



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues finally breaks through offensively

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 17, 2019

VANCOUVER — Evan Rodrigues has finally relaxed a little bit.

That was not easy to do for much of this season. The Buffalo Sabres forward did not have a goal through the first 15 games and had only two through 39 games.

Rodrigues was using his speed to earn scoring chances, but puck luck was not on his side. Through it all, the 25-year-old expressed confidence his fortunes would take a turn for the better.

Rodrigues has since proven himself right, recording two goals among four points in his past five games. He's scored in consecutive games, including a breakaway goal in the Sabres' 4-3 overtime win over the Calgary Flames on Wednesday night in the Saddledome.

"When they finally start to go in you start to get some confidence," Rodrigues said following practice Thursday in Rogers Arena. "You start feeling a little bit better about yourself. At the same time, when they weren't going in I was still getting my chances, so I wasn't really down on myself."

Rodrigues still has four goals among 15 points with a minus-6 rating in 41 games, falling short of his own expectations for this season. This was supposed to be the year he began making more of an impact offensively.

He certainly has the talent to do that. While skating on Jack Eichel's line, Rodrigues had 21 goals among 61 points in 41 games as a Boston University senior in 2014-15. That would earn Rodrigues a contract with the Sabres, and the team drafted Eichel second overall shortly thereafter.

Rodrigues has since struggled to score in the NHL. He has 23 goals among 70 points in 128 career games for Rochester, however, he has only 16 goals in 121 NHL games. That includes seven goals in 48 games with Buffalo last season, a performance that left Rodrigues wanting more.

"I wanted to take my game to the next level and be an impact player in this league," he said. "I think at the beginning of the year I didn't get off to the start I wanted to, obviously. Not getting a goal in the first however many games it was is obviously a little tough for me, but the chances were coming."

When Eichel missed three-plus games with an upper-body injury this month, coach Phil Housley turned to Rodrigues as the top-line center. Though the assignment did not last long, Rodrigues proved capable of playing with Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart.

When Patrik Berglund was acquired as part of the Ryan O'Reilly trade, he was supposed to be a versatile forward who could kill penalties, contribute on the power play when needed and help with secondary scoring.

Rodrigues has provided everything Berglund could not. Rodrigues is a key cog in the Sabres' penalty kill, which ranked ninth in the NHL entering Thursday's games.

"I just see Evan moving his feet," Housley said. "He's been playing the wing, he's been playing center. He's been very versatile. At times he's on the power play. He's playing in all situations. Mainly, I just like — not because he's scoring — positionally he's sound in our own zone. Having defensive awareness, using his speed and attacking offensively. It's great to see him get rewarded."

Rodrigues' reliability on defense is particularly important given the Sabres' struggles. Additionally, his work at center has helped strengthened one of the organization's weaknesses.

There are no NHL-ready centers in Rochester, except for Scott Wilson, who was assigned to the Amerks after clearing waivers. This season was also important for Rodrigues because he is a restricted free agent this summer.

The Sabres will surely want to see more from him offensively before then. His singular focus is consistency. Like most young players, Rodrigues' play has admittedly dipped at times since he debuted with Buffalo in 2015-16.

Experience taught him how to handle that challenge, as well as the mental anguish of a scoring drought.

"Mentally, I was trying to make the hard play instead of the right play," he said. "I relaxed a little bit and gained more confidence. Now I'm starting to play with my head up more, be confident in making those little area passes. Hopefully that will continue to grow and develop throughout the year."

Sabres trade Justin Bailey to Flyers for Taylor Leier

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 17, 2019

VANCOUVER — Justin Bailey's tenure with his hometown Buffalo Sabres came to an end late Thursday night when the former second-round draft pick was traded to the Philadelphia Flyers.

Bailey, a Williamsville native drafted by the Sabres in 2013, was dealt for Taylor Leier, a 24-year-old forward with two goals in 55 career NHL games. Leier had 10 goals among 19 points in 34 games for the Lehigh Valley Phantoms of the AHL and will report to Rochester.

