



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Tom Wilson breaks tie in 3rd, Capitals beat Sabres 2-1

By Jeff Seidel

The Associated Press

December 21, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — Braden Holtby and Tom Wilson gave the Washington Capitals another two points in the standings.

Holtby made 36 saves, Wilson broke a tie with seven minutes left and the Stanley Cup champion Capitals beat the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 on Friday night.

Evgeny Kuznetsov started the winning play when he stole the puck from goalie Carter Hutton behind the net. The center quickly fed Wilson just outside of the crease. Wilson has 10 goals in 15 games this season.

"Whenever the goalie is behind the net, you just try and get open, just in case," Wilson said. "(Kuznetsov) makes a great play, and you've just got to try and get it there before the goalie gets back in the net. It was good timing."

Still, the Capitals needed Holtby as Buffalo held a 37-24 edge in shots. The Sabres had 17 third-period shots, and Holtby made 16 saves in the final 20 minutes and came up big at the end

Washington was under pressure late as Nic Dowd was called for tripping with 2:12 left in the game. The Capitals then spent most of the final two minutes killing off that penalty, dealing with a six-on-four situation for nearly a minute as Buffalo pulled Hutton in favor of an extra attacker.

"(Holtby) was a big reason we were able to get two points tonight," Washington coach Todd Reirden said. "He was outstanding all game long. He had a huge role in us winning that game."

Holtby made a big play late in the second period by coming far out of his net to beat Rasmus Ristolainen to a loose puck and prevent a breakaway.

The goalie raced out past the circle to nearly the blue line and even swatted the puck away from Ristolainen and Buffalo teammate Conor Sheary.

"I thought I could get there," Holtby said. "I was thinking I'd kind of have to get down to try and seal the ice and get it out of the blue line there. I didn't really see the second guy coming so after that you just try and do whatever you can to keep it up."

Washington has won six of its last seven games and has beaten the Sabres twice at home in less than a week. Buffalo is 0-5-2 in its last seven games in Washington.

The first period was scoreless, and Buffalo could not convert on three good scoring chances in the first 1:30 of the second.

The Sabres then went on a power play 2:37 into the period, but Washington scored 13 seconds later with its second short-handed goal of the season. Dowd flipped a puck in the air from the Capitals' zone that sprung Chandler Stephenson on a breakaway, and he beat Hutton for his first career short-handed score.

Johan Larsson tied it for Buffalo at 9:01 of the third period, scoring from in close.

Buffalo coach Phil Housley thought his team played well and came up with many scoring chances but agreed that Holtby might have been the difference.

"Holtby played terrific," Housley said. "Give Holtby credit. He's a pretty good goaltender, and there's a reason why he won the Stanley Cup."

NOTES: Andre Burakovsky returned to the Washington lineup after missing the past four games as a healthy scratch but did not score a point. ... Housley played two seasons for Washington. ... Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner of Buffalo had seven-game points streaks end.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Host Anaheim on Saturday night.

Capitals: At Ottawa on Saturday night.

Key mistakes doom Sabres in tight battle with Caps

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 21, 2018

WASHINGTON -- Two games in seven days on the home ice of the Stanley Cup champions. Two gut-wrenching, one-goal losses. Just one point in the standings.

The Buffalo Sabres were left cursing their fate Friday night as the Washington Capitals squeezed out a 2-1 win in Capital One Arena. The frustration was borne from the what-ifs that abound in this one.

The Sabres outshot Washington, 37-24, and had 72 attempts at the net compared to the Caps' 50. The shots on goal in the third period were 17-8 and Buffalo had four on a late power play that stretched into the final 12 seconds.

The Sabres continue to have a terrible time getting any scoring from other than their top line. And on this night, Sam Reinhart (11 games), Jack Eichel (7) and Jeff Skinner (7) all lost point streaks as they were shut out. No one else is rippling the net at all, so mistakes can't happen at the other end of the ice.

And there were two critical ones as Buffalo fell to 3-5-3 in its last 11 games after its 10-game winning streak.

