



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Girgensons playing 'desperate' with blocked shots, hits to help Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 17, 2018

BOSTON – Zemgus Girgensons held his right hand over his heart, surveyed the visitors' locker room inside TD Garden and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's really not that big of a deal," the Buffalo Sabres' relentless fourth-line winger said, showing where Torey Krug's slap shot struck him in the chest with 30 seconds remaining in a 4-2 win over the Boston Bruins on Sunday.

The decision to sacrifice himself ended the Bruins' final blitz and set up Jack Eichel's empty-net goal. On a night when Eichel and Jeff Skinner each scored twice, it was Girgensons' selfless act that best illustrated how the Sabres have gutted through a grueling schedule to knock off some of the NHL's elite teams.

"Maybe it's not on the score sheet, but that could have been one of the biggest plays of the game for us," Eichel, who assisted on both of Skinner's goals, said. "[Girgensons] is a guy that does it every night. He brings his 100 percent effort. He plays the game more desperate than most guys out there and you can't say enough about him. ... If we don't get stuff like that during the season, I don't think we are where we are."

Girgensons was awarded with an assist, his fifth of the season, but to him, blocking a shot is as normal as a goalie making a save. His teammates have shared that sentiment throughout the season.

The Sabres, tied for fourth in the NHL with 45 points entering play Monday, are at their best when players throughout the lineup are contributing with acts such as blocked shots, body checks or chasing down the puck on a potential icing. Girgensons has contributed all three since he was a healthy scratch during a 6-2 loss to Philadelphia on Dec. 8.

That one-game absence came after he was a combined minus-3 in losses to Nashville and Toronto. He was inserted back in the lineup against Los Angeles after coach Phil Housley said Patrik Berglund was "sick." Berglund, a 30-year-old forward, was suspended by the Sabres on Saturday for "failure to report to the team."

Girgensons, a first-round draft pick in 2012, scored in his first game back when he stole the puck away from Kings defenseman Drew Doughty on the forecheck and fired a wrist shot past Cal Petersen.

"He's been huge," Skinner said of Girgensons. "I think the last few games he's made big plays at big times. ... The last few games he's worked really hard. He's beaten out some icings that led to goals. Obviously that block at the end is huge."

Though Girgensons has only three goals among eight points with a minus-2 rating in 31 games, he has found other ways to contribute. He ranks second on the team with 54 hits and is tied for third with 11 takeaways. During 5-on-5 play, Girgensons' Corsi-for percentage – which measures the percentage of shots taken by a team when a player is on the ice – ranks fourth among all Sabres forwards behind Skinner, Eichel and Jason Pominville.

Among Sabres with at least 25 games played, Girgensons has been on the ice for the fewest 5-on-5 scoring chances against and ranks second in shots allowed, despite ranking third in defensive zone starts. He is also partly responsible for them killing 18 of their last 19 penalties, which elevated Buffalo's penalty kill to fifth in the league entering Monday.

While Girgensons has averaged 13:53 of ice time, he often is tasked with facing an opponent's top line. Girgensons, Johan Larsson and Evan Rodrigues – the Sabres' fourth line – have thrived since being reunited, combining for three goals in wins over Los Angeles and Arizona.

"We click pretty well," Girgensons said. "We're all pretty fast players. We push the pace, and we play pretty good in the D zone. Try to contribute offensively as much as we can. Do the hard work."

Girgensons has personified the new Sabres culture. They pride themselves on selflessness and effort. Eichel and Skinner deflect praise to teammates. Every forward and defenseman is quick to give credit to their goalies: Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark. That team-wide mentality is why Girgensons brushed off any praise or credit for his decision to dive in front of Krug's shot.

"We've had different guys doing it all season long," Girgensons said. "It just happened to be me this time blocking the shot. Not that big of a deal. Just a blocked shot."

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The Sabres made another change to their defense Monday, sending Matt Tennyson back to Rochester. Tennyson, 28, was a healthy scratch for the Sabres' win over the Bruins. He was a minus-3 one night earlier in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Washington Capitals, a performance that prompted the team to recall Brendan Guhle from Rochester.

Tennyson did not record a point and was minus-4 in his four games with the Sabres.

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Eichel was named the NHL's third star of the week after scoring five goals with four assists in four games, three of which the Sabres won. He had four goals during the two-game road trip to Washington and Boston, capped by his four-point performance against the Bruins.

Eichel entered Monday tied for sixth in the NHL with 45 points and his 31 assists were tied for fifth.

Jack Eichel named NHL's third star of the week

The Buffalo News

December 17, 2018

Sabres captain Jack Eichel was named the NHL's third star for the week ending Sunday.

Washington's Alex Ovechkin was named the first star and Winnipeg's Mark Scheifele was named the second star.

Eichel had five goals and four assists in four games as the Sabres went 3-0-1 and moved into second place in the Atlantic Division. He capped the week with his fifth four-point performance with two goals and two assists against the Boston Bruins on Sunday.

He has nine goals and four points in an ongoing six-game points streak heading into Tuesday's game against Florida.

In 34 games, he has 14 goals and 31 assists for 45 points.

Sabres send defenseman Matt Tennyson back to Rochester

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 17, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres made another change to their defense Monday, sending Matt Tennyson back to Rochester.

Tennyson, 28, was a healthy scratch for the Sabres' 4-2 win over the Boston Bruins on Sunday in TD Garden. He was a minus-3 one night earlier in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Washington Capitals, a performance that prompted the team to recall Brendan Guhle from Rochester.

Tennyson did not record a point and was a minus-4 in his four games with the Sabres. His demotion likely means defenseman Nathan Beaulieu could return for the team's game Tuesday night against the Florida Panthers. Beaulieu suffered an upper-body injury Saturday in Washington that limited him to one second-period shift and prevented him from playing against the Bruins.

Neither Jake McCabe nor Casey Nelson has resumed skating with the Sabres since suffering upper-body injuries, and Lawrence Pilut was placed on injured reserve with a lower-body injury prior to Sunday's game.

Guhle, 21, played a team-low 11:59 against the Bruins and was a plus-1. Matt Hunwick, a 33-year-old defenseman acquired from Pittsburgh in June, also made his Sabres debut against Boston. He skated 18:24 while playing alongside Guhle and Zach Bogosian. Though Hunwick was a minus-1, Housley spoke highly of the veteran's play after the game.

Bills game gets impressive rating; Sabres ratings up 61 percent from last year

By Alan Pergament

The Buffalo News

December 17, 2018

The Buffalo Bills' 14-13 victory over the Detroit Lions Sunday had a 35.8 rating on WUTV, the local Fox affiliate.

That is one point higher than the team's average of 34.8 for the first 14 games of the season.

It is an impressive rating when you consider the Bills are out of playoff contention and the Lions weren't much of a draw at 5-9 going into the game.

However, the rating was 2.7 points lower than the 38.5 rating for the Bills' 27-23 loss to the New York Jets a week earlier on WIVB-TV (Channel 4), the local CBS affiliate. That was the Bills' highest-rated Sunday afternoon game of the season.

The highest-rated game of the season was the "Monday Night Football" loss to the New England Patriots that was simulcast on ESPN and WKBW-TV (Channel 7). It had a combined rating of 41.7.

The Buffalo Sabres aren't anywhere near the TV draw as the Bills but they continued to get strong television ratings during the weekend's two-game road trip.

The Sabres' 4-3 shootout loss to the Washington Capitals Saturday night had a 10.5 rating on MSG that ended with a 14.9 rating during the shootout.

The Sabres' 4-2 win over the Boston Bruins that started Sunday afternoon had a 9.6 rating on MSG.

For the Sabres' surprisingly successful early start, the team is averaging an 8.9 rating, up 61 percent from the 5.5 rating they averaged at this point last season.

Eichel named as NHL's 'Third Star' of the week

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 17, 2018

For the third time in his career, Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been named as one of the National Hockey League's "Three Stars" of the week.

On Monday, the NHL announced Eichel as the league's "Third Star" of the week ending on December 16. In four games played, Eichel scored five goals and registered nine points to help the Sabres to a 3-0-1 record in that span.

The week started with Eichel picking up a goal and an assist in Buffalo's 4-3 overtime win over the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday. Eichel followed that up with an assist on Thursday night in a 3-1 win at home over the Arizona Coyotes. Then on the road, Eichel picked up a pair of goals on Saturday night in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Washington Capitals. The 22-year-old finished the weekend by picking up a season-high four points (2+2) on Sunday in a 4-2 win over the Boston Bruins.