Bailey, meanwhile, receives a change of scenery after he failed to establish himself with the Sabres. The 23-year-old has five goals among eight points in 52 career NHL games. He spent much of his professional career with Rochester, where he had 20 points in 37 games this season.

"He started off slow, obviously, but I think he's playing a lot better, and he's doing a great job penalty-killing," Rochester coach Chris Taylor told The Buffalo News last month. "He's getting in on the forecheck, and he's improving. It's only his fourth year. You have to remember he's still young. He's still getting better every day."

A promising power forward, Bailey played only 49 games last season because of injuries and cleared waivers in October. He was a healthy scratch in the Amerks' second game and never gained traction offensively.

Leier, a fourth-round draft pick in 2012, has 56 goals among 136 points in 226 career AHL games. The 5-11 left wing played 49 games for the Flyers last season, when he had five points and a minus-7 rating.

Sabres' Nathan Beaulieu on reported trade request: 'I just want to play'

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 17, 2019

VANCOUVER — Nathan Beaulieu wants to play for the Buffalo Sabres. If Beaulieu can't break into the lineup, Beaulieu would prefer to go elsewhere.

Following a report that he requested a trade, Beaulieu, a 26-year-old defenseman, told reporters Thursday afternoon in Vancouver that he holds no ill feelings toward the Sabres or his teammates.

However, Beaulieu believes his current role is detrimental to his development. He has played only three of the past 14 games, and coach Phil Housley said it's unlikely Beaulieu will replace Lawrence Pilut in the lineup Friday night against the Canucks at Rogers Arena.

"I believe I'm a leader in this locker room," Beaulieu said. "I've got a lot of close relationships with a lot of guys here. My teammates are my biggest support group. They all support me very well. So does [General Manager Jason Botterill]. It was never about that. I love everyone in this room. I just want to play."

Beaulieu is one of eight healthy defensemen on the Sabres' roster and has been passed by Pilut, a 23-year-old whom the organization signed to an entry-level contract in May. A first-round draft pick of Montreal in 2011, Beaulieu has been in and out of the lineup for much of the season, partly because of an upper-body injury.

He has three goals among seven points while averaging 14 minutes, 46 seconds over 26 games. Following a 5-3 loss to Tampa Bay last Saturday, Beaulieu was inserted back into the lineup Monday in Edmonton, only to be partly responsible for the Oilers' third first-period goal in a 7-2 loss.

Though Marco Scandella also struggled in Edmonton, Beaulieu joined Matt Hunwick as a healthy scratch in Calgary. Shortly before puck drop, Renaud Lavoie of TVA Sports reported Beaulieu had requested a trade from Buffalo.

Beaulieu, who practiced with the team Thursday after not participating in warmups Wednesday night, is a restricted free agent at season's end, and the Sabres are expected to have nine healthy defensemen when Casey Nelson returns from an upper-body injury. Buffalo could also wish to get a closer look at Hunwick, who has been a healthy scratch for 12 straight games and is under contract through next season at a \$2.25 annual cap hit. He has played in only two games this season because of injury.

There's no question Beaulieu would draw interest from around the league. He is a quick, puck-moving defenseman who can also play a physical game. However, the Sabres won't be quick to part with him.

They have struggled with defensive depth in the past, and Housley is not afraid to change his lineup following a win or a loss. Beaulieu, who was acquired from Montreal in June 2017, has 76 points over seven NHL seasons.

"It's a difficult situation," Housley said. "As a coach, you never want to sit out players. It's tough. You base your decisions on a number of things, but we have eight very good defensemen. We've changed winning lineups, we've changed losing lineups. We haven't gotten a lot of results in the last 10 games. In Nate's defense, he's done a great job in the way he approaches practice. He comes to work, he's been professional and staying sharp. ... We'll probably go with the same D core we had last night because of the result, because we haven't gotten a lot of results."

Canucks' Elias Pettersson won't face Rasmus Dahlin, Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 17, 2019

VANCOUVER -- Rasmus Dahlin will likely have to wait until next season to face his top competition for the Calder Trophy.

