



Buffalo Sabres

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Fiala leads Predators to 2-1 win over Sabres

By Jim Diamond

Associated Press

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The Nashville Predators credited their defensive effort after their latest win.

Kevin Fiala scored the tiebreaking goal late in the second period and the Predators beat the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 Monday night. Ryan Ellis also scored and Pekka Rinne stopped 21 shots to help Nashville win its second straight.

"I thought we were really good defensively tonight," Nashville coach Peter Laviolette said. "They've got a lot of tools over there, a lot of people that can hurt you, certainly that top line and they've got some guys from the back end that can really move the puck and add to the rush."

Rinne stopped eight shots in the first, five in the second and eight in the third. Five of the eight Rinne turned away in the third came in the final 1:17 with Hutton lifted for an extra attacker — including a stop on a slap shot by the Sabres' Jack Eichel with 15.4 seconds remaining.

"That was one of our better defensive games all year," Rinne said. "Guys did an extremely good job just staying with it. ... They have a lot of team speed and they're top couple of lines are pretty dangerous."

Sam Reinhart had a goal for Buffalo, which is 0-2-1 since a 10-game winning streak — with each loss coming by one goal. Carter Hutton had 23 saves.

"It seems like we've been having trouble for a little bit here," Reinhart said. "So we've got to figure that out, get back to what gave us success earlier."

On the Predators' go-ahead goal, Craig Smith had the puck in the left corner and found Fiala at the left faceoff dot, where he snapped a quick wrist shot between Hutton's pads with 3:26 left in the middle period. It gave Fiala six points in his last six games.

Reinhart had tied the score 1-1 earlier in the period. After a mad scramble in front, Reinhart's backhand was turned aside by Rinne but Nashville captain Roman Josi's clearing attempt with his backhand went into the net, giving Reinhart his seventh of the season at 5:20.

"I did like the shot mentality in that little spurt," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I thought there were times where we did control the play. But other than that, I didn't mind the way we played. I just thought we needed to generate more."

Housley served as an assistant coach with the Predators for four seasons prior to getting the head coaching job in Buffalo.

Ellis scored the game's first goal with 3:35 left in the first. With the Predators on a power play, Josi sent a pass from the right point to Ellis at the top of the left faceoff circle, and Ellis fired a one-timer high to Hutton's glove side.

"Great win for us, I think especially the defense played well and Peks was Peks like always," Josi said. "It's a huge win. That's a good team over there. They're playing really well this year."

NOTES: The road team had won the previous six matchups between the teams. ... Nashville is 15-1-0 this season when scoring first. ... Predators C Nick Bonino returned to the lineup after missing one game with an illness. ... Reinhart has six goals and one assist in seven career games against Nashville. ... Hutton, who served as Rinne's backup in Nashville for three seasons beginning in the 2013-14 season, dropped to 0-3-1 against his former team.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Host Toronto on Tuesday night to open a stretch of four straight at home.

Predators: At Vancouver on Thursday night.

Mike Harrington: Offense struggles in another one-goal loss for Sabres

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
December 4, 2018

NASHVILLE – It was another one-goal loss, but there was really a whole lot of nothing for the Buffalo Sabres until the last minute Monday night in Bridgestone Arena.

For nearly 59 minutes, they had a scant 17 shots on goal. Then Patrik Berglund won three straight faceoffs in the Nashville zone and the Sabres got five pucks on Predators goalie Pekka Rinne. A sixth, a half-fanned attempt by Berglund, just rolled wide of the open side of the net.

Not enough offense. Not enough goals. No reward in the standings. It was a 2-1 loss to the Western Conference-leading Predators, Buffalo's third by one goal on its road trip.

The Sabres finished the trip 0-2-1, sandwiching narrow regulation defeats at Tampa Bay and Nashville – who could easily be the respective Stanley Cup finalists come June – around Friday's overtime heartbreaker in Florida.

"I don't mind the way we played," said coach Phil Housley, whose team is a still-impressive 17-8-3. "I just thought we needed to generate more. From about the 15-minute mark of the third period, they just built that wall up. We had opportunities to get by it and chip it by them and we tried to stickhandle. That's one of the reasons they're so good at it."

The Predators got a go-ahead goal from Kevin Fiala with 3:26 left in the second period and made it stand up for the final 23½ minutes at Bridgestone Arena. And it was a tough tally for the Sabres to take as the shot from the left circle deflected off defenseman Casey Nelson and had goaltender Carter Hutton going haywire trying to track the puck.

"It was going gloveside. Redirected, hit the ice and went blocker side," Hutton said. "Just a bad bounce. It happens."

From there, the Sabres struggled. They only had three shots on goal in the third period until the final 71 seconds. Sam Reinhart and Berglund then came narrowly close to tying the game and allowing the Sabres to steal at least one point.

"We need more at the net in zone," said Reinhart, who was credited with Buffalo's only goal in the second period after Preds defenseman Roman Josi accidentally backhanded a loose puck in the crease into his own net. "I don't think we generated enough. You saw their experience and how they kind of shut everything down and made it hard for us to get pucks in behind them. We need to find a way to generate more speed in the neutral zone."

Until this stretch, the Sabres had been 10-0-2 in one-goal games. You figured that wouldn't last, but you didn't figure Buffalo would suddenly lose three straight of that variety immediately after its 10-game winning streak either.

One key factor is that the Sabres have some injuries to deal with. Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella are out on defense. Conor Sheary and Jason Pominville were missing up front on Monday, although both took part in lengthy drills after the rest of the team's morning skate and seem close to returning.

The absentees all have key roles on special teams and their absences have made a difference. The power play went 0 for 4 Monday and was 1 for 10 on the trip. The penalty kill gave up a goal for the fourth straight game, on a Ryan Ellis laser in the first period, and was only 7 for 11 in the three road contests.

Sheary and Scandella missed the entire road trip, and McCabe played just 7½ minutes in Tampa before going down. Pominville, who has one goal in his last 13 games and none in his last seven, missed his first game of the season Monday.

It evened things out for a Nashville team playing without big names such as P.K. Subban, Kyle Turris, Filip Forsberg and Viktor Arvidsson.

"You miss those players. They're invaluable to our team," Housley said. "Especially the depth at 'D' with Jake and Marco. And Conor's speed can get on the forecheck. I thought it was a good opportunity because [the Predators] are banged up. We could have taken advantage of it, but our power play is banged up, too."

The Sabres got six of their 22 shots on goal from Jack Eichel, who remains frustrated with just one goal in his last 16 games, and 10 shots from Eichel's line. They need more secondary scoring. They need the schedule to loosen up, too, both in numbers of games and quality of opponents.

They'll have to wait on that, with the Toronto Maple Leafs (19-8) already waiting back in Buffalo for them to arrive to stage the season's first meeting Tuesday night in KeyBank Center.

"Just keep playing. It's tight games, a good league," Hutton said. "I don't think it's anything to panic about. We just played one of the best teams in the league and came from playing Tampa, one of the best teams in our conference. And now we have a tough challenge tomorrow with the Leafs."

The Wraparound: Nashville Predators 2, Buffalo Sabres 1

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2018

NASHVILLE – A home team finally broke through in a game between the Buffalo Sabres and Nashville Predators.

A six-game winning streak by the visitors in the series came to an end Monday as the Predators handed the Sabres a 2-1 defeat in Bridgestone Arena. Kevin Fiala's snapshot from the left circle with 3:26 left in the second period snapped a tie and proved to be the game-winning goal.

Buffalo had won its last three trips to the Music City while Nashville has won three straight in KeyBank Center. The last win by a home team had come on March 21, 2015, when the Predators blanked Buffalo here, 3-0.

The Sabres concluded their road trip with an 0-2-1 record, a big downer in the immediate wake of their 10-game winning streak. That run tied the franchise record but it ended with Thursday's 5-4 loss at Tampa Bay. The Sabres then dropped a 3-2 overtime decision Friday at Florida before striking the wrong tune in the Music City.

