



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Jeff Skinner expects emotional day with NHL All-Star vote, return to Carolina

By Jason Wolf
The Buffalo News
January 10, 2019

Jeff Skinner returns to his old stomping grounds for the first time since being traded this offseason when the Buffalo Sabres visit the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday, and 9-year-old Chase Bass will be there to greet his favorite player.

Bass, the little boy with a rare blood cancer who played street hockey with Skinner two years ago, thanks to the efforts of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, plans to wear his old 'Canes jersey and a new Sabres cap, ready to toss it on the ice when Skinner records a hat trick.

"He says, 'Mom, he has to beat Alex Ovechkin. He needs to be the No. 1 goal scorer in the NHL because he's got to go to the All-Stars,'" Tonya Bass said Thursday, counting 28 friends and family, plus one of her son's doctors, who will be on hand for the game.

Skinner, who was second in the NHL with 29 goals, one behind Washington's Ovechkin heading into Thursday night's games, will know if he has been named an All-Star for the first time since his rookie season before the Sabres take the ice against the Hurricanes at PNC Arena. Results of the "Last Men In" fan voting are expected to be announced Friday afternoon, but Skinner may have trouble beating out Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly in a popularity contest to receive the final nod in the Atlantic Division.

Skinner was among the worthy players snubbed on the initial All-Star Game roster, a product of the game's three-on-three divisional format. Only 11 players are named to each All-Star team, and every team in the NHL must be represented. Jack Eichel was named an All-Star for the Sabres.

Skinner said returning to Carolina as an All-Star "doesn't really matter," certainly not as much as the Sabres winning the game.

"It's not just another game," Skinner said after practice Thursday. "Technically, it's another game on a schedule. It's worth the same amount of points. But obviously, personally, I spent a lot of time there, made a lot of good friendships with people in that organization and the first time going back as a visiting team player, I think it's going to be – I don't know – I don't really know what to expect.

"I think it'll be fun, though."

Skinner, 26, spent his first eight seasons with Carolina after being drafted with the seventh overall pick in 2010. He was named the youngest All-Star in NHL history as a rookie, when he was just 18 years old, but Carolina never made the playoffs during his time there. He leads the league with 622 career games without a playoff appearance.

Skinner had one season remaining on his contract, but the 'Canes weren't interested in signing him to a long-term extension. He waived his no-move clause in August, approving a trade to the Sabres for prospect Cliff Pu and draft picks.

Skinner has been a revelation in Buffalo, amassing 29 goals and 42 points in 43 games, thriving on the team's top line.

He's on pace to obliterate his career high 37 goals scored during the 2016-17 season, when he played street hockey with Chase Bass and several Carolina teammates in the arena parking lot.

Skinner remains scheduled to become a free agent this offseason, barring an extension.

Eichel, who appears likely to return from a three-game injury absence to play alongside Skinner against the Hurricanes, said he hopes his first-year teammate gets to join him in the All-Star Game.

"Oh, it'd be awesome. Obviously, we've been pushing as an organization to try and get him in there," Eichel said, referring to the Sabres' social media campaign. "I mean, 29 goals, however many game-winners he's had, he's having a heck of a season. So it would be a great experience to be able to do it with him and I'm really hoping that he gets a shot."

Skinner acknowledged he keeps an eye on Carolina, which was on a five-game winning streak heading into Thursday night's game at league-leading Tampa.

"Obviously, I've got a cluster of friends on that team, so I'm aware of sort of how they're doing," Skinner said. "I don't follow it super, super closely, because I have a lot of other stuff to worry about, but I definitely keep tabs on the guys there."

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he expects Skinner to have a tough time in his first trip back to Raleigh.

"You can prepare all you want for it," Housley said, "but until you get there and you get on the ice and you're facing your ex-teammates, it gets a little emotional and he's going to have to manage that. Obviously, he's had some really good years there. He started his career there. We know the importance of this game for him, so we're going to try to do everything possible to try to help him through it."

"But at the same time, it can be an exciting time. He's done a terrific job as a good teammate here, contributing offensively, doing everything that we've asked of him. We're going to give him the full support he needs going into Carolina."

Skinner isn't sure what to expect.

