



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Kuraly scores in OT to give Bruins 3-2 win over Sabres

By Mark Ludwiczak

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Looking for a rare comeback victory, the Boston Bruins swarmed the Buffalo Sabres in the third period on Saturday night.

In overtime, an unlikely source did it all by himself.

Sean Kuraly scored 3:44 into the extra session to give the Bruins a 3-2 win. It was Boston's first victory this season when trailing through two periods after going 0-11-1 previously.

"I just wanted to get it on net, really," Kuraly said. "I got more on it than I really thought."

Kuraly's third goal of the season came on a terrific one-man effort. His initial shot from the top of the left circle led to a big rebound, and Kuraly followed up with speed to chip the loose puck into the net with one hand on his stick.

"I saw it was a forward I was coming down on," Kuraly said. "I just wanted to get there first. ... I was just going on like, whatever, intuition I guess."

Jake DeBrusk and Noel Acciari scored in regulation for Boston, which improved to 21-14-4 ahead of Tuesday's Winter Classic against the Chicago Blackhawks at Notre Dame Stadium. Tuukka Rask made 26 saves.

"To be able to come back, that's another feather in our cap for being able to do it that way," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "We needed it a lot. We wanted to enjoy these two days. Let's face it, for a lot of guys it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go up to South Bend. ... You want to go there and enjoy it."

Johan Larsson and Marco Scandella scored for Buffalo. Carter Hutton stopped 38 shots.

"I thought we played a very strong 60 minutes," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "You can't fault our effort. We attacked the game. It's going to be like this for the rest of the season where it's going to be tight."

The Sabres had a prime opportunity to win with a power play in overtime but were unable to test Rask in the extra session.

"It goes to overtime and it can go either way," Larsson said.

The Bruins poured it on in the third, outshooting Buffalo 18-5, and were rewarded with DeBrusk's power-play goal with 2:29 remaining. With Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen in the box for kneeling, DeBrusk capped a critical Bruins power play by tipping home Torey Krug's long shot from the point to make it 2-all.

Scandella opened the scoring 4:40 into the game after a big effort by Sabres leading scorer Jeff Skinner. He raced around Zdeno Chara for a partial breakaway, which was stopped by Rask before Scandella buried the rebound.

A giveaway by Skinner, however, led to Boston tying it five minutes later. Acciari's ensuing shot was off target but ricocheted off Ristolainen for Acciari's first goal of the season.

Buffalo regained the lead on a short-handed goal 5:43 into the second. With Jack Eichel in the penalty box, Evan Rodrigues connected with Larsson on a 2-on-1 for Larsson's fourth goal.

It was the eighth short-handed goal allowed by the Bruins this season, most in the NHL. It was also Buffalo's first short-handed goal.

The teams split the final two periods of regulation, with Buffalo dominating the second and Boston dominating the third.

NOTES: Sabres play-by-play announcer Rick Jeanneret returned to the booth. The Hall of Fame broadcaster had a health scare a week earlier, leaving Buffalo's game against Anaheim on a stretcher and being taken to the hospital. The 76-year-old Jeanneret has done play-by-play for the Sabres on radio or television since 1971. ... Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons is week-to-week with an upper-body injury. The fourth-line center has eight points (three goals, five assists) in 35 games. ... Sabres G Linus Ullmark was scratched due to illness. Buffalo recalled goaltender Scott Wedgewood from the AHL's Rochester Americans to fill the backup role. ... David Backes (suspension) and LW Brad Marchand (upper body) were scratched for the Bruins. Backes served the first of a three-game suspension for an illegal hit to the head.

UP NEXT

Bruins: Off to South Bend, Indiana, for the Winter Classic on Tuesday against Chicago.

Sabres: Home against the New York Islanders on Monday.

Sabres recall C.J. Smith from Rochester

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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In search of secondary scoring, the Buffalo Sabres recalled winger C.J. Smith from Rochester ahead of Monday night's game against the New York Islanders in KeyBank Center.

Smith, 24, is currently tied for the Amerks' lead with 29 points in 33 games, including 13 goals, and has posted a plus-8 rating. It's unclear if Smith will be in the lineup against the Islanders given that Jack Eichel was the only Sabres player absent from practice Sunday and the team is not holding a morning skate Monday.

Coach Phil Housley is expected to speak to reporters at around 10 a.m., when he will give clarity on the reason behind Smith's recall. Barring injury, Smith is likely here to help contribute to the Sabres' struggling offense.

Last season, Smith tied for 10th among all AHL rookies with 44 points, including 17 goals, and was named MVP of the league's All-Star Classic. Prior to signing with the Sabres as a free agent in March 2017, Smith scored 56 goals in three seasons at UMass-Lowell.

This could be Smith's second game action with the Sabres. He played in the final two games of the 2016-17 season, recording an assist in his NHL debut against the Islanders on April 2, 2017.

Former Sabres draft pick Devante Stephens becoming trusted defenseman in ECHL

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

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Longtime Sabres beat writer Bill Hoppe of BuffaloHockeyBeat.com, will be writing about Sabres prospects, the Rochester Americans and related topics this season. ROCHESTER – Once prospects get over the initial disappointment of being assigned to the ECHL, they often realize the league can be a terrific place to develop.

"The game is built around confidence, and it's always a blow to your confidence when you get assigned back to a level that you were hoping you wouldn't be in," said Matt Thomas, who coaches the Cincinnati Cyclones, the Sabres' ECHL affiliate.

But in addition to extra playing time, the league that bills itself as "AA hockey" can offer youngsters opportunities they likely wouldn't enjoy in the American Hockey League.

"You can play the game you want to play a little bit more; not the game you're just flat-out required to play," Thomas said. "So there's a little bit more leeway in terms of taking some chances and growing from mistakes. One mistake isn't going to have you parked at the end of the bench where you're not going to see the ice for the rest of the night."

The league has buoyed the growth of defenseman Devante Stephens, a prospect the Sabres drafted in the fifth round in 2015, 122nd overall.

Instead of receiving short minutes with the Americans or sitting out, Stephens, 21, has morphed into a trusted defenseman with the Cyclones, drawing regular duty against the opposition's top line.

"I just needed to play," Stephens said earlier this month in Blue Cross Arena during his brief recall to the Amerks. "You look at the D-men roster up here, and there's a lot of D-men. I don't know if I would've got as much ice time as I would've needed. ..."

"Just playing those game reps, that's how you develop your game, right?"

Besides a gaudy plus-21 rating, which led the ECHL entering Saturday's games, Stephens had scored five goals and 15 points in 27 games. Stephens compiled zero goals and eight assists in 33 games as an ECHL rookie last season.

"When Buffalo drafted him, they wanted to see him become a certain type of defenseman ... and this level is allowing him to discover that," Thomas said.

While the 6-foot-2, 179-pound Stephens played well enough to earn three promotions to the Amerks last season, the adjustment to pro hockey wasn't easy.

A torn labrum and broken orbital sidelined him much of the season.

"Game one of this season to today, I think his growth is his habits and how he practices and how he shows up and how he prepares," Thomas said. "He's really been able to develop a routine that's shown him success and allowed him to be consistent as a pro. I think a lot of it for him was getting into a rhythm."

Part of that rhythm includes Stephens utilizing his speed. That's why Thomas uses him in a shutdown role. Stephens' feet have also helped him create more offense.

"He's got a lot of raw ability, but his skating is certainly his No. 1 asset," Thomas said. "I think like all players, when he's in that zone, and you couple that with his skating, that's when you really see him jump up into the play and create offense in his game."

"But his feet give him a lot of leeway to take some risks up ice and the ability to get back and defend and not have it cost him."

Still, Stephens said his "fundamentals are defense."

"I don't let a lot of goals against me," Stephens said. "But I think with maturity comes developing your game. Obviously, you look at the D-men in the NHL now, they can all score goals and contribute that way."

Four other Sabres draft picks – defenseman Anthony Florentino, forwards Vasily Glotov and Judd Peterson and goalie Jonas Johansson – have played for the Cyclones this season. However, only Johansson and Stephens have NHL contracts.