Eichel is currently riding a six-game point streak that has him scoring nine goals and picking up four assists along the way. He has registered 45 points (14+31) in 34 games this season, which is currently good for seventh place in league scoring.

Eichel is on pace for a career-year this season in goals (34), assists (75) and points (109), while playing in every game for the Sabres to this point.

The last time Eichel was honored as one of the "Three Stars" of the week by the NHL was last season for the week ending on April 1. He was named as the league's "Third Star". Eichel was also named as the "Second Star" of the week last season for the week ending on January 28, 2018.

The Sabres have the day off from practice on Monday, but will return to the ice for the morning skate on Tuesday with the Florida Panthers in town for a 7 p.m. faceoff at KeyBank Center. On Monday, the team announced that they have assigned defenseman Matt Tennyson to the Rochester Americans. This could mean that one of Buffalo's injured defensemen are ready to return for Tuesday night's game.

Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin was named as the NHL's "First Star" of the week, while Winnipeg Jets forward Mark Scheifele was honored as the NHL's "Second Star" of the week.

Jack Eichel enjoying one of greatest seasons in Sabres history

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 17, 2018

BUFFALO – Thirty-four games into his fourth NHL campaign, Sabres captain Jack Eichel is enjoying more than just a career year; the ultra-talented center is putting together one of the greatest seasons in franchise history.

Fresh off a four-goal, nine-point week, Eichel is up to 14 goals and 45 points entering tonight's tilt against the Florida Panthers inside KeyBank Center. At his current pace, he would compile 34 goals and a whopping 109 points over a full season.

The Sabres haven't had a 100-point scorer since the rollicking 1992-93 season, when Pat LaFontaine (53 goals and 148 points) and Alexander Mogilny (76 goals and 127 points) both surpassed the prestigious mark.

That, of course, was a different era. The NHL averaged 7.26 goals a game that season, according to hockey-reference.com. Today's game is much tighter – 6.22 goals a game – which makes Eichel's work that much more remarkable.

Eichel, 22, has done most of his damage at even strength, scoring 35 points. At that pace, his 82 even-strength points would be the third-highest full-season total since the 2005-06, trailing only Connor McDavid (84 in 2017-18) and Henrik Sedin (83 in 2009-10).

A slew of factors have helped elevate Eichel, who averaged 24 goals and 59 points over his first three seasons, to a superstar level.

Naturally, experience and maturity are huge. Having played 243 NHL games, Eichel has been around longer than most players his age.

Earning the captaincy probably changed Eichel, perhaps bringing him a greater focus. It was evident last season he was starting to act and talk more like a leader.

But the Sabres' overall improvements might be the biggest reason behind Eichel's MVP-caliber campaign. Right now, having earned 45 points, they rank second in the Atlantic Division. They're 20-9-5. They won 25 games all of last season.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill overhauled the lineup during the offseason, trading for wingers Jeff Skinner and Conor Sheary, signing goalie Carter Hutton and drafting defenseman Rasmus Dahlin first overall.

Skinner's late addition – he was acquired from the Carolina Hurricanes on Aug. 2, an odd time for a star to be dealt – has helped push the Sabres and Eichel to a new level.

Eichel and Skinner have become arguably the NHL's best duo and form two-thirds of perhaps the league's best line with Sam Reinhart.

Skinner's 24 goals ranked second in the league entering Monday's games, putting him on pace for 58. The Sabres haven't had a 50-goal scorer since 1992-93.

While they have played less than half a season together, Eichel and Skinner have quickly morphed into the Sabres' most dynamic duo since LaFontaine and Mogilny.

Incredibly, Skinner has already equaled last season's goal total in 48 fewer games.

Eichel assisted on both of Skinner's goals Sunday, slickly feeding the sniper from behind the net twice.

"Skinny's so strong on his in front of the net," said Eichel, who has compiled 13 points during his six-game point streak.

Eichel's empty-net goal then sealed the win, his fourth tally in two days. He also scored twice in Saturday's 4-3 shootout road loss to the Washington Capitals before briefly putting the Sabres up in the third period Sunday.