Vancouver Canucks coach Travis Green told reporters following practice Thursday in Rogers Arena that rookie center Elias Pettersson will not play against the Buffalo Sabres on Friday night.

Pettersson, who leads the Canucks with 22 goals among 42 points, has missed the past four games because of a knee injury. He has resumed skating with his teammates, however, he has yet to participate in a full practice. Neither player scored in their only meeting this season when the Sabres won in a shootout, 4-3, on Nov. 10.

The Sabres (24-17-6) will benefit from not having to face one of the league's dynamic scorers, however, Pettersson's absence robs hockey fans of a matchup between the league's two top rookies.

Dahlin, drafted first overall in June, has a five-game point streak, matching the longest such run by an 18-year-old defenseman in NHL history. Only Aaron Ekblad, Bobby Orr and Sabres coach Phil Housley have accomplished that feat.

"He just stays focused on the task and he's very calm," Housley said of Dahlin following the Sabres' practice Thursday. "For the record, I hope he breaks it tomorrow. He's been playing really good, solid hockey lately, especially these past five games. Contributing in all areas, whether it's in the D zone, making that breakout pass, joining the rush, adding to the rush or leading the rush."

Additionally, Dahlin leads all NHL rookie defensemen and is tied for second among all rookies with 26 points. With his 20th point in his 37th game on Dec. 22 against Anaheim, he became the fourth-fastest 18-year-old defenseman in NHL history to reach the 20-point mark, trailing only Housley (28 games), Bourque (30) and Ekblad (34).

With his 21st assist Monday at Edmonton, Dahlin passed Bourque for sixth-most assists by an 18-year-old defenseman in NHL history.

Through 47 games, Dahlin has five goals and a plus-5 rating while averaging 20 minutes, 37 minutes per game.

"It's awesome," Sabres center Jack Eichel said. "It's great to see him having success, but I don't think any of us are surprised by it. You guys see his talent, his ability on the ice. You don't get to see the type of person he is, the type of guy he is. He's great for our locker room. He's so well-liked in here. He's going to get better every day."

Pettersson, a 20-year-old drafted fifth overall in 2017, became the youngest player in Canucks history to be selected for the NHL All-Star Game. He leads all rookies in goals (22), points (42), power-play goals (6), power-play assists (7), power-play points (13), game-winning goals (7) and shooting percentage (27.8).

Prior to his injury, Pettersson was viewed as the odds-man favorite to win the Calder Trophy, but Dahlin is stating his case with consistent play. They also have somewhat of a rivalry. Pettersson and Dahlin were teammates for Sweden at the World Junior Championships the previous two years, and faced each other in the Swedish Hockey League.

"He does some pretty special things out there," Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian said of Dahlin. "I always joke around and say as his D partner I have the best seat in the house. ... Obviously he's in a class of his own."

Sabres winger Jeff Skinner did not practice with the team Thursday for what Housley called "maintenance" but is expected to play against the Canucks on Friday night. Puck drop is 10 p.m. ET.

Skinner briefly left for the locker room in the first period of the Sabres' 4-3 overtime win Wednesday in Calgary after he went hard into the boards, clutching at his left arm and appearing to be in pain.

Canucks center Bo Horvat is expected to play against the Sabres after suffering an injury during a shootout loss to Edmonton on Thursday night. Horvat has 17 goals among 37 points in 48 games. Vancouver called up Tanner Kero from Utica as a precaution in the event Horvat can't play.

The Sabres trade Justin Bailey to the Flyers

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 18, 2019

Vancouver, BC (WGR 550) - The Sabres made a minor league move to strengthen Rochester. Western New York native Justin Bailey was traded to Philadelphia for forward Taylor Leier.

Bailey possesses elite speed, but his body couldn't keep up with his legs. Bailey had many opportunities in Buffalo, scoring five goals and three assists for eight points in 52 games.

In 196 AHL games, Bailey netted 62 goals and 54 assists for 116 points. This season, the 2013 second round pick had nine goals and 11 assists for 20 points in 37 games.