Carter Stephenson scored a short-handed goal for Washington in the second period when Rasmus Ristolainen was too loose with the puck at the Caps' line and Rasmus Dahlin didn't get back in time to guard against Nic Dowd's high flip pass.

And with the game tied at 1-1, goalie Carter Hutton got caught behind the net and was stripped by Evgeny Kuznetsov. The puck was sent to the front and Tom Wilson banged it home into the mostly empty net with seven minutes left to notch the game-winning goal.

"The guy (Kuznetsov) got a hack in on me, I kind of fumbled it and they capitalized," Hutton said glumly.

"He's been terrific for us," coach Phil Housley said. "It's one of those things where I'm sure if he was in that position again, I'm sure he'd like to do something differently. He just lost the handle and they pounced on it. For all the good things he's done, they outweigh that play."

But with the offense unable to beat Braden Holtby other than Johan Larsson's tip-in at 9:01 of the third period, there was just no margin for error.

Conor Sheary was one of Buffalo's best forwards in the game but he was stopped on a first-period breakaway and couldn't connect on a second-period sequence during which Holtby came Dominik Hasek-style to the Caps' blueline to short-circuit Ristolainen and Sheary's work with a loose puck.

"It just takes that one opportunity, seeing it go in and I think you'll grow confidence from there," said Sheary, who has no goals in 15 games.

Sheary is far from alone. Kyle Okposo has no goals in his last 18 games and no points in his last 11. Vladimir Sobotka has no points in 14 games. Tage Thompson, who assisted on Larsson's goal, has no goals in 10 games.

The offensive struggles belied how Buffalo played in the third period, keeping the Caps on their heels on their home ice. NHL goal leader Alexander Ovechkin was mostly silent, with only one shot on goal in the game.

"We were going North. We were playing a much faster game," Housley said. "There wasn't any East-West. When we had an opportunity to attack off the rush with wide speed, we took it. Then we got the puck to the net. It's a simple recipe to score. When we did have those good looks, we just couldn't find it. You can't fault the effort."

The Sabres lost here last week in a shootout, 4-3, but still had some positive takeaways from the two-game set.

"It was a better effort today," Larsson said. "We had more of the game and more of the chances. But they're winners. They've won a lot so they know how to be in games but I think we're there. We've just got to play the same way."

"We outshot them. We outchanced them," Housley said. "We just didn't beat them on the scoreboard."

The Wraparound: Capitals 2, Sabres 1

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 21, 2018

WASHINGTON — A tie game late in the third period and a grievous turnover behind the net from Carter Hutton. It meant curtains for the Buffalo Sabres Friday night.

Hutton, a stalwart much of the season, lost the puck at a bad time and the giveaway turned into the Washington Capitals' winning goal in a 2-1 victory over the Sabres in Capital One Arena.

Hutton lost the puck behind the net to Evgeny Kuznetsov and the Caps' center fed it in front to Tom Wilson, who deposited it into the mostly empty net with exactly seven minutes left. That snapped a 1-1 tie and handed the Sabres their second straight loss.

Pulling even: It took the Sabres just over 49 minutes to break through against Caps goalie Braden Holtby and the goal came at 9:01 of the third as Johan Larsson's backhand tip of a Tage Thompson shot got the Sabres even at 1-1. That was all Buffalo could get on Holtby, who stopped 36 of 37 shots in the game. The Sabres outshot Washington, 37-24.

Breaking the ice: The Caps opened the scoring at 2:50 of the second on Chandler Stephenson's short-handed goal. The play was made at the Buffalo blueline by Nic Dowd, who wrested the puck away from Rasmus Ristolainen and lofted a backhand flip pass down the ice. Stephenson outraced Rasmus Dahlin for the puck and beat Hutton to the top corner on the breakaway.

Holtby is Hasek-like: The Caps' goalie made several strong saves during the game but his signature play came late in the second period when he ended up sliding near the blue line to beat Ristolainen to a loose puck. The puck moved to the boards on the right wing and Conor Sheary had two cracks at it but Holtby stretched with his stick to deflect the puck into the mesh and out of harm's way.

