



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres' Berglund clears waivers; contract will be terminated

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

December 20, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres are set to terminate the remaining three-and-a-half seasons of Patrik Berglund's contract after the forward cleared 24-hour waivers.

The Sabres waived Berglund on Wednesday after suspending him for failing to report to the team for its road game at Washington on Saturday.

Berglund missed five games, including two last week when coach Phil Housley said the player was sidelined by an illness.

The Sabres have declined to discuss Berglund's status since suspending him. The player's agent, Peter Wallen, has not responding to numerous messages.

Berglund stands to lose the \$9.85 million owed him over the final three years of his contract, along with what's left of the \$4.7 million he's still owed this year.

The Sabres benefit by having a \$3.85 million annual salary cap hit removed from their books.

Buffalo acquired the 30-year-old player as part of a four-player trade that sent center Ryan O'Reilly to St. Louis in July.

Berglund spent his first 10 seasons with the Blues, where he had 168 goals and 322 points in 694 games. He had had two goals and two assists in 23 games with Buffalo.

Berglund saga appears over as Sabres move on from waived veteran

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 20, 2018

WASHINGTON — The Patrik Berglund contract termination, one of the more bizarre sagas in recent Buffalo Sabres history, reached a climax Thursday as the veteran center who went AWOL on his team cleared unconditional waivers and the club moved ahead with scrubbing his contract from its books.

Earlier in the day, Berglund's former club team in Sweden said it would be open to another reunion with the 30-year-old forward. For their part, the Sabres have quickly moved on and pushed their focus on to Friday's game against the Washington Capitals in Capital One Arena.

Berglund was removed from the Sabres' web site last Saturday, when he was put on indefinite suspension, and his 23-game Buffalo career officially ended when no one picked him up on waivers Wednesday.

There's no sense the issue has caused a major distraction in the locker room.

"I think that we've tried to limit our focus to playing, and the guys that are here," captain Jack Eichel said after the team practiced for about an hour in the arena. "You let the right people take care of that situation,. You kind of just focus on what you can control and the people that are here."

"He was an ultimate pro, does everything right, every day works hard so obviously it's been a bit shocking," said goalie Carter Hutton, who played with Berglund in St. Louis the last two years. "There's a lot of stuff where we don't even know about I'm sure, so you hope for the best in all cases."

Hutton said the team's older players are used to off-the-ice issues sometimes creeping into the locker room and need to show the younger players how to stay on course.

"There's the business side of things we've dealt with a lot in our careers," he said. "You know you have to deal with it and sometimes you just have to separate yourself and make sure you're taking care of your own business so you don't get caught up in stuff. We've done a good job as a leadership group and with management staying focused on what we need to be."

The Sabres are no longer on the hook for Berglund's \$3.85 million cap hit each of the next three years and get relief for this season to the tune of \$2,235,484, according to CapFriendly.com. In total, Berglund is losing about \$12.5 million over the next four years.

The Sabres had no comment about Berglund's termination on Thursday and have said virtually nothing about the situation since it cropped up. The prevailing theory is that Berglund never wanted to be traded to Buffalo in the first place but his representatives were late in turning in his team list for a modified trade clause that kicked in July 1, so the Blues were able to trade him to Buffalo.

Once here, Berglund never really meshed with his new teammates. He had two goals and two assists in 23 games and was rarely seen in the dressing room by reporters after practices or games. Coach Phil Housley wouldn't go down a certain road Thursday when asked if he was agitated that a player quit his team.

"I'm not going to comment on that," Housley said. [GM Jason Botterill] along with our management has done a really good job of handling it and that's all I'm going to comment on. Jason has done a terrific job. Obviously it's an unfortunate situation but we're focused on the guys that are in that room and getting prepared to play against Washington."

Berglund played three years for Västerås IK from 2005-08 and returned to the Swedish club in 2012 to play 30 games there during the NHL lockout. Officials there are apparently interested in another reunion.

"If he wants to come home and play, we will take him with open arms," Västerås sports director Patrik Zetterberg said in a translated article on Hockeysverige.se. "It is clear that you are wondering what is happening. It is clearly

a difficult situation for all involved. I have not had any dialogue with Patrik about this. So I do not know what is behind [it]. The most important thing for me is he's OK. I think he has a lot to solve over there."

Sabres Notebook: A second chance at Caps, Hutton rues Panthers' penalty shot goal

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
December 20, 2018

WASHINGTON — Just six days after being involved in one of the highest-level games they've been a part of in years, the Buffalo Sabres will get another chance against the defending Stanley Cup champions Friday night.

The Sabres and Washington Capitals will meet for the second time in a week in Capital One Arena and this one will be nationally televised by NBC Sports Network. Washington won Saturday's thriller, 4-3, in a shootout as Alex Ovechkin scored one goal plus the shootout winner to overcome a two-goal game from Sabres captain Jack Eichel.

"It was like a heavyweight bout going back and forth and there's lots of stuff we can learn from," goalie Carter Hutton said after practice here Thursday. "They'll make high-risk plays and they're very talented. It's one of those games you have to have fun with because you know they'll get their chances no matter how hard you work. They're built for that."

"For sure we can be better in terms of the way we defend them," Eichel said. "They're so skilled, they generate a lot of Grade A chances. They play so well together. It's a veteran team for a reason. They've played together for a bunch of years, went to the Cup and won it last year."

The Sabres had leads of 1-0 and 3-2 in the game and outshot Washington, 7-3, in overtime but couldn't pull out the victory. The Caps outshot them, 38-29.

"I really liked the way our guys played," said coach Phil Housley. "Obviously that's a very good team, a physical team, a heavy team. But we played with speed and pace and our transition was really good. We were able to attack. ... We had an opportunity to win a game and that breeds a lot of confidence in our group."

"We maybe gave them too much last week and we had to rely on 'Hutts' more than we wanted," Eichel said. "He played great, made sure he stole us a point. We know we can play in their zone. They don't want to be in their end. They want to have the puck."

