sixth time this season in the middle frame.

With his two points against the Panthers, Reinhart now has nine points in the Sabres last 10 games [he also has 15 points in 14 games]. Playing alongside Eichel and Skinner has certainly helped Reinhart rack up the points. But the 23-year-old winger has also been doing what he does best. Going to the net and scoring from in close. That has been on display in the first two games of the road trip and will likely continue based on his recent surge.

Ready for takeoff

For weeks fans have been clamoring for the debut of highly-touted rookie defenseman Lawrence Pilut. On Friday it was finally time. Injuries to Marco Scandella and Jake McCabe [both are day-to-day] propelled Pilut into the lineup, making him the eighth defenseman to appear in a game for the Sabres this season.

For the most part, I thought Pilut did a good job in his first NHL game despite his limited ice-time. His biggest mistake came in the third period when he tried forcing a pass up the middle of the ice. It went right to a Panthers forward, he was denied by Ullmark.

Adjusting to the speed of the NHL after only a handful of games in Rochester is quite the tall task. But Pilut managed to join the rush a few times while looking responsible in his own end. Overall it was a perfectly fine debut.

#### Locked-In Linus

Fun fact — Linus Ullmark still doesn't have a regulation loss this season. Despite one bad outing against the Montreal Canadiens, Ullmark has been rock solid in nearly every game he's played this season. With his win on Friday, Ullmark is now 5-0-2 this season. Against the Panthers, Ullmark turned away 40 of the 43 shots he faced, including several solid chances from Florida. If you ask me, Ullmark was the Sabres best player on Friday.

## **Rasmus Dahlin Named NHL Rookie Of The Month**

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

December 1, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The 2018 number one overall pick has been paying off for the Buffalo Sabres. Saturday, the league announced defenseman Rasmus Dahlin was named the NHL rookie of the month for November.

Dahlin scored one goal and nine assists, totaling ten points throughout the month. The defenseman is also ranked second among all rookies with a +9 rating. Through his first 27 games in the NHL, Dahlin tallied two goals and 12 assists.

The 18 year old first overall pick helped Buffalo to a 11-3-1 record throughout the month. The Sabres tied a franchise record 10 game win streak in November.

## **Sabres can't hold lead, drop 2nd straight**

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

December 1, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres held two one goal leads Friday night against Florida, but they couldn't hang on as the Panthers would tie things up twice, and score the game winner in overtime to defeat Buffalo 3-2.

Jeff Skinner opened up the scoring halfway through the first period for the Sabres. Jack Eichel slid a pass to Sam Reinhart who opened up the ice with a 2 on one along with Skinner. Skinner tallied his 20th goal of the season. Skinner joins elite Buffalo company, becoming just the 5th scorer to score 20 goals in 27 games or fewer.

Jared McCann would tie the game up for the Panthers on a late period power play.

The only goal of the second period came less than three minutes in, when Reinhart played clean up duty in front of the net and finished home a bouncing puck sent in from Eichel. The goal was the forward's sixth of the season, and his third in two days.

The Panthers would answer, tying the game up on a power play goal from Evgenii Dadonov. The Sabres had a chance to take the lead on a power play late, but the Panthers would kill the penalty, and force overtime.

Aleksander Barkov would score the OT winner for the Panthers, on a one timer that was Florida's only shot in the extra period.

Buffalo travels to Nashville to take on the Predators Monday.

## **Sabres' Dahlin named rookie of the month by NHL**

WGRZ

December 1, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The NHL announced Saturday that Buffalo Sabres rookie defenseman Rasmus Dahlin has been named November's "Rookie of the Month."

Dahlin has 10 points in 15 games, including 1 goal and 9 assists.

The Sabres tweeted out that Rasmus Dahlin has become the first Sabres player to earn NHL Rookie of the Month honors since March 2012 when Marcus Foligno took the honor.

Dahlin was the number one overall draft pick by the Sabres in the 2018 NHL Draft.

The team is coming off a record-breaking November that included a 10-game winning streak, tying a franchise record that was set back during the 1984 and 2006 seasons.

## **Housley's communication skills key to turnaround by Sabres**

By Tim Campbell

NHL.com

December 2, 2018

WINNIPEG -- Communication is the crucial element that has helped Phil Housley transition from a Hockey Hall of Fame defenseman to the coach of the surging Buffalo Sabres.