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Big Break: Kuznetsov nearly put the Caps into a 2-0 lead midway through the second period by tucking the puck inside the post just behind Hutton's pad. The play was ruled no goal on the ice and stayed that way after review as officials ruled the whistle had blown on the play.

Back on defense: The Sabres returned Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut to the lineup from the injured list. McCabe was out nine games with an upper-body injury suffered in a Nov. 29 loss at Tampa Bay and the Sabres went 3-3-3 without him.

Zip-Zip: There was no score in the first period with the Sabres outshooting the Caps, 9-8, and neither team converting its lone power play chance.

Two-touchdown anniversary: Dec. 21 is a big day in the Sabres-Caps rivalry. It was 43 years ago Friday — Dec. 21, 1975 — when the Sabres wore out Washington, 14-2, at Memorial Auditorium in a game in which Buffalo scored a then-NHL record eight goals in the third period.

Rick Martin led the Sabres with four goals and an assist. Danny Gare also had a five-point night with a goal and four assists. Fred Stanfield (3-1-4), Gilbert Perreault (2-2-4), Don Luce (2-2-4), Jacques Richard (0-3-3), Brian Spencer (0-3-3) and Jim Schoenfeld (0-3-3) all had at least three points.

Next: The Sabres headed home immediately after the game and will play their final game before Christmas on Saturday night against Anaheim in KeyBank Center. The Ducks, who suffered a 3-1 loss Thursday in Boston, are 10-2 in their last 12 games.

Capitals double up Sabres 2-1 in D.C.

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

December 21, 2018

For the second time in less than a week, the Buffalo Sabres were defeated by the Washington Capitals by a one-goal margin. After losing in a shootout 4-3 last Saturday night, the blue and gold were done in tonight by the final score of 2-1 from the Nation's Capital.

The first period saw just two penalties, one called for each side, and not much other action than that. Both the Sabres and Capitals shared minor chances, but nothing of the high-danger variety in the opening 20 minutes of play. Carter Hutton made eight saves, while Braden Holtby matched Hutton and then some with nine stops of his own.

After that scoreless, lacking first period, Washington struck first blood less than three minutes into the second stanza. Chandler Stephenson potted a short-handed goal for the Capitals, thus deflating a Sabres' powerplay that ended up with zero shots on the remainder of that man advantage. The home side opened the scoring and held an early 1-0 advantage in the middle stanza.

With about 2:30 left in the second, Rasmus Ristolainen broke up a Capitals attack on the blue line, and Ristolainen found himself in a foot race with a Caps defenseman to the loose puck as it slid into the Washington zone. Before either of the skaters got to the puck, though, goalie Holtby came all the way out of his net to shovel the puck out of his end. The puck was knocked down by the Sabres, and with Holtby out of the goal, Conor Sheary had a golden opportunity to tie things up for Buffalo; his shot was deflected out of play by the Caps' netminder, as his goalie stick deflected yet another opportunity for the Sabres.

After 40 minutes of play in D.C., the Capitals held the 1-0 edge.

Buffalo still remained stymied by Washington and goaltender Holtby early on in the third period; that is, until the 9:01 mark. Tage Thompson took a shot that deflected off a Capitals defender in the slot, and the rebound fell right into the lap of Johan Larsson. Larsson deposited the rebound behind Holtby and knotted the game at a goal apiece just before the halfway point of the final period of regulation.

The tie game was short lived for the Sabres. With 7:00 to play in regulation, Hutton vacated his net to play a puck that was dribbling deep in the Buffalo end. Washington forward Evgeny Kuznestov was able to sneak in next to Hutton, steal the puck from the veteran goaltender, and get off a pass to fellow forward Tom Wilson to re-claim the lead with the Sabres' net effectively empty. The goal was Wilson's 10th already in 2018-19, after serving a 16-game suspension to begin the campaign. Just like that, it was Washington up 2-1 with minutes winding down in the third.

