



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*January 3, 2018*

## **Eichel picked for All-Star Game, Skinner part of new 'Last Men In' vote**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 2, 2019

For the second straight year, Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel is an All-Star. For now at least, Jeff Skinner is not joining him in San Jose.

Eichel has been selected as the Sabres' lone representative to the Atlantic Division team for the NHL All-Star Game, to be played for the fourth straight year as a 3-on-3 tournament Jan. 26 at SAP Center. But Skinner still has a chance to go, as the NHL has instituted a "Last Men In" vote for the final spot on each of the four division teams.

Eichel will be playing on a squad captained by former USA Hockey teammate and close friend Auston Matthews of Toronto. The pair combined for one of the signature moments of last year's game in Tampa, pantomiming a referee's "good goal" point as Eichel scored the go-ahead tally in his team's 7-4 semifinal victory over the Metropolitan Division.

Also on the Atlantic team at forwards are Nikita Kucherov and Steven Stamkos (Tampa Bay), John Tavares (Toronto) and David Pastrnak (Boston), defensemen Thomas Chabot (Ottawa) and Keith Yandle (Florida), and goalies Jimmy Howard (Detroit) and Carey Price (Montreal).

Skinner, who is tied for second in the NHL with 26 goals while spending most of his time in the first half of the season on Eichel's left wing, was one of the game's biggest snubs when the rosters were initially announced Wednesday evening. The league later announced it was starting an online vote for the 11th spot in each division, much like Major League Baseball has used for its game in recent years.

Skinner, however, will have a tough road to get voted into the game against notables like Toronto's Morgan Rielly, Tampa Bay's Brayden Point and Boston's Patrice Bergeron. Also on the Atlantic Last Men In ballot are Detroit's Dylan Larkin, Florida's Aleksander Barkov, Montreal's Shea Weber and Ottawa's Mark Stone. Voting at NHL.com starts Thursday at noon and closes Jan. 10 at midnight.

As previously announced in fan voting, Matthews is joined as a division captain by Washington's Alex Ovechkin (Metropolitan), Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon (Central) and Edmonton's Connor McDavid (Pacific). All teams will get at least one player in the game.

Ovechkin announced Wednesday he is skipping the game and instead choosing to rest rather than participate in All-Star Weekend. By NHL rules, he must serve a one-game suspension for either the Caps' final game before the break (Jan. 23 at Toronto) or the first one after it (Feb. 1 vs. Calgary).

Former Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly of St. Louis and South Buffalo native Patrick Kane of Chicago were named to the Central Division team. O'Reilly represented the Sabres in 2016 in Nashville.

The full rosters of the other three divisions:

Metropolitan — Forwards: Sebastian Aho (Carolina), Cam Atkinson (Columbus), Mathew Barzal (New York Islanders), Sidney Crosby (Pittsburgh), Claude Giroux (Philadelphia), Taylor Hall (New Jersey). Defense: John Carlson (Washington), Seth Jones (Columbus). Goal: Braden Holtby (Washington), Henrik Lundqvist (New York Rangers).

Central — Forwards: MacKinnon, Kane, O'Reilly, Mikko Rantanen (Colorado), Mark Scheifele (Winnipeg), Blake Wheeler (Winnipeg). Defense: Miro Heiskanen (Dallas), Roman Josi (Nashville). Goal: Devin Dubnyk (Minnesota), Pekka Rinne (Nashville).

Pacific -- Forwards: McDavid, Johnny Gaudreau (Calgary), Clayton Keller (Arizona), Joe Pavelski (San Jose), Elias Pettersson (Vancouver). Defense: Brent Burns and Erik Karlsson (San Jose), Drew Doughty (Los Angeles). Goal: Marc-Andre Fleury (Vegas), John Gibson (Anaheim).

## **With Eichel's status in doubt, Rodrigues gets first chance to fill his slot**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 2, 2019

You're never going to replace Jack Eichel. It looks like Evan Rodrigues is going to get the first chance to at least fill in for him Thursday night.

Eichel missed the Sabres' practice Wednesday in HarborCenter with an upper-body injury, and coach Phil Housley said his star center was getting medical evaluation and still is considered day to day.