The Sabres are 17-7-3 entering their game against the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena on Monday (8 p.m. ET; SNE, SNP, FS-TN, MSG-B, NHL.TV). Buffalo has been in and out of first place the Atlantic Division, the Eastern Conference and NHL standings during the past week, and the Sabres matched a team record by winning 10 consecutive games from Nov. 8-27.

It's quite a turnaround from last season, Housley's first as Buffalo's coach, when the Sabres finished last in the NHL at 25-45-12.

The key to the swift turnaround was a series of offseason conversations, mainly between Housley and the Sabres' leadership group.

"I think we solved a lot coming into training camp," Housley said. "We knew we had to change. We talked a lot about that after last season, that we had to change. That included coaching, our philosophy and our leadership group."

Asked to detail changes, Housley first raised his arm and pointed down the hallway to the dressing room.

"Everybody had to make a commitment to holding each other accountable, and we knew it wasn't going to happen overnight," he said. "They've put a lot of work into it. They've done terrific things to mold our culture right now."

Center Jack Eichel, 22, was named captain on Oct. 3, 2018, on the eve of starting his fourth season with Buffalo. Forward Kyle Okposo and defenseman Zach Bogosian were named alternates.

Eichel said a lot of hard questions were asked and answered during the offseason.

"Instead of kind of sulking and letting it go, I thought we did a really good job of figuring out the issues and figuring out solutions and trying to change what's gone on the last few years," said Eichel, who leads the Sabres with 32 points (five goals, 27 assists) in 27 games. "It was about having a higher standard of life and work and just really sacrificing for each other, and I think we've done a really good job of that."

Housley, 54, knew when he took the job with Buffalo that patience would be essential. But that's been easier said than done.

The Sabres hired Housley on June 15, 2017. Before coming to Buffalo, Housley had been an assistant with the Nashville Predators from 2013-17. He started his coaching career with the boys' hockey team in Stillwater, Minnesota, near his home. He also worked for the United States with various junior-level national teams.

"There were times I tried to remain as positive as I could, but you get frustrated," he said. "But I have learned a lot about having patience. And also trying to push the buttons at the right time and holding players accountable."

Housley has found the proper formula this season, Eichel said.

"At times when he's expecting more, he tells us that," Eichel said. "And at times when he's happy with where we're headed, he's letting us know. We're learning, he's learning and we're all just trying to get better."

Housley, selected by the Sabres in the first round (No. 6) of the 1982 NHL Draft, played his first eight seasons with Buffalo and had 558 points (138 goals, 380 assists) in 608 games. He retired in 2003 after playing in 1,495 games during 21 NHL seasons with the Sabres, Winnipeg Jets, St. Louis Blues, Calgary Flames, Chicago

Blackhawks, New Jersey Devils, Washington Capitals and Toronto Maple Leafs, finishing with 1,232 points (338 goals, 894 assists), the most by a U.S.-born defenseman. Housley is fourth all-time in scoring among NHL defensemen and was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2015.

A transition from playing excellence to coaching excellence does not surprise Ed Olczyk, a former teammate with the Jets.

"Howie was always a guy who was one step ahead as a player," said Olczyk, who coached the Pittsburgh Penguins (2003-06) and is a TV analyst for NBC Sports and the Chicago Blackhawks. "He had great instincts and such a feel for the game. And he's been able to translate that as a coach."

"I know, talking to a lot of guys in Nashville, when he was an assistant there, they said he could deliver the message in a way that players could relate to. When he played, his offensive level was on another level. Sometimes when players are that skilled and great, they can't, in layman's terms, express themselves."

Predators defenseman Ryan Ellis said Housley never had an issue in relaying his modern and progressive approach as an assistant under Peter Laviolette. The Predators reached the Stanley Cup Final in 2017, losing to the Pittsburgh Penguins in six games, in Housley's final season before he was hired in Buffalo.

"He was a great coach for all the D and what he did for our games inside our locker room," Ellis said. "We'll always forever be grateful to him."

Craig Button was the general manager of the Flames when Housley was there. He appreciated Housley's skills as a player but wasn't sure they would translate to coaching.