The final, big chance of the night for Buffalo came with 2:12 left in regulation. Nic Dowd of Washington was called for a tripping minor during a pile-up in front of Holtby, and the Sabres kicked off a 5-on-4 powerplay to essentially end the third period. Buffalo elected not to pull Hutton off the draw for the immediate 6-on-4 advantage. They did, however, motion Hutton to the bench with 1:20 to play in regulation.

Ristolainen's point shot with 22.6 seconds to play proved to be the best chance on the powerplay for the Sabres, as yet again with bodies in front, Holtby stood tall to deny Buffalo of the game-tying goal.

That 2-1 score would stand as the Capitals survived the last-second push from the Sabres and held on to win this one by that one-goal final. The loss drops Buffalo's record to 20-11-5.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:**BUF:** NONE**WSH:** NONE**Second Period:****BUF:** NONE**WSH:** 2:50 - Chandler Stephenson (3) SHG (Nic Dowd)**Third Period:****BUF:** 9:01 - Johan Larsson (3) (Tage Thompson, Rasmus Ristolainen)**WSH:** 13:00 - Tom Wilson (10) (Evgeny Kuznetsov)**Penalty Summary:****First Period:****BUF:** 4:32 - Jeff Skinner (2 min., - hooking)**WSH:** 8:28 - Tom Wilson (2 min., - hooking)**Second Period:****BUF:** 7:12 - Evan Rodrigues (2 min., - holding), 9:38 - Casey Mittelstadt (2 min., - holding)**WSH:** 2:37 - Jonas Siegenthaler (2 min., - tripping)**Third Period:****BUF:** 14:23 - Vladimir Sobotka (2 min., - hooking)**WSH:** 9:24 - Matt Niskanen (2 min., - tripping)**Shots on Goal:****BUF:** 37 (9, 11, 17)**WSH:** 24 (8, 8, 8)**Goalies:****BUF:** Carter Hutton - 22 saves**WSH:** Braden Holtby - 36 saves**Power Plays:****BUF:** 0 for 4 (0%)**WSH:** 0 for 4 (0%)**Three Stars:****1.** Braden Holtby - WSH**2.** Tom Wilson - WSH**3.** Chandler Stephenson - WSH**What's Next:**

It's another quick turnaround for Buffalo, as they travel back home to Western New York to host the Anaheim Ducks. Puck drop from KeyBank Center is set for Saturday night at 7:00 p.m. Brian Koziol will lead you through the Paul William Beltz Pre-Game Show at 6:00 on the radio home of the Buffalo Sabres, WGR Sports Radio 550.

The Sabres enjoy having their moms with them on the road

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 21, 2018

Washington, DC (WGR 550) - In a tradition that was started by Lindy Ruff when he was the Sabres coach, the team has their mothers with them for the game in Washington and the home game in Anaheim. The original idea was a dad's trip, but over the years they've had parents, mentors and moms.

Scott Wilson is with the team for the first time all season. He broke his ankle before the season started and he's glad his mom is here in Washington with him, "It's awesome, she's one of my biggest fans and having my mom here is pretty special. The dads usually go on the trip so I think the moms are pretty happy to be here and we're happy to have them."

Phil Housley has been spending time with the players and their moms. He's glad to be a part of something like this, "It's special, it's the first time that I've been involved with a mother's trip and it's great to get to know the moms here and it's important that the guys play well because their moms are here."

Jack Eichel has always said that he owes a lot to his parents. He had a big smile on his face talking about his mother being here on this trip, "It's awesome, it's really cool. It's her first experience doing this and she was with me my whole life growing up going to all the tournaments and games, so it's cool for her to experience it all.

"She likes DC, she likes all the monuments and all the sights and the things you can see here, so it's been really cool, it's nice that it flows right into our Christmas break, so she gets to spend a lot of time with me. I know she has been enjoying it, it's been a great experience for her and I just want to get a couple of points with them on the trip and then head home. I think she's been having a blast."