But not being able to practice after a day off is an ominous sign for Eichel's availability for Thursday's game against the Florida Panthers in KeyBank Center.

Rodrigues took Eichel's spot between Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart at practice Wednesday and figures to get the call on game day as well. It's a reward for his recent play, which has seen him total 23 shots on goal in the last eight games and play a career high 22 minutes, 7 seconds in Monday's loss to the New York Islanders.

One problem? Rodrigues has no goals in those eight games and just two for the season.

"You want the points to come and to be contributing offensively. It's when the chances don't come that you start to worry," said Rodrigues, a college linemate of Eichel's at Boston University. "I'm getting my chances, I'm getting a lot of shots. The opportunities are there. It's just a matter of bearing down now and finishing those opportunities.

"I think I've done that over the last five, six games. My confidence is running high, back to where I want it to be. Hopefully that will lead to more points."

Eichel entered Wednesday tied for 11th in the NHL in scoring with a team-high 49 points and tied for seventh in the league in assists with 34. He has yet to miss a game this season, as the Sabres (21-13-6) will be playing Game 41 and reaching the halfway mark of the NHL schedule.

Skinner, who has a team-high 26 goals, is optimistic about what he can do with Rodrigues in Eichel's absence.

"He's a good player, has got some speed, some pretty good skill to make plays. I think it will be fun." Skinner said. "Everyone is good enough. We've been around each other long enough. Guys have seen each play in games and practice. Sam and I have some pretty good chemistry, and there's two-thirds of a line right there. You just try to communicate, get on the same page as quickly as possible and play the game."

Coach Phil Housley liked what he saw early in Monday's game with Rodrigues playing on a wing alongside Conor Sheary and Casey Mittelstadt. Lines and positions then became fluid when Eichel went out after playing just four shifts totaling 2:42.

"He's getting a lot of looks," Housley said of Rodrigues' shot totals. "The next stage is his contributions offensively, trying to finish and going to the net hard. He's doing all the right things right now. Hopefully that translates to production."

The timing of Eichel's injury couldn't be worse. Just as the Sabres are taking major steps backward in the playoff race, they run into a Florida team that has dominated them since 2014.

The Panthers have beaten Buffalo seven straight times, including twice this year, and that's their longest winning streak against the Sabres since joining the NHL in 1993. Since the calendar hit 2014, in fact, the Sabres are just 4-15-3 against Florida — 3-8-1 at home and only 1-7-2 in BB&T Center.

A big reason is the play of veteran goalie Roberto Luongo, who again will be in the nets against the Sabres on Thursday. He has owned Buffalo in his career with a 20-8-2 record, a 1.96 goals-against average, .934 save percentage and five shutouts.

In just over a month, the Sabres have gone from first overall in the NHL's overall standing to 12th entering Wednesday's game (albeit they remain just four points out of third in the tightly packed standing).

Of much more importance is the playoff race, where the Sabres have now slipped into a wild-card position, as they are just 1-4-1 in the last six games and 4-7-4 since their 10-game winning streak ended.

Boston pulled even with the Sabres in points and passed them on tiebreakers with its Winter Classic win over Chicago Tuesday at Notre Dame, and Montreal is one point back. The New York Islanders are two points behind Buffalo with two games in hand after beating the Sabres here on New Year's Eve.

The Sabres have averaged 33.5 shots on goal over the last six games but have managed to score just 10 goals.

"Maybe earlier on in the season there's some games we win that maybe we didn't have our best effort," Rodrigues said. "Now we're putting together a good string of games and not getting results. ... The wins will come as long as we keep doing the right things. the pucks will start to bounce our way."

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The Sabres' other lines Wednesday had Johan Larsson centering C.J. Smith and Kyle Okposo, Vladimir Sobotka between Sheary and Tage Thompson and Mittelstadt between Remi Elie and Jason Pominville.

Lawrence Pilut, out two games as a healthy scratch, was back in the top six on defense playing with Zach Bogosian. Nathan Beaulieu skated with Matt Hunwick on the extra pair.