"In so many ways, those players had unique skills," said Button, now an analyst with TSN. "That's why they were Hall of Fame players. I won't say the game came easy to them, but it came naturally. They didn't need as much coaching in skill areas, if any at all."

"So now when they might come to coach, well, being a good coach is understanding what a player needs and how to help a player. When you've been gifted and it's come so naturally, sometimes it's hard to make that connection. It's like the brilliant physics student who can't be a physics teacher. They get it but they can't teach it."

Button said he admired Housley's willingness to grind his way up the coaching ladder.

"He went and learned and worked at it," Button said. "That's incredibly important to be successful as a coach."

"And I'm so happy to see in Buffalo that when they hired him, they were 'in' with him, making sure they were there for him as he gets better as a coach. It's a great credit to [general manager] Jason Botterill."

Housley was an assistant with the United States at the IIHF World Junior Championship in 2007 and 2011, winning bronze each time. In 2013, he coached the U.S. to the gold medal at the WJC in Ufa, Russia.

"He was the first coach I had that treated me like an adult," said Winnipeg Jets defenseman Jacob Trouba, who played for Housley in 2013. "I was 19 and he treated me like an adult. As you grow up, you have coaches that treat you more like a younger kid, but he was the first one, for me, who was different that way."

"When you're in junior, there are still curfews and everybody's watching over you. He kind of treated us like, you can make your own decisions and he taught me that he wasn't there to babysit me; that he'd treat you like you want to be treated and left it up to you as to what you'd do with it."

Trouba's story gets to the heart of the matter with Housley.

"With today's player, Howie fits in perfectly," Olczyk said. "He's a players coach, no doubt about that. It's knowing when to push the button and it's a lot of positive messaging, nurturing, sometimes coddling."

"I've had this conversation with him ... you have to understand and figure out who and what your players are before everybody else does. It's finding a way to tell [a player] what he needs to know, not what he wants to hear. And I think that's Howie. He's direct and I think he gets that. He's a communicator and I think players of today appreciate that."

## **Jeff Skinner on Sabres' success, joining Bills Mafia and the Hurricanes' celebrations**

By Greg Wyshynski  
ESPN

December 3, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres have been the NHL's hottest team and biggest surprise this season. Their success can be linked to competent goaltending and some smart moves by GM Jason Botterill to reshape the roster of a team that hadn't made the playoffs since 2011. None of those moves was smarter than the acquisition of left wing Jeff Skinner from the Carolina Hurricanes. He was entering a contract year. He needed a change of scenery, and Buffalo was close to his hometown of Toronto. His goal-scoring prowess seemed to be a fit with center Jack Eichel, and Eichel would be the best center with whom Skinner had played.

Through 25 games, Skinner had 19 goals to lead the NHL. His chemistry with Eichel has provided the engine to drive the Sabres up the standings.

We spoke with Skinner recently on the ESPN On Ice podcast about his move to Buffalo, success on the ice, what's happening in Carolina and, of course, the Bills Mafia:

ESPN: Being that Terry Pegula now signs your checks, do you have to become a Buffalo Bills fan?

SKINNER: I don't know if that's the reason. If you live in Buffalo, you don't have much choice. It's pretty mandatory that you get on the Bills train. It's pretty fun. I went to the game [against Jacksonville], and it was a pretty good atmosphere.

ESPN: Everyone's down on the NHL about fighting, even though there's no fighting anymore. And yet there's a fight in the football game, and no one's going after the NFL for fighting.

SKINNER: Yeah, they got after it, those guys. I think the excitement in the stands spilled down to the field.

ESPN: You were in Carolina your entire career. How hard was it to uproot your life and relocate to another city for the first time in the NHL?

SKINNER: It was a little bit of an adjustment, I think. Fortunately for me, I don't have to worry about a family, about moving kids or changing schools. So in that sense, it's been easier for me than some other guys. But I was in Carolina so long. I had a lot of friends there. To come to a new organization, not know many teammates, get to know new staff ... those kinds of things are an adjustment. But it has gone smoothly. They made me feel comfortable.

ESPN: I'm sure you walked through that door and thought, "Yeah, this team is going to be on a 116-point pace at the end of November," right?