Carter Hutton has been a part of dad's trips in St. Louis and Nashville. He likes the fact that mom gets to come this time, "It's a great experience, I mean my dad's been on a bunch of them, so I think he might have been a little disappointed, but he gave her a little pep talk on how to handle herself.

"With my mom, she's just excited to be with me and be around me. With hockey and being gone a lot, you don't get to spend this kind of time together, so it's cool she can see how we live."

Teams make travel as easy and comfortable as possible. They fly on charter aircrafts which means they avoid the hustle and bustle of the airport terminals. They also stay in luxury hotels as dictated by the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Hutton said now that his mom has been a part of things, she's on to him, "Now that she's seen it, I don't think she's going to care too much about me being tired from traveling because we're so fortunate to get to play in this league and live the way we do, so it's just great to have our moms around."

The mothers got to watch practice, have a tour of DC and have great meals while in Washington. Team owner and President Kim Pegula was along and she brought her staff along too to make sure every mom had a great time. After Saturday's game the players can go home with their moms as they're off until Dec. 27 when they fly to St. Louis for a game that night.

Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut return to give injury-plagued Sabres a boost

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

December 21, 2018

WASHINGTON, D.C. — At last the Buffalo Sabres defense was virtually back to full health and despite a 2-1 loss to the Washington Capitals, the signs of what they can be were there.

The Sabres got Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut back against Washington and after getting Marco Scandella back a week ago against Washington their defensive unit looked like what you'd want to see going forward.

Here's what the Sabres rolled with defensively against Washington on Dec. 15:

Rasmus Dahlin – Zach Bogosian

Marco Scandella – Rasmus Ristolainen

Nathan Beaulieu – Matt Tennyson

Here's what they went with against the Capitals on Friday night:

Rasmus Dahlin – Zach Bogosian

Lawrence Pilut – Rasmus Ristolainen

Marco Scandella – Jake McCabe

It looks like a simple swap of two players (McCabe and Pilut in, Beaulieu and Tennyson out), but their roles and how they've played make a world of difference and it showed against Washington.

A week ago, the Capitals outshot Buffalo 38-29 for the game and 24-16 at even strength in their 4-3 shootout win. They finished with a 10-5 high-danger chance advantage and a 31-18 scoring chance advantage, as well. Even though the game went to overtime, Sabres defense did it in the most bend-don't-break way.

Getting Pilut back after he missed the past three games and McCabe after he missed the past nine helped turn things around against the Capitals. This time around, the Sabres controlled the game and outshot Washington 37-24 while Braden Holtby did his damndest to make sure the Sabres couldn't score goals in close or from far away.

"(I could've used) maybe a little bit more poise with him being all the way out at the blue line, but when you're in the moment and you see the goalie out there you just try to get it to the net and hopefully something good happens," Conor Sheary said about seeing Holtby challenge him at the blue line.

Washington capitalized (sorry) on a shorthanded goal in which Nic Dowd lofted a perfect backhand pass to send Chandler Stephenson in on a breakaway and a turnover by Carter Hutton behind the net forced by Evgeny Kuznetsov that led to a Tom Wilson goal. Bad breaks will happen and when they happen against the defending Stanley Cup champions they generally wind up in your net.

"Give credit, Holtby played terrific," coach Phil Housley said. "I really liked our game. At times we didn't manage the game well, we didn't make the proper decision and we had to come back and play defense. But even in saying that, defensively we kept them to the outside pretty much. We talked about it before the game, specialty teams was going to be an important part. It's unfortunate we gave up that shorty, but we still get a power play at the end there and we've got to respond the right way. We had a lot of good looks but we couldn't find the net."

Even in spite of Holtby, the Sabres still buckled down at 5-on-5 with advantages in shot attempts (55-38), scoring chances (22-15), and high-danger scoring chances (7-5). Of all six defensemen, only McCabe was below 50 percent at 5-on-5 on shot attempts (30.8%; 8 for, 18 against), but earned the praise for his usual hard work as well as for blocking two shots.