Leier is one year older than Bailey and was the Flyers' fourth round pick in 2012. His NHL numbers are pretty close to Bailey's, scoring two goals and five assists for seven points in 55 games.

In 226 AHL games, Leier has 56 goals and 80 assists for 136 points. This season with Lehigh Valley, Leier had 10 goals and nine assists for 19 points in 34 games.

Sabres' Beaulieu is about playing, not being traded

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 17, 2019

Vancouver, BC (WGR 550) - Nate Beaulieu has played in 26 of the Sabres' 47 games this season. A few of those games he missed due to injury, but the rest have been healthy scratches.

There was a report on Wednesday that Beaulieu asked to be traded. Talking to him on Thursday, it was clear it's about playing time. He prefers it be in Buffalo, but he just wants to play, "I'm going to make it pretty clear, I just want to play. I'm 26-years-old and I just feel like I'm still developing and I just want to be out there and that's my main message."

Beaulieu has told me many times that he likes Buffalo and he likes being a Sabre. He said that hasn't changed, "The short time I've been here I've really found some lifelong friends and I know these guys love me in here and it's a mutual feeling, so it was never anything about that it's strictly business."

Beaulieu is not quitting and he's not going to give up. He said, "The biggest thing for me is to keep grinding away. I'm proud to be a Buffalo Sabre and my main message is I just want to be out there."

Guys have been there for Beaulieu during this trying time. He said, "The players are my biggest support group, they all support me very well and so does Botts."

Housley can sympathize with Beaulieu. He said, "I understand. It's a difficult situation and as a coach, you never want to sit out players. You base your decisions on a lot of things, but we have eight very good defensemen.

"In Nate's defense, he's done a very good job in the way he approached practice. He's been professional, but we'll probably go with the same D as we had last night because of the result and in Matt Hunwick's defense, I'm trying to work him into the lineup because he's been very, very patient."

Jeff Skinner didn't practice on Friday after hitting the boards hard in Calgary. Housley said, "Jeff was just taking a maintenance day and he should be ready to go tomorrow."

It's looking like the Canucks will, once again, be without rookie sensation Elias Pettersson. Bo Horvat got hurt Wednesday against Edmonton. They don't know for sure on either player, but Horvat is trending towards playing.

Sabres trade Justin Bailey to Flyers for Taylor Leier

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 17, 2019

BUFFALO – Williamsville native Justin Bailey's career in the Sabres organization is over.

The Sabres traded Bailey, a winger with 52 games of NHL experience, to the Philadelphia Flyers for forward Taylor Leier late Thursday.

The 5-foot-11, 180-pound Leier, 23, has compiled two goals and seven assists in 55 games with the Flyers over the last three seasons.

Leier, however, has mostly played in the AHL over the past five years, scoring 56 goals and 136 points in 226 games with the Lehigh Valley Phantoms. The Saskatchewan native has scored 10 goals and 19 points in 34 contests this season.

The Flyers drafted Leier in the fourth round in 2012, 117th overall.

Meanwhile, Bailey's days with the Sabres appeared number when they waived him in training camp and assigned him to the AHL.

After beginning his fourth season with the Rochester Americans, Bailey was quickly a healthy scratch. He rebounded a bit, though, compiling nine goals and 20 points in 37 games this season.

Bailey, 23, has scored five goals and eight points in his NHL career. He has often been a notable scorer in the AHL, compiling 62 goals and 119 points in 196 games.

The Sabres drafted him in the second round in 2013, 52nd overall.

Sabres acquire Taylor Leier in exchange for Justin Bailey

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 17, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Buffalo Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill has made his first move of 2019.

On Thursday, the Sabres acquired Taylor Leier from the Philadelphia Flyers in exchange for forward Justin Bailey.

Leier, 24, has appeared in 55 NHL games and tallied seven points. This year, with the Lehigh Valley Phantoms of the AHL, Leier has 18 points in 33 games.