The path from the ECHL to the NHL can be arduous. Just one current Sabre, goalie Carter Hutton, played in the league.

"It's a league that's up-and-coming," Stephens said. "It's a lot better than it used to be. There's a lot of skill down there. I think that's why my offense is getting a little better, there's a little bit more room down there."

Thomas said the NHL recognizing the value in "AA" hockey has helped the ECHL grow. The changes taking place at hockey's highest level quickly trickle down.

"It's pretty remarkable to see how quickly those changes are becoming visual and evident at the different levels," Thomas said.

The demise of the Central Hockey League and United Hockey League has also made better players available.

"It's created a wealth of talent at this level that the league hasn't seen across the board," Thomas said.

Nylander hurt

Amerks winger Alexander Nylander left Friday's 5-1 home win against the Toronto Marlies with an upper-body injury and is day-to-day, coach Chris Taylor said.

Nylander, the eighth overall pick in 2016, missed Saturday's 4-3 road loss to the Utica Comets. The Swede has compiled eight goals and 21 points in 30 games this season.

The Amerks' first game of the new year is Wednesday against visiting Bridgeport.

Sabres' Kyle Okposo demoted after not scoring for 21st straight game

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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Kyle Okposo was back.

The Buffalo Sabres winger's toe drag and wrist shot to beat Tampa Bay's Louis Domingue for the eventual game-winning goal against Tampa Bay on Nov. 13 appeared to be the latest step in a breakthrough.

It was Okposo's fifth goal in 10 games and put him on pace for his first 20-goal season since he scored 22 for the New York Islanders in 2015-16. After two tumultuous years on and off the ice in Buffalo, the 30-year-old helped revitalize the Sabres with seven points during their 10-game winning streak.

His tenure in Buffalo has since taken another tragic turn. Okposo could be skating on the fourth line with Johan Larsson and Remi Elie when the Sabres host Okposo's former team, the Islanders, Monday in KeyBank Center.

That was Okposo's assignment in practice Sunday after he failed to score a goal for a 21st consecutive game. Coach Phil Housley is hoping a different assignment can spark Okposo, who was supposed to provide secondary scoring behind the Sabres' dynamic top line.

"Everybody knows the production, right?" Housley told reporters when asked about Okposo on Sunday. "You look at the statistics, but I think he just has to get back to work. I wouldn't read too much into the lines. We're just trying to create more balance, and I think [Larsson's] played terrific hockey."

Okposo, who had three 20-goal seasons in New York, has five goals among 15 points in 39 games this season, including only one assist in his last 17 games and a minus-7 over his past 11 games. He has provided leadership in the locker room and has served as a mentor to young players, particularly Casey Mittelstadt. But former Sabres General Manager Tim Murray was expecting more when he signed Okposo to a seven-year, \$42 million contract in July 2016.

The Sabres need more from Okposo and he knows it. He yelled in frustration following an outstanding second-period shift by his line did not yield a goal Saturday against Boston. This was supposed to be his bounce-back season. After all, the nightmare he and his family endured contributed to struggles on the ice in 2017-18.

In March 2017, a concussion and resulting reaction to medication landed Okposo in Buffalo General Medical Center's neuro intensive care unit. He returned last season to post 44 points in 76 games, his lowest for a full season since he had 39 points as a rookie in 2008-09.

Okposo was a minus-34, the second-worst number in the NHL and worst among forwards. He vowed to improve his skating and to help in the Sabres' turnaround. That's what made the 10-game winning streak such a joyous three weeks for him, particularly his mentoring of young players like Mittelstadt.

"It comes full circle," Okposo told The Buffalo News last month. "It feels like just yesterday I was [Mittelstadt's] age and a rookie. I'm not anymore. It goes by quick. I know everyone says it, whether they're talking about life or kids or the hockey career. It's short. It goes by fast. You have to make sure you enjoy every phase of it. I'm really taking some time to enjoy this phase of my career where I still feel like I have a lot of game left to give, but I can give something to these younger guys as well."

Okposo was not made available to reporters after practice Sunday. Instead of promoting a player from Rochester to help with secondary scoring, Housley chose to shuffle his lines again. Evan Rodrigues, who assisted on Larsson's shorthanded goal Saturday and has 10 shots on goal over the past two games, took Okposo's place on the second line.

Housley wants Okposo to act as more of a power forward than a sniper by going hard to the net. It is a role Okposo has seemed uncomfortable filling at times.

"I think he's really handled it well," Housley said of Okposo. "He's been providing us with some terrific leadership within our locker room and says a lot of the right things. He gives a lot of feedback to our young players. He represents everything we want as a Buffalo Sabre. It's one of those things where when you go through a difficult time you have to fight your way through it. There's no easy recipe for it. It's keep it simple, go to the net hard, things are going to happen."

The Sabres are in a predicament. Okposo has a modified no-trade clause and there would not be much of a market given he's under contract for four more seasons at a \$6 million annual cap hit. That explains why all involved are trying to help him find success.

Okposo is revered in the locker room and works relentlessly at his craft. That explains why defenseman Zach Bogosian chose this response when asked about his fellow alternate captain following Sunday's practice.

"I'm not going to be one to comment on Kyle's situation," Bogosian said. "Kyle trying to find that offensive side of things. ... As a teammate, you care about all your teammates. You want them to all do well. That's not saying Kyle hasn't done other things defensively. He's a huge part of our team on the ice and in the locker room. He'll find it. More importantly, through the whole process he's been a great teammate, great leader and really hasn't changed his demeanor, especially in the locker room."

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Jack Eichel was absent from practice Sunday for "maintenance," according to Housley, but is expected to play Monday against the Islanders. Goalie Linus Ullmark also returned to practice after he was unavailable Saturday because of an illness. As a result, goalie Scott Wedgewood was sent back to Rochester.

Late penalty, missed opportunities cost Sabres in overtime loss to Boston

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 29, 2018

A precedent appeared to be set. The Buffalo Sabres and Boston Bruins got away with some borderline penalties for most of the third period Saturday night in KeyBank Center, including an ugly trip that forced Sam Reinhart to skate slowly to the bench.

That's why the Sabres were puzzled and frustrated when Rasmus Ristolainen was penalized for kneeing with 3:43 left in regulation. The Bruins scored the tying power-play goal 74 seconds later and won in overtime, 3-2, when Sean Kuraly capitalized on his own rebound to beat Carter Hutton.

"That was a pretty tough call at the end," Sabres winger Evan Rodrigues lamented of Ristolainen's penalty. "They were kind of letting things go, I thought, from the last half of the third."

As a result, the Sabres, now 21-12-6 with 48 points, have only a two-point lead over the Bruins for third place in the Atlantic Division and failed to gain ground on Toronto. Jake DeBrusk scored the tying goal and Kuraly won it with 1:16 remaining in overtime.

That left Buffalo wondering what could have been. It failed to score on the power play in overtime and again failed to build on a one-goal lead. While the result was a second consecutive loss, the Sabres were encouraged with how they responded following an ugly performance in St. Louis two nights earlier.

"Completely different game," defenseman Marco Scandella said. "That St. Louis game was not our game, was not our identity. Tonight we responded well. ... Still, it's not good enough, and we have to get the win at home."

The Sabres finally received some secondary scoring. Johan Larsson scored a go-ahead shorthanded goal 5:43 into the second period, and Scandella's second goal of the season made it 1-0 in the first. Simply put, they were the better team for most of the first 40 minutes and had a one-goal lead entering the third period.

The Bruins, who were without Brad Marchand, Charlie McAvoy and David Backes, had yet to win this season when trailing after two periods. The Sabres had a botched 2-on-1 odd-man rush. Vladimir Sobotka was stopped by Tuukka Rask on a shot from the top of the crease. A puck nearly deflected off Jason Pominville's skate and into the goal early in the third period.

It was another game of what ifs. At the other end of the ice, Buffalo allowed too many scoring chances. The Bruins, now 21-14-4 with 46 points, outshot the Sabres, 42-28, including 18-5 in the third period, and had 24 more shot attempts.