"I don't know. There will definitely be some emotions, I think," Skinner said. "But it's just sort of part of the game, part of life. I think you just have to find a way to sort of channel it, I guess, and use some of it to your advantage. And other than that, just sort of focus on the game, because we've got a big job in front of us."

Sabres' Jack Eichel gets in full practice, says 'I feel 100 percent'

By Jason Wolf
The Buffalo News
January 10, 2019

Jack Eichel was on the ice for the start of practice Thursday morning at HarborCenter and appears poised to return from a three-game injury absence to center the Buffalo Sabres' top line against the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday in Raleigh, N.C.

"I felt good today," Eichel said. "I feel 100 percent, so I'm just excited for the game (Friday)."

But Sabres coach Phil Housley, who said he liked what he saw from Eichel at practice, wouldn't commit to the captain's return to game action.

"I thought he did quite well," Housley said. "It was a pretty high-tempo, little bump-and-grind practice and it was good to see him out there. I thought he did a good job today."

"I wouldn't declare him in the lineup. Obviously, we wanted to see how he reacted to practice and we'll know more (Friday)."

Eichel, who has been sidelined by an "upper body" injury, skated alongside Jeff Skinner and Tage Thompson during his first full practice since late December.

Eichel said he was eager to play on the same line as Thompson, who Housley has moved to the top line in place of Sam Reinhart in an effort to create balance.

"He's been playing well," Eichel said of Thompson, "so we'll just try to build chemistry as quick as possible."

Reinhart skated on the second line Thursday, alongside center Vladimir Sobotka and left wing Conor Sheary.

"I just thought Tage has been playing very good hockey the last 10 games, particularly the last five," Housley said. "He's creating a lot of offense, he's using his speed, he's using his shot, he's been reliable defensively and just put him up there with Jack to just get some balance."

Eichel's injury surfaced when he took a maintenance day from practice on Dec. 30. He skated just four shifts in a home loss to the New York Islanders on New Year's Eve before leaving the game.

The Sabres have won two of the three games Eichel has missed, using Evan Rodrigues, Casey Mittelstadt and Sobotka to center the top line in his absence.

Eichel was a limited participant in the team's practice on Monday but didn't play in the Sabres' 5-1 victory against the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday night.

C.J. Smith, who scored his first NHL goal during the team's five-goal second period, remains a candidate to be sent to Rochester upon Eichel's return.

But Housley said Smith will accompany the team to Carolina.

Smith and Remi Elie skated as extras Thursday.

"Obviously, it's big for our group and the confidence," Eichel said about the Sabres' eruption in the second period, when five different players scored against the Devils. "There was a bit of maybe lack of scoring there going on for a while for a lot of us, so it's good to see it get spread around. I don't think anybody had more than one point. There were so many different guys contributing and it's good to see. I think we can build off that and take it into (Friday) night."

Sabres' Skinner looks forward to his return to Carolina

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 10, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Jeff Skinner will play his first game in Carolina on Friday after being traded to the Sabres. Skinner played eight years with the Hurricanes, but he said he really didn't have this date circled on his calendar, "I knew when it was, so obviously it's my first time back there and I spent a lot of time there, so it should be fun."

Carolina's new owner had no interest in paying Skinner, so when players aren't wanted somewhere, it often means more, "It's not just another game, I mean it's another game on the schedule and it's worth the same amount of points, but I spent a lot of time there, I made a lot of good friendships with people in the organization, so I really don't know what to expect, but it should be fun."

Skinner has never walked into that arena and headed to the visitors room. He thinks it'll be weird to start with, "Yes probably, muscle memory going into that building I always turned the same way and do the same things, so it'll be different, but after the first couple of shifts, I'll be back into playing the game."

Skinner has a lot of friends that still play for Carolina, so he said he keeps track of how the team is doing, "Yes, I sort of watch the whole league and keep tabs on friends on other teams, obviously I have a cluster of friends on that team, so I'm aware of how they're doing, but I don't follow them super closely because I have a lot of other stuff to do."

Skinner had Jack Eichel back as his center for practice on Thursday, but Tage Thompson was their right winger. Phil Housley said, "I just thought Tage had been playing very good hockey in the last 10 games, particularly in the last five. He's creating a lot of offense, he's using his speed, he's using his shot, he's been reliable defensively, so I put him up there with Jack to get some balance."