SKINNER: [Laughs] Uh ... I don't know. You come into every season, and there's optimism and excitement. Every team, starting with the same record. And you've seen in recent years that teams can turn things around from the years before or make a big push from midseason to the end of the season. For me coming in, the organization thought there was a young core of players. They had [Rasmus] Dahlin coming in. They made some other moves during the summer. There was a big sense of excitement around the team that we could get off that fresh start. And fortunately, we've been on a nice little run.

ESPN: One of those young core players is Jack Eichel, obviously. What is it about your game that fits so well with what Jack does?

SKINNER: He's one of the best centers in the league. That helps, to start with. When you look at his game, he's really, really good with the puck. He creates a lot space, draws a lot of players to him, because he handles the puck so well with speed and handles the puck so well in traffic. Sometimes he has drawn three guys to him. As a winger, you try to read off him. Try to utilize that extra space. And be ready for when he's going to make a pass.

Sometimes you don't think he's ready, and then the puck is on your stick. So read off him and stay ready. Those are my pointers to myself, I guess.

ESPN: You're a humble Canadian kid. Jack ... isn't. How do you get along with him?

SKINNER: I like him. I sit beside him in the locker room. It's only been a couple of months, but when you see someone every day, it accelerates that process of getting to know each other. It's been fun. We've got a good mix of young guys and old guys in our locker room. It's been fun.

ESPN: You're 26. What do you consider yourself to be now?

SKINNER: I'm probably an old guy now. It's pretty sad. But when you see Rasmus Dahlin and Casey Mittelstadt wheeling around out there, then I feel pretty old. But hopefully I can stick with Jason Pominville (age 35) a little bit more. To me, he's an old guy. I'll stick close to him, make myself feel younger.

ESPN: You need to grow a beard now that you're old.

SKINNER: That might take me a while.

ESPN: Take us back to your rookie year with Carolina, when you won the Calder Trophy. What did you take away from having that success so early?

SKINNER: You get put in a position where it's a pretty good opportunity. For me, I got to play with some pretty good players, and I know that's not always the case. Sometimes it's because of the team you were drafted to, and your position is filled, and there's not room for you right at that moment. For me, it was a perfect storm: I had an opportunity to play and with some pretty good players. Any time, as a young guy, you get to play with veteran players, it's going to help your development. I definitely learned a lot that first year.

ESPN: At any point were you like, "Hey, this is going to be easy?"

SKINNER: [Laughs] Nah, not really. I think you realize quickly that a lot of things have to go right for you to have a good season like that. For me, I was fortunate that a lot of those things went in my favor.

ESPN: Sabres coach Phil Housley called you a "slippery guy." How would you describe your game?

SKINNER: I don't have the hardest shot. I'm not going to blow by guys wide with high-end speed. For me, to generate offense and be productive, I need to find openings to create that time and space. To work between a check or find rebounds. Those greasy goals I get more than some guys. I don't know if it's a compliment, but if it goes in, I'll take it.

ESPN: You're a UFA after this season. In a perfect world, how would you like this whole thing to play out?

SKINNER: My agents and I agreed that we would put it on hold until things were more settled because there was so much to adjust to. There's no sense in bringing in anything else that's not needed to be brought into the fold. It's gone pretty well for me, not have to think about that kind of thing. And I think that's how I think it's going to continue to be. When they talk later on, things will work themselves out. But for me, the focus is on playing hockey. These things usually work out for the best.

ESPN: Finally, is there any part of you that's jealous about not having had the chance to take part in the Carolina Hurricanes' victory celebrations?

SKINNER: [Laughs] I don't know. As long as I didn't hurt myself. They've got some coordination things in there, and I'm afraid I'd hurt myself doing those. Sometimes you get fired up after a win and go overboard. But it looks like they're having fun with it, and their fans are enjoying it. As long as I'm not in there getting hurt, I'll be fine.

## **Sabres ride 10-game win streak to unexpected success**

By Ben Gotz

Las Vegas Review-Journal

December 1, 2018

The people of Buffalo woke up Friday morning sad and disappointed, and not for the usual late-November reasons.

For the first time since Nov. 4, the city's beloved Sabres were coming off a loss.

The Lightning squeaked out a 5-4 home victory Thursday against Buffalo, ending a 10-game winning streak for the visitors that briefly shot them to the top of the NHL standings.