Opening salvo: The Predators opened the scoring with a power-play goal at 16:25 of the first period as defenseman Ryan Ellis pounded home a one-timer from the left circle off a Roman Josi pass.

Own-goal: The Sabres tied the game at 5:20 of the second period on a goal by Sam Reinhart, who got credit for an own-goal by Nashville's Josi. The Predators' defenseman whirled and tipped the puck past goalie Pekka Rinne on the backhand after Jack Eichel and Reinhart had attempts on the edge of the crease. Because of the own goal, there were no assists on the play.

Back in front: Fiala put the Preds on top late in the second period with a wicked snapshot from the left circle that appeared to deflect off Casey Nelson and change direction past Carter Hutton.

"It was going gloveside, redirected, hit the ice and went blocker side," Hutton said. "Just a bad bounce. It happens."

Big Nashville numbers: The Predators are 15-1 this season when scoring first and leading after two periods. They improved to 8-0 against Eastern Conference teams (4-0 against both the Atlantic and Metropolitan divisions).

Little Buffalo numbers: The Sabres were outshot in the game, 25-22, and managed just three shots on goal in the third period until pulling Hutton for an extra attacker in the final minute and getting five more. They combined for just 46 shots on goal over the final two games of the trip.

"You saw their experience and how they kind of shut everything down and made it hard for us to get pucks in behind them," Reinhart said. "We need to figure out when teams do that how to generate more and generate speed on the puck and simplify it."

Special teams report: The Predators were 1 for 2 on the power play while Buffalo was 0-4. The Sabres were just 1 for 10 on the man advantage in the three games and only 7 for 11 on the penalty kill.

The standings update: Tampa Bay (20-7-1) improved to 41 points with its 5-1 pounding of New Jersey. The Predators pushed their total to 39, Toronto is at 38 and idle Colorado remained tied with the Sabres at 37.

Next: Here they come -- with all their fans in tow. The Maple Leafs (19-8) will be in KeyBank Center Tuesday night in the first meeting of the season between the two Atlantic Division rivals. It's an NBC Sports Network game that faces off shortly after 7:30 p.m.

Sabres Notebook: Carter Hutton enjoys latest showdown with ex-teammate Pekka Rinne

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
December 3, 2018

NASHVILLE – When he was first asked Monday about his three seasons in the Music City, Buffalo Sabres goalie Carter Hutton joked that his biggest memory was getting coffee for Predators starting goalie Pekka Rinne.

But turning serious, Hutton has always enjoyed coming back here to face his former teammate and close friend. They manned opposite nets Monday night in Bridgestone Arena as the Sabres faced the Nashville Predators.

Hutton played three seasons for the Predators from 2013-2016. He posted career highs of 40 games played and 20 wins in 2013-14 as Rinne was battling hip trouble. But he only played a combined 35 games the next two seasons as Rinne was healthy and departed for St. Louis in 2016.

"My second year was my toughest year only playing 18 games," Hutton said. "It was a good year for me to learn. You're playing with a top-tier guy and at that point I had to learn how to play good on a lot of rest before I had a chance to play a little more, so it was a good experience for me."

Rinne, the reigning Vezina Trophy winner, entered Monday's game with an NHL-best 1.86 goals-against average and still on the top of his game at age 36 with 585 NHL games to his credit. He has won at least 30 games for four straight seasons. Hutton already has 12 wins this season in helping the Sabres to a 17-7-3 start.

"He's an amazing goalie, amazing person and teammate," Hutton said of Rinne. "Something for me that was an eye-opener when I came here was work ethic. You always think you work hard and then you see somebody who is an elite guy, you're staring down the far end and you see him outwork you. He makes everybody better.

"My years here, it was him, Shea Weber and Mike Fisher as the leaders so you had guys who were so humble and worked so hard that really kind of set the tone. For me, you set your roots on that and those are the guys you learn from. You take pride in having that same kind of mindset. Pekka was a big mentor in my life and helped me along the way to get to where I am now."

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Winger Jason Pominville skated fully Monday morning and even stayed on the ice for an extra 30 minutes but did not play in the game after being drilled from behind into the boards Friday night by Florida defenseman Alex Petrovic. Pominville said he is hopeful of playing in Tuesday's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres are mum on the specifics of Pominville's injury although it's likely he was dealing with back soreness and seemed to be favoring an arm or hand that he used to brace himself when he exited Friday.

"I was a little stiff the last couple days but I woke up today and felt much better," Pominville said. "I honestly didn't think I was going to skate today but I felt good enough and they decided to let me go out there. I obviously wasn't opposed to it."

It was the first game of the season missed by Pominville, who has played the full 82-game schedule eight times in his career. Six of those seasons are with Buffalo.

"I wish I would be out there, I'm not going to lie," he said. "But I get the other side of it. There's a lot of hockey left to play and you always want to be cautious. I'm hopeful it keeps progressing the way it has because it's been a good couple days after how stiff it was the first night."

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Tuesday night's game, the first meeting of the season with the Leafs, is a 7:30 start and will be televised nationally by NBC Sports Network. The teams have been relatively even in recent years, with the Sabres posting a 15-11-4 record in the last 30 meetings.

The Leafs opened their December schedule with Saturday's 5-3 win at Minnesota. It was their fourth straight win and eighth win in their last 10 games and pushed their record to 19-8-0.

Center Auston Matthews has three goals and four points in the two games he's played since returning from a shoulder problem that kept him sidelined for 14 games. Matthews has 13 goals and 20 points in just 13 games this season.

Winger William Nylander, who signed a six-year, \$41.4 million contract on Saturday just minutes before the deadline for him to miss the entire season, is not expected to play for the Leafs. He has to go through physicals and practice with the team and may not debut until Thursday against Detroit.

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Three Sabres prospects were named to training camp rosters for the World Junior Championship that open Dec. 26 in Vancouver. Goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and defenseman Oskari Laaksonen have been named by Finland and forward Matej Pekar has been selected by the Czech Republic. Defenseman Mattias Samuelsson is likely to be named to Team USA's camp roster later this week

Luukkonen (Sudbury) and Pekar (Barrie) are both playing this year in the Ontario Hockey League after signing entry-level contracts with the Sabres. Luukkonen is 15-5-1 with a 2.50 goals-against average and .922 save percentage while Pekar has 10 goals and 20 assists in 27 games.

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In addition to Pominville, the Sabres played Monday without defensemen Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella, as well as winger Conor Sheary. Only Sheary skated with the team Monday, staying on the ice nearly as long as Pominville. It's possible he could play Tuesday.

Sunday was the 49th anniversary of Buffalo being awarded its NHL franchise. On Dec. 2, 1969, the Niagara Frontier Hockey Corporation headed by Seymour and Northrop Knox and Robert Swados were awarded an expansion team to begin play in the 1970-71 season.

Sabres announce inaugural Skills Challenge

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2018

Fans who have memories of the Sabres' annual Open Practice that was a Christmastime staple of the 1970s and 80s can rekindle them Jan. 6 when the team hosts its inaugural Sabres Skills Challenge at KeyBank Center. The event begins at 12:30 p.m.

As announced by the team Monday night, current Sabres players will be divided into two teams to compete against each other in an All-Star-style skills contest.

The five events are:

Hardest Shot

Accuracy Showdown

Puck Control Relay

Power Play Challenge

Shootout Challenge

The events largely mimic the ones used by the NHL during its annual event on All-Star Weekend, which will be held this year on Jan. 25 in San Jose, Calif. Many teams have held similar events in their home arenas in recent years.

"We're all pretty competitive, so this will be a good opportunity for us to face off against each other," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said in a release from the team. "We've got some of the best fans in the league, and we're looking forward to putting on a show for them."

Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased starting Friday at Sabres.com/SkillsChallenge. Season ticket holders will receive a presale code to purchase tickets beginning Wednesday at a discounted rate of \$5.

The event includes an autograph session that begins at 11 a.m. and features Sabres alumni, including Danny Gare, Dominik Hasek, Gilbert Perreault and Rene Robert.

Fans will be given a ticket to one autograph table, to which alumni will be assigned randomly. There will be a 200-ticket limit per table and autographs will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. for the autograph session.

During the Skills Challenge, players will wear custom Sabres jerseys that will be auctioned to raise money for the Sabres Foundation.

Travis Yost's Sabres Metrics: Don't worry about Jack Eichel's lack of goals

By Travis Yost

The Buffalo News

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Travis Yost has been involved in the world of hockey analytics for a decade and is currently part of TSN's Hockey Analytics team. Prior to joining TSN, Travis was a contributor at the Ottawa Citizen, the Sporting News and NHL Numbers, and has been a consultant for an NHL franchise. He will be contributing breakdowns on the Sabres for The Buffalo News this season. Follow Travis on Twitter: @travisyost.

Should we be concerned with Jack Eichel's lack of goal scoring?

It's a fair question to ask. Despite the Sabres' tremendous start to the season, Eichel has had a truly curious season. He's the center on one of the league's hottest lines, and is playing comfortably above a point-per-game pace. Moreover, the Sabres are scoring 57 percent of the goals with Eichel on the ice. So by just about any measure, the season he is having would be considered successful.

But curiously, the goal scoring just hasn't been there. Eichel has just five goals in 27 games, which would pace him out to about 15 goals by season's end. For a player who sat in the mid-20s in his first three years, that's a pretty considerable step down. And while we would expect that a player like Jeff Skinner would rob from Eichel's goal totals a bit, a 40 percent drop in individual goal scoring is still eyebrow raising.

The thing about Eichel is that he's still individually generating tremendous amounts of offense. In fact, he is only one of 10 forwards who have already logged 100 or more shots on goal. So volume – which is usually a strong bellwether of future scoring performance – is actually considerably up. Eichel just isn't converting on those chances right now:

The takeaway to me is that volume isn't an issue for Eichel. He is generating as many shots per game as Vladimir Tarasenko, one of the league's deadliest snipers. And he's ahead of other prominent snipers, including Alexander Ovechkin and Patrik Laine. The massive offset is those guys are converting on close to one of every five shots on net; Eichel, on the other hand, is converting on one of every 20 shots on net.

But how do we know that the quality of these shots is up to snuff? After all, if Eichel is generating heaps of volume but most of said volume is from the perimeter, he's not really as threatening as initially perceived.

To that end, let's take a look at Eichel's shot distributions over the years. For "shot quality," we can use Natural Stat Trick's danger approximation as a proxy for scoring chances based on shot distances and locations.

Eichel is actually taking more dangerous shots per-60 minutes than he ever has, and the percentage of his shots that would be considered dangerous are the highest of his career. More than anything, I suspect it's indicative of a Sabres team that's spending more time in the offensive zone. Eichel, especially in the early parts of his career, had to be a do-it-yourself type of player – transitioning the puck through the neutral zone and generating his own attack.

The 2018-19 Sabres are no possession monster, but they certainly are generating more offensive action this season than in any year prior, and that needs to be taken into consideration.

At this point, I think it's fair to conclude that Eichel individually has been rather unlucky this season. His shooting percentage is nearly half his career norm despite other, more reliable measures falling in line with what we would expect. To that end, I think it's fair to stay patient.

Those agnostic to the role that luck plays with shooting percentages and goal scoring might be more inclined to consider that the Sabres are still really, really dangerous with Eichel on the ice. Even to the extent that Eichel is in a shooting lull, his teammates aren't. Consider the same shot measures, but from a team perspective – or, how well the Sabres generate shots (and dangerous shots) with Eichel on the ice.

Despite curiously low goal scoring from Eichel, the rest of the Sabres with Eichel on the ice are scoring at a tremendous rate. In Eichel's four-year career, he has never seen a better on-ice shooting percentage, more shot attempts, more dangerous shot attempts, or a higher percentage of Buffalo's shots being dangerous than in 2018-19. And while it's true that Eichel might be fitting himself in for more of a playmaker/distributor type of role (this is probably the area of his game that is the most underrated and overlooked), the offense is still highly productive with him out there.

For as long as Buffalo is outshooting, outchancing and outscoring their opponents with Eichel on the ice, caring about his limited goal scoring seems counterproductive. And truthfully, it seems as though it will be a matter of time before Eichel himself starts finding the back of the net.

Sabres at Predators: Five Things to Know

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2018

NASHVILLE – The Buffalo Sabres just battled with the top team in the East in the Tampa Bay Lightning and their arduous chore Monday night is to face the best in the West.

The Sabres will meet the depleted Nashville Predators amidst the howling, singing, chanting throng of Bridgestone Arena in the front half of a brutal set of back-to-back games. The game starts at 8 p.m. Eastern time and can be seen on MSG and heard on WGR Radio.

The Sabres have slipped to fifth overall in the NHL standings and can move into second with a win tonight. They cannot sneak back into first because they would be even in points with Tampa Bay (39-39) but the Lightning have the tiebreaker edge. Tampa Bay plays tonight in New Jersey.

Here are Five Things to Know about tonight's game:

1. In the nets: It's a reunion for Sabres goalie Carter Hutton, who played 75 games over three seasons for the Predators from 2013-16 while serving as Pekka Rinne's backup. Hutton is 12-7-1/2.63/.917 this season while Rinne is 11-4-1/1.86/.934, leading the league in GAA and ranking second in save percentage.

Hutton and Rinne remain close friends from Hutton's time here.

"You're playing with a top-tier guy and at that point I had to learn how to play good on a lot of rest before I had a chance to play a little more," Hutton said today. "So it was a good experience for me.

"He's an amazing goalie, amazing person and teammate. Something for me that was an eye opener when I came here was work ethic. You always think you work hard and then you see somebody who is an elite guy, you're staring down the far end and you see him outwork you. He makes everybody better."

2. Odd series streak: 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 coach Phil Housley's return to the Music City after he served as an assistant on the Preds' 2017 Stanley Cup finalists. In January 2017, they posted a 5-4 overtime win on a Jack Eichel goal, less than five months before the Preds met Pittsburgh in the Stanley Cup final.

3. New look on defense: With Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella still out, the Sabres are switching their defense pairs to give Lawrence Pilut a chance to play on the top pair with Rasmus Ristolainen during his second NHL game. The other pairs will be Rasmus Dahlin with Zach Bogosian and Nathan Beaulieu with Casey Nelson.

"It's a great opportunity. Risto is an awesome D man and will help me a lot," said Pilut, who played 12:48 during his NHL debut Friday in Florida. "You watch him in practice and games, and he's really amazing. This is going to be fun. I really like when it's a big, wild crowd and I'm looking forward to it."

"Just trying to give him an opportunity," Housley said. "He's here, so let's see where he can bring to our team. He had a pretty good game in Florida. He made some mistakes that will happen at time stepping in at the NHL level. We're just giving him a big opportunity."

Housley acknowledged he's liked Dahlin better with Bogosian than with other members of the Sabres' defense.

"They've been a terrific pair when they've been together," he said. "We're trying to manage the minutes and spread those around."

4. The Sabres lineup: Housley said Conor Sheary would be a game-time decision although Sheary did a lot of post-practice work today and Remi Elie came off the ice early. That generally means Elie is playing in the game and Sheary is not. Housley also has Evan Rodrigues back at center in another flip-flip for the versatile forward.