## **Jack Eichel missing from Buffalo Sabres' practice**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 2, 2019

After a day off to open the new year, the Buffalo Sabres returned to practice Wednesday – minus injured captain Jack Eichel.

Eichel, who left Monday's game against the New York Islanders after four shifts due to an upper-body injury, was not on the ice at HarborCenter as the team prepared for Thursday's visit to KeyBank Center by the Florida Panthers.

Eichel took a "maintenance day" from practice on Sunday, then skated Monday morning prior to the game as most of the players did not skate. He played just 2 minutes, 42 seconds in the game and was gone by the halfway mark of the first period.

During his regularly scheduled appearance Wednesday morning on WGR Radio, coach Phil Housley said Eichel was undergoing more evaluation and that the injury doesn't appear to be anything long-term.

Asked after practice if Eichel's day-to-day status still held, Housley said, "I still anticipate that being the case. However, he is speaking to our medical staff and we'll know more tomorrow."

Eichel leads the Sabres with 49 points in 40 games. If he does not play against the Panthers, it will be the first game he has missed this season.

The timing of Eichel's injury adds to the woes of the Sabres, who are just 4-7-4 since the end of their 10-game winning streak. Boston's win over Chicago Tuesday in the Winter Classic pushed the Bruins ahead of Buffalo into third place in the Atlantic Division and dropped the Sabres into an Eastern Conference wild-card slot.

Evan Rodrigues took Eichel's spot on the team's top line between Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart.

## **Sabres' Eichel is an All-Star once again**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 2, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - For the second season in a row, Jack Eichel is the only Sabre to be named to the NHL All-Star Game.

In 40 games this season, Eichel has 15 goals and 34 assists for 49 points. Last year in Tampa, Eichel played two games for the Atlantic Division and had a goal and two assists.

This season, the NHL is having a vote for "The Last Man In" for each division. Fans can vote for the final player for all four rosters. Jeff Skinner is one of the choices for the Atlantic Division along with:

Patrice Bergeron - Boston

Dylan Larkin - Detroit

Aleksander Barkov - Florida

Shea Weber - Montreal

Mark Stone - Ottawa

Brayden Point - Tampa Bay

Morgan Rielly - Toronto

The NHL's sixth leading scorer, Mitch Marner of Toronto is not on the list for the fan voting because there must be one player from each team. Voting opens Thursday at noon and closes Jan. 10 at 11:59 p.m.

Others joining Eichel on the Atlantic Division Team are:

Nikita Kucherov - Tampa Bay

Auston Matthews - Toronto (C)

David Pastrnak - Boston

Steven Stamkos - Tampa Bay

John Tavares - Toronto

Thomas Chabot - Ottawa

Keith Yandle - Florida

Jimmy Howard - Detroit

Carey Price - Montreal

The game is Jan. 26 in San Jose.

## **Sabres' Housley still has no new information on Eichel**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 2, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - As the Sabres had their first practice of 2019, Jack Eichel was not in attendance. Eichel got hurt early in Monday's game and never returned. Phil Housley said, "He's speaking to our medical staff as we speak and we'll know more tomorrow."

When asked if he's still day-to-day the head coach said, "I still anticipate that being the case and we'll know more tomorrow."

There's no word on if Eichel will be able to play on Thursday. Kyle Okposo said it's up to them to perform if he doesn't play, "He's a big part of our group, but if he's not in the lineup and then he's not in the lineup."

"I think we need to have everybody bearing down on their chances and we've got to make sure we're committed to playing the way we need to play."

Jeff Skinner said they're all in the National Hockey League and they have to be able to overcome it, "We have to have guys step up. There's going to be some opportunity there and everyone in here plays in the NHL, so it's a good challenge for us."

Evan Rodrigues took Eichel's place in the third period against the Islanders with Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart. Housley said, "I liked the way that line played in the third period. There were a lot of different combinations with Jack being out, we had to move some wingers to center and rotated wingers, but I liked the third period, they weren't able to cash in, but it all pointed in the right direction."