Bailey, 23, was a second-round draft pick of the Buffalo Sabres in 2013. In 52 games played with the team, the Williamsville native recorded eight points. In 37 games with the Rochester Americans this year, Bailey has nine goals and 11 assists.

Sabres Trade Bailey to Flyers

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

January 17, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Williamsville native Justin Bailey is no longer with his hometown team. Thursday night the Sabres sent Bailey to the Philadelphia Flyers.

In 37 games this season with Rochester Bailey had nine goals and 11 assists for 20 points. Bailey played 12 games with the Sabres during the 2017-18 season and had three goals and one assist.

The Sabres drafted Bailey in the second round of the 2013 NHL entry draft. Bailey had a number of chances with the Sabres but simply wasn't productive enough to stay with the big club.

In exchange for the 23-year-old Bailey the Sabres get forward Taylor Leier. Leier, 24, has 10 goals and nine assists in the AHL this season and had five points with the Flyers last season. Leier is expected to report to Rochester.

Sabres Trade Justin Bailey to Flyers

Spectrum News

January 17, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres made a minor league trade on Thursday, sending forward — and Williamsville native — Justin Bailey to the Philadelphia Flyers for forward Taylor Leier.

A fresh start might be what Bailey needs, as he was never able to hang around with the Sabres. He spent the bulk of his time in Rochester with the Amerks since being drafted in 2013.

Leier has 19 points in 34 AHL games this season.

Flyers pick up Bailey from Sabres

TSN

January 17, 2019

The Philadelphia Flyers have acquired right wing from the Buffalo Sabres in exchange for forward .

Bailey, 23, has nine goals and 11 assists over 37 games in the American Hockey League this season. He scored three goals and one assist over 12 games with the Sabres last season.

Leier, 24, has 10 goals and nine assists in the AHL this season and had five points with the Flyers last season.

Sabres restored confidence ahead of win in Calgary

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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VANCOUVER - Following their overtime win in Calgary on Wednesday night, Jack Eichel and Evan Rodrigues described the atmosphere on the Buffalo Sabres' bench in a manner that was reminiscent of their early-season, never-quit attitude.

Two nights earlier, the Sabres felt they were emotionally deflated by goals against in a 7-2 loss to the Edmonton Oilers. They used the time between those two games to restore confidence, and it paid off in a winning effort.

"We had a great practice," Jason Pominville said. "We had a really, really good meeting. We had a meeting after, the boys talked. I think you can't just sit there and feel sorry for yourself and dwell on losing a game, whether you lost it 7-2 or 2-1. A loss is a loss and you've got to move forward.

"I thought we did a good job the next day of seeing it on video, putting it behind us, coming to work and practicing hard and having good habits. So were the coaches, the coaches were upbeat at practice a couple days ago and it helped us, for sure."

Early in the season, players spoke often about the importance of having the wherewithal to stick to a game plan through times of adversity. It was a signature aspect of the Sabres in October and November; when they were trailing, they stuck to their simple, defense-first identity and let the rest fall into place.

Rodrigues said he felt they had drifted from that identity of late. They deviated from their simple game in adverse times, instead falling into the trap of trying to do too much and making more mistakes in the process. They used their practice in Calgary on Tuesday to get back on track.

"I think it's really important that we stay consistent," Housley said. "I think our leadership group has done a terrific job. We have very good conversations on what we need to do, what we need to improve on, how our work habits are, what our standard is, and we've got to stay consistent in that."

Pominville said the attitude on the bench on Wednesday reinforced the importance of making the simple plays, even after they fell behind late in the first period and again early in the third.

"I think being positive makes everyone feel good," he said. "You can make a good dump-in and come back to the bench, guys are yelling, 'good chip, good play.' That kind of gives everyone a little confidence in that sense. It doesn't have to be a big play. Sometimes little plays add up and make a big play happen."

The Sabres conclude their road trip against the Canucks on Friday, then have nine days off for their bye week and the All-Star break.

"We have a really good opportunity tomorrow against a team that's been playing some pretty good hockey in its own right, to get back to .500 on the road, to go 2-1 on this road trip," Housley said. "There's a lot of things to play for, and more importantly just moving up and staying tight in the standings."