Other lines on Thursday were:

Sheary - Sobotka - Reinhart

Rodrigues - Larsson - Okposo

Girgensons - Mittelstadt - Pominville

Smith, Elie

Pilut - Ristolainen

Dahlin - Bogosian

Scandella - McCabe

Beaulieu - Hunwick

After practice, Eichel said he's back to 100-percent. Housley said C.J. Smith will make the trip.

Does Botterill have to make a trade?

WGR 550

January 10, 2019

By this time last season, I was well into trying to figure out how Buffalo Sabres general manager Jason Botterill might best see fit to try and fix his hockey team. Underproducing veterans with bloated contracts and youth still waiting to blossom made for not many options. I concluded pretty early on that the only move that made sense was to trade Ryan O'Reilly. This, of course, eventually happened, changing the team dramatically on the ice, altering the leadership structure within the locker room and freeing up salary cap space.

Of course, along the way to the 2018-19 season, the Sabres finally had the lottery balls blow their way and landed a franchise altering defenseman in Rasmus Dahlin. So here the Sabres sit in early January. They rode an improbable 10-game winning streak to land there and have predictably come back to the pack after flirting with the top spot in the entire league for a few days.

So what now, Jason Botterill? Is there a move to make? Does this Sabres team warrant a bold move to try and solidify it's chances of either making the playoffs or actually doing something should they end up making it?

Anyone following the team can plainly see a couple of things. Most nights it's challenging to find scoring beyond the top line and there is great reason for optimism that the ultimate answer to that is already on the roster in Buffalo. Casey Mittelstadt is the most obvious player to be referenced here, probably followed by Tage Thompson. At least as far as the young guys go. Maybe veterans like Conor Sheary or Kyle Okposo will start producing more and fill the secondary scoring void. I don't know if that will happen. If it does, great, but I don't think you should count on it.

Rochester isn't overflowing with options right now either. Eventually, maybe even later this winter, Alex Nylander or Victor Olofsson could warrant a look, but neither player is busy making a case that the Sabres better make room because they're breaking down the door.

So Botterill's options appear to be as follows...

Do nothing. It's obviously not exciting, but is actually pretty reasonable. Don't get tricked into thinking you're better than you are because you won a bunch of overtime and shootout games in a row. You're solidly in the mix and it's possible that players like Mittelstadt and Thompson may produce more regularly in the second half of the season. Of course, it's also possible they hit some kind of rookie wall and fall off a cliff, so...

Trade for a rental piece to help secondary scoring and try to make the playoffs because it's been so long and the fans deserve it. This is a terrible idea, and I neither think it likely, nor would I be in favor of it.

Trade for a moderately priced immediate upgrade that is under contract beyond this season in an effort to give your team a boost. Charlie Coyle has been my favorite name for this. He's under contract through 2020 for a cap hit of \$3.2 million. He's not great, but he is a 26-year-old versatile forward. I wouldn't think the asking price would be massive, so you shouldn't have to sacrifice too much of your future and you'd at least have the player here beyond this season.

Make a massive trade. Matt Larkin of The Hockey News dropped a piece on Tuesday including the Sabres as one of five teams that made sense as a landing spot for Vladimir Tarasenko of the St. Louis Blues. Yowza! That's a whopper of a trade. Multiple first round picks and top-end prospects are in that trade if it ever gets made. Tarasenko is under contract for four more seasons with a cap hit of \$7.5 million. He just turned 27 and is a consistent 30-40-goal scorer.

My first thought is you probably have a hard time making this trade without including Casey Mittelstadt, and I don't really want to go any farther. I'm not trading Mittelstadt. If there's a way to make a trade for a player like Tarasenko by packaging up other prospects and picks, I'm all ears. I'm not sure I would do it then, but I would at least consider it

Mittelstadt is 20-years-old. He's super talented, and I believe he is going to eventually be the perfect compliment to Jack Eichel. His second contract, which will come along after next season, shouldn't break the bank. He's not going anywhere in my book, and I'd bet heavily on Botterill feeling likewise.

So I guess option No. 3, the moderately priced trade, is my pick. It's not super, hot but you know what? Botterill has been digging out of the super hot moves Tim Murray made since he got here. I'm alright with some patience. I think the talent is here already and just needs some time to develop.

Here's to patience.