In 34 games, Rodrigues is averaging 2.18 shots per-game. Against the Islanders, Rodrigues only had one shot, but he played a season-high 22:07. Housley said, "He's getting a lot of looks. Rodger's been used in a lot of different capacities moving up and down the lineup, that's what he brings to our team and the next stage is his contributions offensively."

Rodrigues has two goals and nine assists for 11 points. He has just one goal and three points in his last 18 games. Rodrigues looks forward to playing on that top line if Eichel can't go, "It's a good opportunity, they're two highly skilled players who have had a great season so far so I'll just play my game and let them play theirs and try to get them the puck as much as possible."

Rodrigues feels he's played well, despite not having the points to show for it. He said, "You always want the points to come, but at the same time, it's when the chances don't come that you start to worry and I'm getting my chances and I'm getting a lot of shots and the opportunities are there it's just a matter of bearing down and finishing those opportunities."

Carter Hutton is 1-6-2 in his last nine games. In that time, he has a 2.88 goals-against and .911 save percentage. In those nine games the Sabres have averaged two goals per-game. They've only scored seven goals for Hutton in his last five starts.

Ullmark has won three in a row after losing three straight. In his three games, Ullmark has a goals-against average of 1.65 and save percentage of .953. In the three games Ullmark played, Buffalo averaged 3.31 goals per-game. I asked Housley if he's considering a goaltending change on Thursday against Florida and he said, "We'll evaluate that and make that decision tomorrow." He added, "Both our goaltenders have played well, but through all this we haven't given him a lot of run support."

In his 28 games, Hutton has given up five or more goals twice. In his 13 games, Ullmark has given up five or more goals three times.

Wednesday's lines:

Skinner - Rodrigues - Reinhart

Sheary - Sobotka - Thompson

Smith - Larsson - Okposo

Elie - Mittelstadt - Pominville

McCabe - Ristolainen

Pilut - Bogosian

Scandella - Dahlin

Hunwick – Beaulieu

## **31 Stats: Drop for Dallas' dynamic duo, trophy tracker and Sabres slide**

By Dom Luszczyszyn

The Athletic

January 2, 2019

21. After a 10-game winning streak that vaulted the Sabres to a 17-6-2 record back in November, many were treating them as a virtual playoff lock thanks to their 118-point pace at the time. My model wasn't so sure given that the team finished in last place just last season, giving Buffalo a 73 percent chance at the playoffs after that 10th straight win and an 80 percent chance at the team's peak on Dec. 18.

Sabres fans weren't happy with the lack of optimism saying teams with that many points banked are generally playoff locks. While true, Buffalo has visible roster warts (forward depth, defence) that made it more likely that they could be the exception to that rule. It was just last year that the St. Louis Blues started off just as hot as Buffalo and ended up missing the playoffs. Predictably, the Sabres have cooled off considerably since that November high earning a 4-7-4 record (a 66-point pace) dropping to a wild card spot. More precarious is that Monday's loss to the Islanders – a team that's chasing Buffalo – dropped the Sabres playoff chances to below 50 percent, though they're still eighth in the East.

22. I mentioned forward depth as one of Buffalo's glaring issues (the team's top line is a top-10 trio, but the other three are all bottom five league-wide) and getting Casey Mittelstadt going would go a long way in addressing that. The hype machine surrounding Mittelstadt was in overdrive going into the season and so far he has not delivered. He has just 11 points in 40 games and a poor possession rate to boot. As a result, my model considers him to be worth 0.1 wins which would make him the league's worst second line centre.

23. To date, Buffalo has 21 wins. Adding up all of Buffalo's win probabilities to date gets them 19 expected wins. For a team that's taken the league by surprise, it's actually only the 10th largest gap this season. It's a good barometer to see how far a team has deviated from expectations so far this season and which teams might come down to earth in the second half (or which teams my model hasn't given enough credit). On the flip side, it also shows the teams who haven't met expectations. Tampa Bay is in a league of its own at the top, while Chicago, Carolina and Philadelphia languish at the bottom.

## **Other Sabres must step up with Jack Eichel injured**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 2, 2019

BUFFALO – Thanks to center Jack Eichel's upper-body injury, Sabres coach Phil Housley leaned on Evan Rodrigues heavily throughout Monday's 3-1 loss, skating him a career-high 22 minutes, seven seconds.