The Capitals (20-10-3) continue to lead the Metropolitan Division and would overtake the Sabres (20-10-5) in the NHL's overall standing on tiebreakers with a regulation win. Alex Ovechkin (29-14-43) had a career-high point streak end at 14 games in Wednesday's 2-1 loss here to Pittsburgh.

The Sabres are 1-4-2 in their last seven games vs. the Caps and 0-4-2 in their last six meetings here, last winning on Nov. 22, 2014.

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Hutton could only offer a pained smile when asked about the excruciating penalty shot goal against him Tuesday in KeyBank Center from Florida's Evgenii Dadonov. Hutton was like just about everyone else in the building: He said he had never seen a goal scored that way either.

With the score tied at 2-2, it appeared Hutton had stopped Dadonov's attempt and the crowd started to cheer a potential big momentum boost for the Sabres. But Hutton, on his knees, tried to move in the crease when he felt the puck traveling down his body — and crumbled in dismay on his stomach when it slowly rolled into the net to give the Panthers the lead for good.

"It was a tough break. I thought I had it," Hutton said. "You watch the replay and it lands on my pad on edge and slowly, slowly makes its way down and rolls in. I was trying to not move because I knew I had it. I felt it when it fell off the end of my pad. By that time, it was moving and then it hit my skate and kind of scooted over the line. That's obviously a really tough break."

The Sabres have faced penalty shots in each of the last two games, with Linus Ullmark stopping Ryan Donato Sunday in Boston before Hutton was beaten by Dadonov. It's just the third time in franchise history the Sabres have given up penalty shots in back-to-back games.

It also happened on Jan 6 and 8, 2000 (New Jersey's Petr Sýkora beat Dwayne Roloson but Martin Biron stopped Ottawa's Daniel Alfredsson), and March 20-21, 2009 (Patrick Lalime stopped Philadelphia's Mike Richards and Lauri Korpikoski of the New York Rangers).

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The Sabres had a full complement of players on the ice Thursday, with defensemen Lawrence Pilut, Jake McCabe and Nathan Beaulieu all practicing and forward Scott Wilson skating with the team for the first time since breaking his ankle in training camp.

Pilut and McCabe both skated in regular pairs with Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella, respectively, and Pilut took turns on the power play. Housley said the team will decide Friday if they will play, although that appears likely unless they have setbacks from their injuries.

Winger Jason Pominville, who was accidentally bulldozed by Ristolainen during a line change Tuesday, was not at practice. Housley would not say if the 36-year-old was in concussion protocol, saying only that he was day to day. Winger Conor Sheary left practice early after what Housley termed a "minor bang-up" in a 3-on-3 drill and should be fine for the game.

A group of the players' mothers were watching from the stands, as they are on the trip and enjoying the sights of the nation's capital.

"It's special, the first time I've been involved in a mothers' trip," Housley said.

Sabres' Eichel said Berglund has not been a distraction

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 20, 2018

Washington, DC (WGR 550) - With Patrik Berglund clearing waivers at noon on Thursday, the Sabres terminated his contract. Berglund was given a time and date that he had to report to the team by. When he didn't, the Sabres had cause to begin the process to terminate his contract.

This is the first time that young captain Jack Eichel has had to deal with something like this and he said he and the players in the room can't be focusing on it, "It's not really in our hands. There are other people in our organization that are dealing with the situation, so in terms of the focus of the guys in the room, it's on the task at hand which is our game tomorrow night and I think we've tried to limit our focus to just playing and you let the right people take care of that situation and you focus on what you can control."

Eichel and his teammates have been able to keep things moving forward and not let the Berglund thing divert them, "I don't think there was a distraction to start with, I thought we did a really good job as a group trying to stay focused on what we needed to do.

"At that time last week we were coming into this building getting ready for two big games and I think it's great the way the guys have handled it, we're strictly focused with our product on the ice and I think the guys did a great job of not making it much of a distraction and not let it creep into our room."

I think the way this group of players have handled this shows how together they are as a group. Eichel said, "It says a lot about the guys that are here, it's a really good group that trusts each other and believes in each other and the relationship with each other has been really good this year and I think its went a long way for us and you can see it with our play on the ice."

Jeff Skinner is new on this team just like Berglund was. He said, "As players you just try to worry about what you can do and I think management will figure out what the situation is."

Skinner agreed with Eichel that here really is no distraction, "No, for me I think as a player you've got a lot of things on your plate and I think you try to worry about things that you can control and through the course of a long season, there's going to be a lot of different situations that pop up and you have to do a good job as a player just to zero in on what you can control."

Phil Housley said that Jason Pominville is day-to-day and declined to answer if he's in concussion protocol. Pominville is not on the trip, but others that returned to practice on Thursday were Lawrence Pilut, Nate Beaulieu and Scott Wilson. This was Wilson's first practice with the team after having ankle surgery before the season started. He said he was so glad to be back at practice, "It was just a breath of fresh air to get on the ice with the guys, it feels like a long time coming, but I'm feeling a little bit better every day."

Wilson said he's still a ways from being back, at least a couple of weeks.

Conor Sheary left practice early, but Housley said it was minor and should be ready to play on Friday.

Thursday's lines:

Skinner Eichel Reinhart

Sheary Sobotka Rodrigues

Girgensons Mittelstadt Okposo

Elie Larsson Thompson

Pilut Ristolainen

Dahlin Bogosian

Scandella McCabe

Guhle Hunwick

Wilson Beaulieu

Sabres can easily fit big Skinner contract into their cap

By Joe DiBiase

WGR 550

December 20, 2018

Before you read this whole thing, just keep in mind the Sabres take on \$9.7M in cap space for Jeff Skinner and Matt Moulson this season. Okay, continue.