"It shows that we can win every night we're out there, and that should be our mindset no matter what," captain Jack Eichel told reporters after Thursday's loss. "We should expect to win every night we go on the ice, and that's the confidence you build through a winning streak like that. We built some camaraderie and some chemistry and just that never quit effort."

The Sabres, who have the second-longest playoff drought in the league at seven seasons, lost 3-1 to the New York Rangers on Nov. 4 to fall to 7-6-2. The team then matched the longest winning streak in franchise history despite sweating out games seemingly every night.

Nine of the Sabres' 10 wins during the run were by one goal, and seven were decided in overtime or a shootout. Only the 2012-13 Pittsburgh Penguins have as many one-goal victories as part of a winning streak of at least 10 games.

"I'm proud of our guys. They were in a lot of positions where we had to fight back," Buffalo coach Phil Housley said Thursday. "We kept going right to the end, and credit to our guys because we've found a lot of ways to win."

The run caused the Sabres to shoot up the standings, and they had the most points in the NHL before the Lightning leapfrogged them Thursday. Still, it was an expectations-defying run by a team with a lot of young talent in Eichel and 2018 No. 1 overall pick Rasmus Dahlin.

Only three writers out of 18 picked Buffalo to make the playoffs in an NHL.com preseason panel, but the Sabres seem to be maturing faster than expected.

"You could say a lot about our group and how we've grown," forward Kyle Okposo said Thursday.

## **Rookie of the Month Dahlin, Sabres prepare for difficult back-to-back set**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 2, 2018

NASHVILLE - Rasmus Dahlin entered the first month of his NHL career with a lot of hype surrounding him. The first-overall pick in the 2018 NHL Draft has been getting more and more comfortable as the season progressed.

Now, at the end of his second month in the league, the 18-year-old defenseman has been named the NHL's Rookie of the Month for November.

His ice time per game has increased 56 seconds on average to 19:54 from October to November, and he's been up over 23 minutes in four of the last five games. He skated a career-high 25:51 on Thursday against Tampa.

There's also been an uptick in offensive production. He recorded a goal and nine assists over the 15 games played last month, including few dazzling plays like this assist on Jake McCabe's goal on Nov. 17 at Minnesota:

"I think more offense because I'm more comfortable with the puck. If you're comfortable, it's easy to have confidence," Dahlin said after practice at Centennial Sportsplex.

The uptick in ice time has been part of the developmental plan set forth by the front office. Dahlin has also seen time on a pair with every other regular defenseman on the team, playing both the left and right side depending on the situation.

"You want to put him in places where he's going to succeed first. I think he's handled it pretty well," coach Phil Housley said. "Let's face it, our younger players are going to make mistakes and we've had a lot of patience through that. But I think he's gotten better and used to more minutes.

"I think he feels comfortable playing a lot more. It was just something that he earned. He earned his way up there."

He credited his teammates and the coaching staff for helping him in his first season both on and off the ice.

"It's easy to play on this team," he said. "They help me out a lot so thanks to my teammates right now."

### Injury updates

Conor Sheary returned to practice after missing the last three games with an injury. He could return to action tomorrow night against the Predators.

"You always want to get back in the lineup, but you also don't want to rush it with injuries. I want to take it day by day, see how I feel in the morning and hopefully I can be back in the lineup and contribute to this team."

Jason Pominville left Friday's game with 6:39 to play when he was hit by Panthers defenseman Alexander Petrovic. Petrovic was given a boarding minor on the play. Pominville did not practice on Sunday and Housley ruled him out for Monday.

Defenseman Marco Scandella, who is dealing with an upper-body injury that has caused him to sit out the last three games, was sent back to Buffalo.

Rasmus Ristolainen was given a maintenance day and Housley expects him to be ready for Monday's game. McCabe is day-to-day with an injury sustained on Thursday. He did not practice Sunday, either.

Following a stretch of nine games in 15 days, the Sabres had yesterday off and held an upbeat and up-tempo practice on Sunday. They'll try to shake off back-to-back losses tomorrow night with a game against the Western Conference-leading Predators that will wrap up a three-game road trip.

"Losing two games, we're not happy with the results we got, but on these road trips, you get to spend a lot of time with your teammates and get to know them pretty well. I think guys are kind of excited about that," Sheary said. "Today, we brought good energy, good excitement and we're happy with where we are in the standings. Hopefully we can come away with a couple points tomorrow night."