"He's just brought his game to another level, especially under the circumstances tonight, too," Sabres coach Phil Housley told reporters in Boston. "Like, he played 24, 25 minutes (Saturday). (He) comes back and plays almost 20 minutes tonight and he plays at both ends. He's attacking the game with speed offensively. He's reloading with meaningful strides coming back into our zone. He's just playing a 200-foot game, a very complete game right now."

Two weeks ago, Eichel was having a huge playmaking season. His goal total, however, was unusually low. His shooting percentage was well below his career average.

Now, after scoring nine goals in the last six games, he's shooting 9.5 percent for the season. His career average is 9.9.

It's no coincidence Eichel has been shooting the puck more often. He has pumped 33 shots on goal in the last six games, a 27.3 percent shooting percentage.

Notes: Reinhart has five goals and 16 points during his 10-game point streak. ... Eichel's 17 multi-point games had him tied for the league lead entering Monday's game. He has seven multi-point contests in the last nine outings and is just one shy of his career high. The Sabres sent defenseman Matt Tennyson to the Rochester Americans on Monday. ... The Sabres had Monday off.

Sabres star Jack Eichel named NHL's third star of week

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 17, 2018

BUFFALO – Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been named the NHL's third star of the week after compiling five goals and nine points as the Sabres went 3-0-1.

Eichel had a goal and two points, including an assist on the overtime winner, in Tuesday's 4-3 win over Los Angeles. The center followed up with one assist Thursday's 3-1 win over Arizona before scoring twice in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss in Washington.

The fourth-year star capped the week by scoring two goals and four points in Sunday afternoon's 4-2 win in Boston.

Following his fifth career four-point performance, Eichel is up to 14 goals and 45 points in 34 contests this season. He has scored nine goals and 13 points during his six-game point streak.

Washington's Alex Ovechkin (seven goals in three games) earned first star honors. Winnipeg's Mark Scheifele (five goals and 11 points in four games) earned second star honors.

Sabres send Matt Tennyson to Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 17, 2018

BUFFALO – The Sabres sent defenseman Matt Tennyson back to the Rochester Americans this morning.

Tennyson, 28, struggled in Saturday's 4-3 overtime road loss to the Washington Capitals, compiling a minus-3 rating in barely nine minutes of ice time.

The Sabres recalled defenseman Brendan Guhle prior to Sunday's 4-2 road win against the Boston Bruins and scratched Tennyson.

Tennyson has zero points and a minus-4 rating in four NHL appearances this year.

The Sabres are off today.

Eichel named NHL's Third Star of the Week

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 17, 2018

Jack Eichel has been named the NHL's Third Star of the Week, the league announced Monday. The Buffalo Sabres captain tallied five goals and four assists in four games, leading the team to a 3-0-1 record.

Washington's Alex Ovechkin (7+0) and Winnipeg's Mark Scheifele (5+6) were the league's first and second stars, respectively.

Eichel has turned in seven multi-point outings in his last nine games and is tied for the NHL lead with 17 such games this season. He scored a goal and an assist against Los Angeles on Tuesday, added two goals in Washington on Saturday and scored four points (2+2) in Boston on Sunday. He also tallied an assist against Arizona on Thursday.

"He's just brought his game to another level," Sabres coach Phil Housley said after the game in Boston.

"Especially under the circumstances tonight, too. He had played 24 or 25 minutes last night and then he comes back and plays almost 20 minutes tonight. And he plays at both ends.

"He plays the game with speed offensively, he's reloading with meaningful strides coming back into our zone. He's just playing a 200-foot game, just a complete game right now."

Tickets for Tuesday vs. Florida

Eichel is tied with Calgary's Johnny Gaudreau for sixth in the NHL with 45 points in 34 games. His 31 assists are tied for fifth with Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon. He's on pace for 33 goals and 108 points, both of which would mark new career-highs.

If he maintains his pace, it would be the fourth-most productive season in franchise history. Pat LaFontaine holds the record with 148 points in 1992-93, followed by Alexander Mogilny (127 in 1992-93) and Gilbert Perreault (113 in 1975-76).

Eichel is also on pace for 82 points at even-strength, which would stand as the third-highest single season total for any player since the 2004 lockout. Edmonton's Connor McDavid scored 84 points at even-strength last season and Vancouver's Henrik Sedin tallied 83 points in 2009-10.

Read our feature story about the strides Eichel has made so far in his first season as captain here.