"It's great to get some depth back," goalie Carter Hutton said. "We've had a lot of injuries on the back end so it's nice to see those guys going. Jake is really steady back there and Pilut showed a lot of potential here, he's young and he'll keep developing as we go here."

Pilut teamed up with Ristolainen and those two owned it offensively at 5-on-5 with Pilut at 68.8 percent CorsiFor (22 for, 10 against) and Ristolainen at 66.7 percent (22 for, 11 against). Ristolainen led in time-on-ice at 24:27 just ahead of Dahlin (22:59) and Bogosian (21:15) on defense and they were each above 60 percent at 5-on-5 CorsiFor (Dahlin 64.7; Bogosian 68.6).

"I really liked the balance. Obviously having Jake and Lawrence back really we can spread the minutes around," Housley said. "I thought the minutes were pretty good. Whether you're chasing a game or protecting a lead in those scenarios the minutes might change, but I really liked the way they came back and played tonight."

It's a one-game sample for this defensive crew after they regained their health and were reunited after one practice, but the comparison between this game against Washington and the game a week ago showed how much better they can be. After all, the Capitals have the NHL's top goal scorer in Alex Ovechkin and while he scored one in regulation and one in the shootout a week ago, he was held to one shot on goal and five total attempts. Now the key is making sure it carries over against Anaheim on Saturday night and through the Christmas break.

What should be on Sabres GM Jason Botterill's Christmas list?

By Matt Bove

WKBW

December 21, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — 'Twas the weekend before Christmas and all through rink, Buffalo Sabres fans are ecstatic because their team doesn't stink.

For the first time in a long time, the Sabres are heading into the Christmas break with a team nestled snugly in a playoff spot.

How neat is that?

Despite the Sabres semi-slide in the month of December, they are off to their best start in years. General Manager Jason Botterill has slowly converted the worst team in hockey into one that appears to be heading in the right direction.

But what can Botterill ask for from Santa to ensure his team doesn't revert in a flash?

Secondary Scoring

To be fair, practically every NHL GM is looking for more secondary scoring. That's like the equivalent of a college student asking for AirPods. Full disclosure, I totally searched the internet for the most popular Christmas presents this season.

But back to the hockey.

Like so many borderline playoff teams in the NHL, the Sabres have relied way too much on their top-line. Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, and Sam Reinhart have combined for 117 points this season, putting them firmly in the conversation to be considered one of the best lines in hockey.

But when the aforementioned trio doesn't produce, their teammates rarely have bailed them out. Kyle Okposo hasn't scored since Nov. 13 while his linemate Conor Sheary hasn't found the back of the net since Nov. 8. Don't get me wrong, both Okposo and Sheary are valuable pieces to the Sabres lineup. But both need to start scoring at a more productive rate.

The same can be said for Kevin McAllister.... I mean, Casey Mittelstadt.

In 35 games this season, Mittelstadt has just five goals and five assists. There is no denying the 20-year-old center has oodles of talent and potential. But teams need more than 10 points in 35 games from a second line center.

Perhaps with the money cleared up from the Patrik Berglund situation, the Sabres can use some of their draft capital and cap space to add a second line center, sliding Mittelstadt into a role he's better suited for as of right now. There is no doubt in my mind that Mittelstadt is going to turn into a very good NHL player. Perhaps that even happens before the end of the year. But right now, he could use some sheltering and less responsibility.

Years of friendship

If Jason Botterill doesn't get anything for Christmas it will be because he was put on the naughty list for stealing Jeff Skinner from the Carolina Hurricanes. Seriously, the Skinner deal couldn't have worked out any better for the Sabres.

In 35 games, Skinner has already scored more goals this season [25] than he did last year with the Hurricanes [24]. Sure, it helps to play alongside one of the top-tier players in the NHL in Jack Eichel. But he has been everything Botterill was hoping for and then some.

Skinner will surely get a big contract and it sounds like negotiations could begin as soon as next month. In an interview with Joe Yerdon from The Athletic, Skinner said the two sides haven't begun negotiating but specifically mentioned the long break at the end of January [19-29] as a potential time to begin talks.