Rodrigues, 25, had never even cracked the 20-minute mark in his previous 113 NHL outings.

Expect Rodrigues to see plenty of action again tonight against the Florida Panthers inside KeyBank Center.

Eichel, who skated only four shifts before leaving Monday's tilt against the New York Islanders, did not practice Wednesday inside HarborCenter. Housley did not have an update on Eichel because the Sabres' leading scorer was talking to the team's medical staff early Wednesday afternoon.

Housley still believes Eichel is day-to-day.

So without Eichel, Rodrigues practiced at center on the No. 1 line between Sam Reinhart and Jeff Skinner, a spot he occupied some of Monday's game.

"I like the way that line played in the third period," Housley said. "There was a lot of different combinations, obviously, with Jack being out."

The speedy Rodrigues offers the Sabres plenty of versatility. His offensive contributions, however, have been limited.

In 34 games, Rodrigues has compiled two goals and 11 points, including just one assist in the last eight contests. He scored his first goal Nov. 21 and has a shooting percentage of just 2.7 percent.

The Sabres don't exactly possess a lot of depth at center, so Rodrigues, a healthy scratch six times earlier this season, has a plum gig for the time being.

Skinner has already compiled 26 goals and 39 points. Reinhart, meanwhile, has scored eight goals and 38 points.

"Power play, penalty kill, moving up and down the lineup, that's what he brings to our team," Housley said of Rodrigues. "The next stage is just his contributions offensively and trying to finish and go to the net hard. He's doing all the right things right now. Hopefully that translates into production."

Rodrigues has pumped 23 shots on net since scoring his last goal Dec. 13, so he has been generating some chances.

"It's when the chances don't come that you start to worry," Rodrigues said. "I'm getting my chances, I'm getting a lot of shots. The opportunities are there. It's just a matter of bearing down now and finishing those opportunities. I think I've done that over the last five, six games."

Even if Eichel misses a single game, his absence is a huge blow to the Sabres, who have lost three straight games (0-2-1) and fallen into the Eastern Conference's first wild card spot.

Eichel, who has scored 15 goals and 49 points in 40 games, is the Sabres' offensive catalyst. The captain has been a part of a whopping 43.8 percent of his team's goals.

"Anytime you lose a guy of that caliber it's tough," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "But I believe in the process and this is bigger than one person, what we've built here. Jack's a big part of that and how it's played. But we have an identity as a team, and just because one guy goes down it doesn't change our identity."

Having scored only 10 goals in the last six games, the Sabres' offense looks anemic. The secondary scoring that boosted them earlier this season has dried up.

What could happen without Eichel?

Still, they've been creating chances, averaging 33.5 shots a game over their last six outings.

Housley has said a few times the Sabres have mostly been playing well and will eventually be rewarded if they keep showcasing the same style.

"We're playing some pretty decent hockey for the most part," said Okposo, who ended a 21-game goal drought Monday. "I still think we have our lapses, but we definitely are creating offense when we don't score.

"You can't just rely on one guy or one line to score. We got to get contributions from everybody."

When Housley tells his team to stay the course, it's more significant, than, say, last season, when the Sabres finished dead last.

"Maybe it's a little different because I think we've got a little something to fall back on," Sabres defenseman Nathan Beaulieu said. "We've had the success, the pucks have gone in. Last year, they didn't at all. ...

"We're not playing bad hockey at all by any means right now. We're going to run into hot goalies and hot teams."

## **Sabres captain Jack Eichel named to second straight NHL All-Star Game**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 2, 2019

BUFFALO – Captain Jack Eichel has been named the Sabres' lone NHL All-Star Game representative for the second straight season.

Eichel, 22, has compiled 15 goals and team-high 49 points in 40 games this season.

Given every team must be represented and teams are chosen by division, there are always some significant snubs. Incredibly, Sabres winger Jeff Skinner, whose 26 goals are tied for second in the NHL, was left off the Atlantic Division's roster.