The Sabres currently have the second leading scorer in the NHL. He's on an expiring contract. It's not a surprise that fans are clamoring for any news item pointing to his resigning in Buffalo. Good news! TSN's Darren Dreger reports that Jeff Skinner wants to stay in Buffalo, and the feeling is mutual. Now, that doesn't mean he'll definitely stay, but it's a start.

Our own Jeremy White tweeted this last month.

Jeremy White

@JeremyWGR

Replying to @JeremyWGR

Per #SuperSecretSabresTwitterSource

Skinner looking for 8 years @ 9-9.5 million to keep him from going to the market.

That figure may sound like a lot, but for a player the caliber of Skinner, it really isn't. His even strength goal production is right at the top of the league in the past few years. The Sabres are also in great shape to take on a contract that big.

2019 unrestricted free agents:

Jeff Skinner (\$5.725M), Jason Pominville (\$5.6M), Matt Moulson (\$5M)

2019 restricted free agents:

Nathan Beaulieu (\$2.4M), Jake McCabe (\$1.6M), Zemgus Girgensons (\$1.6M), Johan Larsson (\$1.475M), Remi Elie (\$755K), Linus Ullmark (\$750K), Evan Rodrigues (\$650K)

The Sabres are not in the situation the Maple Leafs are in. They don't have an Auston Matthews or Mitch Marner to pay this offseason. They'll likely have that with Mittelstadt and Dahlin soon, but not yet. No upcoming Sabres' RFA should get more than a couple million per year, except Jake McCabe. McCabe has been on a very team friendly deal and could see his cap number double, or more.

Add Patrik Berglund's \$3.8M cap hit to contracts coming off your books, and the Sabres have roughly \$30M in cap room for next season. If they sign a Skinner contract that cost them \$9M and signed all their RFAs, the Sabres should still have five or six million left.

Overall, if you look at the Skinner contract debate, it's getting closer and closer to a no-brainer. The Sabres will have to make sure there's no hiccups with terminating Berglund's contract for one. We also have to continue to re-adjust what we think is a monster contract. For example, you could compare a \$9M Skinner deal to Sidney Crosby's \$8.7M and say "there's no way Skinner is worth more than him!". However, if you look at the percentage of the cap when each player signed, you'd see Crosby's was much higher and that today he's severely underpaid.

A \$9-9.5M Skinner contract wouldn't hamper the Sabres. They'd still have flexibility to make moves, so at this point, there doesn't seem to be much reason not to sign him.

While circumstances behind Patrik Berglund's exit remain mysterious, Sabres teammates aren't letting situation 'creep into our room'

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

December 20, 2018

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The mood of a locker room gives away the feeling of a team. This season, the Sabres have shown their room to be lighter and more relaxed as the wins have come more often than the losses.

That's what makes the situation surrounding Patrik Berglund so strange.

Berglund, who made it through waivers on Thursday and will have his contract terminated by the Sabres for failing to report to the team, was one of a host of new guys on the team. He was hailed as the "Swedish Godfather" by captain Jack Eichel in October, seen as the guy who could keep the bevy of Swedes on the roster engaged and provide a guiding hand of sorts as a 10-plus-year NHL veteran.

Berglund played 23 games for Buffalo, his final appearance coming in a 6-2 home loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on December 8th. The following two games against the Kings and Coyotes, the team told the media that he was out sick. And then he was suspended. And now he's gone.

For a team with a young makeup that's looking at the possibility of making a run at the playoffs, a veteran player bailing could've been a big problem. Instead, by all appearances, the Sabres are forging ahead and not allowing what happened to wear on them.

"I don't think there was a distraction to start with. I thought we did a really good job as a group just staying focused on what we needed to do," Eichel said. "That specific time last week we had two really big games and we were coming in this same exact building (Capital One Arena) so I think it was great the way the guys handled it. That's not something that we make decisions on. We're strictly focused on our product on the ice. I think that's the important part and the guys did a really good job of not making it much of a distraction or not letting it creep into our room and just focused on what we needed to do."

The Sabres players have done their jobs and gone about their business, but there's an air of awkwardness when the topic comes up regarding Berglund. For many on this young roster, there's an understanding of the business side of things combined with the brotherhood that comes with being part of a team.

"I think as a player you have a lot of things on your plate," Jeff Skinner said. "I think you try to worry about things you can control and through the course of a long season there's a lot of situations that are going to pop up and whether it's on the ice or off the ice you have to try and do a good job as a player to zero in on what you can control and go about trying to do those things and work on those things over the course of the season."

Being on a team when a guy doesn't want to be there isn't an uncommon experience in pro sports, but it's still uncomfortable. When Kyle Okposo was with the New York Islanders, he saw that firsthand when Evgeni Nabokov and Lubomir Visnovsky refused to report to the team after different transactions.

In 2011, Nabokov left Russia to sign with the Detroit Red Wings but needed to pass through waivers to land there. Instead he was claimed by the Islanders, who had used six different goalies that season. Nabokov didn't report because was hoping to land with a playoff team, but the Islanders tolled his contract and he wound up arriving the following season and staying on Long Island for two more seasons after that.

Before the lockout in 2012, the Islanders acquired Visnovsky from the Anaheim Ducks in a trade. As Sean McIndoe wrote recently, Visnovsky thought he had no-trade protection, but it expired and he threatened to stay in the KHL. It was eventually figured out and he finished his NHL career with the Islanders after three seasons. Even though both Nabokov and Visnovsky were suspended by the Islanders, differences were worked out.

"It was kind of a tough situation," Okposo said. "With those two guys they hadn't been part of the team yet, so it was just something that they felt like they needed to do and they wanted to do so we just carried on. But when they did come and you get to know them and they explain their side, you can see both sides of it, for sure..."

"This is a business and hockey's always been something that's a really fun thing to do and something that you do because you love it and you love the game and then all of a sudden you get to the NHL and it's a business and no one prepares you for that. It just kind of happens. You obviously still love the game and you want to play, but you also have to adapt and you have to learn that it is a business and most guys have a really short window to do this in their career so you have to plan accordingly."