5. Around the boards: Nick Bonino (flu) returns to the Nashville lineup. Remaining out are P.K. Subban, Kyle Turris, Filip Forsberg and Viktor Arvidsson. ... Jason Pominville misses his first game of the season for Buffalo after taking a hit from behind Friday from Florida's Alex Petrovic. ... The Predators are 7-0 against the Eastern Conference this season (3-0 vs. the Atlantic Division). The Sabres are 8-3-1 against the Western Conference (2-1 against the Central). ... Buffalo is 12-0-3 when scoring first this year and Nashville is 14-1-0. The Sabres are 10-0-2 when leading after one period and 8-0-2 leading after two. Nashville is 7-0 leading after one and 14-1-0 leading after two.

Sabres' Hutton learned plenty from Pekka Rinne

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 3, 2018

Nashville, TN (WGR 550) - Carter Hutton started his career in Chicago, but only played one game. For the next three seasons, Hutton played in Nashville backing up Pekka Rinne. In 75 games with the Predators, Hutton went 33-23-12 with a 2.55 goals-against and .910 save percentage. Hutton said he took away a lot from his experience here, "It was mostly making Pekka coffee most of the time," Hutton said with a laugh. "I learned a lot he was a great mentor to me and I think it was good for me in the sense of and there isn't a ton of pressure on you playing once in a while and I really learned how to be a pro.

"I learned how to play once every two weeks and that slowly built my mental toughness in the league."

In the three seasons Hutton was with Rinne, there was one thing he really took away from him, "The thing for me that was an eye opener was you always think that you work hard and then you see him and an elite guy and you're staring down at the far end and you're seeing him out work you, so he makes everybody do better and I take pride in having that same kind of mindset."

Hutton was never drafted and was never traded. The 32-year-old spent three years in the minors before being signed by Nashville. The Blues inked him as a free agent as did the Sabres. Hutton enjoyed his time in Nashville and still likes coming back, "Of course, it's a fun city and a lot of memories and I have a lot of good friends on that team so it's fun."

Hutton seems to have the knack of making the big save at the big time. Hutton said, "It's sticking with it, it's not always going to be perfect and we play a position that is very humbling, the ups and downs you have to stick with it throughout a season and when you get the opportunity late in a game, you have to relish those moments and for me it's more mental, I just try to set myself up well mentally to compete and be ready, especially in those situations when they're going to pull their goalie and be ready to come.

"You're always under the microscope, but that's goaltending. For me not a lot changes. I put a lot of pride into the way I prepare, unless there's something glaring in my game that we need to work on and Andrew is great with that stuff."

Hutton spent two years in St. Louis, going 30-15-5 with a 2.23 goals-against and a sparkling .923 save percentage.

While with the Blues, Hutton played five games against the Preds going 0-2-1 with a 2.63 goals-against and .909 save percentage.

In the first period Monday, Hutton made harder saves than Rinne did. Early on, Rocco Grimaldi tipped a Roman Josi shot from the corner forcing Hutton to be sharp.

Hutton had to stop Colton Sissons on an odd man rush and turned the puck over himself to Austin Watson who pulled the puck in front, but Hutton bailed himself out.

Hutton made the big save on a Ryan Hartman one-timer, but it didn't help him while his team was shorthanded. Nashville moved the puck around well and Ryan Ellis ripped a one-timer from the left circle to score the only goal of the period.

Hutton made 10 saves in the first period, while Rinne had eight fairly easy stops.

The Sabres kicked it into high gear for the first 10 minutes of the second period, allowing just one Nashville shot on Hutton. That all of a sudden changed as the Sabres stopped playing again and the Predators had the last seven shots of the period.

Ramus Ristolainen fanned on a pass about five feet in front of Hutton, but the goaltender got his pad on Sissons' shot.

The goal came when Kevin Fiala got rid of the puck quickly from the top of the circle. Casey Nelson screened Hutton and deflected it by him.

Through two periods, Hutton had 17 saves while Rinne stopped 14 pucks.

In the first eight seconds of the third period, Josi was alone in front, but Hutton didn't allow him to cash in on a power play rebound.

Hutton kept it a one-goal game, making a big save on Hartman, who was alone in front. That's the big save I always talk about that he makes when needed.

In the third period, Hutton only had to make five saves and 23 on the game. He was very upset live on the post-game, showing frustration in losing a game where the team only gives up two goals.

The Sabres spent way too much time trying to stickhandle through the Nashville defense. Phil Housley said they had plays designed to beat the Nashville lock, but they didn't execute them.

Now, the team has to change time zones and face the waiting Toronto Maple Leafs at the arena on Tuesday night.

Predators shut down Sabres 2-1

WGR 550

December 3, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres are streaking in the wrong direction after their recent 10-game winning streak came to an end last week.

The Sabres dropped their third straight game on Monday night in a 2-1 loss to the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena. Sam Reinhart scored Buffalo's lone goal in the loss after Predators captain Roman Josi accidentally put the puck into his own net in the second period.

Nashville defenseman Ryan Ellis scored the game's first goal on the power play as his slapshot gave the Predators a 1-0 lead in the first. It was Ellis' second goal of the season with Josi and Ryan Johansen picking up the assists.

The Sabres evened up the score in the second period with Reinhart's fourth goal in three games, and his seventh goal of the 2018-19 campaign. The goal was originally credited to Jeff Skinner, but later given to Reinhart upon further review.

The Predators re-gained the lead later in the period on Kevin Fiala's fifth goal of the season. His shot from the faceoff circle deflected off Casey Nelson and caught the top corner of the net behind Carter Hutton.

After going back on top, Nashville clamped down defensively, holding Buffalo to just eight shots on goal in the third period. With Carter Hutton on the bench, Buffalo had a glorious chance in the game's final minute, but Jeff Skinner was stopped point blank and Patrik Berglund couldn't corral the rebound.

The Sabres were out-shot in the loss 25-22, with Hutton making 23 saves for Buffalo in the losing effort.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

NSH: 16:25 - Ryan Ellis (2) PPG (Roman Josi, Ryan Johansen)

Second Period:

BUF: 5:20 - Sam Reinhart (7) (Unassisted)

NSH: 16:34 - Kevin Fiala (5) (Craig Smith, Mattias Ekholm)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

NSH: NONE

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 15:04 - Nathan Beaulieu (Tripping - 2 min.)

NSH: 11:41 - Mikka Salomaki (Holding - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 18:19 - Jeff Skinner (Slashing - 2 min.)

NSH: 1:50 - Dan Hamhuis (Tripping - 2 min.); 13:26 - Austin Watson (Hooking - 2 min.); 17:27 - Ryan Hartman (Tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

NSH: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 22 (8, 6, 8)

NSH: 25 (11, 8, 6)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 23 saves

NSH: Pekka Rinne - 21 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 4 (0%)

NSH: 1 for 2 (50%)

Three Stars:

Ryan Ellis - NSH

Kevin Fiala - NSH

Pekka Rinne - NSH

What's Next:

A quick turnaround for the Sabres, who now look ahead to Tuesday's matchup against, yet, another one of the league's top teams. The 19-8-0 (38 points) Toronto Maple Leafs will be at KeyBank Center to face the 17-8-3 (37 points) Sabres for a 7:30 p.m. faceoff. William Nylander is back in the fold for Toronto, and may make his season debut. Hear all the action on WGR 550 with Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray on the call.

The Sabres and Predators limp into Monday's game

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 3, 2018

Nashville, TN (WGR 550) - After two days off, the Sabres are back at it in Nashville on Monday. Both teams are facing injuries with players that will miss the game.

Phil Housley had hoped Conor Sheary would be ready for tonight, but said he's a game-time decision. It's not looking good for Sheary as he skated for a long time after practice and Remi Elie came off with the rest of the team.

Jake McCabe, Marco Scandella, Matt Hunwick and Scott Wilson are the others out with injury as well as Jason Pominville.

Pominville said he wasn't supposed to skate, but he felt so much better that he did. The winger said, "I was a little stiff the last couple of days, but woke up today and felt much better and honestly really didn't think I was going to skate today, but I felt good enough and they decided to let me go out there and I obviously wasn't opposed to it."

Pominville has played in 82 games in eight different seasons, and he wants to play on Tuesday against Toronto, "I'm hopeful. I've got to talk to the staff and see how the day progresses, but the staff has done a great job and I'd like to be in sooner than later for sure.

"If it were up to me I'd probably want to play today, but I guess I'm not playing today. I wish I would be out there, I'm not going to lie, but there's a lot of hockey left so you've got to be cautious."

Lawrence Pilut is going to get a chance to play with Rasmus Ristolainen in this game. Housley said, "I'm just trying to give him an opportunity. He's here let's see what he can bring to our team. I thought he had a pretty good game against Florida, so we're just giving him a bigger opportunity."

Housley said part of the decision with Pilut was that he likes Rasmus Dahlin better with Zach Bogosian.

Carter Hutton will get the start in goal. He has won eight of his last nine games. Overall, Hutton is 12-7-1 with a 2.63 goals-against and .917 save percentage.

Hutton spent three years as Pekka Rinne's backup. This season, Rinne is 11-4-1 with a great 1.86 goals-against and very good .934 save percentage.

Nashville is missing a lot of fire power with Filip Forsberg, Kyle Turris, Viktor Arvidsson and P.K. Subban all out with injuries.

The Predators have lost three of five games and are 5-5-1 in their last 11.

Ryan Johansen leads Nashville is scoring with 23 points in 27 games. Forsberg had 14 goals when he went on injured reserve.

Join Brian Koziol for the pre-game starting at 7:00 when he'll have Phil Housley, Rasmus Dahlin, Carter Hutton and Jason Pominville.

The Athletic Q&A: Linus Ullmark opens up about his instant bond with Carter Hutton, new fatherhood and the future of his 'Minions' mask

By John Vogl

The Athletic

December 4, 2018

Shortly after Carter Hutton wrapped up a chat with the media, fellow Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark strolled into the dressing room.

"People keep asking me about you," Hutton said.

"Oh yeah?" Ullmark replied.

"I'm sick of lying to them about what a good guy you are," Hutton said.

Buffalo's new goalie tandem is clearly a hit on and off the ice.

Hutton is a candidate for team MVP after signing as a free agent. Ullmark, who was the minor-league workhorse the previous two seasons in Rochester, is thriving as Buffalo's backup.

Just as importantly, they are enjoying the camaraderie and conversations that come from playing the same position.

"A lot of times in this position and this world, everybody wants to undermine everybody to get ahead – and that doesn't get you anywhere," Hutton said. "I think you've just got to do the right things and be a good person. The rest takes care of itself.

"He's a great guy. Honestly, we talk a lot about everything. We were just talking about restaurants. He's a fun-loving kid, you know?"

Ullmark is at a unique stage of his career. On one hand, he's enjoying his first full season in the NHL and all the wide-eyed wonderment that comes with it. But the Swede is also not a teenager like other Sabres prospects. He's a 25-year-old married man who has an 8-month-old son named Harry.

"He's mature beyond his age at this level," Hutton said. "He's pretty relaxed when he plays, and he's played in a lot of tough hockey games, you know what I mean? He's been really, really good for us this year, and just getting to know him as a guy has been a lot of fun."

It would be easy for Ullmark to steer conversations toward his game. He's 5-0-2 with a .927 save percentage, made more impressive considering three starts came on the second night of back-to-backs. But the goalie actually prefers conversations with Hutton that have nothing to do with stopping pucks or winning games.

"We know there's going to be a whole lot of hockey," Ullmark said. "It's a very intensive hockey season, so there's no need to talk about hockey or whatever. You just let it slide and enjoy your moments with him, just be a good guy."

With that in mind, here's a conversation that's light on hockey and long on getting to know Ullmark.

I could tell last year how much the team meant to you guys in Rochester. What have you learned so far about these guys in Buffalo?

It's kind of the same thing, you know? A great group of guys that came together pretty quickly. I think the guys up here have learned that you've got to tear down your personal walls and kind of let who you are shine, then it would be easier for other players and people to get to know you better. I think I've gotten to learn a lot more about guys, which has been a lot more fun for me.

And what are they learning about you? What kind of person are you?

I think one of the words is "goofy." I don't really know, but that's kind of who I am. Sometimes if they say hello in a regular voice, I kind of say something weirder like "Halloooooo" (in a high-pitched voice). I'm just trying to be a little goofy, laidback but a serious guy that does his job every day. I hope that's what they see in me is that I bring my A game every day and do what I have to do to help the team.

Has your personality changed now that you're a dad and a husband?

For sure. I'm a lot more calm and relaxed, you know? I'm not really as frustrated during practices. Usually, if I had a little worse practice than usual, I would get rattled and it would be harder and harder for me to bounce back during the practice. Whenever the practice was going bad for me, it would keep on going bad until the practice was finished.

But now I'm a little bit better at letting things slide. I'll be mad at the initial shot or goal that happened, and then it's just take it out of my mind, throw it away and focus on the next puck.

Now I hear you like Harry Potter. Is Harry named after him?

Yes, he is. We didn't know what sex he was going to be, so we had two names. It was Lily (Harry's mother) and Harry, so it works in both countries, too. We didn't want to have a name that just works here or just works back home, so those names were kind of good. We always liked those movies and fell in love with the show, and we got the inspiration from there.

I read all the books, got crazy about it, went to all the movies. I still go to all the movies. I just love the whole universe and the depth of it.

The family includes a couple of corgis?

Two corgis, Bob and Barry. They're fun dogs, you know? Our older dog, we used to call him Little Sassy. Like, he's a little sassy. He struts around, you know? But now when we got Harry, he's turned into a little bitch. (Laughs) You don't have to write that, but that's how he is.

I leave for a road trip, and he goes and sleeps in his cage for like five hours. He just lays there and will be sad, you know? Life is terrible. Food comes, he goes out, eats, then goes out with my wife, then goes to sleep again. He doesn't want to be a part of anything. But then whenever we get people over, he just loves everybody that comes over. He wants to get petted. He's a real attention seeker.

Then we have the young fellow, Barry, who is just Harry's dog. He follows him around everywhere. He wants to be close by. He doesn't guard him, which we are thankful for, but whenever Harry is awake and is buzzing around on the floor crawling, Barry is right after him. It's kind of fun to see those guys interact with each other. Barry is 3 years old in January, so he's still a young dog, and it's going to be fun for him to grow up with Harry.

We just got a puppy in July, and their personalities are fun to watch.

Yeah, and it's a lot of fun for kids, too. I grew up with dogs, too, so I know how fun it is to have it. And you get more perspective of things. You value things more, other people's lives and dog's lives, and you grow up a little bit. You know you have to take care of someone else instead of just yourself.

With animals, I saw you told the Amerks you were interested in being a zookeeper at one point in your life?

Yeah, zookeeper or veterinarian. I would say they sort of go hand in hand. I just like exotic animals: pandas, tigers, bears, whatever. My dream job would be to work with pandas if I weren't being a hockey player.

Obviously, you're a big gear guy. Where did these pads come from, the design?

So I worked with a guy that I saw made some nice designs on Instagram, so I just DM'd him and asked if he'd want to collaborate. He said, "Yeah, sure," and he came up with a couple designs. We chose one, but then the

issue with that one was whenever I went down in the butterfly, the buffalo was on his back. That wasn't a very good thing to do, so we switched them when we talked to the guys at Bauer. We used his initial design, but we moved it around a little bit.

And obviously the Minions are back.

Yup, the Minions are back. I just can't get a break from them. Initially, it was just going to be a one-year thing, but there were just so many kids that came up to me or their parents came up to me and said, "Are you the Minion goalie? They love your mask."

It feels like I might do something different for my next mask maybe, but I'm still going to come back to it because it's such a big part of me and my career now. And kids love it.

Did you have any idea it would take off like that?