Right now, Eichel, a fourth-year center, is nursing an upper-body injury and is day-to-day and could miss Thursday's home tilt against the Florida Panthers.

In addition to Eichel, here is the full Atlantic Division roster the NHL announced tonight: (forwards) Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay Lightning; Auston Matthews, Toronto Maple Leafs (captain) David Pastrnak, Boston Bruins; Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay Lightning; John Tavares, Toronto Maple Leafs; (defensemen) Thomas Chabot, Ottawa Senators, Keith Yandle, Florida Panthers; (goalies) Jimmy Howard, Detroit Red Wings; Carey Price, Montreal Canadiens.

Former Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly earned a spot on the Central Division's squad for the St. Louis Blues.

The NHL All-Star Game is Jan. 26 in San Jose.

## **Eichel Named to All-Star Team**

By Josh Reed

WIVB

January 2, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y.(WIVB) - Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been selected to represent his club in the NHL All-Star game on Jan. 25th and 26th. It's the second time Eichel has been named to the All-Star team.

He leads the team with 49 points in 40 games this season and is tied for seventh in the NHL with 34 assists.

Teammate Jeff Skinner was left off the Atlantic Division roster despite having the second most goals in the NHL. Skinner is on the "Last Men In" ballot so fans do have a chance to vote the Sabres forward onto the roster. Fans can vote on NHL.com starting on Thursday.

## **Jack Eichel does not practice on Wednesday**

By Evan Anstey and Jenna Harner

WIVB

January 2, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Jack Eichel did not practice with the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday, following an injury he suffered on Monday.

The upper body injury caused Eichel to leave during the first period of the team's game against the New York Islanders.

Sabres Head Coach Phil Housley says he expects Eichel to be day-to-day in terms of his recovery.

## **Sabres captain Jack Eichel named NHL All Star**

WKBW

January 2, 2019

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) — Sabres captain Jack Eichel is named to the Atlantic division roster for the 2019 All Star game in San Jose.

Eichel, who is currently listed as day-to-day with an upper body injury, is the only member of the Sabres to be named to the All Star Team.

The NHL All Star weekend takes place January 25 and 26.

This marks the second time that Eichel will appear in the All Star Game.

Eichel leads the Sabres with 49 points in 40 games this season.

## **Housley: 'Jack is seeing our medical staff, we'll know more tomorrow'**

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

January 2, 2019

Sabres captain Jack Eichel missed practice Wednesday at Harborcenter.

Head coach Phil Housley said afterward that "Jack is seeing our medical people and we'll know more tomorrow." Housley added he "still anticipates that Eichel will remain day to day" but reiterated his comment about seeing the medical staff and knowing more tomorrow.

Eichel has an upper body injury. He started Monday's game against the New York Islanders, but left after just playing four shifts.

Eichel took what was called a maintenance day from practice Sunday.

If Eichel is unable to play Thursday against Florida Evan Rodrigues will take his place between Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart.

## **Eichel Named to NHL All-Star Game**

By Dale Mussen

WYRK

January 2, 2019

For the second year in a row Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been named to the NHL All-Star game. This year's game will be played at the SAP Center in San Jose on January 26th. For the fourth year in a row it'll be played in a 3 on 3 format.

Although he's tied for 2nd in goal scoring with 26 this season, Jeff Skinner was snubbed. But he could be added to the Atlantic Division squad if he's voted in by the fans in what the NHL is calling the "Last Men In" balloting.

Skinner will be among eight players vying to be the last player to complete the Atlantic Division squad. The league's three other divisions will also each have "Last Men In" balloting.

Voting begins at noon on Thursday (January 3rd) at [NHL.com/All-Star](https://www.nhl.com/all-star) fan vote and concludes on Thursday, January 10th at midnight.

## **Eichel named to 2019 Atlantic Division All-Star team**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 2, 2019

Jack Eichel is on the way to San Jose.

The Buffalo Sabres captain will represent his club on the Atlantic Division roster for NHL All-Star Weekend on Jan. 25 and 26, the NHL announced Wednesday night. It marks the second time Eichel will participate in the All-Star Game.