The speed at which Berglund's situation played out is remarkable, although letting things like this linger in season isn't something a team wants to do. More often than not when there's a contract termination it's a mutually agreed upon decision.

This just opens up more questions as to what went on, ones that neither the Sabres nor Berglund and his agent have been willing to answer so far.

Was he unhappy about the trade that brought him to the Sabres? SportsNet's Elliotte Friedman noted that Berglund's no-trade protection ended June 30 and he was sent to Buffalo as part of the Ryan O'Reilly deal the next day.

Was he displeased about his role and his ice time? Playing on the fourth line and averaging the fewest minutes per game in his career would be a shot to the ego of anyone who has had success like Berglund had in St. Louis. But if it's neither of those things and it wasn't mutually decided, he'll have options to fight back.

When the Tampa Bay Lightning terminated Jake Dotchin's contract for showing up to training camp in what they deemed to be poor condition, they wasted no time in taking care of it. No suspension was used and instead, like Berglund, he was put on waivers to have his contract terminated.

As Joe Smith of The Athletic wrote in September about Dotchin, he filed a grievance through the NHLPA against the Lightning after he signed with the Anaheim Ducks. Berglund will have that option and has 60 days to decide on it; letting over \$12 million and three more years on a contract go up in a puff of smoke isn't something the player's union wants to see happen regularly, or at all, but not all circumstances are the same.

Although this situation is still shrouded in mystery, the fact of the matter is the Sabres are moving on. Much like any postgame environment after a loss, they're all focused on what's ahead of them and not allowing whatever's gone on with Berglund to keep them distracted.

"It says a lot about the guys in the room, it's a really good room that trusts each other and believes in each other. The relationship with each other has been really good this year and I think that goes a long way," Eichel said. "I think it's went a long way for us and you can see it with our play on the ice and our ability to overcome adversity and come back in games or whatever is, it's been pretty evident. We just stick together with whatever we get thrown at us."

Stimson: How the Sabres' formation shifts lead to better chances on the power play

By Ryan Stimson

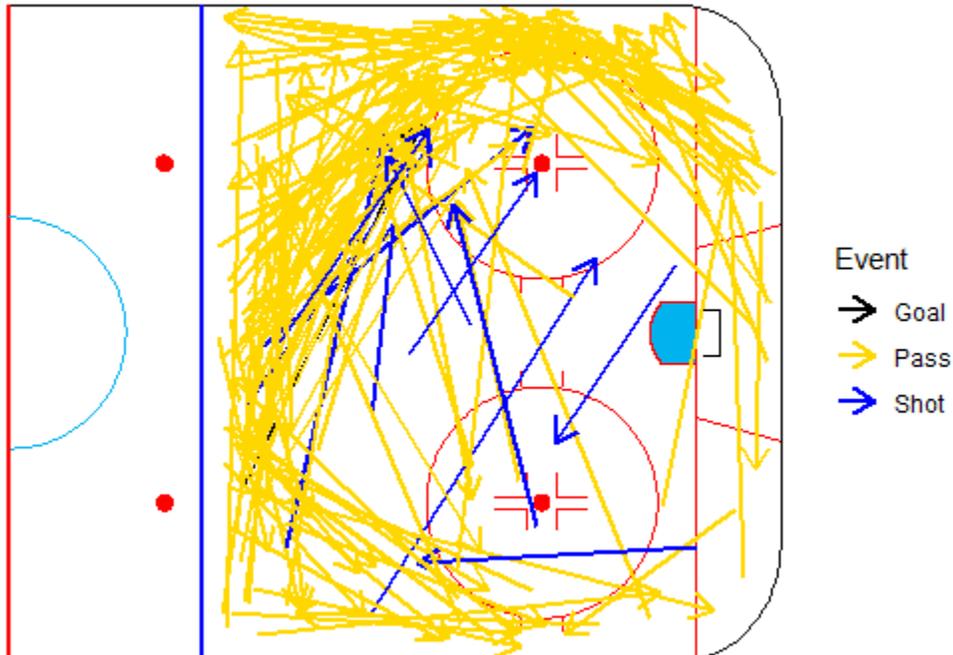
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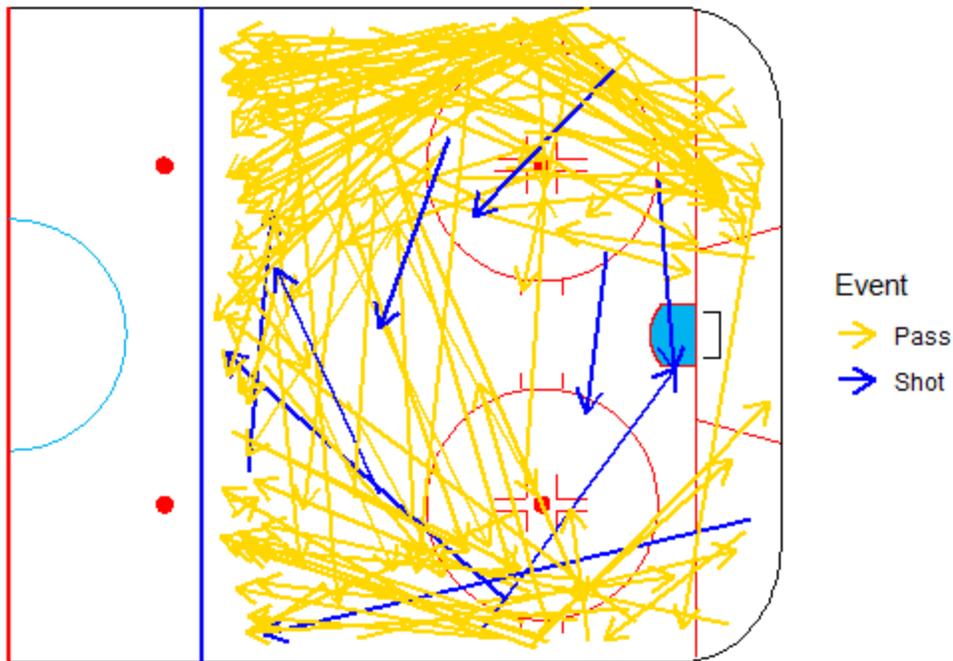
Last time, I took a high-level look at the Sabres power play and concluded that it, in fact, was quite good. We're going to narrow it down a little more specifically here, focusing on the team's passing during the man advantage. This data was collected by myself and is through the first seven weeks or so of the season. I've fallen behind a bit, but just finished a book on hockey that will be out any day now. I'll get caught up soon!

Let's get to it.

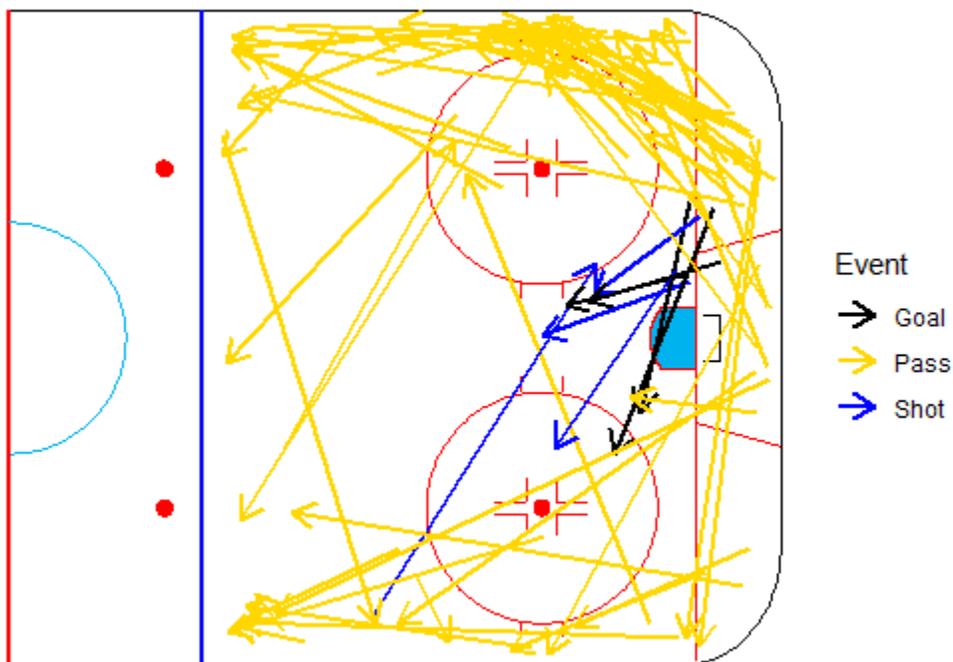
In my first piece on the power play, I highlighted how the team generates a large portion of their shots from Jack Eichel. While Eichel is a great shot, the team generates more of their value from shots from close in front rather than from his shots from farther out. Power play offense is largely determined by roles, so as Eichel is the main puck handler on the power play from the half-wall, let's look at where he receives the puck first.



To explain what you're looking at, the tip of the arrows are where Eichel receives passes on the power play. Anything in blue or black means that the pass was a shot or goal assist and Eichel shot the puck from close to the area where he received the pass (tip of the area). You'll see that a large majority of his receptions are along the half walls or at the top of the circles. This is consistent with his role on the power play. But where does he send his passes?



Many of these are either down low or back to the point, which is consistent with the Sabres' puck movement on the power play. Eichel doesn't make too many cross-ice passes, which could be influenced by the lack of a shooting option opposite him during these games. Now let's look at another player's role on the power play – Sam Reinhart.



Reinhart's role as the down low player yields more dangerous opportunities. There are a few reasons for this – the obvious being the impact playing down low has on the opposition's lesser ability to properly cover players in the slot. Passes from down low (below or at the end line) result in a scoring chance (shot from inside the home plate area) 17 percent of the time. Passes from anywhere else in the zone only result in a scoring chance 11 percent of the time. Shot distance is the most influential variable on many expected goals models and so when

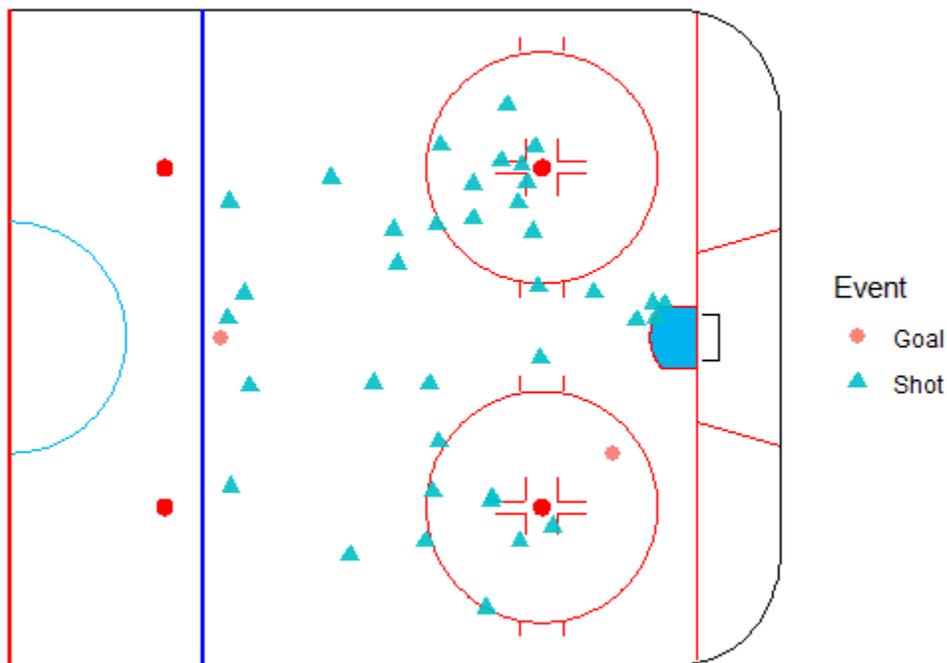
you have time and the freedom to create on power plays, teams would be more successful in scheming open looks from down low more often than the pass back and forth from wing to point.