After the game, the team will fly home where the Toronto Maple Leafs are waiting. Buffalo hosts Toronto at KeyBank Center at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

"After we get through this back to back, the schedule sets up pretty well for us," Housley said. "We'll get some quality practice time in. Obviously, it's been a tough stretch."

Here's how the line combinations and defensive pairings looked on Sunday

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

72 Tage Thompson - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 21 Kyle Okposo

43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 17 Vladimir Sobotka

10 Patrik Berglund - 22 Johan Larsson - 28 Zemgus Girgensons

4 Zach Bogosian - 26 Rasmus Dahlin

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 8 Casey Nelson

48 Matt Hunwick - 24 Lawrence Pilut

81 Remi Elie\* - 5 Matt Tennyson

\*Forward practicing on defense

40 Carter Hutton

35 Linus Ullmark

## **Skinner scores 20th of season, but Sabres fall to Panthers in overtime**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

November 30, 2018

SUNRISE, Florida - Although the 10-game winning streak is behind them, the Buffalo Sabres are still near the top of the NHL standings, and that means the opposition is going to do everything they can to knock Buffalo down a peg.

The Florida Panthers were the latest team to give the Sabres its best effort and ended up rallying back to pick up a 3-2 overtime win over Buffalo at BB&T Center on Friday.

Buffalo held the lead until midway through third period when the Panthers scored a power-play goal with 8:04 remaining to force overtime. Then Aleksander Barkov one-timed a puck in during the extra period to give the home team the victory.

The Sabres are now 0-1-1 after their dramatic run ended with a loss to Tampa Bay on Thursday. With 37 points, they're tied with the Lightning for first overall.

"You talk about every team being ready. They know about the streak now. They see where we are in the standings and we're going to get everybody's best game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "Going through this now for the last couple games, against Tampa and coming in here, we didn't execute well.

"...Give them credit because they came out with a purpose and going through this, our guys are learning that we're going to get the best game and we've got to be a little more desperate in our game, especially on the road here."

Linus Ullmark was strong in net for Buffalo, making 40 saves.

"We've got ultimate confidence in either of these guys going in net," captain Jack Eichel said. "He steals a point for us tonight."

The Sabres were outshot 43-24 in the game and 35-19 at even strength. Jeff Skinner, who scored one of Buffalo's two goals, felt that they didn't have nearly enough offensive zone time to be successful.

"It seemed like we had a tough time getting into their end and sustaining our forecheck," he said. "We turned a couple pucks over too many, and it's a skilled group over there. You give them too many chances, they're going to hurt you. Maybe we just need be a little more simple, a little bit more clean through the neutral zone. That would allow us to spend more time in their end."

Jeff Skinner opened the scoring, cashing in a 2-on-1 with Sam Reinhart with 9:05 to play in the first period.

With the goal, Jeff Skinner reached the 20-goal mark in his 27th game of the season. Only four Sabres - Alexander Mogilny (23 games in 1992-93), Rick Martin (24 games in 1972-73), Dave Andreychuk (26 games in 1992-93) and Danny Gare (26 games in 1975-76) - have scored 20 goals in fewer games.

Skinner and Martin are the only two Sabres to reach 20 goals before Dec. 1. Mogilny set the single-season franchise record with 76 goals that season. His 23rd game of the season was played on Dec. 9, 1992.

He's the second player to hit the 20-goal mark this season. Winnipeg's Patrick Laine has 21.

Power plays make a difference

The Panthers tied it up on the power play with 1:29 left in the first when Jared McCann's slap shot deflected off Zach Bogosian and in over the shoulder of Linus Ullmark.

The Sabres' power play got on the board for the first time in three games thanks to a goal from Reinhart. Eichel raced down the right wing and tossed a puck in front of the net. It bounced and Reinhart was able to knock it in for his sixth goal of the season.

With a goal and an assist on the evening, Reinhart extended his point streak to three games. He has five points (3+2) over that stretch.

Ullmark was credited with the secondary assist for his first career point.

Florida then tied it again with the man advantage when Evgenii Dadonov potted his 11th of the season. Florida finished the game 2-for-4 with the man advantage. In overtime, the Sabres mostly controlled the play, but Barkov's goal came 2:26 in, on Florida's only shot in the 3-on-3 sequence.

Ullmark felt that he could've made a difference on all three goals allowed, particularly the third.

"On the third one, I wasn't aware of where Barkov was, he said. "It's 3-on-3, you should be able to handle three guys out there. In my mind, I should be aware of where they are at all times."

#### Taking flight

The game also marked the NHL debut of Lawrence Pilut.

The 22-year-old defenseman logged 12:48 of ice time, one hit and two blocked shots. He ended up a plus-1 since he was on the ice for Skinner's goal.

"I really liked Lawrence stepping in. In this situation, I thought he handled himself really well," Housley said. "He made some mistakes. It's part of his development, we understand that, but all in all, I like the way he played in both ends of the ice.

You see a lot of confidence in his game."

Pilut got the call because Marco Scandella and Jake McCabe are currently out of the lineup with upper-body injuries. McCabe is considered day-to-day while Scandella was placed on injured reserve earlier in the day.

He entered the night fifth in the AHL in scoring, but it was his defensive game that caught Housley's eye.

"He has a really good stick, stick-on-puck detail. Especially in the defensive zone, he leads with it," Housley said. "He's on the puck. He doesn't give a lot of time and space to the [player] that he's defending. It's a good step. It was great to get him in that game."

#### Coming up

It doesn't get any easier for Buffalo as they have another tough test ahead. After a practice session on Sunday, they'll go up against the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena on Monday.

(The Predators are 4-5-1 in their last 10 games and are coming off a 3-0 loss to Arizona on Thursday. They host Chicago on Saturday. They're tied for first place in the Western Conference with 35 points following Colorado's overtime loss to St. Louis on Friday.)

And then Toronto will be waiting for a game against the Sabres at KeyBank Center on Tuesday. Tickets for that game are on sale now.

## **Pilut to make NHL debut tonight against Panthers**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

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SUNRISE, Florida - Lawrence Pilut has made a solid impression early on within the Buffalo Sabres organization.

Coming over from Sweden as the Defenseman of the Year in the Swedish Hockey League, the 22-year-old blue liner has quickly put up points in his first AHL season. In 16 games, he has three goals and 22 points, which is tied for fifth in the league.

Now, he'll have the chance to kick off his NHL career on the right foot when he makes his debut with Buffalo tonight.

"It's going to be fun. It's a dream come true tonight to get on the ice and play my first game. I'm ready for it," he said.

The Sabres take on the Florida Panthers at BB&T Center at 7 p.m. The GMC Game Night pregame show on MSG starts at 6:30.

Pilut will take the place of Jake McCabe in the lineup, who is day-to-day with an injury sustained during last night's 5-4 loss to Tampa.

Pilut was called up for the first time late last week when the Sabres D corps was hit with some injuries. He was recalled again on Tuesday and has taken pregame warmups in every game he's been a healthy scratch for. He'll finally get his shot tonight.

"He's been around the guys now and he seems to get more comfortable each day," coach Phil Housley said. "I know we haven't had a lot of quality practice time with him because of our schedule, but he's done a terrific job. He's earned a spot or earned the right to play tonight."

Patrik Berglund was activated from injured reserve this afternoon and will return to the lineup tonight. He's in for left wing Remi Elie. Conor Sheary and Marco Scandella have each missed the past two games and have been added to the injured reserve list. Housley said that Sheary skated today on his own. Defenseman Matt Tennyson has also been recalled.

Linus Ullmark will start in goal. He's 5-0-1 on the season and 1-1-0 with a 3.02 goals-against average and a .906 save percentage in his career against the Panthers.

The Sabres are coming off that loss to Tampa that snapped their franchise-record tying 10-game winning streak. Housley thinks the quick turnaround will be beneficial to his club.

"I think it's great. We can get right back into action," he said. "Obviously, he played a very good hockey team last night that was ready and they showed why they're one of the top teams in the East. But at the same point, we had an opportunity to win a hockey game. We had a one-goal lead in the third period.

"Obviously, I think we took too many penalties against a good power play and eventually, it cracked and got them back in the game. What we can control tonight is how we get ready and prepare for this game."

He's also expecting a tough test from the Panthers.

"They're going to be hungry," Housley said. "Expect their best game and so we're going to have to be prepared for that."