But how much will it take to keep Skinner in Buffalo? Like you, I don't know how much he'll be asking for.

He certainly deserves a pay raise based off his incredible start to this season. In my opinion, anything less than \$8 million would be a win for the Sabres. Anything more would make me a bit skeptical. But one thing is certain — getting a deal done before Skinner becomes an unrestricted free agent is imperative.

More of the same

This season is off to a better start than really anybody anticipated. Even if the Sabres end up making the playoffs by the skin of their teeth, I don't think many fans would be upset, as long as they get in. With young players like Eichel, Reinhart, Rasmus Ristolainen and Rasmus Dahlin steering the ship, the Sabres are in a great place moving forward. Add their four first-round picks over the next two seasons into the mix and it looks like the Sabres are on the verge of something special.

So perhaps a competitive hockey team was on your Christmas list. If it was, don't thank Santa, thank Jason Botterill [you can still thank Santa].

Happy holidays everyone!

Wilson goal in third period gives Capitals win against Sabres

By Harvey Valentine

NHL.com

December 21, 2018

WASHINGTON -- Braden Holtby made 36 saves, and Tom Wilson scored with seven minutes left in the third period to give the Washington Capitals a 2-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Capital One Arena on Friday.

Evgeny Kuznetsov took the puck away from goalie Carter Hutton and passed to Wilson, who scored his 10th goal of the season.

"I was waiting for Kuzy to get me an open net. It seemed like it's been a little bit overdue here," Wilson said.

"Usually they come pretty often."

Chandler Stephenson scored a shorthanded goal in the second period for Washington (21-10-3), which killed a penalty in the final two minutes.

"We talked about it before the game, specialty teams was going to be an important part," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "It's unfortunate we give up that shorty and we still get a power play at the end there. We had a lot of good looks but we just couldn't find the net."

Johan Larsson scored, and Hutton made 22 saves for Buffalo (20-11-5).

Larsson tied it 1-1 when he backhanded Tage Thompson's deflected shot at 9:01 of the third period.

"We had a lot of good opportunities, a lot of pucks on net," Larsson said. "I think [Thompson] had two shots and the second one went on to me. So I had an open net."

Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin did not score for a second straight game; he needs one goal to join Mike Gartner as the only players to begin an NHL career with 14 straight 30-goal seasons.

Washington won for the first time this season when Ovechkin failed to get a point (eight games).

Sabres forward Sam Reinhart had his NHL career-high 11-game point streak end. Linemates Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner each had a seven-game point streak end.

Stephenson gave Washington a 1-0 lead at 2:50 of the second period. Nic Dowd lofted the puck over the defense, and Stephenson got to it first to score his third goal of the season.

"That was a good play by [Dowd]," Stephenson said. "Just saw he had some time, so just took off and hoping he'd throw it to an area, which he did."

The Capitals thought they had a two-goal lead when Hutton covered Kuznetsov's shot and the puck slid across the goal line, but the referee had blown the play dead.

Late in the period, Holtby skated toward the blue line, slid and swiped a loose puck to prevent a breakaway by Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. Holtby then got his stick on the follow-up attempt by Conor Sheary.

"I thought I could get there," Holtby said. "I was thinking I'd kind of have to get down to try and seal the ice and get it out of the blue line there. Once I kind of went to go down, he kind of stopped skating, which was strange. I didn't really see the second guy coming, so after that you just try and do whatever you can to keep it up."

They said it

"We played well. Obviously, that's a good hockey team. I thought Holtby played well and we only get one and they get a shorthanded goal. That's obviously tough to take, frustrating, but I thought we have a lot to take away and we've got a big game tomorrow." -- *Sabres goalie Carter Hutton*

"Found a way to win and that's what good teams do. We dealt with some adversity on a non-goal call and some penalty kills at the end, 6-on-4. I like the adversity for our team and the fact that we were able to come out of here with two points." -- *Capitals coach Todd Reirden*

Need to know

Buffalo has lost its past seven visits to Washington (0-5-2). ... Dowd has seven of his nine assists this season in his past nine games.