Sabres' Jeff Skinner ready for first meeting against Hurricanes

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 10, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres winger Jeff Skinner knows returning to Carolina, where he became the face of the Hurricanes over eight seasons, will have special meaning.

Skinner, 26, was a star from the get-go in Raleigh, scoring 31 goals and winning the Calder Trophy as a rookie in 2010-11. He surpassed the 30-goal mark two other times.

During some lean seasons, Skinner, who has already scored 29 goals in 43 games, was usually the Hurricanes' most popular and exciting player.

So when reporters asked Skinner about facing his old team for the first time Friday, he refused to downplay the meeting.

"It's not just another game," Skinner said Thursday inside KeyBank Center. "Technically, it's another game on the schedule, it's worth the same amount of points. But personally, I've spent a lot of time there and made a lot of friendships with people in that organization.

"First time I've been back as a visiting team player, I think it's going to be ... I don't know. I don't really know what to expect. I think it will be fun."

He added: "There will definitely be some emotions, I think. But it's just sort of part of life. I think you have to find a way to sort of channel it, I guess, and use some of it to your advantage."

While the Hurricanes had won five straight games entering Thursday's tilt in Tampa Bay, they've missed Skinner badly. They stood fifth in the Metropolitan Division.

The Hurricanes annually ranked among the NHL's bottom-feeders with Skinner. They haven't made the playoffs since 2009, the only active drought longer than Buffalo's.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill fleeced counterpart Don Waddell on Aug. 2, sending forward prospect Cliff Pu and three draft picks to the Hurricanes for Skinner, who has formed an electrifying duo beside center Jack Eichel.

"It's been cool," Skinner said of joining a new team. "For me, coming to Buffalo, it's been a new experience – a new fan base, new teammates, a new organization. Everyone's made me feel real comfortable from the beginning and it's continued. It's a good feeling."

Right now, the Hurricanes look downright foolish for trading the NHL's second-leading goal scorer. Their top scorer, winger Sebastian Aho, had 16 goals entering Thursday. Their offense ranked 28th overall.

Last month, in an interview with Triangle Business Journal of Raleigh, owner Tom Dundon said the Hurricanes were looking for a "sniper."

Hmm, they had one not too long ago.

Skinner, an unrestricted free agent following the season, has been an electrifying presence. He has scored 23 even-strength goals and seven game-winners, both league highs. Washington Capitals superstar Alexander Ovechkin is the league's overall goal leader with 32.

At his current pace, Skinner would score 55 times over 82 games. Only four Sabres – Rick Martin, Danny Gare, Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny – have hit the prestigious 50-goal mark. No one has done it since LaFontaine and Mogilny in 1992-93.

A goal Friday would make Skinner the Sabres' first 30-goal scorer since teammate Jason Pominville in 2011-12.

Hitting that mark is always special. To do it against your old team would probably make it extra sweet.

Housley spent the first eight seasons of his Hall of Fame career with the Sabres before moving to the Winnipeg Jets. He understands how difficult a homecoming can be.

"You can prepare all you want for it, but until you get there and you get on the ice and you're facing your ex-teammates, it gets a little emotional," Housley said. "He's going to have to manage that. Obviously, he's had some really good years there. ...

"We know the importance of this game for him, so we're going to try to do everything possible for him to help him through it. But at the same time, it can be an exciting time. He's done a terrific job, is a good teammate here, contributing offensively, doing everything that we asked of him."

Sabres' Jack Eichel close to playing

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 10, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres center Jack Eichel practiced this morning in his regular spot beside winger Jeff Skinner, a sign the NHL All-Star is ready to return from his upper-body injury.

"He did quite well, a pretty high-tempo, bump-and-grind practice," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "It's good to see him out there."

So, will the captain return for Friday's road tilt against the Carolina Hurricanes following a three-game absence?

"I wouldn't declare him in the lineup," Housley said. "Obviously, we wanted to see how he reacted to the practice and we'll know more tomorrow."

Still, Eichel will likely play his first game since Dec. 31.

"I'm back to 100 percent, so I'm just excited for the game tomorrow," Eichel said.

Eichel and Skinner had a new linemate inside HarborCenter, Tage Thompson. Sam Reinhart, their regular right wing, practiced beside center Vladimir Sobotka and Conor Sheary.