The four division rosters were selected by the NHL Hockey Operations Department.

Eichel leads the Sabres with 49 points in 40 games this season. He's currently tied for seventh in the NHL with 34 assists.

Eichel's 18 multi-point games this season tied him for second-most in the league entering play Wednesday and have already matched his single-season high.

At his current pace, Jack Eichel would finish the season with the third-most even-strength points ever recorded by a Sabre, trailing only Pat LaFontaine (83) and Alexander Mogilny (78) in 1992-93, and would trail only LaFontaine's franchise-record 52 even-strength assists that season. He would also become the first Sabre to record more than 95 points since the 1992-93 season (LaFontaine/Mogilny/Dale Hawerchuk).

The NHL All-Star Skills Competition is set for Fri., Jan. 25 at 9 p.m. ET on NBCSN and the Honda NHL All-Star game will take place on Sat., Jan. 26 at 8 p.m. ET on NBC from SAP Center in San Jose.

Jeff Skinner, who is currently tied for second in the NHL with 26 goals, is the Sabres' representative on the "Last Men In" ballot.

Starting Thursday at noon, fans can go to [NHL.com/Vote](http://NHL.com/Vote) and vote for Skinner to fill the final spot on the Atlantic Division squad.

Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews was voted captain of the Atlantic Division through the 2019 NHL All-Star Fan Vote presented by adidas.

Here's the rest of the roster:

And all of the All-Star rosters (before "Last Men In" voting):

## **Rodrigues gets chance on top line with Eichel nursing injury**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 2, 2019

With Jack Eichel nursing an upper-body injury, the Buffalo Sabres were left to press on without their captain for practice at Harborcenter on Wednesday.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he expects Eichel's absence to be short-term but added that he'll have more definitive word on Thursday. Eichel left the team's game against the New York Islanders on Monday after skating 2:42 in the first period. He had been absent from practice the day prior.

In the meantime, players emphasized that filling in for Eichel will take a full-team effort.

"We can't try and do too much different," Sam Reinhart said. "No one's going to step up and play the way he does. It's got to be an effort out of everybody. We've got to just play our game, and nothing really changes. We're going to need to focus on the area in front of their net and try to get pucks in."

Evan Rodrigues took Eichel's place on the top line with Reinhart and Jeff Skinner. He said his main focus playing between Buffalo's second and third-leading goal scorers will be playing a sound defensive game, allowing Skinner and Reinhart to play to their strengths offensively.

"Focus on the defense, focus on getting the puck back for us, that way we can play offense, get those guys the puck and let them do their thing," he said. "Make sure I'm sound defensively, making sure I'm sound in my own zone, and hopefully that will lead to offense."

Tickets for Thursday vs. Florida

Rodrigues has gone eight games without a goal, but he's generated an encouraging number of chances. His 23 shots in that span rank fourth on the team, two back from Eichel and Skinner and one behind Rasmus Ristolainen.

"It's when the chances don't come that you start to worry," Rodrigues said. "I'm getting my chances, I'm getting a lot of shots. The opportunities are there. It's just a matter of bearing down now and finishing those opportunities."

Rodrigues' situation is a microcosm for the team's overall game, having lost three straight since the Christmas break. The Sabres scored three goals between losses to Boston and New York but felt in both cases they played to the identity that made them successful early in the season.

"When we are successful, we're doing things right away from the puck," alternate captain Kyle Okposo said. "When we're not playing that well, we seem to lose a little bit of that work ethic away from the puck. That's really what it comes down to for me."

"As long as we're doing that, we're going to get our opportunities, we're going to get our chances. Now, we just need to do a better job burying our chances."

The key, Housley said, is maintaining that identity through adverse times and trusting that results will follow.

"When we play to it, we're a very, very good hockey team," he said. "... There's a lot of things to like. We're not getting the results. That's the next step."

Lines at Wednesday's practice

53 Jeff Skinner - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 23 Sam Reinhart  
43 Conor Sheary - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 72 Tage Thompson  
81 Remi Elie - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 29 Jason Pominville  
49 C.J. Smith - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

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

40 Carter Hutton  
35 Linus Ullmark