What's next

Sabres: Host the Anaheim Ducks on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; MSG-B, FS-W, NHL.TV)

Capitals: At the Ottawa Senators on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; SN360, CITY, TVAS, NBCSWA+, NHL.TV)

Sabres come up short against Holtby, Capitals

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Conor Sheary stabbed at a loose puck in the blue paint, part of a last-ditch effort by the Buffalo Sabres with two extra attackers in the final minute of their game against the Washington Capitals on Friday night.

Capitals goalie Braden Holtby stood strong and covered the puck as it dribbled in the crease, the moment serving as a microcosm of the bigger picture in what would end as a 2-1 Sabres loss.

Holtby made 36 saves for the Capitals on a night when the Sabres outshot the reigning Stanley Cup champions, 37-24. Johan Larsson scored the lone goal for Buffalo to spoil the shutout, temporarily tying the game at 1-1 with 10:59 remaining in regulation.

"We thought we put together a really good effort," Sheary said. "I think [Holtby] stood on his head for a lot of the game, kept them in it especially in the third. I think he was the difference tonight."

Washington capitalized on its chances, opening the scoring on shorthanded breakaway Chandler Stephenson early in the second period and netting the tying goal when Evgeni Kuznetsov forced Carter Hutton into a turnover behind the Buffalo net and fed Tom Wilson with 7:00 remaining.

"[Holtby] kind of got a hack in on me," Hutton said. "I fumbled it, he capitalized."

Sabres coach Phil Housley offered a reminder of all the good Hutton has done in net, including some key saves on Friday. His 22-save effort include one point-blank stop on Alex Ovechkin in the slot and another on Andre Burakovsky.

"He's been terrific for us," Housley said. "It's one of those things where I'm sure if he was in that position again, I'm sure he'd like to do something differently. He just lost the handle and they pounced on it. All the good things he's done, they outweigh that play."

The loss marked the second time the Sabres came one goal short in Washington in the span of a week. Larsson said he saw this performance as an improvement over the first meeting, a 4-3 shootout loss. The Sabres held the Capitals below their season average of 3.64 goals, which ranked third in the NHL.

Buffalo benefitted from a healthy defense corps, which saw Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut both return from injury, as well as a 4-for-4 night against Washington's sixth-ranked penalty kill.

"These guys left everything out there tonight," Housley said. "It's unfortunate. We've been on the other side of these games but give credit. Holtby played terrific. I really liked our game."

While a number of Sabres had grade-A chances that didn't materialize, Sheary stood out in particular as one whose standout performance was stifled by Holtby. He was stopped on a breakaway, had a deflection robbed from point-blank range and saw the puck poked away at the offensive blue line.

On that third play, Holtby all the way out above the circle to challenge a Rasmus Ristolainen breakaway. After blocking Ristolainen's attempt, he knocked the puck away from Sheary and out of play. Sheary was asked if he could have done anything differently.

"I mean, maybe a little bit more poise with him being all the way out at the blue line," he said. "But when you're in the moment and you see the goalie out there, you're just trying to get it to the net and hopefully something good happens."

Still, the Sabres kept pushing. They played their best hockey in the third period, outshooting the Capitals 17-8 in the process.

"I think we were just playing on our toes," Sheary said. "Sometimes when you play a team like this, you give them a lot of respect with the success they've had. I think we kind of took it to them there. We know we're a good team here, so I think that's good confidence for us moving forward."

As frustrating as two close losses in the same building can be, Sheary - who had plenty of battles with the Capitals during his tenure in Pittsburgh - put them in perspective. Outcome aside, they once again showed they can compete with the best.

"It's frustrating, but we also have to understand that's a good team over there," he said. "They took advantage of their opportunities and they scored one more than us.

"I think we have a quick turnaround here, we've got to have a fresh mindset tomorrow and work as hard as we did. Hopefully we'll come out with a better result."

Up next

The Sabres host the Anaheim Ducks for their final game ahead of the holiday break. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.