"Tage has been playing very good hockey the last 10 games, particularly the last five," Housley said. "He's creating a lot of offense, he's using his speed, he's using his shot, he's been reliable defensively. I just put him up with Jack to get some balance."

Jeff Skinner returns to Carolina Friday night

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

January 10, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Sabres captain Jack Eichel went through practice with his teammates Thursday morning at Harborcenter and seemed to pronounce himself ready to go for Friday's game at Carolina.

"I felt good today, back to 100 percent. I'm excited for the game tomorrow," Eichel said.

However, head coach Phil Housley wouldn't commit to Eichel returning to the lineup for the Carolina game.

"I wouldn't declare him in the lineup," said Housley. "Obviously we'll see how he reacted to practice and we'll know more tomorrow."

The Sabres are at Carolina Friday night and home against Tampa Bay Saturday night. The Hurricanes and Lightning are two of the NHL's hottest teams. Tampa leads the NHL with 68 points. The Hurricanes have won five straight and play at Tampa Thursday night.

Sabres forward Jeff Skinner spent the first eight seasons of his career with the Hurricanes.

"There will be definitely be some emotions but its just part of the game part of life," Skinner said. "I think you just have to find a way to sort of channel it, I guess, and use some of it to your advantage, and other than that just focus on the game because we have a big job in front of us."

Housley, who spent the first part of his career with the Sabres before moving on has an idea what it might be like for Skinner as he returns to Carolina for the first time.

"You can prepare all you want for it but until you get there and you get on the ice facing your ex-teammates it gets a little emotional," Housley said. "He's going to have to manage that. We know the importance of this game for him so we're going to try to do everything possible to help him through it."

So far, Eichel is the Sabres' only All-Star. Skinner is part of the NHL's Last Man In vote, where fans choose the player they want to see in the game.

Voting ends Thursday night at 11:59 pm. Skinner is second to Alex Ovechkin in goals with 29.

Friday's game in Carolina is a 7:30 face-off.

Eichel Eyes Return

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

January 10, 2019

The Sabres didn't sink without star center Jack Eichel, who in his recovery from an upper body injury was bolstered to see his teammates win two out of three without him.

"It's huge for our group. It's a tight race right now. You try not to look at the standings every day, but it seems like teams in the Atlantic win every night," said the Sabres captain, who has missed three games. "For us, it's about controlling what we can control. That's our own group, putting a good effort on the ice every night. The guys did it the last few nights.

"It's good to see guys get rewarded in a big win the other night. A lot of guys contributing."

Even though Head Coach Phil Housley won't say it, Eichel says he's fully recovered.

"I felt good today. Excited for the game tomorrow."

The Sabres scored five goals in their last game without Eichel, and it should be fun to see if they can keep the offense up upon his return.

Skinner to play against Hurricanes for first time with Sabres

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

January 10, 2019

BUFFALO -- Jeff Skinner doesn't know what to expect.

The Buffalo Sabres forward will play against his former team, the Carolina Hurricanes, for the first time at PNC Arena in Raleigh, North Carolina on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET, NHLN, FS-CR, MSG-B, NHL.TV).

Skinner, who played his first eight NHL seasons for Carolina before being traded to Buffalo for forward Cliff Pu and three draft picks Aug. 2, said he thinks the game will be fun but may not be that easy.

"There'll definitely be some emotions, but it's just part of the game, part of life," Skinner said. "You just have to find a way to channel it and use some of it to your advantage. Other than that, just focus on the game because we've got a big job in front of us."

Sabres coach Phil Housley has been in Skinner's skates. Housley played his first nine NHL seasons for Buffalo before playing his first game against them for the Winnipeg Jets on Jan. 4, 1991.

"You can prepare all you want for it, but until you get there and you get on the ice and you're facing your ex-teammates, it gets a little emotional," Housley said. "He's going to have to manage that."

"We know the importance of this game for him, so we're going to try to do everything possible for him to help him through it. But at the same time, it can be an exciting time. He's done a terrific job, is a good teammate here, contributing offensively, doing everything that we asked of him. We're going to give him the full support he needs going into Carolina."

Skinner, selected by the Hurricanes with the No. 7 pick in the 2010 NHL Draft, said he didn't know what to expect when he was traded to the Sabres.