No, I had no idea. The thing was I like them. I do, and they just kind of fit in with the theme, you know? The blue and gold.

You and Carter both play the puck well, and I see you shoot during practices all the time. Will either of you score a goal?

Well, I've got my first apple now. (He assisted on a goal Friday in Florida.) I've tried a couple times. I've hit the post. It's been a dream. I want to score some day, but it's tough, you know? You don't get a lot of opportunities. You've got to be in a late lead, and it's got to be two goals up. You don't want to take a chance when it's 3-2 and there's two minutes left and you whiff it and they get an open net. You've got to take your chances whenever they come, but I'll settle for apples right now.

You're a fan of fishing and outdoors stuff?

Growing up there in the north creek, I used to do a lot of outdoor things. My dad was a big fisherman. My brother, too, and it was something I never was a part of when I was really young because I just didn't have patience for it. But I still enjoy just going outside, walking in the forest with my dogs. It's very relaxing. I like fishing, too. I don't fish as much because I don't find the time to do it. There's a lot of things going on back home. We're renovating our summer house, taking care of Harry, working out. There's just a bunch of stuff that you have to do, so fishing goes in the back. But I enjoy it whenever there's time for it.

Is Buffalo anything like your hometown?

It's the same environment with the snow, the coldness. It's a little warmer, especially during the summertime, but I'm a winter guy. I like it when it's colder, but I don't enjoy the wind. I'd rather just have it really cold without the wind.

But it's not even close to where I grew up. Where I grew up is like 300 people, which is basically like my condo now. The complex that I'm living in is basically 300 people.

The NHL is going back to Sweden. What would it mean if they picked the Sabres for you to play an NHL game there?

For me, it would be super fun and very honorable. My dad is terrified of flying, so he will never come here. It's tough for him to cover over here, too, with his health. My mom is coming over here in March, which will be very fun, but it would be nice to have all my friends and family come down. Usually, they play those games in Stockholm or Gothenburg, but they can travel down and I can see them. I can get to show them a real hockey game at home.

Injuries on special teams proving problematic for suddenly struggling Sabres

By John Vogl

The Athletic

December 4, 2018

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Overall, the Sabres have built their organizational depth to a respectable level. They can overcome some injuries.

But there are still a couple of glaring weaknesses:

Conor Sheary is one of the best power-play guys. The unit has been terrible without him.

Marco Scandella is one of Buffalo's best penalty killers. The unit has been terrible without him.

When a team is playing one-goal games on a nightly basis, it can't afford terrible special teams. Buffalo's 0-2-1 road trip proved that.

"It's something that we've got to be better at," forward Patrik Berglund said after Monday's 2-1 loss in Nashville.

Scandella, who was leading the Sabres with an average of 6:52 of short-handed ice time, has missed four games. The Sabres have given up power-play goals in all of them. The penalty-kill unit was fifth in the NHL at 82.6 percent when he went out, and it's at just 64.3 percent since then.

Sheary has also missed four games. He's second on the team with three power-play goals. Before he went out, the unit had scored in three straight to climb to 20.3 percent. They're 1 for 11 in the last four, a paltry 9.1 percent.

"You miss those players," coach Phil Housley said. "They're invaluable to our team."

What makes them invaluable is their specialties. During the Sabres' 10-game winning streak, which ended when the team boarded the plane for Tampa Bay, Florida and Nashville, they had nine one-goal victories. All three of these losses were one-goal games, and the negative swings in special teams made the difference.

The power play has been particularly troublesome. It went 0 for 4 against the Predators while putting just three shots on Pekka Rinne.

"Our power play's got to come through for us," Housley said. "We just didn't generate enough shots or have a shot mentality, and our entries weren't very good."

The Sabres simply couldn't set up. Early, they tried a double drop in which Rasmus Ristolainen left the puck for Jeff Skinner, who left it for Jack Eichel. Nashville never bit on the possibility of Ristolainen or Skinner carrying it, so the defenders were ready to block Eichel at the blue line.

The second unit couldn't get into the zone, either.

"We've got to be a little sharper, a little better at executing plays at the blue line there," forward Tage Thompson said. "You've got to give credit to them, as well. They're a good team and have really good defensemen and are good with their sticks."

Once Buffalo fell in its 2-1 hole late in the second, the game was all but over. The visitors took just three shots in the third period before pulling goalie Carter Hutton. Much like the power-play unit, the five-on-five groups ran into a wall at the blue line.

"They do a good job clogging up the middle," center Casey Mittelstadt said. "When we put the puck in behind them and started forechecking to get the puck back, we started getting chances. I think that's what we've got to do moving forward."

Getting healthy would help. Remi Elie has played in place of Sheary, and he has one shot. The left winger's absence has also forced juggling on the second through fourth lines. It hasn't worked as the top line of Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart has scored five of the last seven goals.

"We're going to need more help from our other lines to create some more offense, generate some more offense to take some heat off of Jack's line," Housley said.

There's a chance Sheary could return Tuesday when the Sabres host the Maple Leafs. Right wing Jason Pominville is hopeful of playing, too, after missing the game in Nashville.

Until the Sabres figure out how to replace certain areas, the depth they built could become a question mark.

"Obviously, there's things we can build on," Mittelstadt said, "but we've got to get back in the win column."

Sabres, Maple Leafs could become fierce rivals again

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 3, 2018

BUFFALO – Ask any Sabres player or fan to name the team’s biggest rival, and they would likely peg the Toronto Maple Leafs, tonight’s opponent at KeyBank Center.

Without any recent playoff series – the Sabres haven’t made the postseason since 2011 – or high-stakes regular-season meetings to ramp up intensity and generate hatred, the Sabres don’t exactly have a lot of opponents they detest these days.

The Leafs, their closest opponent at just 100 miles away, have been a convenient rival.

“I feel like if you asked the Toronto Maple Leafs, ‘Who are your biggest rivals?’ it would be a bunch of other teams before they got to Buffalo,” said former Sabres goalie Martin Biron, who noted Toronto has played thrilling playoff series against the Washington Capitals and Boston Bruins in recent seasons.

The Sabres and Leafs haven’t played any truly meaningful tilts in a long time.

“Rivalries can die off,” said former captain Michael Peca, who helped push the Sabres past the Leafs in the 1999 Eastern Conference final to compete for the Stanley Cup.

Neither team has made the playoffs in the same season since 2001. Before the Leafs’ resurgence over the past three seasons, both teams were pretty bad.

“The last few years here in Buffalo the rivalry has been one-sided,” Biron said. “It’s like the Leafs are the Sabres’ rivals, but the Sabres are not the Leafs’ rival.”

But that could change soon. The teams will meet tonight as two of the NHL’s heavyweights for the first time in more than 17 years.

The bipartisan crowd inside KeyBank Center should be noisy all night.

The Leafs, having earned 38 points (19-8-0) entering Monday’s games, ranked second in the ultra-competitive Atlantic Division and second overall in the NHL, trailing only the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Sabres, meanwhile, had gained 37 points (17-7-3) before Monday’s road tilt against the Nashville Predators, putting them third in the division and fifth overall.

“Both teams are trending upwards, there’s no doubt about it,” Peca said.

Biron said: “I do believe that it’s going to start changing, because now there’s a lot more riding on the line when those teams are going to meet.”

Given the makeup of the Sabres and Leafs – they’re young, exciting and feature two American stars in Jack Eichel and Auston Matthews – the rivalry between the talent-laden teams could be rekindled for years and years.

“It’s just going to continue, I think, to get better and better because both teams are going to continue to be competitive for a long time now,” Peca said.

Entering Monday’s games, the Sabres and Leafs were on track to play a first-round playoff series.

“In a perfect world, these teams meet up in the first round this year,” Biron said.

Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, after the Leafs’ move to the Eastern Conference in 1998, the rivalry was one of the NHL’s best.

"Anytime you play a conference final, especially with short proximity, it's going to be a major rivalry for years after that," Biron said.