"I thought we played a very strong 60 minutes and overtime," coach Phil Housley said. "I can't fault our effort. We attacked the game. It's going to be like this throughout the rest of the season where it's going to be tight. I thought we felt really comfortable in the situation."

The Sabres' penalty kill had been 30-for-31 when Ristolainen's knee collided with David Pastrnak, despite the Buffalo defenseman trying to avoid making contact. The sequence began when Jeff Skinner failed to get the puck out of the defensive zone.

"It's a tough call," Rodrigues, who assisted on Larsson's goal, said. "I just thought that's one that got away from us. At the same time, if we keep playing like that we'll win some games."

With 3:29 remaining in regulation, Torey Krug carried the puck toward the middle of the blue line and fired a wrist shot that was deflected by DeBrusk past Hutton, who made 39 saves.

Buffalo did not threaten after that. Boston controlled play for the final two minutes, and Skinner drew an interference penalty 34 seconds into overtime. However, the Sabres' impatience led to a missed opportunity and

they had only two shots on goal in overtime. Kuraly collected a pass from Matt Grzelcyk in the neutral zone, skated up ice and fired a wrist shot on Hutton.

Neither Rasmus Dahlin nor Skinner could clear the rebound from in front of the net, and Kuraly chipped it past Hutton for the game-winner.

The Sabres are 4-6-4 since their 10-game winning streak ended on Nov. 29 and continue to struggle to score. Though Hutton has not won in his last five games, he has received only nine goals from his teammates during that span. Kyle Okposo has not scored a goal in 21 games. Casey Mittelstadt has one goal in 16 games. Conor Sheary has one goal in 19 games.

"It's always tough to lose, but they're in the division," Larsson said. "Those are huge points. Yeah, it's a tough one."

Mike Harrington: It's hard to believe Sabres haven't made a move for offense

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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It's hard to watch the Sabres be patient. They have to make some moves with this roster. Especially up front. Don't they?

They tried to win Saturday's game over Boston, 2-1. The third period rope-o-dope didn't work. It fell just short. They got outshot, 18-5, in the third while giving up a tying goal with 2½ minutes left and couldn't convert on an overtime power play. Then Carter Hutton, who was mostly terrific in this one, gave up an overly juicy rebound in overtime and Sean Kuraly capitalized on his good fortune to give the Bruins a 3-2 victory.

On a night when Brad Marchand, Charlie McAvoy and David Backes were all missing from the Boston lineup, the Sabres couldn't get two points against the team right behind them in the Atlantic Division. That really hurts.

And the biggest reason is they just don't get much scoring from anybody outside their top line. Now that mortality has struck Jack Eichel (one goal in five games), Jeff Skinner (one goal in four) and Sam Reinhart (no goals in 10, but 14 assists in that span), the offense is really challenged.

Saturday's game was an outlier of recent weeks. Marco Scandella swooped in on a Skinner rebound for the first goal, just the second by a defenseman in the last 14 games, and Johan Larsson scored the Sabres' first short-handed tally of the year on a neat Evan Rodrigues feed.

"It was great. You could feel it on our bench," coach Phil Housley said of the Larsson goal. "It really gave us energy and we're going to continue to need that down the stretch. I can't fault our effort the way we played tonight. If we continue that kind of effort, we'll be on the right side of things."

Perhaps. But the offense is still choking on exhaust fumes much of the time. So it's high time we see leading goal scorer C.J. Smith come up from Rochester. And maybe give Victor Olofsson a shot, too. Alex Nylander is nursing an injury or it might be time to try him as well.

Seriously now, Remi Elie played on the second line Thursday in St. Louis. That shows you some of the desperation Housley must be feeling. The pressure is building. The Sabres don't want to join the 2017 Philadelphia Flyers as the only teams in NHL history to miss the playoffs in a year when they had a 10-game winning streak, but a 4-6-4 record in the last 14 games doesn't bring much confidence.

Late penalty, missed opportunities cost Sabres in overtime loss to Boston

Folks want Jason Botterill to make a trade but it's just not that easy in the salary cap era. And GMs tend to hold on tight until the trade deadline. Botterill is obviously using his phone for more than ordering pizza and wings but you've got to have a willing partner and meet the price.

Ultimately, the Sabres need a second-line center because Casey Mittelstadt is overmatched in that spot most nights. Patrik Berglund failed there to start the year before flat-out quitting on this club because Housley, who only happens to be in the Hall of Fame, saw very little on the effort scale from the veteran and dared to scratch him.

The names you like are probably the ones Botterill has in mind, too. But there's going to be a price to pay for the likes of Los Angeles' Jeff Carter, Minnesota's Charlie Coyle or St. Louis' Brayden Schenn, to point out three guys you might find interesting.

Some of these numbers of players on lines 2-3 are just ghastly. Kyle Okposo, he of four years remaining at \$6 million per season, has no goals in his last 21 games and no points in his last 14. Vladimir Sobotka has no points in 17 games and one assist in his last 23 while Ryan O'Reilly is St. Louis' best player (and don't even get me started on Berglund).

Jason Pominville has no points in 12 games and no goals in 14. Conor Sheary has one goal in 19 games, and that was last Saturday's empty-netter against Anaheim. Poor Mittelstadt, who has no wings converting anything he sets up, has one goal in 16 games and no points in seven. And he committed a grievous third-period turnover on a blind backhand pass into the slot that would be a bad play at Eden Prairie High in Minnesota, let alone against the Bruins.

The list goes on. Tage Thompson has no goals in 13 games and just one point in that span. Elie, who was actually pretty good Saturday, has just one point in his 13 games.

Rodrigues has just two goals in 33 games but he's the guy you sense a breakthrough coming from. He came out of the Christmas break and was one of the Sabres' best players Thursday in St. Louis, with six shots on goal. He's had 22 in his last seven games. No goals.

"You can't get frustrated. I'm getting the chances," Rodrigues said. "It's just comes down to me bearing down, finding a way to get the puck in the net, continuing to trust my game and play confident and they'll come.

"We got some secondary scoring today. We can't rely on the primaries. We have to find a way to chip in whether it's a dirty one. We have to support those guys."

Okposo has his moments at times down low, especially along the wall. But those moments are few and far between for a player whom former GM Tim Murray clearly overpaid.

This season is almost half over. A lot of these guys are who they are. It's time to try somebody else, either from the farm or from the outside.

The Wraparound: Bruins 3, Sabres 2, OT

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 29, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres did not play an ugly final 40 minutes and there was not an embarrassing collapse. However, they saw another opportunity to gain ground in the Atlantic Division slip away.

After controlling play for much of the first 50 minutes, the Sabres allowed two unanswered goals, capped by Sean Kuraly's in overtime, for a 3-2 loss to the Boston Bruins in KeyBank Center on Saturday night.

The defeat resulted in a three-point swing in the standings. Rather than having a five-point lead over the Bruins, the Sabres are now only two points ahead for third place. Johan Larsson scored a shorthanded goal in the second period and Carter Hutton made 39 saves.

Marco Scandella also scored for the Sabres, who are 21-12-6 and played their 14th overtime game of the season. Noel Acciari and Jake DeBrusk scored for the Bruins.

Opening salvo: Jeff Skinner collected a backhanded outlet pass from Sam Reinhart, skated around Zdeno Chara and got off a backhanded shot that Tuukka Rask stopped with a pad save. But Scandella was there to hammer home the rebound for a 1-0 lead at 4:40 into the first.

Season of Sam: With the secondary assist on Scandella's goal, Reinhart has already matched his career high with 30 assists. Reinhart has 35 points in his past 31 games, including 27 assists.

Bruins answer: A series of ugly plays in the Sabres' defensive zone finally backfired when Skinner lost track of the puck behind Hutton, and it took an unlucky bounce to the front of the net, where Acciari shot the puck off Rasmus Ristolainen to tie the score 9:30 into the first.

Fine first: The Sabres had an ugly first period, despite being tied 1-1 at intermission. They were outshot 14-7 and shot attempts were 27-17 in favor of Boston. But Hutton was exceptional, beginning with his save on Patrice Bergeron after Vladimir Sobotka committed a turnover in defensive zone. Hutton also stopped Chris Wagner during a 3-on-2 odd-man rush.

Go-ahead goal: Larsson scored for the second time in four games when he collected a 2-on-1 pass from Evan Rodrigues and beat Rask with a high shot for a 2-1 lead 5:43 into the second period. It was the Sabres' first shorthanded goal of the season.

Shorthanded: By killing three of four penalties, the Sabres' penalty kill is 30-for-32 over its last 11 games.

Power-play woes: The Sabres went 0 for 3 on the power play and are now 2 for 17 in their last six games. Their second opportunity was cut short after only nine seconds when Jack Eichel was called for a four-minute double minor for high-sticking Chara.

Shake it off: Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe left for the locker room briefly after blocking a Bergeron slap shot but returned to finish with eight first-period shifts. Reinhart also left after being tripped by Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson but returned a few minutes later.

Injury updates: Linus Ullmark was out with an illness, which forced the Sabres to recall goalie Scott Wedgewood from Rochester to backup Hutton. Additionally, Housley announced Saturday morning that winger Zemgus Girgensons, who missed practice Friday, is out week-to-week with an upper-body injury.

With Wedgewood promoted, Rochester recalled Jonas Johansson from Cincinnati. Johansson, a third-round draft pick in 2014, has a .907 save percentage in 17 games with the Cyclones.

Meanwhile, the Bruins were without winger Brad Marchand (upper body), defenseman Charlie McAvoy (lower body) and winger David Backes (suspension).

Lineup changes: Defensemen Lawrence Pilut and Matt Hunwick were healthy scratches. Nathan Beaulieu, who missed the previous five games with an upper-body injury, replaced Pilut in the lineup. Jason Pominville also returned after missing the previous three games as a result of his collision with Ristolainen on Dec. 18 against Florida.

He's back: Longtime Sabres broadcaster Rick Jeanneret returned to the booth Saturday. Jeanneret was taken from KeyBank Arena on a stretcher and hospitalized Dec. 22.

Next: The Sabres return to practice Sunday morning in preparation to play the New York Islanders on Monday at 6 p.m.

Sabres vs. Bruins: Five Things to Know

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 29, 2018

Despite their inconsistent play, the Buffalo Sabres are already being asked about the Stanley Cup playoffs. That might sound absurd, given there is more than half a season to play; however, it is indicative of how expectations have changed in a matter of months.

The Sabres, 21-12-5 with 47 points, are third in the Atlantic Division and three points ahead of the Boston Bruins, whom they will host tonight in KeyBank Center. Faceoff is at 7 p.m. Eastern on MSG and WGR Radio. One year ago today, Buffalo beat New Jersey in overtime, 4-3, for the team's 10th win of the season.

Naturally, expectations were raised after a 10-game win streak. The Sabres defeated the Bruins, 4-2, in TD Garden on Dec. 16 behind a four-point performance from Jack Eichel.

"These are huge games," Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe said.

Here are five things to know about tonight's game:

1. The lineups: It will be Carter Hutton (13-11-2/2.64/.916) in goal for the Sabres. With Linus Ullmark ill, Scott Wedgewood was recalled from Rochester on Saturday morning to serve as Hutton's backup.

Jason Pominville, who missed the past three games after colliding with Rasmus Ristolainen, will return to the lineup, according to coach Phil Housley. Additionally, defensemen Lawrence Pilut and Matt Hunwick will be healthy scratches with Nathan Beaulieu back in the lineup. Beaulieu has missed the past five games with an upper-body injury. Winger Zemgus Girgensons is out week-to-week with an upper-body injury, which breaks up the Sabres' effective fourth line.

2. Season series almost over: This is the third of four meetings between the two teams, and the season series will end next Saturday when the Sabres play the Bruins in TD Garden. Boston won the first game in the season opener, 4-0, but has since failed to meet expectations because of injuries.

Prior to losing Marchand and McAvoy, the Bruins were finally at full strength when winger Patrice Bergeron, defenseman Zdeno Chara and defenseman Kevan Miller returned from injury. The Sabres are 4-6 in their last 10 games against the Bruins and are 125-122-44 in the all-time series.

"The guys have done a really good job of knowing the situation," Housley said. "Obviously, we know it's a big game tonight. We're going to control what we're going to control, and that's play. It's great that we're in a position that we're in, playing some really meaningful games at this point in the season. I think the guys will embrace this."

3. On the kill: The Sabres' penalty kill enters the game ranked fifth in the NHL at 83.8 percent and has gone 27 for 28 in their last 10 games. It's the first time Buffalo has allowed one power-play goal or fewer in a 10-game stretch since 2012. Over the past 10 games, the Sabres' goalies have made 34 saves on the penalty kill and the team has killed off 48:07 of power-play time.

They will be without Girgensons, one of their top penalty-killers, after the winger did not practice Friday and did not participate in the morning skate. The Bruins' power play ranks fifth in the NHL and has scored at least once in four of their last five games, but Marchand ranks second on the team with 17 power-play points.

4. Dahlin's debut season: Sabres rookie defenseman Rasmus Dahlin leads all rookie defensemen and ranks third among all rookies with 20 points. With his 20th point in his 37th game on Dec. 22 against Anaheim, Dahlin became the fourth-fastest 18-year-old defenseman in NHL history to reach the 20-point mark, trailing only Housley (28 games), Ray Bourque (30) and Aaron Ekblad (34).

Dahlin's on pace for 43 points this season, which would tie for sixth-most by a rookie defenseman since 2005-06 and would trail only Housley (57 points in 1982-83) for most ever by a defenseman before his 19th birthday.

"If you win or you lose, it's hockey," Dahlin said. "You can't go a full season with only winning. If you have a bad game, go back the next game and play better. I think we've bounced back from every bad period we've had. We're a strong team. We're trusting ourselves."

5. By the numbers: The Sabres enter tonight's game with a 12-4-2 record at home, which puts them on pace for the franchise's eighth-best home record and their best since 1982-83 (25-7-8, .725). ... Jeff Skinner ranks second in the NHL in 5-on-5 goal differential (plus-21), trailing only Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby. ... Sam Reinhart has 34 points (eight goals with 26 assists) in his last 30 games. ... If he maintains his current pace, Jack Eichel would finish the season tied with Alexander Mogilny (78 in 1992-93) for the second-most even-strength points ever recorded by a Sabres player, trailing only Pat LaFontaine, who had 83 points in 1992-93.

The Sabres blow another late lead and lose in overtime to Boston

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 29, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550)- The Sabres got off to a quick start against the Bruins and it was again the Jack Eichel line that got it started. Sam Reinhart hit a breaking Jeff Skinner with a nice backhand pass from his own zone. Zdena Chara had no chance to keep up with the speedy Skinner, but Tuukka Rask made the save as the winger broke free. Marco Scandella made a great read on the play and deposited his second goal of the season into the empty net.

Carter Hutton was tested after that when Vladimir Sobotka made a horrendous turnover at the blue line to Chara. He found Patrice Bergeron who was behind the defense, but Hutton stopped him. I liked how the kid Tage Thompson got back quickly to clear the rebound.

It didn't take long for a turnover that was even worse. Skinner was behind the net and just threw the puck up the middle. Noel Acciari was right there and beat Hutton for his first goal of the season.

Buffalo got out skated in the first period, but got out of it tied at one. Hutton had to make 13 saves while Rask stopped six pucks.

In the second, the Sabres started skating better and got some early pressure.

Buffalo has been one of the best penalty killing teams in the NHL this season, especially at home, but coming in they hadn't scored a shorthanded goal. The team took care of that with a real pretty one. Scandella sent away Johan Larsson who quickly got the puck up to Evan Rodrigues to produce a 2-on-1. Rodrigues had a lane to get it back to Larsson who went high to beat Rask.

I really liked the Sabres second period. I thought they skated well and had plenty of chances. The one thing is they played very well, but could get that third goal. Rask made 13 saves in the second while Hutton wasn't too busy with seven saves.

Buffalo had more pressure on Rask early in the third period, but again couldn't get one past him.

The Bruins almost tied the game when Casey Mittelstadt made a lazy, blind back pass right to Danton Heinen, but the puck rolled on him as he went to shoot.

Remi Elie almost had that third goal 12 minutes into the third period, but Rask made the save on his tip of a Zach Bogosian shot.

Earlier I mentioned the fact that many times this year they can't push that goal across that gives them a two goal lead and it cost them again. At 16:17, Rasmus Ristolainen got a kneeling penalty that he deserved. The problem I had with it is the referees had let everything go in the third period. There were at least four penalties that should've been called, but weren't. Either call penalties or don't.

On the power play sure enough, Jake DeBrusk was in front and got a tip to tie it. I thought the penalty kill was once again fantastic in the game, but there's not much you can do about tips.

Jeff Skinner started overtime with Jack Eichel and drew a penalty when David Krejci pulled him down. The Sabres have done very well 4-on-3 this season, but they were way too anxious this time and never tested Rask.

Rasmus Dahlin didn't do a very good job on Sean Kuraly in overtime allowing him not only to get a shot off, but Hutton didn't play it well and Dahlin allowed Kuraly to get by him to get to the puck laying in front to give the Bruins the overtime win.

The Sabres have a lot of trouble protecting leads and getting the goal that would put games away. Even in the 10 game winning streak, they went to overtime and a shootout in seven of those games. It seems like they always lose any lead they have, it's just a matter of if they can get it back.

I thought Marco Scandella was very strong in this game and it wasn't because he had a goal and an assist. There were numerous times that he got his stick on shots forcing them over the net and did a great job in one-on-one situations. Scandella earned the third star in the game, but I would've had him No. 2.

The loss allowed Boston to pull to within two points of the Sabres while Montreal lost in Tampa and are now three in back of Buffalo.

The Islanders took out the Leafs in Toronto 4-0 and are here on New Year's Eve. New York is four points behind Buffalo if you're thinking about the wild card race.

Bruins come back for 3-2 win over Sabres in overtime

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

December 29, 2018

The Boston Bruins were able to erase two separate one-goal Sabres leads to score a 3-2 overtime win on Saturday night at KeyBank Center.

Marco Scandella used a rebound chance in front of the net to give the Sabres a 1-0 lead over the Bruins just over four minutes into the game. Jeff Skinner drove to the net for the initial shot on goal that was stopped by Tuukka Rask, but the puck was in front of the goal when the defenseman trailed the play and scored his second goal of the year. Skinner and Sam Reinhart assisted on the goal.

Boston would tie the game at 1-1 midway through the period thanks to strong work in the offensive zone. Noel Acciari recorded his first goal of the season to draw the visitors even. It came after a pair of Buffalo turnovers in their own zone. The goal was unassisted.

Neither team was able to take advantage of their lone power play chance in the first period. Zach Bogosian was called for a hooking minor, while Colby Cave was penalized for hooking as well. The Bruins outshot Buffalo 14-7 in the period also.

Buffalo re-gained the lead in the middle frame while Jack Eichel was in the penalty box serving a double minor. Johan Larsson and Evan Rodrigues combined to score, making it 2-1 Sabres. The goal was Larsson's fourth of the season. Rodrigues and Scandella were credited with assists on the short handed goal.

The Bruins controlled the play for much of the third period, and used a Rasmus Ristolainen penalty to their advantage to re-tie the game. Ristolainen was in the penalty box for kneeing when Jake DeBrusk tipped a shot from the point into the net, making the score 2-2 with just under three minutes remaining in regulation. Torey Krug took the shot from the blue line that eventually found the net. He and David Pasternak were given the assists on the the power play goal.

After controlling the shots on goal in the middle frame, the Sabres were outshot 18-5 by Boston in the third. Just the one penalty was called on either side in the last period of regulation as well.

David Krejci was called for interference early in the overtime to give Buffalo a 4-on-3 power play in the extra period. The Sabres recorded one shot on goal during the man advantage.

Sean Kuraly scored on a rebound chance in OT to give the Bruins the win. He was able to chip in his own second chance opportunity after taking the initial shot as well. The game-winning goal was unassisted.

Scoring Summary

Goal Summary

First Period

BUF: 4:40 - Marco Scandella (2) (Jeff Skinner, Sam Reinhart)

BOS: 9:30 - Noel Acciari (1) (unassisted)

Second Period

BUF: 5:43 - Johan Larsson (4) SHG (Evan Rodrigues, Marco Scandella)

BOS: none

Third Period

BUF: none

BOS: 17:31 - Jake DeBrusk (11) PPG (Torey Krug, David Pasternak)

Overtime

BUF: none

BOS: 3:44 - Sean Kuraly (3) (unassisted)

Penalty Summary

First Period

BUF: 11:07 - Zach Bogosian (2 min., hooking)

BOS: 16:48 - Colby Cave (2 min., hooking)

Second Period

BUF: 3:02 - Jack Eichel (4 min., high sticking)

BOS: 2:53 - Torey Krug (2 min., tripping)

Third Period

BUF: 16:17 - Rasmus Ristolainen (2 min., kneeling)

BOS: none

Overtime

BUF: none

BOS: 0:34 - David Krejci (2 min., interference)

Shots on Goal

BUF: 28 (7, 14, 5, 2)

BOS: 42 (14, 7, 18, 3)

Saves

BUF: Carter Hutton - 39 saves

BOS: Tuukka Rask - 26 saves

Power Play Chances

BUF: 0 for 3

BOS: 1 for 4

What's Next

The blue and gold will close out 2018 when they welcome the New York Islanders for a six o'clock puck drop on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Mike Schopp kicks off at five p.m. from (716) Food and Sport.

The Sabres try to beat Boston for the second time this season

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 29, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres come into their game against Boston with three losses in four games. Before that, they had won three out of four.

Carter Hutton will be back in goal with four straight losses and just one win in seven games.

In his last three starts, the Sabres have only scored four goals for Hutton. In his last four starts, Hutton has allowed four, two, four and three goals.

Scott Wedgewood will back up Hutton because Linus Ullmark is still sick.

The Sabres have other problems than goals-against. None of the bottom 10 forwards are scoring, and Vladimir Sobotka has just two games all season where he's scored any goals. The former St. Louis Blues forward expects better from himself, "It's been frustrating, I think about it a lot, but I have a different role on the team and I need to keep going, work harder and try to shoot the puck more."

Sobotka scored twice in the one game and that was in Montreal. In 35 games this season, he has three goals and two assists for five points.

Overall, Lawrence Pilut has played pretty well since being called up from Rochester, but lately he's had some games where he's struggled, especially in St. Louis. With that in mind, Nate Beaulieu returns to the lineup. He's missed five games since Tom Wilson hammered him into the boards.

Phil Housley said Zemgus Girgensons' maintenance day has turned into a week-to-week upper-body injury.

Jason Pominville will return to the lineup after missing three games with a head injury.

This has been a road series so far as the Bruins won here on opening night, 4-0 and Buffalo won 4-2 in Boston.

Montreal has gone past Boston in the Atlantic Division thanks to two straight Bruins losses. Buffalo is in third with 47 points, the Canadiens have 45 and Boston has 44.

Patrice Bergeron has been back for three games from injury, scoring three goals and two assists for five points. Zdena Chara returned last game, but two more prominent players are now out. Charlie McAvoy has a lower-body injury, while Brad Marchand has an upper-body problem. David Backes is serving a three-game suspension for a head hit on Blake Coleman of the Devils.

Recently, Jaroslav Halak has taken over the net from Tuukka Rask. Rask is 8-8-2 with a 2.72 goals-against and .911 save percentage. He's only played one of the last five games and gave up five goals in a loss at Carolina.

Join Brian Koziol for the pre-game starting at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Jason Pominville and Vladimir Sobotka.

Tonight marks the return of Rick Jeanneret to the broadcast booth. The Sabres legend was taken from the press box on a stretcher last Saturday feeling light headed.

Sabres call up Wedgewood from Rochester

By Derek Kramer

WGR 550

December 29, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres have called up goaltender Scott Wedgewood from the Rochester Americans on Saturday morning.

Wedgewood will back up Carter Hutton against the Boston Bruins on Saturday night at KeyBank Center.

Wedgewood played on Friday night for the Americans, making 35 saves in a 5-1 win over the Toronto Marlies. Wedgewood has a .916 save percentage and a 2.78 goals-against average in 20 games for the Amerks this season.

Sabres' Kyle Okposo enduring career-worst slump

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 30, 2018

BUFFALO – Kyle Okposo's offensive slump has become startling.

The Sabres winger has a career-long 21-game goal drought entering Monday's home tilt against the New York Islanders, his old team. The former NHL All-Star hasn't even mustered an assist in the last 14 contests, the longest pointless stretch of his 12-year career.

Following a strong start, Okposo stopped producing around mid-November.

Incredibly, Okposo, who usually skates on the second line and power-play unit, is one outing away from a pointless December.

Not surprisingly, Sabres coach Phil Housley demoted Okposo to the fourth line beside center Johan Larsson and Tage Thompson during Sunday's practice.

Of course, given the way Okposo's regular center, Casey Mittelstadt, has been performing – the rookie has compiled just one goal and two points in the last 16 games – Housley is probably doing him a favor.

"I wouldn't read too much into the lines," Housley said of Okposo, who has compiled five goals and 15 points in 39 games. "We're just trying to create balance. I think Larry's played terrific hockey.

"I just want (Okposo) to get back to focus about his power forward game and going to the net hard, having guys hang on his back. When he does that, he's really, really effective."

Okposo wasn't available to talk following Sunday's session inside HarborCenter.

Larsson has been playing arguably his best hockey since dislocating his elbow and wrist two years ago. The Swede scored short-handed in Saturday's 3-2 overtime loss to the Boston Bruins, his second goal in four games.

Perhaps Larsson will help ignite Okposo. Thompson and Evan Rodrigues, who replaced Okposo beside Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary, started generating more offense when they joined Larsson.

"His play's been really great," Housley said of Larsson. "A lot of the things he does you don't see on the scoreboard."

Okposo hasn't scored since Nov. 13, when his second-period goal held up as the winner in a 2-1 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning.

At that point, 18 games into the season, Okposo was scoring at a 23-goal, 46-point pace over a full year, numbers in line with his career averages.

Since then, he has taken 35 shots without scoring.

Okposo struggled last season, compiling 15 goals, 44 points and a ghastly minus-34 rating in 76 games. Clearly, he never found a groove after a scary concussion he suffered in March 2017 limited his offseason workout regimen.

Six weeks ago, it appeared Okposo's full summer of work was paying off. But these days, his seven-year, \$42 million contract – he still has four and a half seasons left – ranks among the league's worst.

Buying out Okposo following the season would leave his dead money – hits of up to \$5 million – on the salary cap until 2026-27, according to capfriendly.com.

So the Sabres better hope Okposo starts showcasing some of his old scoring prowess.

Housley said the affable Okposo, one of his alternate captains, has handled his struggles well.

"He's been really providing us some terrific leadership within our locker room, says a lot of the right things and he gives a lot of feedback to our younger players," Housley said. "He represents everything we want as a Buffalo Sabre."

Sure, that still helps the Sabres, but how can Okposo bust out of his marathon slump?

"When you go through a difficult time, you just got to fight your way through it," Housley said. "There's no easy recipe for it – it's keep it simple, go to the net hard, things are going to happen."

Notes: Sabres captain Jack Eichel had a maintenance day Sunday, Housley said. ... Goalie Linus Ullmark, who missed Saturday's game because he was ill, practiced Sunday. The Sabres sent goalie Scott Wedgewood back to the Rochester Americans later in the day. ... Former Sabres goalie Robin Lehner could face his old teammates for the first time tonight at KeyBank Center. Lehner posted a 36-save shutout against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday. ... Defenseman Lawrence Pilut practiced with Matt Hunwick on Sunday, meaning the rookie could be a healthy scratch for the second straight game. ... Okposo had two 18-game goal droughts – in 2009-10 and 2012-13 – earlier in his career.

Sabres blow late lead, fall to Bruins in overtime

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 30, 2018

BUFFALO – By about halfway through the third period of Saturday's 3-2 overtime loss, which inched the Boston Bruins within two points of the third-place Sabres, it appeared officials would let just about anything go.

At one point, 6-foot-9 defenseman Zdeno Chara wasn't penalized for tackling 5-foot-8 Sabres winger Conor Sheary.

So when defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen went off for kneeing with the Sabres clinging to a 2-1 lead in the waning minutes, the capacity crowd of 19,070 inside KeyBank Center booed relentlessly.

The fans only got louder after Jake DeBrusk tipped in a shot with 2:29 remaining in regulation, tying the game.

"That was a pretty tough call at the end," Sabres winger Evan Rodrigues said. "They were kind of letting things go, I thought, from the last half of the third. It's a tough call and nice tip-in.

"That's one that got away from us. But at the same time, if we keep playing like that, we'll win some games."

That's the good news for the Sabres, who frittered away a power play in overtime before winger Sean Kuraly buried the juicy rebound goalie Carter Hutton left him at 3:44. While the Sabres lost for the 10th time in 14 games (4-6-4), they played much better than Thursday's 4-1 loss in St. Louis.

"We played a very strong 60 minutes," Housley said. "You can't fault our effort. We attacked the game. It's going to be like this for the rest of the season where it's going to be tight. I thought we looked comfortable in the situation. We got opportunities to be up by two but didn't capitalize."

The Sabres couldn't capitalize on an opportunity to distance themselves from the Bruins.

Their penalty killing had stymied 30 of 31 opportunities before DeBrusk tipped defenseman Torey Krug's shot in. Center Johan Larsson also scored short-handed.

"We didn't get beat by anything," said Rodrigues, who assisted on Larsson's second-period goal. "A guy just got a good stick on it, nice deflection. You probably don't change anything up when you see that go in."

Secondary scoring has quickly become the Sabres' Achilles heel. Beyond the top trio of center Jack Eichel and wingers Sam Reinhart and Jeff Skinner, many guys haven't been producing offense.

The Sabres have basically morphed into a one-line team in recent weeks, and not surprisingly, they've struggled relying on three players so much.

So any contributions from other players are critical. Larsson scored his fourth goal, equaling last season's total in 47 fewer games. Defenseman Marco Scandella opened the scoring 4:40 into the contest, following up the play and burying Skinner's rebound.

"It was great," Housley said of the secondary contributions. "You could feel it on our bench. It provided a lot of energy for us."

The Bruins won their first game this season when trailing after two periods, improving to 1-11-1. The Sabres, meanwhile, fell to 10-1-3 when leading after 40 minutes.

Sabres notes: Scott Wilson nearing return from broken ankle

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 30, 2018

BUFFALO – Scott Wilson couldn't even walk yet. Still, after breaking his right ankle, the Sabres winger wanted to enjoy some hockey-related activities.

So instead of staying idle, at about the four-week mark of his recovery, Wilson, 26, started going on the ice and shooting pucks ... from a chair.

"As basic as you could think of it, that's pretty much what it was," Wilson said prior to Saturday's 3-2 overtime loss to the Boston Bruins inside KeyBank Center.

Dennis Miller, who rehabilitates the Sabres' injured players, guided Wilson.

"I'd be sitting in a chair and shooting and all types of different things," Wilson said. "We tried to mix it up just so I didn't put any pressure on it."

At about the six-week mark, the cast was removed and Wilson could put a little pressure on the ankle.

"Then you graduate to standing," Wilson said.

Wilson, who broke his ankle in practice Sept. 30, was hellbent on making his rehabilitation a positive experience.

"As soon as you start getting negative about injuries or feeling sorry for yourself, I think that's when people start to spiral downhill," Wilson said. "That's one thing I've learned over my injuries is just you got to stay positive."

Wilson just rejoined his teammates for practices. Even in just a handful of sessions, he can feel a difference from his work.

"With hands and shooting-wise, I feel the best I've ever felt," Wilson said.

Wilson, who hasn't played a regular-season contest since April 7, believes he's about two weeks away from game action.

"Trying to get that timing back is probably the biggest thing, I think, when you're hurt," Wilson said. "Your injury might be healed, but I think your brain needs to catch up to speed a lot more than most people think."

In a dreary 2017-18 season, Wilson was one of the Sabres' only surprises, compiling six goals and 14 points in 49 appearances following his December arrival from the Detroit Red Wings.

After some short summers – he won two Stanley Cups with the Pittsburgh Penguins – Wilson used the long offseason to his advantage, packing on 15 pounds. He was expected to be a strong contributor again on the fourth line when he broke the ankle for the second time in two years.

"Aside the from the injury, I've had even more time to refresh," Wilson said. "I said at the beginning of the year, last summer was kind of the first summer that I had with some serious time and not just eight weeks or whatever. So I'm just kind of mentally recharged."

"My ankle's starting to feel good every day. It's definitely a little bit of an uplifting feeling."

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Sabres winger Zemgus Girgensons, a steady presence on the fourth line this season, is sidelined week-to-week with an upper-body injury, coach Phil Housley said.

Girgensons, 24, has formed a strong duo beside center Johan Larsson, giving the Sabres some valuable minutes.

"Zemgus has done a terrific job," Housley said. "I think with Larsson and him together, they have a unique chemistry, and whoever we put down there with them, they're almost like a fix-it, so to speak.

"I just like the tenacity. They're very reliable, trustworthy, taken a lot of D-zone starts, killing penalties, blocking shots. (They're) doing all the things you don't see in the paper but they're really important to our team."

The Sabres gave Girgensons the "week-to-week" label after he underwent more evaluation. Housley said Friday he was day-to-day.

With Girgensons out, winger Jason Pominville returned Saturday. An undisclosed injury cost Pominville three games after he collided with teammate Rasmus Ristolainen.

Meanwhile, in his first nine NHL games, Sabres rookie Lawrence Pilut has often looked impressive, generating offense and skating more than 20 minutes some nights.

But Pilut, who turns 23 today, struggled in Thursday's 4-1 loss in St. Louis. So defenseman Nathan Beaulieu, who was playing well before an upper-body injury shelved him five games, replaced the Swede against the Bruins.

"We got some fresh bodies in here that want to get an opportunity," Housley said. "Lawrence has played very well. I think last game wasn't his best game."

In other lineup news, goalie Linus Ullmark was still feeling ill, so the Sabres recalled Scott Wedgewood from the Rochester Americans prior to the game.

Wedgewood, 26, is 11-6-1 with a 2.64 goals-against average, a .916 save percentage and three shutouts in 20 appearances with the Amerks this season.

Notes: Legendary Sabres play-by-play man Rick Jeanneret called the game, his first broadcast since he was taken to the hospital during last Saturday's 3-0 win over the Anaheim Ducks. ... Linesman Mark Shewchyk officiated his 1,000th NHL game. ... The Sabres also scratched defenseman Matt Hunwick.

Sabres' Zemgus Girgensons week-to-week; Lawrence Pilut to be scratched

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 29, 2018

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Wedgewood, 26, is 11-6-1 with a 2.64 goals-against average, a .916 save percentage and three shutouts in 20 games with the Amerks this season.

After a posting a 31-save shutout in Wednesday's 4-0 win against the Cleveland Monsters, Wedgewood made 35 saves in Friday's 5-1 win against the Toronto Marlies.

Sabres fall to Bruins 3-2 in overtime

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

December 29, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Sean Kuraly scored the game winner in overtime as the Buffalo Sabres lost their second straight game following a 3-2 defeat to the Boston Bruins on Saturday night.

With the loss, the Sabres are now 21-12-6 overall with 48 points..

The Sabres struck first in the first period after Marco Scandella notched his second goal of the season. After the Bruins came back and tied it up, Johan Larsson scored his second career shorthanded goal, his fourth goal of the season, to give the Sabres the lead once again. That lead lasted until the final two minutes of regulation when Jake DeBrusk scored on the Bruins power play to send the game to overtime. Kuraly scored the game winner with 1:22 left in the overtime period.

The Sabres return to KeyBank Center on Monday, December 31st for their final game of the 2018 calendar year when they host the New York Islanders. Puck drops at 6 p.m.

Housely: "Can't fault Sabres' effort" in OT loss to Bruins

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

December 29, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - All season long secondary scoring has been an issue for the Blue and Gold.

After struggling to generate offense against the St. Louis Blues in a 4-1 loss on Thursday, Buffalo bounced back and received goals from Marco Scandella and Johan Larsson on Saturday.

But, it wasn't enough in a 3-2 overtime loss to the Bruins.

Buffalo led 2-1 late in the third before Jake DeBrusk tied the game and Kuraly tallied the game winner in the extra session.

"They made a push, I thought we played well," said Scandella. "it's unfortunate that we couldn't pull it off at the end."

"I though we played a very strong 60 minutes and even in overtime and I can't fault our effort," added head coach Phil Housley. "We attacked the game. It's going to be tight like this throughout the rest of the season. It was tight and I thought we felt really comfortable. We had opportunities to get up by two and didn't capitalize but we played strong throughout the 60 some minutes."

Scandella opened the scoring in the first, burying a rebound off a shot from Jeff Skinner to give the Sabres a 1-0 lead.

Tied at one in the second, this time it was special teams and the hard work of Johan Larson, who netted a short handed goal to put the Sabres up 2-1 after two period.

Buffalo has now four of its last five games but will have an opportunity to end 2018 on a high note when they host the Islander on New Year's Eve.

Sabres turn the page, look ahead to matchup with Islanders

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 30, 2018

With another key Eastern Conference matchup awaiting them on Monday, the Sabres came to work at Harborcenter Sunday morning and put their overtime loss to Boston in the rearview mirror.

It's been mentioned as a point of emphasis throughout this season, the importance of staying even keel through the highs and lows of an 82-game season. Alternate captain Zach Bogosian said they kept that same mentality after letting a one-goal lead slip away late against the Bruins.

"I think the guys' spirits were up," Bogosian said. "Obviously we're not happy with the result last night but that being said, we can't get better today worrying about yesterday. We've got to make sure we're pushing forward. Today's a brand-new day. We're looking forward for tomorrow."

The Sabres close out 2018 with a home game against the New York Islanders, who have won six of their last seven games following a 4-0 shutout victory in Toronto on Saturday. Their recent run puts them a point out of a playoff spot, four back from the Sabres.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he was happy with his team's overall performance in the loss on Monday, which turned on kneeling penalty assessed to Rasmus Ristolainen with 3:43 remaining in regulation. Boston tied the game on the ensuing power play and went on to win in overtime.

"I don't think there's a big concern," Housley said. "I think we played a heck of a game last game. It's just, you know, continuing to fight on. We've got a tough test tomorrow against the Islanders, playing pretty good hockey. They're well-balanced throughout their lineup. We're going to have to have another solid effort."

Tickets to Monday vs. New York Islanders

The Sabres benefitted from secondary scoring against the Bruins, with Johan Larsson and Marco Scandella contributing goals. Housley continued to tweak his forward lines on Sunday in an effort to get others going, swapping Kyle Okposo and Evan Rodrigues' places in the lineup. Rodrigues joined a line with Conor Sheary and Vladimir Sobotka while Okposo skated with Remi Elie and Johan Larsson.

Larsson's simple, consistent game has helped elevate the play of his linemates this season, with Rodrigues being the most recent benefactor in a four shot, one assist performance on Sunday. Housley expressed hope that the move could help Okposo, mired in a 21-game goal scoring drought, get back to basics.

"I wouldn't read in too much about the lines," Housley said. "We're just trying to create more balance and I think Larry's played terrific hockey. We just want him to get back and focus on his power forward game, going to the net hard, having guys hanging on his back, and when he does that he's really effective.

"... I really liked their line in practice. They were just going to the net hard and creating. Hopefully that will transfer into tomorrow."

Jack Eichel took a maintenance day Sunday but is expected to be in the lineup against New York. Scott Wilson, rehabbing his way back from early-season ankle surgery, filled in between Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart in Eichel's absence.

Linus Ullmark returned to the ice after an illness kept him from dressing for Saturday's game. Scott Wedgewood was assigned to Rochester following practice.

Here's how the Sabres lined up in full on Sunday:

53 Jeff Skinner - 20 Scott Wilson* - 23 Sam Reinhart
43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 71 Evan Rodrigues
72 Tage Thompson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 29 Jason Pominville

81 Rem Elie - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 4 Zach Bogosian

6 Marco Scandella - 26 Rasmus Dahlin

48 Matt Hunwick - 24 Lawrence Pilut

40 Carter Hutton

35 Linus Ullmark

31 Scott Wedgewood

Late penalty paves way for OT loss to Bruins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 29, 2018

In an important game against a division rival, the Sabres had answered the bell for nearly 60 minutes in their game against the Boston Bruins at KeyBank Center on Saturday night.

It went awry with the blow of a whistle.

Rasmus Ristolainen was called for kneeing Bruins forward David Pastrnak in the corner, giving Boston a power play with 3:43 remaining in regulation. Jake DeBrusk tipped a shot past Carter Hutton to tie the game with the extra man and Sean Kuraly scored with 1:16 left in overtime to give the Bruins a 3-2 win.

Despite the sting of a close loss, defenseman Marco Scandella spoke with a different tone than he had following the team's game in St. Louis on Thursday, a performance he said wasn't up to their standard.

"Completely different game," Scandella said. "That St. Louis game wasn't our game, wasn't our identity. Tonight we responded well, full crowd, but still it's not good enough and we've got to get the win at home."

Scandella tallied a goal and assist for his 10th-career multi-point game. It was his marker that opened the scoring at 4:40 in the first period, when the defenseman pounced on a rebound in the crease after Tuukka Rask stopped a backhand attempt from Jeff Skinner on the rush.

Noel Acciari tied the game for the Bruins later in the first period, but the Sabres regained the lead on a shorthanded goal from Johan Larsson with Jack Eichel serving a double minor for high-sticking. It was the continuation of a dominant stretch for the Buffalo penalty kill, which entered the game on its best 10-game stretch since 2011 (27-for-28).

Larsson buried the 2-on-1 feed from Evan Rodrigues at 5:43 in the second period. They pushed for a third goal for the next 30-plus minutes, to no avail.

The chances were there. Rask's 26-save night included a glove save to rob Remi Elie on a 2-on-1 rush in the second period and a point-blank stop on a tip from Elie in the third. Jason Pominville saw a deflection drift inches wide of the net.

Hutton made 39 saves for Sabres, including 17 stops in the third period. They felt they controlled the quality of chances against in those final 20 minutes despite the high volume of shots.

"I can't fault our effort and the way we played tonight," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "If we continue to play like that, we're going to be on the right side of things."

Tickets for Monday vs. New York Islanders

The call against Ristolainen, which came on a knee-to-knee collision with Pastrnak in the corner, was preceded by a no-call on a play in which Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara had an arm wrapped around Conor Sheary along the boards.

DeBrusk tied the game with a tip of a shot from the point by Torey Krug, the only blemish on an otherwise stellar night from the Sabres' penalty kill.

"Yeah, that was a pretty tough call at the end," Rodrigues said. "They were kind of letting things go, I thought, from the last half of the third. It's a tough call and nice tip-in. That's one that got away from us. But at the same time, if we keep playing like that, we'll win some games."

Housley declined to comment on the officiating.

"I don't really want to get into that," he said. "We just try to control what we can control. There's going to be calls for us and there's going to be calls against us that we're not going to agree on. That's what the game gives you. You have to still stay focus on the task at hand and focus on your next shift."

The Sabres had a chance to win the game on their own power play overtime, but generated just one shot on goal. Kuraly buried his own rebound on the rush for the winner.

The Sabres' lead over the Bruins for third place in the Atlantic Division is down to two points, with the teams set to meet for their season finale in Boston next Saturday. The Sabres will play two games at home in the meantime, against the Islanders on Monday and the Panthers on Thursday.

They'll look to rebound from one that got away.

"It's unfortunate we took a penalty at the end," Scandella said. "I thought we played a great game collectively. It's too bad that we lost this one. We should've won."

Up next

The Sabres host the New York Islanders on New Year's Eve. Coverage on Monday 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.

Pominville, Beaulieu to return for matchup with Bruins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 29, 2018

Jason Pominville and Nathan Beaulieu will be back in the lineup for the Sabres when they host the Atlantic Division rival Boston Bruins at KeyBank Center on Saturday night. Pominville and Beaulieu are returning from absences of three and five games, respectively.

Pominville will step in for Zemgus Girgenson, who coach Phil Housley announced is week-to-week with an upper-body injury. Rookie defenseman Lawrence Pilut will be scratched to make room in the lineup for Beaulieu.

Girgenson has spent most of his minutes this season playing a key role on a checking line alongside Johan Larsson, which Housley has often utilized in defensive-zone matchups against opponents' top forwards. He leads all Sabres forwards with a 51.45 Corsi-for percentage in 35 games.

Remi Elie is expected to move to a line alongside Larsson and Evan Rodrigues in his absence.

"Zemgus has done a terrific job," Housley said. "I think with Larsson and him together, they have a unique chemistry, and whoever we put down there with them, they're almost like a fix-it, so to speak. I just like the tenacity.

"They're very reliable, trustworthy, taken a lot of D-zone starts, killing penalties, blocking shots, doing all the things you don't see in the paper but they're really important to our team."

Tickets for tonight

Beaulieu sustained an upper-body injury early in the team's game in Washington on Dec. 15. He's been practicing since before the Christmas break but had to wait his turn in a crowded eight-man defense corps. He's tallied six points (3+3) in 23 games this season.

"We got some fresh bodies in here that want to get an opportunity," Housley said. "Lawrence has played very well. I think last game wasn't his best game."

Carter Hutton will start in net for the Sabres. Scott Wedgewood was recalled from Rochester to serve as backup with Linus Ullmark feeling under the weather.

Rick Jeanneret and Rob Ray will have the call on MSG-B, with coverage beginning at 6:30 p.m. You can also listen to the game live on WGR 550.

Have tickets for tonight? Come down early to catch the Buffalo Beauts hosting the Minnesota Whitecaps at KeyBank Center at 2 p.m. Admission to that game is free with tickets to tonight's Sabres game.

Tonight's matchup

The Sabres and Bruins will conclude their season series with a pair of games this week, with the two teams set to meet again in Boston next Saturday. In both instances, the stakes will be high - the Sabres currently hold a three-point lead on the Bruins for third place in the Atlantic Division.

"These are huge games," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "You're talking about a four-point swing, so it's very crucial for us to get off to a good start."

Pominville and Kyle Okposo spoke Friday about the difficulty of the road ahead for the Sabres, many of whom are finding themselves in the thick of their first playoff race as the second half nears. The upcoming week also features matchups against the Islanders and Panthers, both of whom are pushing to climb into playoff spots in the Eastern Conference.

"The guys have done a really good job of knowing the situation," Housley said. "Obviously, we know it's a big game tonight. We're going to control what we're going to control, and that's play. It's great that we're in a

position that we're in, playing some really meaningful games at this point in the season. I think the guys will embrace this."

The Bruins will be without forward Brad Marchand and defenseman Charlie McAvoy coming off losses in their last two games against Carolina and New Jersey. Tuukka Rask will start in net.

The Sabres beat the Bruins in their last meeting, a 4-2 victory in Boston on Dec. 16. Jack Eichel tallied a season-high four points in that game.

"I think we played a full 60 minutes against these guys last time," McCabe said. "It's going to be a tough game. There's going to be waves and they've got a lot of fire power over there, so we have to limit their opportunities, keep them off the power play as much as possible and just kind of stick to our game plan."

Projected lineup*

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 21 Kyle Okposo

72 Tage Thompson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 29 Jason Pominville

81 Remi Elie - 22 Johan Larsson - 71 Evan Rodrigues

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6 Marco Scandella - 26 Rasmus Dahlin

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 4 Zach Bogosian

40 Carter Hutton

31 Scott Wedgewood

*Based on Friday's practice and subject to change