Everyone's been "super welcoming," he said. "It's been fun so far."

It's been a seamless fit, playing most of the season on Jack Eichel's left wing. Skinner leads the Sabres with 29 goals, tied for second in the NHL with Toronto Maple Leafs forward John Tavares, three behind Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin, and is second on Buffalo with 42 points (Eichel has 49).

Skinner is on pace for 55 goals and 80 points, which would surpass his previous NHL highs (37 goals in 2016-17 and 63 points in 2010-11 and 2016-17).

"When you get to play with a guy that talented and that skilled, he makes the game a little bit easier for his linemates," Skinner said of Eichel. "The first thing when you play with any new linemate is you try to build chemistry and communicate. When you play with a guy like that, sometimes that process gets accelerated because he's so smart and he's able to adapt so quickly."

"Getting to be around a guy like that every day and see what he does in practice and every game, it's pretty fun to watch."

Jason Pominville also knows what Skinner is going through. After playing 578 NHL games for the Sabres, he returned to Buffalo and scored for the Minnesota Wild on Oct. 14, 2013. Traded back to the Sabres before last season, he had an assist against the Wild on Nov. 22, 2017.

"Embrace the moment, enjoy it," Pominville said. "He'll prepare the same way he usually does. He'll get some chirps here and there, guys will be all over him [Friday]; actually, it started [Thursday], but it's fun. Guys like it, appreciate it. Once it's over with, you can move on, but that first game is always pretty special."

Sabres' Skinner makes initial return to Carolina

Yahoo! Sports

January 10, 2019

Left winger Jeff Skinner has skated many times at PNC Arena.

Never has he been on the visiting team.

That changes Friday night when the Buffalo Sabres bring Skinner along for the matchup with the host Carolina Hurricanes.

Skinner, 26, played the first eight years of his NHL career with the Hurricanes until an offseason trade sent him to Buffalo last summer. He has been one of the NHL's top offensive players this season.

He was the Rookie of the Year in 2010-11, when he racked up 31 goals. He reached the 30-goal mark two other times with Carolina (33 in 2013-14, and 37 in 2016-17) before notching 24 goals last season.

Skinner is tied for second in the NHL with 29 goals, trailing only Washington's Alex Ovechkin. He's on pace to collect the third-most goals in a season in Sabres history.

"Jeff Skinner has obviously been a big, big contributor for us, has put us in this position," Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

Skinner's line could include center Jack Eichel and right winger Tage Thompson. Eichel hasn't played since New Year's Eve, but he could be ready to return to action, based on Thursday's practice session.

The Hurricanes had been on a roll with a season-best five-game winning streak until Thursday night's 3-1 setback at Tampa Bay, where they concluded a three-game road trip.

Carolina led 1-0 until the final nine minutes, so it was a frustrating finish.

The Hurricanes return to home ice with youngsters playing increased roles, particularly among forwards as veteran Jordan Staal remains out of the lineup.

"They're learning on the fly and putting them in some situations," coach Rod Brind'Amour said of the relative newcomers. "I don't think they lose confidence. If anything, I think it's the opposite. They gain confidence because they are getting shifts out there."

Forward Micheal Ferland said the recent stretch has been good for the Hurricanes.

"We wanted to get something going," Ferland said. "I think we put ourselves in a good spot to create momentum for ourselves."

Hurricanes captain Justin Williams has 300 career goals after his second-period tally Thursday night. He has scored in four of the past five games.

The Hurricanes are likely to go with Curtis McElhinney as the goalie after using Petr Mrazek on Thursday night.

Buffalo has won three games in a row.

Sabres rookies C.J. Smith and Lawrence Pilut, a defenseman, scored their first NHL goals in Tuesday night's 5-1 victory against the New Jersey Devils.

"It was really kind an indescribable moment more than anything," Smith said. "You work your whole life to get to the NHL and you get that first one, it's pretty exciting."

Housley said he likes to see the mixture of goals from several sources.

"There are going to be guys that contribute offensively when you win," he said. "It doesn't matter who it is on our team. I think that's going to help their confidence as we move forward."

This is the first of three meetings this season. Buffalo returns to Raleigh in mid-March.

Friday's game is also part of a back-to-back for the Sabres, who will be home Saturday against Tampa Bay.