Rooting for Rasmus

Rasmus Dahlin has a chance to break a record held by Housley, Aaron Ekblad and Bobby Orr with a point in Vancouver, which would give him the first six-game point streak by an 18-year-old defenseman in NHL history. It's a record the Sabres coach said he'd like to see fall.

"Just for the record, I hope he breaks it tomorrow," Housley said. "But he's been playing really good, solid hockey lately, especially these last five games. Just contributing in all areas, whether it's in the D-zone, making a good breakout pass, joining the rush, adding to the rush or leading the rush. He's trying to create.

"His game is in a really good spot in his development. He continues to work on his defensive-zone awareness. We understand there are going to be mistakes with young players, but he wants to learn from his mistakes. He wants

to be coached. He wants to look at video. Those things are good things for him to have to be able to be a true competitor and learn and get better."

Dahlin is tied for second among rookies and leads rookie defensemen with 26 points (5+21) in 47 games this season. He's on pace for 45 points, which would trail only Housley (57 points in 1982-83) for most the most recorded by a defenseman before his 19th birthday.

Thursday's practice

Jeff Skinner took a maintenance day but is expected to play against the Canucks on Friday. Remi Elie filled in on the top line alongside Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

Here's how the lineup looked in its entirety:

81 Remi Elie - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 72 Tage Thompson
17 Vladimir Sobotka - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

24 Lawrence Pilut - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
6 Marco Scandella - 19 Jake McCabe
48 Matt Hunwick - 82 Nathan Beaulieu

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

Alumni Spotlight: Mike Grier

By Brian Duff

Sabres.com

January 17, 2019

Mike Grier was a reliable right winger for the Sabres over his two stints with the team from 2004-2006 and 2009-2011. He played in a total of 272 regular-season and playoff games with Buffalo.

Now an assistant coach with the New Jersey Devils, he gave Sabres.com a few minutes of his time last week when he was in town before their game against the Sabres.

What is the best game you were ever a part of while you were with the Sabres?

We had some good ones! There's a lot that are up there. I guess I'll go with Pommer's game-winner in overtime, shorthanded against Ottawa. That was pretty good to beat those guys and you know they were a team we had trouble with all regular season. To beat them in five in their building was pretty good.

With Jay McKee in the box for tripping, Jason Pominville scored shorthanded 2:26 into overtime to give the Sabres a 3-2 win, and a 4-1 series victory in the 2006 Eastern Conference Semifinals.

I thought you might say Game 1 of that series, the epic 7-6 overtime affair.

Well, that game was a little wild, so it was nice to actually put them away and be done with them and get to move on.

The Sabres trailed the Senators five times in Game 1 of that series before prevailing in overtime 7-6. Grier scored the game's opening goal and assisted on two others - including the winner from Chris Drury just eighteen seconds into the fourth period.

It felt like everybody on that team contributed that year. Would you agree that it was kind of unique that way?

It was for sure. It's something that I didn't come across too often in my career, a team that was that close and everyone kinda played their role. Everyone felt important and everyone contributed. It didn't matter.

We had some skilled guys who didn't get a lot of power-play time and things like that, but no one complained. Everyone just went out and did their job. It was a pretty special group.

Understanding there are always contractual situations and free agency, why did you leave Buffalo the first time and why did you come back?

The first time, I think things were kind of teetering, it could have gone one way or the other. I think myself, J-P [Dumont] and Jay McKee, a few of us had contracts that were up, and I think Danny [Briere] and Dru's [Chris Drury] were coming up the following year and it just wasn't clear which direction they were gonna go.

And I was at the point in my career where I really wanted to win. I had a taste of it here the year before getting to the [Eastern Conference] Finals and I thought going to San Jose was a good opportunity to do that. I would have loved to have stayed here if everyone had been wrapped up and committed to staying here, I would have definitely hopped on board and would have loved to.