In a scheme-driven environment like NHL power plays, it's often just as important to attempt to dictate the penalty kill coverage strategies. While it's effective to play the puck down low, it's not always feasible to create a chance due to how often the opposition collapses. But is there hidden value in doing just that? There is!

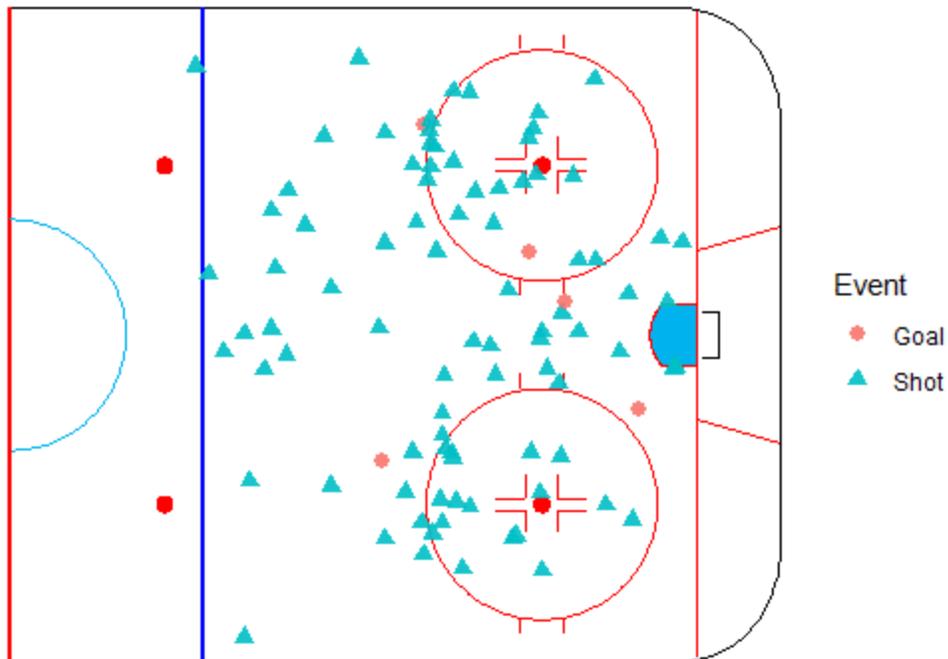
I isolated the penalty kill coverage in many of these passing events to see if such a pattern emerged. What I found made intuitive sense – by passing the puck down low it forces the opposition into a more conservative and collapsing coverage. They often remained in this once the puck was moved back up to wall or point.

On the pass sent down to below the goal line, the opposition pressured the puck carrier, [usually in a Czech Press formation](#), 40 percent of the time. When the next pass was made from below the goal line, the opposition pressured only 20 percent of the time. On the next pass after the puck has been moved back above the goal line, the Sabres were only pressured 28 percent of the time. When I say they were pressured less, I mean that the opposition moved from the Czech Press into a Wedge+1; while these are similar in structure, the latter is much more focused on containment and keeping things to the outside rather than direct pressure on the puck carrier.

Why are we interested when the penalty kill moves from an aggressive posture to a more conservative one? Observe.



These are the Sabres' shots when facing a Czech Press. There are some shots near the net no doubt, but most are near the faceoff dots or at the top of the faceoff circles. Now let's look at how this picture changes when facing a Wedge+1.



What changes is noticeable volume of course, but this is simply due to playing against the Wedge more often. What we want to look at is the distribution of chances and the Sabres see a slight uptick in scoring chances (46 percent compared to 40 percent). Generally, when teams sit back, the team can be more incisive with their passing. Let's look at this in action.

The Sabres move from the High-Low Umbrella setup off of a faceoff win into the 1-3-1 down low. You can see Mika Zibanejad (93) come out to pressure the puck at the point. He then heads over to Eichel on the wall to do the same. Once the puck moves down low, the Rangers move to cut off any passing lane inside. Eichel gets the puck back from Sam Reinhart and then the Rangers are frozen. Ultimately, this play doesn't connect, but you can see how the opposition reacts to the movement down low and then back up the wall, which creates the opportunity in the first place. Power plays are really just about pushing and pulling defenders where you want them to go with your movement.

Is it also important to consider is how effective the Sabres formations are against both the Wedge and Czech Press? While you'd think this would be similar to how specific breakouts can match up better against specific forechecks, it's a little different. The Sabres have often used two looks on the power play and move seamlessly from to another. I think this is a reason why it's one of the top five or so in the league by many expected goal models.

The 1-3-1 is superior in terms of offensive output, but as we just saw above, it's often how the team moves from one formation into the other that creates these looks. Evaluating in-zone performance strictly based on formation isn't a great way to evaluate power plays. Look at the following chances and decide if it's due to a formation or more a fluid interchange between multiple?

The movement keeps the penalty killers at bay and discourages them from pressuring the puck carrier too much. The High-Low look generally involves one of the wing players (Casey Mittelstadt here) to curl for a pass while the point player draws the primary defender away. Mittelstadt then puts a question to the defenders as to who will come out and challenge. Naturally, this movement opens the net and then the back door options.

The subsequent loose puck battle and recovery leads to a similar sequence unfolding. Again, is this due to a specific formation? No, it's about designed options to move from one to another and then taking advantage of what the penalty killers offer.

Conclusion

It's easy to say things like "play behind the net more and you'll score more." While it's true, what I've attempted to show here were ways in which the Sabres have done that and the specific formation shifts that allow for that to happen. They create more of these plays when the opposition are not pressuring the puck, and a way to dictate that more conservative philosophy is to move the puck down low to compress defense in the 1-3-1, then pull it back to the point and roll a player high into the High-Low Umbrella look while the puck carrier takes the defender out of the play. Finally, the team can execute plays back down low having freed up more room. It's not about static formations, but how they link together and we'll get more into this on a regular basis after the new year when I have more data.

In the meantime, if you want to see where a player passes, receives, shoots from, or are interested entry data, hit me up on Twitter and I'll share some viz!

Patrik Berglund clears waivers, Sabres can terminate contract

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 20, 2018

Forward Patrik Berglund cleared waivers today, meaning the Buffalo Sabres can terminate his contract.

The Sabres placed Berglund, 30, on unconditional waivers Wednesday, four days after they suspended the 11-year veteran for failing to report to the team.

Berglund has three years left on his contract. The Swede will lose \$12,579,032 from the termination, according to capfriendly.com. The Sabres are also free from his \$2.235 salary cap hit this season and his \$3.85 million yearly hit.

When asked if he was shocked Berglund essentially quit on the Sabres, coach Phil Housley refused to comment.

General manger Jason Botterill "has done a really good job along with our management of handling that," Housley told reporters today in Washington.

In injury news, Housley said winger Jason Pominville, who left the ice woozy Tuesday after teammate Rasmus Ristolainen accidentally flattened him skating to the bench, is day-to-day. Housley did not say if Pominville is in concussion protocol.

Meanwhile, Housley said defensemen Jake McCabe (upper body) and Lawrence Pilut (lower body) could both return Friday against the Capitals. Both practiced today.

Winger Scott Wilson also practiced with his teammates today, his first session since breaking his ankle late in training cam.

"I'm just feeling a little bit better every day, still a ways away," Wilson said. "But just to be traveling and stuff and just being on the ice with all the guys in pretty nice."

Wilson said he needs "at least a couple weeks" until he's ready for game action.

Sabres can make best of bad situation with Berglund contract termination

By Jared Clinton

The Hockey News

December 20, 2018

Acquired and expected to be a middle-six center who offered some depth and stability to a team in need, it's safe to say that this was never the way the Sabres wanted Patrik Berglund's tenure in Buffalo to go. He had been a consistent producer, reliable two-way pivot and logged some decent minutes throughout his tenure with the St. Louis Blues, and that's what Buffalo had hoped he would bring when he was acquired as one of five pieces in the summer's blockbuster Ryan O'Reilly trade.

But after being placed on unconditional waivers Wednesday, the Sabres and Berglund officially went their separate ways Thursday afternoon. Following a team-imposed indefinite suspension, Berglund's contract — this season and the remaining three years at \$3.85 million — has been terminated.

In some ways, the entire situation is a mystery. It was reported over the weekend by Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman that Berglund landed in Buffalo without much choice, that his former full no-trade clause had switched to a modified no-trade on July 1, the day he was traded, and that allowed him to be shipped to the Sabres without any say. But why it didn't or couldn't work out for Berglund in Buffalo beyond that, and what has prompted him to walk away from upwards of \$10 million that would have been paid out across the remainder of his deal, is impossible to say right now.

What we do know is that Berglund, for whatever reason, hadn't found his fit with the Sabres. That was evident almost immediately.

After a 16-minute average ice time through the opening games of the season, Berglund's ice time fell dramatically. He skated upwards of 16 minutes just twice over his last 20 games in Buffalo and his average declined to 12:35 per outing over that span. His single-game playing time dipped into the single-digit minute totals on two occasions. He was scratched twice. Along with the precipitous decline in ice time came a drop in production, as well. A player who had scored at nearly one-quarter goal and half-point per game rates during a 10-year stay with the Blues managed less than one-tenth of a goal and .17 points per game in his brief time with Buffalo. Berglund's two goals and four points put him on pace to have the worst season, bar none, of his career.

Where this leaves Berglund is to be seen. He has unexpectedly become a free agent with more than half the campaign remaining. He could wind up back in the NHL this season, much the same way Jake Dotchin did with the Anaheim Ducks after his deal was terminated by the Tampa Bay Lightning. Berglund could decide instead to head home to Sweden or elsewhere in Europe. He could even take the year off, recharge and get prepared to return to action come the 2019-20 campaign. Really, his options are wide open.

As for the Sabres, it's clear-cut where this have left the franchise: in a much better financial position than they were mere days earlier, with one significant contract for a player who wasn't working out in their system off the books.

Again, this was never the hope or expectation for Berglund upon his acquisition, but it's certainly not an unwelcome fallout from this entire mess. Though there's the possibility of some back-and-forth between the Sabres and the NHL Players' Association, it seems likely that not much more will come of this entire ordeal. That means Buffalo, who short of trading or buying Berglund out were set to be on the hook for another three seasons at a \$3.85-million cap hit for the veteran center, have now completely cleared the contract from their bottom line. The result? Additional cap space when cap space is at a premium.

It has become abundantly clear as the season has rolled on that the top priority for the Sabres in the coming weeks and months should be hammering out a contract with off-season acquisition and free agent-to-be Jeff Skinner. He's been a focal point of the offense this season and there's no other pure shooter in the Sabres' lineup right now. In 35 games, he has positively flourished as a member of the Sabres, his 25 goals and 37 points the first and second-best totals in Buffalo, respectively. There was always going to be the money available to re-sign Skinner should he want to stick around, to be sure, but Buffalo is now looking at a cap situation that is nearly \$4 million better than it was with Berglund on the books. Make no mistake, that's not insignificant.

Having the additional spending room gives the Sabres the ability and flexibility, should they so choose, to go dollar-for-dollar with any other suitor for Skinner's services. Sure, engaging in a bidding war could lead to potential overpayment, but having additional cap space lessens the immediate and likely the long-term cause for concern.

Consider that re-signing Skinner to a deal worth, say, \$8-million annually would still leave Buffalo with upwards of \$18-million in spending room without any other major unrestricted free agent concerns. The cap space above and beyond what's set aside to retain Skinner can be used to add via the open market, re-sign restricted free agents and plan for a future when the likes of Sam Reinhart and Casey Mittelstadt will be due raises as RFAs. All of those things would have been impacted by Berglund's contract, which was set to carry through to the 2021-22 season.

So, while Berglund was certainly part of the Sabres' plans, at least in the short term, when he was brought over from the Blues, Buffalo won't be sad to strike his contract from the books. It's an unfortunate way to earn extra cap flexibility, but it's one that sets the Sabres up to benefit from a bad situation.

Reinhart carries point streak into rematch with Capitals

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - When the final horn sounded on the Washington Capitals' 2-1 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins at Capital One Arena on Wednesday night, Alex Ovechkin's 14-game point streak officially came to an end.

Sam Reinhart stepped onto that same ice for practice on Thursday as the new owner of the NHL's longest active point streak. Reinhart has tallied at least a point in each of his last 11 games, the longest such stretch of his career and the best by a Sabre this season.

The stretch has brought his season total to 34 points in 35 games. He's already surpassed his 82-game assist total from last season (25) and is four helpers away from matching his career-high (30 in 2016-17). His 11 multi-point games this season are already a career-high.

Sabres coach Phil Housley has attributed Reinhart's success to his stick-to-itiveness through a slow start statistically. He continued to do the right things and picked up right where he left off at the end of last season, when he tallied 37 points in his final 38 games.

"I'm just continuing to do the same things," Reinhart said. "I'm obviously playing with some good players and we're having some success. Our team needs us to be on the score sheet, so we'll try to continue that."

Reinhart's surge in production has coincided with his move to a line with Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel, who have formed of the NHL's most productive duos since mid-October. When asked what he's learned about Reinhart, Skinner mentioned the same two attributes that teammates have been lauding for years.

"Just sort of how smart he is I think sticks out," Skinner said. "I think he's obviously a great passer. But yeah, getting to play with him and getting to see him on your team and in practices, he's really smart. He's got really good hockey sense.

"He's got a good ability to know where everyone is at all times. He gets the puck and he's prepared to make the next play. That's probably the biggest thing that stands out."

To paint a picture of Reinhart's hockey sense, Skinner cited his late goal against Vancouver on Nov. 12. Reinhart was stationed with the puck behind the Vancouver net, from where he found Skinner with a perfect one-time pass to the slot.

"I wasn't really exactly in the hole at the time," Skinner recalled. "I think he saw, when he took a peek, I was sort of coming into the hole. He's able to sort of read that that's where I'm going. If he doesn't make that read he probably he can't make the play.

"It's a combination of awareness and anticipation. He's aware of what's going on, but he's also sort of smart enough to know what's going to happen next."

Eichel, meanwhile, is no stranger to playing with Reinhart. The two have played as linemates at various points throughout their young careers, accounting for 1,143:42 of shared 5-on-5 ice time through last season (according to NaturalStatTrick.com).

The two were roommates since their rookie years and cited their off-ice chemistry as having the potential to translate onto the ice (Reinhart said they would even re-watch games together at home), but they were never able to stick as a line until now.

In 312:40, the Eichel-Reinhart combination has been on the ice for 20 goals-for at 5-on-5 as opposed to just 13 against.

"I think that's something that comes as you gain experience and you get more comfortable," Reinhart said. "We love being out there with each other. We're just trying to get that consistency. As you get older and you get more experience, that certainly comes."

Eichel attributed their success to a commitment to outworking their opponents and letting their chemistry and skill take over from there. Their assists on Skinner's goal against Florida on Tuesday serves as an example.

"I think it's been really good, the whole stretch here," Eichel said. "Obviously we want to keep it going every night. In order to be one of the best lines in the league, which is what we want to do, we have to be consistent every night and we have to bring it every time we go over the boards."

They'll be tested on Friday in their rematch with the Capitals, less than a week removed from a shootout loss in their first meeting. That game offered plenty of positives as the Sabres stood toe-to-toe with the reigning champions, but Eichel sees room for improvement.

"For sure, I think we can be better in terms of the way we can defend them," he said. "They're so skilled over there they have so many good players. They generate a lot and they generate a lot of really grade-A chances and they play well together."

"It's a veteran team for a reason. They've played together for a bunch of years, they went to the Cup and won it last year so we know it's a big task. I think it's important to understand the way we need to defend and take care of our own end and then I think the rest of our game will come to us."

Thursday's practice

Scott Wilson practiced with the team for the first time since sustaining an ankle injury at the end of training camp, while the Sabres welcomed a number of bodies back on defense in Nathan Beaulieu, Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut.

Beaulieu is still day-to-day, but McCabe and Pilut both have the potential to play against the Capitals.

"This was a really good practice today, a lot of energy and a little physicality at the end there in a battle drill," Housley said. "We'll just see how they respond to that later on. But they're still a possibility for tomorrow."

Wilson said he's still at least a couple of weeks away from returning to game action, but he was elated to be back on the road with his teammates.

"It's just a breath of fresh air, I think, to get back on the ice with the guys," he said. "It feels like a long time coming. I'm feeling a little bit better every day, still a ways away but just to be traveling and stuff and just to be on the ice with all the guys is pretty nice."

Jason Pominville did not practice and is day-to-day after sustaining an injury during a collision with Rasmus Ristolainen on Tuesday.

Here's how the Sabres lined up:

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
43 Conor Sheary - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 71 Evan Rodrigues
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 21 Kyle Okposo
81 Remi Elie - 22 Johan Larsson - 72 Tage Thompson

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
24 Lawrence Pilut - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Marco Scandella - 19 Jake McCabe
48 Matt Hunwick - 45 Brendan Guhle

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 20 Scott Wilson*

40 Carter Hutton

35 Linus Ullmark

*Extra forward skating on defense