The rivalry, of course, had layers and fun story lines. Tough guys Rob Ray and Tie Domi would usually fight. Peca would shadow future Hall of Famer Mats Sundin. Dominik Hasek and Curtis Joseph were two of the NHL's best goalies.

"I would say for my whole time here in Buffalo, playing Toronto meant playing Tie Domi, playing Shayne Corson, playing Darcy Tucker, playing Mats Sundin, playing Ed Belfour and Curtis Joseph and playing all those guys," Biron said. "It was definitely a rivalry."

Peca said: "There were little stories within the rivalry that made it an enjoyable rivalry. Both teams were really competitive."

Biron remembers Domi, not exactly the most skilled forward, chasing Brian Campbell around the ice one night after the slick Sabres defenseman hit him.

"Soupy was quick with the spin-o-ramas and all of that, and I remember thinking, 'What is this guy doing?'" Biron said. "Tie Domi is chasing a 22- or 23-year-old Brian Campbell around the ice trying to just kill him. That's what was so interesting, I think, at that time with the rivalry it wasn't just Tie Domi-Rob Ray, it was a whole team thing that would happen."

Following the 2005 lockout, the Sabres began consistently pummeling the Maple Leafs, who have historically struggled in Buffalo.

"I remember Tim Connolly walking all over Ken Klee and going bar down backhand on Eddie Belfour," Biron said of one of Connolly's most memorable goals. "I remember the building exploding when that happened at home."

Still, Biron, a Sabres regular from 1999 until 2007, said in the dressing room, the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers were possibly seen as bigger rivals "because of all the playoff meetings."

If the Sabres and Leafs meet in the playoffs come April, you can bet they'll be fierce enemies again.

5 Observations: Sabres drop third straight game, fall to Predators 2-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

December 3, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - For the third straight night, the Buffalo Sabres came up one goal short. On Monday the Sabres fell to the Nashville Predators 2-1, dropping their third straight game. Sam Reinhart scored the Sabres lone goal, as Buffalo slips to 17-8-3 on the season with the loss.

5 Observations from Monday's loss:

10 steps forward, three steps back

The last thing the Sabres wanted to do was follow up a 10-game win streak with a three-game skid. Matchups against Tampa Bay and Nashville certainly aren't easy. But in all three games, the Sabres left a lot to be desired. With Toronto on the docket Tuesday, Buffalo needs a great game or the losing-streak will become four games.

For weeks it has seemed like the Sabres power play has regressed quite a bit. Their struggles were on display against the Predators, failing to convert on any of their fourth chances with the power play.

Not only did the Sabres not score with the man-advantage. They failed to generate any solid chances and couldn't maintain continuous possession. Against a team like Nashville, the power play can be the ultimate equalizer. That wasn't the case on Monday.

Not enough shots

One of the biggest differences during the Sabres current losing streak has been their lack of shot attempts. In their last three games, the Sabres have been out-shot in every period except the final frame against the Predators. That needs to change. While the shot disparity wasn't as significant on Monday as it was in Florida against the Lightning and the Panthers, it was certainly noticeable which team was controlling play for most of the night.

Swedish Defensemen

Everyone knows about Rasmus Dahlin. But in Lawrence Pilut's first two games he's been very impressive. At both ends of the ice, Pilut has made his presence felt. Whether the 22-year-old defender was jumping into the rush or batting a puck out of the air to break up a 2-on-1, Pilut has been solid. Regardless of what happens with Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella, I'd like to see Pilut stick in the lineup at least until he regresses. If, of course, that happens.

No late push

Despite trailing after 40 minutes, the Sabres never appeared to be a serious threat to tie things up in the final frame until the final minutes. Unlike the team that managed to win 10 straight games, the Sabres spent most of the third period [first 15 minutes] chasing the Predators at their own end of the ice. With the clock winding down the Sabres managed to generate a few solid scoring chances but it was too little, too late.

Rinne & Preds hand Sabres a 3rd straight loss

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

December 3, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Entering Monday's game, Nashville netminder Pekka Rinne led the league surrendering less than two goals per game to opponents.

The reigning Vezina Trophy Winner continued his solid play between the pipes on Monday, turning away 21 of the 22 shots he faced to hand the Sabres a third straight loss, 2-1.

Trailing 1-0 in the second period, after a mad scramble for the puck, Sam Reinhart was credited with his seventh goal of the season although the puck was tapped into the back of the net by Roman Josi.

Still tied at 1 late in the period, Kevin Fiala fired on net, and after taking a weird bounce off defenseman Casey Nelson, the puck found it's way past Carter Hutton and to the back of the cage.

The Sabres had several chances in the final minute to tie the game, but failed to convert with the extra attacker. They're back on the ice Tuesday to host the rival Toronto Maple Leafs.

Sabres at Predators preview

By Robby Stanley

NHL.com

December 3, 2018

SABRES (17-7-3) AT PREDATORS (18-8-1)

8 p.m. ET; SNE, SNP, FS-TN, MSG-B, NHL.TV

The Game

The Buffalo Sabres will attempt to finish a three-game road trip with a win against the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena on Monday.

Buffalo is 0-1-1 on the trip after winning its previous 10 games. Forward Jeff Skinner has scored 11 goals in his past 12 games.

The Predators will be without forward Filip Forsberg for the next 4-6 weeks because of an upper-body injury. Kevin Fiala was on the top line alongside Ryan Johansen and Ryan Hartman in a 5-2 win against the Chicago Blackhawks on Saturday in Forsberg's absence.

Players to watch

Sabres forward Jack Eichel has four assists in his past two games and 13 points (one goal, 12 assists) in his past nine games.

Fiala has five points (two goals, three assists) in his past five games.

They said it

"We have different guys that contribute. We have, obviously, our stars that are getting the job done but at the same time, we have other guys chipping in. I think that's what makes us dangerous, just our all-out effort. Everybody believes in each other now, and that's a big thing." -- Sabres goalie Carter Hutton

"They're determined, and they're playing with a little chip on their shoulder and a lot of confidence. So for us I think it's a lot of what we did the other night. We had a good bounce back game, obviously, and I think it's picking up where we left off and even being a little bit better. I think we're going to have to be." -- Nashville defenseman Matt Irwin

Sabres projected lineup

Jeff Skinner -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart

Tage Thompson -- Casey Mittelstadt -- Kyle Okposo

Conor Sheary -- Evan Rodrigues -- Vladimir Sobotka

Patrik Berglund -- Johan Larsson -- Zemgus Girgensons

Lawrence Pilut -- Rasmus Ristolainen

Rasmus Dahlin -- Zach Bogosian

Nathan Beaulieu -- Casey Nelson

Carter Hutton

Linus Ullmark

Scratched: Remi Elie, Matt Tennyson, Matt Hunwick

Injured: Jason Pominville (upper body), Scott Wilson (ankle), Jake McCabe (upper body), Marco Scandella (vertigo)

Predators projected lineup

Kevin Fiala -- Ryan Johansen -- Ryan Hartman

Eeli Tolvanen -- Calle Jarnkrok -- Craig Smith

Miikka Salomaki -- Colton Sissons -- Austin Watson

Frederick Gaudreau -- Nick Bonino -- Rocco Grimaldi

Roman Josi -- Ryan Ellis

Dan Hamhuis -- Mattias Ekholm

Matt Irwin -- Yannick Weber

Pekka Rinne

Juuse Saros

Scratched: Zac Rinaldo, Anthony Bitetto

Injured: Viktor Arvidsson (broken thumb), P.K. Subban (upper body), Kyle Turris (undisclosed), Filip Forsberg (upper body)

Status report

Sabres coach Phil Housley said Sheary is a game-time decision. ... The Predators reassigned forward Anthony Richard to Milwaukee of the American Hockey League.

Stat pack

Hutton is 7-1-0 with a 2.43 goals-against average and .925 save percentage in his past eight starts. ... Rinne is 8-3-1 with a 1.76 GAA and .936 save percentage in his past 13 games.

Sabres unable to generate enough offense in loss to Predators

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 3, 2018

NASHVILLE - The Buffalo Sabres had some chances late, but it wasn't enough against the Nashville Predators on Monday.

With goaltender Carter Hutton on the bench in favor of the extra attacker with 90 seconds left, the Sabres were able to come up with at least three prime opportunities to tie the game. However, the Predators held on for a 2-1 victory at Bridgestone Arena.

Patrik Berglund won three offensive-zone draws in the final 1:11 to give Buffalo a chance, but also missed on an open net as part of Buffalo's last-ditch effort.

Sam Reinhart, who scored for Buffalo, didn't think they were able to generate enough offensive chances throughout the game.

"I think it's something we need to be better at," he said. "It's seem like it's something we've been having troubles with for a little bit here so we've got to figure out, get back to what gave us success earlier in that part of it. We just need more from that in-zone. I don't think we generated enough."

Buffalo's power play went 0-for-4 on the night. Offensively, they were without Conor Sheary and Jason Pominville due to injuries. It's possible they both could return to the lineup Tuesday night, but coach Phil Housley would like to see more from his group of forwards. Monday's lone goal was the result of a five-man attack consisting of Reinhart, Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, and defensemen Lawrence Pilut and Rasmus Ristolainen.

"We had some opportunities, we just didn't cash in," Housley said. "I just thought overall, I think we're going to need more help from our other lines to create some more offense, to generate some more offense to take some heat off of Jack's line."

Scoring plays

Nashville opened the scoring a power-play goal from Ryan Ellis off a slap shot with 4:56 remaining in the first period.

Reinhart was then credited with his seventh goal of the year when Roman Josi inadvertently knocked the puck into his own net 5:20 into the second period. Reinhart is on a four-game point streak with four goals and two assists in that span.

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The Predators recaptured the lead on Kevin Fiala's shot with 3:26 left in the middle frame that bounced off defenseman Casey Nelson, hit the ice and found its way past Hutton.

Hutton finished the game was 23 saves to Pekka Rinne's 21.

The Predators didn't give the Sabres much of anything, especially when they attempted to go on the attack through the neutral zone.

"You saw their experience and how they just kind of shut everything down, make it hard for us to get pucks behind them, and ultimately get speed and get on it," Reinhart said. "I think we need to find a way to generate more speed through the neutral zone and simplify it a little more against a team that shuts it down like that."

Housley, who spent four seasons on Nashville's coaching staff knows how well the Predators can smother an opponent.

"Once they got the one-goal lead and from about the 15-minute mark of the third period, they just built that wall up," he said. "We had opportunities to get by it and chip it by them, but we tried to stick handle and that's one of the reasons they're tough to play against. We had some plans and plays in place, we just didn't execute them."

Tight games and another tough opponent coming up
The Sabres are now 10-2-3 in one-goal games this season.

They wrap up the three-game road trip - all of which were one-goal contests - with an 0-2-1 record. They're coming off a franchise-record tying 10-game winning streak in which nine of those 10 wins were by a single goal.

They'll host the Toronto Maple Leafs at KeyBank Center at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

"Just keep playing. It's just tight games, it's a good league, you know? I don't think there's anything to panic about," Hutton said. "Obviously, we just played one of the best teams in the league. We just came from playing Tampa, one of the best teams in our conference.

"We've got a tough challenge tomorrow with the Leafs and it's not really an easy schedule right now by any means. The schedule wasn't easy when we picked up those 10 wins. It is what it is. We've just got to move on. It's obviously frustrating standing here with a 2-1 loss. I thought we could've done more."

Sabres ready for another big test in Nashville

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

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NASHVILLE - The Buffalo Sabres are no strangers to big games lately.

Each game of their 10-game winning streak last month seemed to gain steam in terms of intensity as it went on, especially when it ended with a first-place battle against Tampa Bay on Thursday. On Friday, they managed to earn a point in a 3-2 overtime loss to the Florida Panthers, who are now 2-1-1 in their last five games and four points out of a Wild Card berth.

Tonight, they'll wrap up their three-game road trip when they go up against the Nashville Predators, who sit in first place in the Western Conference. The Predators are 10-5-0 at home this year and are coming off a 5-2 win over the Blackhawks on Saturday, a game in which they jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the first period.

The Lightning are also in action tonight in New Jersey. If Tampa loses in regulation, whichever team comes away with two points at Bridgestone Arena will be tied with them at the top of the NHL standings with 39 points.

Faceoff from Bridgestone Arena is scheduled for 8 p.m. ET with the GMC Game Night pregame show on MSG starting at 7:30. The run against top opponents continues for Buffalo with a contest Tuesday night at home against Toronto, who are currently one point ahead of Buffalo and Nashville.

First though, the Sabres will focus on the task at hand.

"We'd like to salvage this road trip and come out with a win," coach Phil Housley said after the club's morning skate. "Obviously, it's going to be difficult and it's going to be a tough job, but I think our guys will be ready."

Goaltender Carter Hutton is 0-2-1 against the Predators in five career appearances and three starts. All three of those starts came against Pekka Rinne, who could be in net for the Predators tonight.

Hutton, Buffalo's expected starter tonight, served as Rinne's backup for three seasons in Nashville and developed a close relationship with the reigning Vezina Trophy winner.

Hutton is trying to pass on some of the lessons he learned over the years onto Linus Ullmark, who is in the midst of his first full NHL season.

"Every day come to work and do what you need to do and take care of business. But at the same time, being a good person," Hutton said. "For me, a lot of times in this position and this world, everybody wants to undermine everybody to get ahead and it doesn't get you anywhere. I think you've just got to do the right things and be a good person. The rest takes care of itself."

Housley is also familiar with the Predators organization and their style of play, having served as an assistant coach there for four seasons. Even with Viktor Arvidsson, Filip Forsberg, Kyle Turris and P.K. Subban out due to injury, he knows it's going to be a difficult test.

"The work part of it is going to be important tonight. This is a team that's banged up but they have a good, hard work ethic and we're going to have to match that or be better," Housley said. "I think getting off to a better start - we've talked about it before - but we're really going to have to focus on that and our execution because they will try to establish their forecheck and try to hem you in and build some momentum off that. So we've got try to steal that from them."

It's no secret that the atmosphere in Bridgestone Arena favors the home team. A players poll conducted by NHL.com this fall ranked it the hardest building to play in.

"This is a rink that when they start buzzing you, it seems like it closes in on you," Hutton said. "They do a good job feeding off the crowd so it's something we have to be prepared for tonight."

Lineup notes

Lawrence Pilut is set to play in his second NHL game and he could see a boost in both ice time and responsibility. He was paired with Rasmus Ristolainen at the morning skate.

"He's here, let's see what he can bring to our team. I thought he had a pretty good game against Florida," Housley said. "He made some mistakes - that's going to happen at times, stepping in at the NHL level - but we're just giving him a bigger opportunity."

Rasmus Dahlin and Zach Bogosian, and Nathan Beaulieu and Casey Nelson will make up the other pairs. The Sabres are without Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella because of injuries.

As for the forwards, Jason Pominville and Conor Sheary were on the ice for the morning skate.

Pominville has been ruled out after taking a hard hit into the end boards on Friday in Florida.

"I woke up today and felt much better. Honestly didn't really think if I was going to skate today, but felt good enough and they decided to let me go out there," he said. "I obviously wasn't opposed to it, but it was nice to be out there for sure."

He's hopeful to be back for tomorrow's game against the Maple Leafs.

Sheary did extra drills on the ice after the skate with the scratches and injured players. Housley declared him a game-time decision. If he can't go, it looks like Remi Elie will play on a line with center Evan Rodrigues and Vladimir Sobotka.