So, looking back at it, it's kind of disappointing it couldn't have worked out, even when you see the guys that were still coming up after me - [Thomas] Vanek, I think that was his first year, and Pommer and [Paul] Gaustad, and you had guys like Staff [Drew Stafford] coming up. I think it really could have been really really something special if everyone could have been kept together.

But when [general manager] Darcy [Regier] and [head coach] Lindy [Ruff] reached out and gave me a chance to come back, I was more than happy to take it. It's a place that one, I enjoyed playing for Lindy. He was a great

coach and a great person, and I had a great relationship with him. And two, my wife and I, we enjoyed it here, so to get a chance to come back just made sense.

Grier made the playoffs in each of his three seasons in San Jose, playing in 30 postseason games. However, the Sharks did not advance past the second round despite entering as the second, fifth and first seeds in the West those years.

One-thousand games played is still an incredible milestone. How do you look back on that and the fact it was accomplished here and also against a home team for you, that being Boston?

It was way beyond any of my wildest dreams to be able to play in the league that long. So, to do it is kind of mind-blowing but to do it here at home in front of the fans who were so good to me and to have Boston too was something my friends back home could watch. It was a special night.

On Nov. 3, 2010, Grier became the ninth player to appear in his 1,000th game as a member of the Sabres. Brian Gionta and Jason Pominville have since become the 10th and 11th, respectively, to do so.

Do you have a significant off-ice memory from being here?

Flying home from Arizona and my son Tristan being born here.

Did you make it in time?

No, I actually missed it. We had a West Coast trip and it was one of those things where your phone is on all the time waiting and waiting and I thought I'd be able to make it. It was maybe a week or an eight-day trip and on the last day as I'm getting on the plane, she [Anne] called me and said she was going into labor [laughs].

So, I think I missed it by about an hour, or hour-and-a-half, but it was pretty good surprise to come home and see the little guy.

Was he your first?

No, he was our third so [laughs] that bought me a little leeway at least to miss it. But he was the only one born here so he always says he's a Sabres fan and it's his hometown.

When you think of Buffalo what do you think of?

I think it's a good community. That's what I think of first. My family, we really enjoyed it here. The people treated us well. It's a good place to live and they supported the team whether we were winning or losing.

What led you into coaching?

I've always loved working with players, even as I was finishing my career. Coming back to Buffalo, that was something that was attractive to me - was the young players that were here to help them along, so I enjoyed that.

Then I went to coach high school then coached my oldest son. I just enjoyed being on the ice and helping and trying to mold players. And I've known Hynes [Devils Head Coach John Hynes] since college, so when that opportunity opened up, it was something that I was excited to do.

This is Grier's first season as an assistant coach with the New Jersey Devils. Grier was a teammate of Devils head coach John Hynes during their time at Boston University, which included winning a national title in 1995.

How would you say that you might have "lived fearless" during the course of your career?

I just went out and played. I didn't really think or worry about making mistakes too much or consequences. I just played and did the best I could, worked as hard as I could and figured the rest would take care of itself.

Whether that meant blocking shots or fighting or whatever that was needed to be done to help the team win, I would do it and I guess I kind of did it without thinking about it.

Does that include playing through some badly injured shoulders?

Yeah, some shoulders and some knee stuff. But when you are in this profession and it's something you love to do, you want to be out there and try help the team and help your teammates win a game and just try and do whatever it takes to do that.

How many times did the shoulders have to be popped back in place over the years?

I don't know. It was a whole half of a season one year, where every couple of games it would come out. So that was definitely not fun.

When the end arrived, did you feel like you still had more left in you to play at this level or did you leave on your terms?

I was fine. I think the competitiveness in you still wants to go on and play, but I think my body was kind of telling me it was enough.

My knee was really giving me a hard time the last year and that last series against Philly so I think I was at peace with it. And you know, I think the Philly game was a little bit emotional afterwards because I think just knowing that probably that was going to be the last game.

If I could have rehabbed and got myself where I felt right, I would have maybe tried to give it another shot, but I think my body just told me that was it.

Grier's final game was April 26, 2011, a 5-2 Sabres loss in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals.