



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sheary scores in 3rd to lift Sabres over Blue Jackets 5-4

By Mitch Stacy

Associated Press

January 29, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A long midseason break apparently was just what Conor Sheary needed.

Coming back from a bye week followed by the All-Star weekend, the Buffalo Sabres forward was ready, ending an 11-game goal drought with the winner Tuesday night.

Sheary got an easy tap-in 2:12 into the third period to lift Buffalo over the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-4.

Artemi Panarin was roundly booed by his home fans when he was introduced in the starting lineup. This was Columbus' first game since Panarin's agent said the star forward would not discuss a new contract until after the season. Panarin will be an unrestricted free agent. He wasn't made available for interviews after the game.

Sheary and linemate Evan Rodrigues each had a goal and an assist for the Sabres, who had lost four of five before getting the time off. Sheary has struggled all season and hadn't scored since before Christmas.

"Coming off the break, I had fresh legs and was well-rested," Sheary said. "I have to give credit to my linemates when credit is due. I think our line in general was buzzing all night and we had good chemistry, and I think all that together just added up to a good night."

Carter Hutton had 33 saves to get his first win since Jan. 8.

Buffalo had a solid game except for a stretch at the end of the second period when Columbus scored two quick goals to tie it at 4. That set up Sheary's go-ahead goal, and Hutton shut down Columbus the rest of the way.

Coach Phil Housely said the break benefited the Sabres, who are in fifth place in the Atlantic Division.

"I just thought it was a reboot," he said, "We talked about it the first day back on Sunday, just getting back to what has made us successful, going back to training camp and our thought process through that. I think for the most part we did a really good job."

Pierre-Luc Dubois and Cam Atkinson each had a goal an assist for Columbus, and Sergei Bobrovsky had 29 saves.

The Blue Jackets, who also were coming off a bye week, lost their third in a row as they try to stay among the leaders in the Metropolitan Division. They dropped both ends of a back-to-back before the break after winning four straight.

"They were quicker, they won more battles," said Blue Jackets center Brandon Dubinsky, who scored in the second period. "A pretty unacceptable game almost all the way through."

Rodrigues opened the scoring 2:15 into the game when he put back Casey Mittlestadt's rebound. Dubois tied it up for Columbus a minute later, redirecting Ryan Murray's shot.

Later in the first, Rasmus Ristolainen flicked a nice pass to Sam Reinhart, who finished from the slot. Two minutes later, Tage Thompson beat Bobrovsky to give Buffalo a 3-1 lead.

Foligno poked a goal past Sutton on a power play 21 seconds into the second period. Before the Nationwide Arena crowd had finished celebrating, Skinner gave Buffalo a two-goal lead again on a breakaway.

The Blue Jackets' two quick ones late in the second period erased the Buffalo lead.

NOTES: Rodrigues has scored in each of the last four games and has points in six of his last seven. ... Ristolainen has four assists in the last four games. ... Columbus F Markus Hannikainen returned after being out since Jan. 8 because of an elbow injury. ... The Blue Jackets called up center Mark Letestu from Cleveland (AHL) before the

game, but he was a healthy scratch. ... Columbus F Boone Jenner sat out with an unspecified injury. Lukas Sedlak replaced him.

UP NEXT:

Buffalo: At Dallas on Wednesday.

Columbus: At Winnipeg on Thursday.

Conor Sheary scores go-ahead goal, Sabres hold on for 'character win'

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 29, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- When the Buffalo Sabres were in jeopardy of watching two points slip away, Jack Eichel spoke up inside the visitors' dressing room.

An impassioned speech from the 22-year-old captain was an emotional response after he and his teammates let a two-goal lead slip away in the final three minutes and eight seconds of the second period Tuesday night in Nationwide Arena.

The Sabres responded with one of their finest performances in weeks, scoring the go-ahead goal 2:12 into the third period and holding on for a 5-4 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Instead of losing for the sixth time in eight games, Buffalo finally gained ground in the playoff chase, closing within two points of Pittsburgh for the second wild-card spot.

The Sabres, now 25-18-6, also matched their win total from all of last season. But their performance against Columbus, from start to finish, better illustrates how far they have come.

"I thought we played two really good periods until the last two or three minutes of the second," coach Phil Housley said. "That's just something we're learning as we go through this. Key times of the game, we have a two-goal lead. It's a little puck management. It's rush coverage. It's coming in and funneling into our zone and knowing your responsibility. ... We just have to learn from it and move forward."

The Sabres had not played a game in 11 days because of the All-Star break and bye week, and this was their fourth consecutive road game. Additionally, the Blue Jackets (28-18-3) -- third in the Metropolitan Division with 59 points -- have playoff experience and top-end talent such as Artemi Panarin.

Still, Buffalo was the better team for all but three minutes Tuesday night. Housley's defense was mostly solid without the puck, there was another breakthrough with secondary scoring and Carter Hutton made timely saves. Hutton had 33 saves for only his third win in 13 starts.

Evan Rodrigues, Sam Reinhart and Tage Thompson scored in the first period to give the Sabres a two-goal lead. The Blue Jackets answered quickly in the second with Nick Foligno's power-play goal 21 seconds in, only for Jeff Skinner to score his 31st goal of the season 21 seconds later to make it 4-2.

Rasmus Dahlin, who finished with a plus-4 rating, had two assists to become the third defenseman in NHL history to have at least six multi-point games before their 19th birthdays, joining Housley and Bobby Orr. Eleven different Sabres had at least one point.

The Sabres had a number of chances to pull away in the second period, too. Casey Mittelstadt came charging down the ice with the puck for a 3-on-1 odd-man rush, only to have his pass broken up by Scott Harrington.

Sergei Bobrovsky also made timely saves and benefited from some puck luck, including a loose puck Thompson was unable to poke over the goal line. It appeared a rout was inevitable given the number of scoring chances, and the Blue Jackets' poor play in the offensive zone.

Following Mittelstadt's 3-on-1 chance, the Blue Jackets rushed up the ice and caught Marco Scandella out of position, leading to Brandon Dubinsky cutting the Sabres' lead to one at 16:52.

"We had a tough shift there in the second," Mittelstadt said. "We had a few chances and they go down and kind of get a lucky one. It's never good. It was good to go back out there and get that one in the third. Obviously there are some things we can work on with [losing a] two-goal lead, but it was a really good response by our group in the third."

They did not respond quickly enough to prevent Columbus from tying the score, 4-4. The Sabres were unable to clear the puck from the defensive zone, and it ended up on Cam Atkinson's stick in the slot, where his high shot went over Hutton's glove with 33 seconds remaining in the second period.

The Sabres, who have a number of players without experience in meaningful games, have often folded this season after such breakdowns. Following Eichel's talk, Conor Sheary scored only 2:12 into the third period for the go-ahead goal.

"It's a big goal," Skinner said. "It sort of swings momentum back into our favor."

The Sabres controlled the puck for much of the third period, yet they were unable to get a much-needed insurance goal. Their struggles when playing with the lead have become an alarming trend since the 10-game winning streak ended Nov. 29.

Though they could not break through with a goal, it was an otherwise strong finish. Shots were 12-12 in the final 20 minutes, despite Columbus having an extra attacker for the final 1:56 of regulation. Hutton made timely saves -- including his stop on Pierre-Luc Dubois' shot from atop the crease -- and the Sabres' porous defense limited the Blue Jackets to shot attempts from the perimeter.

"That's a new-age NHL hockey game, right?" Hutton said. "It's a lot of scoring, a lot of chances. It's fun. Obviously, you want to hold a two-goal lead. ... We get a big goal early [in the third] and from there we did a good job locking it down. I thought we did great in the last three minutes. It was 6-on-5 hockey there for a while. They had a couple shots but just from the outside. Guys were blocking shots, battling. A real character win."

The Wraparound: Sabres 5, Blue Jackets 4

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 29, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Since winning 10 consecutive games, the Buffalo Sabres have frustrated themselves and their fans.

At times, their tantalizing skill makes them look like a playoff team. At others, they appear too mistake-prone and young to break a seven-year postseason drought.

Those remarkable strengths and sometimes overwhelming weaknesses were again on display Tuesday night in Nationwide Arena. This time, the Sabres endured, beginning the season's second half with a 5-4 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Buffalo, now 25-18-6, matched its win total from last season and has 33 regular-season games remaining. Also, it closed within two points of the second wild-card playoff spot and avoided another losing streak.

Conor Sheary scored 2:12 into the third period – only his second goal in 29 games – to break a 4-4 tie. That occurred after Columbus (28-18-3) scored two goals in the final 3:08 of the second period to erase the Sabres' two-goal lead.

Carter Hutton made 32 saves to earn only his third win in 13 starts. Evan Rodrigues, Sam Reinhart, Tage Thompson and Jeff Skinner also scored for the Sabres.

Pierre-Luc Dubois, Nick Foligno, Brandon Dubinsky and Cam Atkinson had goals for Columbus, which has lost three consecutive games.

Opening salvo: The Sabres broke the scoreless tie 2:14 into the first period when Sheary carried the puck through the right-wing circle and made a backhanded pass to Casey Mittelstadt, whose shot was stopped by Sergei Bobrovsky. Rodrigues was there to shoot the rebound into the open net for his fourth consecutive game with a goal. He had only one goal in 23 games prior to that.

1:03: The lead lasted only 1:03. With an extra attacker on the ice because of a delayed Sabres penalty, Blue Jackets defenseman Ryan Murray ripped a shot toward the net and it was deflected by Dubois to tie the score 1-1. It was Dubois' 18th goal of the season.

Reinhart answers: The Sabres successfully cycled the puck in the offensive zone until Rasmus Ristolainen carried it through the right-wing circle and passed to the slot, where Reinhart unleashed a shot that beat Bobrovsky to make it 2-1 at 7:59 into the first period.

Reinhart has 12 goals and a career-high 33 assists. Entering Tuesday, the Sabres were 18-8-4 this season when Reinhart had at least one point.

Young guns: Thompson gave the Sabres a 3-1 lead at 9:39 into the first period when he collected a drop pass from Rasmus Dahlin, skated toward the slot and beat Bobrovsky with a shot that went off the crossbar and in. It was Thompson's seventh goal of the season.

Power play: The Blue Jackets scored 21 seconds into the second period when Foligno hammered home his own rebound to make it 3-2. Columbus entered the game with the NHL's 27th-best power play.

21 seconds: The Sabres answered 21 seconds later when Skinner scored on a breakaway, his 31st goal of the season, to make it 4-2. Dahlin's two assists give him eight points over his last seven games.

Two minutes, 35 seconds: The Blue Jackets scored two goals in a span of two minutes and 35 seconds to tie the score, 4-4. First, Dubinsky poked a puck past Hutton with Marco Scandella out of position, and Atkinson tied the score with a shot from the slot when the Sabres were unable to clear the puck from the defensive zone.

Lineups: Lawrence Pilut, Nathan Beaulieu and Remi Elie were healthy scratches for the Sabres. With Hutton in goal, Linus Ullmark will likely start Wednesday night in Dallas. Additionally, the Blue Jackets were without winger Boone Jenner, who has nine goals among 21 points in 48 games this season.

Next: The Sabres traveled to Dallas, where they will play the Stars in American Airlines Center Wednesday night at 8:30 p.m. EST.

Sabres Notebook: Defenseman Lawrence Pilut a healthy scratch again

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 29, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Lawrence Pilut's youthful mistakes earned him a seat in the Nationwide Arena press box.

Pilut, the Buffalo Sabres' 23-year-old defenseman, was a healthy scratch Tuesday night against the Columbus Blue Jackets after he struggled in a 4-3 loss to the Vancouver Canucks prior to the All-Star break. Matt Hunwick, who has been scratched for 13 consecutive games, will replace Pilut in the lineup.

Pilut has one goal among five points in 16 games since being recalled from Rochester, and advanced analytics paint him as the Sabres' most consistent threat on the blue line during that span. However, coach Phil Housley is hoping another break will help Pilut improve his decision-making.

"Lawrence's game has been pretty solid for us," Housley said following the morning skate. "He's had some games where he's made mistakes. That's going to be part of his development, learning from those things. He's going to get another opportunity. Tonight we're going to go with the six guys who give us a chance to win. I think Lawrence has done a terrific job just getting accustomed to the North American game. He still has a good swagger about his game. I think it's just in those times of [needing to keep] it simple and making better decisions."

Pilut's no-look backhanded pass in the defensive zone resulted in Brock Boeser's second-period goal in Rogers Arena on Jan. 18, giving the Canucks a 3-2 lead. He was scratched after a similar turnover during a 5-3 loss to Tampa Bay in KeyBank Center on Jan. 12, but only sat for the Sabres' 7-2 loss in Edmonton two days later.

Housley has remained patient with Rasmus Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson but has used a different strategy with Pilut since the Sabres have more options on defense. Rather than giving Nathan Beaulieu playing time, Housley opted for Hunwick, who has appeared in only two games this season.

Hunwick, 33, was acquired along with Conor Sheary from Pittsburgh in June but was unable to skate with the Sabres until December because of a neck injury suffered during an off-ice offseason workout. Hunwick made his Sabres debut in Boston on Dec. 16, and played the following game against Florida.

With eight healthy defensemen on the roster, Hunwick has not played since. He is under contract through next season and has played 523 NHL games over 12 seasons. Housley said that experience could be important with this being the Sabres' first game in 11 days.

Pilut was named the Swedish Hockey League's top defenseman last season after scoring eight goals among 38 points in 52 games. He started this season in Rochester, where he was tied for the AHL lead with 22 points through 16 games. That was enough to earn him a spot in the AHL All-Star Classic, though the Sabres excluded Pilut from this past weekend's festivities since he was needed on the NHL roster.

"It is a learning experience," Housley said. "We've been patient all along, not only with Lawrence but our young players. We know they're going to make mistakes. I thought our young guys were playing very good hockey before the break. Hopefully that transfers into tonight. We have eight very good defensemen that can play. ... [Hunwick] has bought his time and earned his due to get back into the lineup."

Rochester defenseman Brendan Guhle did not record a point in the North Division's four round-robin, 3-on-3 games during the AHL All-Star Classic in Springfield, Mass. The North won the event by beating the Central Division, 1-0, in a shootout Monday night.

The Amerks' All-Star break runs through Thursday, and they play in Binghamton at 7:05 p.m. Friday.

Defenseman Oskari Laaksonen, a Sabres prospect who won a gold medal at the World Junior Championships, has been added to Team Finland's roster for the upcoming Euro Hockey Tour, an annual tournament open to the national teams for Finland, Sweden, Russia and Czech Republic.

Laaksonen, a third-round draft pick in 2017, had one goal in seven games during the World Junior Championships and three goals among 18 points for Ilves of Liiga, Finland's top professional league.

The Sabres score a huge victory in Columbus

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 29, 2019

Columbus, OH (WGR 550) - The Sabres came off break flying taking the play to the Blue Jackets and getting themselves out to a 4-2 lead. There were so many things to like in the first 35 minutes. They made it tight by the end, but a good third period allowed Buffalo to pick up two points on everybody it's chasing except Boston.

The line of Casey Mittelstadt, Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues was around the net the whole first period and it paid off with Rodrigues scoring a goal in his fourth consecutive game. I thought the play by Sheary to set up the goal was fantastic and I thought Sheary had his best period of the season.

By being around the net, Sheary got two great opportunities to score and was using his speed to help get the puck up ice. His persistence in being there also got him the game-winning goal. He camped himself in front of Sergei Bobrovsky and was wide open to convert a Rodrigues rebound.

If Sheary plays around the net like that on a regular basis, his goal scoring slumps will be a thing of the past.

I was particularly impressed with the third period. Buffalo had a 4-2 lead but gave up two goals in the final five minutes of the second period to go into the intermission tied. It was maddening for the fans because Buffalo had played 35 minutes of very good hockey and then five minutes of horrible hockey making it 4-4.

Both Carter Hutton and Sheary said Jack Eichel rallied the troops helping them to a good third.

I thought the final three minutes were very good. Hutton was called on to make a few good saves while it was 6-on-5, but I thought they locked it down despite many tired players that had to stay on due to icing calls. John Tortorella did Buffalo a favor by calling time out allowing the Sabres stuck on the ice to rest and regroup.

Another thing that I liked was the answer the Sabres had to the Blue Jackets second goal. It took 21 seconds for Eichel to spring Jeff Skinner in alone. Bobrovsky appeared to have stopped it, but he fell backwards and the puck went over the goal line. That's the kind of response we haven't seen enough of this season.

This was only Matt Hunwick's third game of the season and I thought he was solid. He got into the offensive flow and was good in his own end.

Rasmus Ristolainen did a nice job of setting up Sam Reinhart for his goal, but it was the way he attacked the offensive zone that was key. He got in on the cycle and dominated along the wall to set up the goal.

I also don't want to forget to talk about the jump Mittelstadt had. The Sheary goal doesn't happen if Mittelstadt doesn't get in on the puck not once but twice. He was quick and Columbus couldn't handle him.

The win came at just the right time and the same thing can happen Wednesday in Dallas because the only other team playing will be Pittsburgh against Tampa Bay.

Sabres come back from the break with a 5-4 win in Columbus

WGR 550

January 29, 2019

Conor Sheary scored for the first time since December 22 and Evan Rodrigues found the net for the fourth straight game, leading the Buffalo Sabres to a 5-4 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Tuesday.

Buffalo's first game after a 10-day break saw the team give up a pair of two-goal leads, but the Sabres hung on for an important regulation win against an Eastern Conference foe. Jeff Skinner, fresh off his All-Star Game appearance picked right up where he left off with his team-leading 31st goal of the season.

Rodrigues opened the scoring, continuing his hot streak. Rasmus Dahlin got the play started, working the puck up ice with a spin-around pass from his own blue line. Sheary picked it up in the Columbus zone, sent it over to Casey Mittelstadt and Rodrigues was there to clean up the rebound for the 1-0 lead. The Blue Jackets answered almost immediately with Pierre-Luc Dubois' 18th goal of the season just 1:03 later.

Buffalo re-claimed the lead at 7:59 of the first on Sam Reinhart's 12th goal of the season. Reinhart broke free in front and finished off a strong shift for the Sabres' top line, sweeping a Rasmus Ristolainen pass by Sergei Bobrovsky. Reinhart was deked after the goal by Dubois, sparking a mini-scrum in front of the Columbus net. Less than two minutes later, Tage Thompson was left alone in the high slot and beat Bobrovsky cleanly, putting the Sabres up 3-1.

Nick Foligno pulled the Blue Jackets to within a goal 21-seconds into the second period with a power play goal, but Skinner's breakaway put Buffalo back in front by a pair only 21-seconds later. Bobrovsky got in front of Skinner's shot, but fell backwards into the net with the puck between his pants. Skinner's goal was allowed to stand after a brief review, giving the Sabres a 4-2 lead.

Columbus pulled even with a pair of goals in the latter stages of the second period, beginning with Brandon Dubinsky's fifth of the season. Cam Atkinson followed that up with his 28th, capitalizing on a bouncing puck in the Buffalo end. Atkinson gained possession near the crease, spun around and fired a shot by Carter Hutton, tying the score 4-4.

The Sabres went back on top 2:12 into the final period when Sheary put home a Rodrigues rebound for the 5-4 lead. Sheary, who added an assist earlier in the evening, punctuated a solid night with, what turned out to be, the game-winning goal.

Rasmus Dahlin added two assists, earning his sixth multi-point game of the season. Dahlin joins Phil Housley and Bobby Orr as the only defensemen in NHL history to rack up at least six multi-point games before their 19th birthday.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 2:14 - Evan Rodrigues (6) (Casey Mittelstadt, Conor Sheary); 7:59 - Sam Reinhart (12) (Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe); 9:39 - Tage Thompson (7) (Rasmus Dahlin, Zach Bogosian)
CBJ: 3:17 - Pierre-Luc Dubois (18) (Ryan Murray, Cam Atkinson)

Second Period:

BUF: 0:42 - Jeff Skinner (31) (Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin)
CBJ: 0:21 - Nick Foligno (13) (PPG) (Artemi Panarin, Pierre-Luc Dubois); 16:52 - Brandon Dubinsky (5) (Scott Harrington, Josh Anderson); 19:27 - Cam Atkinson (28) (Ryan Murray, Artemi Panarin)

Third Period:

BUF: 2:12 - Conor Sheary (8) (Evan Rodrigues, Zach Bogosian)
CBJ: NONE

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 18:37 - Conor Sheary (Delay of game - 2 min.)
CBJ: 10:12 - Artemi Panarin (Hooking - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 9:17 - Tage Thompson (Goaltender interference - 2 min.)
CBJ: 2:18 - Seth Jones (Tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE
CBJ: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 34 (16, 6, 12)
CBJ: 37 (13, 12, 12)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 33 saves
CBJ: Sergei Bobrovsky - 29 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 2 (0%)
CBJ: 1 for 2 (50%)

Three Stars:

Conor Sheary - BUF
Evan Rodrigues - BUF
Cam Atkinson - CBJ

What's Next:

The Sabres have a quick turnaround with an 8:30 p.m. faceoff in Dallas on Wednesday. The Stars are 24-21-4, good for 52 points and one of the two wild card spots in the Western Conference. Hear the call on WGR 550 with pregame coverage beginning at 7:30 p.m.

A wild finish to come in the East?

By Derek Kramer

WGR 550

January 29, 2019

Back on November 29th, the Buffalo Sabres were at the top of the National Hockey League, first place amongst all of the teams, nine points clear of the final playoff spot and at what would be the end of a 10-game winning streak. Fans were more focused on what team the Sabres could be facing in the playoffs, rather than if they were going to even be in the playoffs.

Since then, the Sabres have been on a 7-12-4 slide that has the team suddenly four points out of a playoff spot and has fans clamoring for some way to fix the team's issues.

What's been ignored is a rather odd story: the other nine teams in the playoff conversation have been producing at a clip that is a bit uncommon. For reference, the Western Conference's two wild card spots are sitting at 52 points, and the final spot in the Central Division is sitting at 55 points. In the West, the Sabres and Carolina Hurricanes (54 points each) would be ahead in the Wild Card and off by one point of an automatic divisional spot.

Sadly, the Sabres are in the Eastern Conference and, more problematically, the Atlantic Division. Tampa Bay is on another level, but the Sabres are now eight points back of the Toronto Maple Leafs, seven back of the Montreal Canadiens and five back of the Boston Bruins. In addition, Buffalo is four points behind the Pittsburgh Penguins for the final Wild Card spot in the East.

If the Sabres are to play better and make the playoffs, who is the most likely to start tailing off? Let's take a peek, in order of striking distance from the Sabres in the standings:

Pittsburgh Penguins (26-17-6, 58 points, second Wild Card)

Case for the Penguins falling out:

The Penguins seem to be a team that is still trying to recover from an early season slide that saw them closer to the bottom of the standings rather than their general spot among the top of the Metropolitan Division. It's strange to see a roster with Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Phil Kessel and Kris Letang fighting for a spot in the playoffs. The main problem has been goaltender Matt Murray taking another step back with a 3.00 goals-against-average and only a .908 save percentage. Murray has struggled with consistency and injuries, and has not been able to keep his No. 1 status in net.

Case for the Penguins holding on:

While Murray has struggled, Casey DeSmith has been able to play well in more action this season, with numbers far superior to Murray's. If Murray can steady up, DeSmith and Murray become a solid tandem that can do enough for a deep lineup in Pittsburgh.

Boston Bruins (27-17-5, 59 points, first Wild Card)

Case for the Bruins falling out:

Injuries have been a massive issue for Boston, the latest coming to goaltender Tuukka Rask. Boston has also dealt with major injuries to defensemen Zdeno Chara and Charlie McAvoy, and center Patrice Bergeron throughout the season. In addition, the Bruins have a problem that Sabres fans can relate to: a top-heavy roster that boasts only five players over 20 points on the season (Buffalo has six). If the Bruins can't get their secondary scoring going, they could be on the outside looking in.

Case for the Bruins holding on:

While Rask has been banged up this season, backup goalie Jaroslav Halak has been a revelation in matching Rask's numbers for the second-best team in goals against this season. Their goaltending has been solid, which allows the likes of Bergeron, David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand to do enough with their stellar production to win enough games.

Columbus Blue Jackets (28-17-3, 59 points, third in the Metropolitan)
Case for the Blue Jackets falling out:

Columbus is in a very awkward spot. They're a team that is a regular in the playoffs, yet has never won a playoff series and now has two unrestricted free agents to make major decisions on. Winger Artemi Panarin has told the Blue Jackets that he will not sign an extension in Columbus, which means that they will lose their best player after the season for nothing in return. The Blue Jackets, who are still just a playoff team but not a Cup contender, would be foolish to hold on to Panarin. Goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky is also an unrestricted free agent, but has picked a bad time to see his numbers drop. With Bobrovsky playing up and down and Columbus heavily invested in the future of Joonas Korpisalo in net, a moderate losing streak could see the Jackets unload a top winger and a former Vezina winner.

Case for the Blue Jackets holding on:

Being in the Metropolitan helps, where they are still just four points off of first place. Columbus is a team that is balanced and able to get scoring help throughout the lineup. If their goaltending can steady up, Columbus could be back in the playoffs yet again.

Washington Capitals (27-17-6, 60 points, second in the Metropolitan)
Case for the Capitals falling out:

The Capitals are in this piece simply due to their recent struggles, at a 3-5-2 record in their last 10 games, matching the Sabres current pace. The goaltending in Washington has struggled without their former coaching staff, as Braden Holtby and Pheonix Copley are rocking a combined save percentage of only .904. The team's defensive structure that was prevalent with former coach Barry Trotz is now gone and Washington has suffered in the goals against department.

Case for the Capitals holding on:

Alex Ovechkin is a bad, bad man. The league-leader in goals is a main cog for the sixth-best scoring team in the NHL. Ovechkin is the big name in a deep lineup that includes John Carlson, Nicklas Backstrom, Evgeny Kuznetsov and T.J. Oshie. While the defending Stanley Cup champs are on a slide, their scoring is spectacular and deep enough to make a return to the postseason.

Montreal Canadiens (28-18-5, 61 points, third in the Atlantic)
Case for the Canadiens falling out:

The Canadiens are not a team that wows you with scoring. They have no players at a point per-game in production (Max Domi leads Montreal with 44 points in 51 games). Domi, in particular, has cooled off a bit after starting the season at a point per-game pace. Goaltender Carey Price has been solid this season, but Montreal has gotten little help from Antti Niemi in relief (.894 save percentage and 3.66 goals-against average).

Case for the Canadiens holding on:

Price has steadied his game after an off year last season, and has gotten scoring help throughout the lineup with nine players over 20 points. Montreal is not shy about being aggressive, if not questionable, at the deadline with general manager Marc Bergevin.

Toronto Maple Leafs (30-17-2, 62 points, second in the Atlantic)
Case for the Maple Leafs falling out:

If only due to the fact that Toronto has been in a rut and is in the bunch with the rest of the East, Toronto should be included. The Leafs have seen players like Auston Matthews and William Nylander go cold as they head into their bye week. Like a pair of their star players, Toronto headed into their bye week with a 4-6 record in their last 10 games. If Toronto can't figure out their issues at home (14-11-1), the Leafs could make their fan base nervous.

Case for the Maple Leafs holding on:

Bad news is that Toronto took care of a need on their roster this week in the trade for defenseman Jake Muzzin. Muzzin allows the Leafs to finally drop Ron Hainsey off of the top pairing with Morgan Reilly, who is enjoying a career year. In addition, Mitch Marner has been Toronto's best player while teamed up with John Tavares on a line.

Bonus - Carolina Hurricanes (24-20-6, 54 points, currently out of playoffs)

Case for the Hurricanes falling out:

Carolina has usually been plagued by terrible goaltending in recent years. While Petr Mrazek has been a free agent bust, Carolina has gotten good production from waiver claim Curtis McElhinney. This season, it's about a lack of scoring, which is fitting after Carolina dealt Jeff Skinner to Buffalo. While Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen have been revelations, they're the only two players over 30 points this season. Carolina is also rumored to be looking at potential deals for winger Michael Ferlund and defenseman Dougie Hamilton.

Case for the Hurricanes to make it in:

Carolina has a balanced group that the analytics community seems to love. Their expected goals and shot generation numbers are off of the charts for a non-playoff team, and the Hurricanes are finally getting semi-competent goaltending. However, Carolina, like the Sabres, have the most work to do as they sit on the outside looking in.

The Sabres come out of their break continuing a five-game road trip

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 29, 2019

Columbus, OH (WGR 550) - After being a healthy scratch for 13 straight games, Matt Hunwick is getting an opportunity to play as the Sabres come out of break in Columbus. Phil Housley said, "There are a lot of things that go into it, he's been a great teammate and has bought his time and coming off a break, he has a little more experience because this game is going to be important." Hunwick will be paired with Marco Scandella.

It was more than Pilut's horrible giveaway in Vancouver that put him out of this game. He struggled that whole night and Housley said, "Lawrence's game has been pretty solid for us, but he's had some games where he's made mistakes and that's going to be part of his development, just learning from those things and he'll get another opportunity, but tonight we're going to go with the six guys that we feel give us a good chance to win, but he still has a good swagger about his game and I just think it's the times where he needs to keep it simple and making better decisions."

When talking about Pilut or Rasmus Dahlin, the whole thing is learning the right way. Housley said, "It is a learning experience and we've been patient all along not only with Lawrence, but with our young players. They're going to make mistakes, but I thought our young guys were playing very good hockey before the break and hopefully that transfers into tonight."

Joining Pilut in the press box will be Nate Beaulieu and Remi Elie.

This is a golden opportunity for the Sabres with Montreal and Toronto on their bye week. A regulation win can give the Sabres a chance to pick up two points on both those teams, as well as the Blue Jackets, Pittsburgh, Washington, Carolina and the Islanders. Boston hosts Winnipeg, so if the Jets win in regulation and the Sabres do the same, Buffalo will pick up two points on every team they're in the race with.

The last time here in Columbus, Buffalo blew a 2-1 first period lead giving up three goals in the second period. The Sabres got two back to force overtime, but Artemi Panarin won it in overtime.

Carter Hutton will be back in goal. He's only played in one of the last four games, giving up five goals in 24:49 of work in Edmonton. Recently, Hutton is 2-8-2.

Hutton spent the first few days of his break in Vancouver and then came back to Buffalo. He said he's coming back refreshed, "It's good to get away from it, it was quite a lot of hockey in not a lot of time, so it's nice to just refresh and take some time off from the rink."

Overall, Hutton is 14-14-3 with a 2.75 goals-against and .912 save percentage.

Buffalo went into the break with just one win in five games.

Evan Rodrigues probably didn't want to see the break come as he had goals in three consecutive games to go with five points in six games. Before the six games streak started, the forward only had 11 points in 36 games.

Jeff Skinner hasn't scored in four games, although he did have a goal in the All-Star Game.

Columbus is also coming out of the break with two consecutive losses. Before that, they won four straight.

In their last 10 games, the Blue Jackets are perfect on the penalty kill, going 23-for-23.

Sergei Bobrovsky is in net with a record of 19-14-1 with a 2.91 goals-against and a .904 save percentage. He's only played one of the last three games, giving up two goals in a loss at Minnesota.

Before that game, he struggled, allowing 22 goals in six games.

Panarin is their leading scorer with 19 goals and 34 assists for 53 points in 46 games. The Blue Jackets got bad news on Monday when Panarin's agent announced he will not negotiate with Columbus for a new contract and Panarin will become an unrestricted free agent July 1. Panarin has six goals and eight points in his last six games.

Join Schopp and the Bulldog for the pre-game starting at 6:00 when they'll be joined by Phil Housley, Carter Hutton and Evan Rodrigues.

Out of play: With a roster stacked with defensemen, playing time has become scarce for several Sabres

By John Vogl

The Athletic

January 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Good news or bad (and it's usually bad), Matt Hunwick just wants to know.

Is he going to play?

The Sabres have eight healthy defensemen, so two sit on a nightly basis. It's typically Hunwick, and either Nathan Beaulieu or Lawrence Pilut. Practice is a good indicator of who might get in. If Pilut or Beaulieu is working with the power-play unit, he's in — but sometimes it's not obvious.

Hunwick just wants to know.

"They've been pretty good about not keeping us guessing in terms of if we're going to go in," Hunwick said Monday. "The more you know, the clearer things are and the easier it is."

Not that it's easy. Far from it. It's reached the point where Beaulieu would welcome a trade if he's not going to play, even though he loves being in Buffalo.

"I'd like to say it's not that difficult," he said, "but it is."

Coach Phil Housley recognizes the pain in his players. But until general manager Jason Botterill clears the logjam — which might get worse now that injured Casey Nelson is practicing again — there will be two disappointed defensemen on a daily basis.

"We've got eight very good defensemen that can play, so it's tough decisions," Housley said. "It falls on me to make the right one."

Though the coach certainly looks at individual stats, he will only concede that he makes roster decisions based on wins or losses. The Sabres lost Dec. 27 in St. Louis, so Pilut sat for two games. They lost Dec. 31 to the Islanders, so Beaulieu missed five straight. Pilut was part of a losing lineup Jan. 12 against Tampa Bay, so he sat. After Buffalo lost the next game in Edmonton, the defensemen alternated roles again.

"It's sort of been driven by results, so that's what goes into a lot of those decisions," Housley said.

So, who's providing results? Here are the season records for the oft-scratched trio:

*The Sabres are 12-9-5 when Beaulieu plays, including 0-2-2 in his last four.

*They are 6-8-2 with Pilut in the lineup.

*They are 1-1 with Hunwick, with a loss in his last appearance Dec. 18.

"There's really not a lot you can do about the numbers," Hunwick said of having extra defensemen. "Right now, we've been limited to just practice. So, just prepare as best we can and be ready for the next time we get a chance to play."

He gets ready when the others are resting.

"There's a lot of skates where the team's not skating in the morning skate," Hunwick said. "It'll be just three, four guys out there, so it gives you an opportunity to keep working on your puck skills. You have to do extra after regular practice just to keep up. But that's it, really."

Beaulieu turns to video.

"Just try to watch a lot of film," he said. "Every now and then, I'll go back and watch a game I played and usually a lot of positive things that I've done. Watch a lot of tape, and that's basically all you can do."

"The biggest thing for me is mentally try and stay involved. I think that's what goes first. It's not so much my body and my hands, my legs. It's more the mental part of it."

Pilut, a rookie, watches the veterans who are in the lineup when he's not.

"I just try to focus on our game and our system, try to look at guys and learn from guys," he said. "The veterans who help me out a lot in the locker room, I focus on those guys and learn a lot from them, just how they are out there on the ice."

Aside from joining the scratched list, Pilut and Beaulieu have something else in common. They perform better at home than on the road, where the opposition decides the matchups. Here are their stats at home:

Player	Games	Goals	Assists	Corsi	Plus/minus
Beaulieu	16	3	4	52.13	4
Pilut	8	1	4	52.32	5

And their stats on the road:

Player	Games	Goals	Assists	Corsi	Plus/minus
Beaulieu	10	0	0	45.19	-4
Pilut	8	0	0	52	-1

Beaulieu adds a physicality that the 5-foot-11, 180-pound Pilut can't match. Pilut is a better puck mover, though he's had egregious giveaways during recent games.

"Those type of mistakes aren't really my game," Pilut said. "It's been happening a couple times now, and you just want to forget about it. But in one way, you learn from it, and you go on. You don't want to do that again, you know? That's what I'm trying to do now is refocus on my game, keep developing and play my game even better."

If the Sabres wanted to get down to seven defensemen, they had an ideal chance last week. Their bye and the NHL All-Star break coincided with the AHL All-Star Game. Pilut was selected to play in the minor-league showcase, so he could have gone down to Rochester.

He stayed, though he says no one has told him if he's staying for the rest of the season. The long-term uncertainty matches the short-term questions about the lineup spots.

Botterill and his fellow GMs will have the ultimate say in who stays or departs. Defensemen have been in demand. Toronto acquired Jake Muzzin from Los Angeles on Monday, hours after Dallas picked up Jamie Oleksiak from Pittsburgh for a fourth-round pick. There were four other trades involving D-men earlier this month, typically for a mid- to late-round pick.

Odds are good that Buffalo will join the movement before the Feb. 25 trade deadline. Until then, Housley is deciding who's sitting and playing — and two guys have to deal with it.

"It's just where we are," the coach said. "We're carrying eight defensemen, and there's no good way to go about it."

Sabres' Nathan Beaulieu, Matt Hunwick patiently waiting to play

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 29, 2019

BUFFALO – Doing extra work on and off the ice to stay sharp for your next opportunity is the easy part for healthy scratches.

"It's not so much my body, my hands, my legs," said Sabres defenseman Nathan Beaulieu, who has been scratched 12 out of the last 15 games. "It's more the mental part of it. The game's really fast. You step in the position you're in, a lot is on the line, so it's important that you're ready."

Right now, the Sabres have eight healthy defensemen, meaning coach Phil Housley must sit out two healthy ones every game. Casey Nelson is also practicing again after recovering from an upper-body injury.

For more than a month, Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick have usually been the odd guys out.

"There's 22, 23 other hours in the day where it can creep in your mind you're not playing," said Hunwick, who has played only two games this season after recovering from a neck injury. "You just try to focus on the things that you can control, be a good teammate."

However, Hunwick, 33, might dress for tonight's road tilt against the Columbus Blue Jackets, the Sabres' first outing since Jan. 18 following their bye week and the NHL All-Star break.

Hunwick, a healthy scratch the last 13 games, has been practicing beside defenseman Marco Scandella, a sign he has possibly cracked the top six.

Still, Housley wouldn't officially say Hunwick would play his first game since Dec. 18.

"We'll know more tomorrow," Housley said Monday inside KeyBank Center.

Based on Monday's practice pairings, Beaulieu, 26, and rookie Lawrence Pilut, 23, will likely be scratched tonight. Before the long break, Pilut, who has passed Beaulieu on the depth chart, struggled in the Sabres' 4-3 road loss to the Vancouver Canucks.

For the third straight contest and eighth time in the last nine outings, Beaulieu could watch his teammates.

A report surfaced two weeks ago the affable Beaulieu, a former first-round pick by the Montreal Canadiens, had requested a trade.

Beaulieu wants to make it clear he loves being a part of the Sabres and the city.

"Buffalo's taken me with open arms," Beaulieu said Monday.

But Beaulieu, a restricted free agent following the season, wants game action.

"Let's face it, we're in a business now," Beaulieu said. "I'm a hockey player and ... I feel like I can play every night. I think I proved that over my time in this league. So (the) bottom line is you just want to be out there and help this team because we set ourselves up. We're in a pretty good position for the second half."

As the Sabres, who have fallen from first overall to fifth in the Atlantic Division, piled up wins early on, it was easier for Housley to pick his defense lineup.

"We've made decisions earlier in the season and we were having a lot more success, and it was easier to change guys when we were winning or losing," Housley said. "But now it's sort of been driven by results. That's what goes into a lot of those decisions. Are we getting the results?"

"We've got eight very good defensemen that can play. So that's tough decisions. It falls on me to make the right one."

Hunwick, who arrived from the Pittsburgh Penguins on June 27, has endured an odd campaign. The neck injury he suffered working out during the offseason sidelined him until Dec. 16.

"I've played two NHL games in probably nine or 10 months," Hunwick said. "I'm sure there will be some rust next time I play just from a lack of playing. Guys are too good at this point to kind of feel like you can just jump in and be at your best.

"But I think that's kind of the goal. That's why you practice so hard, that's why you do all the things away from the rink to give yourself the best opportunity when you go in."

Sitting out hasn't sapped much of Beaulieu's confidence. He knows he contributed regularly to the Sabres early on, contributing some solid minutes.

"(Playing only) 26 games stinks," Beaulieu said of his season. "But I'm happy with where I'm at. Obviously, I just got to try to keep developing. It's tough not playing. I'm a 26-year-old defenseman. I feel like I could skate well, got good skill.

"I just give a lot of credit to my teammates. They've really helped me along (with) this. It hasn't been the easiest road. The bottom line is it's just human nature, you want to be out there."

5 Observations: Sabres return from break with win, top Blue Jackets 5-4

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) —

It turns out a 10-day break is just what the doctor ordered as the Buffalo Sabres returned from the all-star break with a 5-4 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets. Evan Rodrigues, Sam Reinhart, Tage Thompson, Jeff Skinner, and Conor Sheary scored for the Sabres, who improve to 25-18-6.

5 Observations from Tuesday's win:

They needed that

In a playoff race, you can't blow two-goal leads. Well, the Sabres did it twice but still managed to find a way to win. For much of the evening the Sabres outplayed Columbus but in the final minutes of the second period, they watched a 4-2 lead quickly become a tied game. After a long break this was a game the Sabres needed and they found a way to win. If nothing else, starting off the unofficial second half of the season with a win should be a big morale boost for a team that needs to go on a run.

Buzzing right out of the gate

From the minute the puck was dropped the Sabres combination of Conor Sheary, Casey Mittelstadt, and Evan Rodrigues controlled the pace of play. On numerous occasions, the trio led the Sabres down the ice on odd-man rushes and on two different occasions their efforts led to goals.

In the first period, a nice play from Dahlin allowed Sheary and Mittelstadt to streak down the ice and generate a great chance. Bobrovsky turned away Mittelstadt with a nice save, but Rodrigues followed the play to score his sixth goal of the season. For those keep tracking at home, this is the fourth consecutive game where Rodrigues has found the back of the net.

In the third period with the game on the line, it was Sheary stepping up, jamming home a rebound on a shot from Rodrigues. For Sheary it's his first goal with a goaltender in the net since November 8 [he scored an empty-netter on Dec. 22]. It was arguably his best game as a member of the Sabres and his linemates weren't too shabby either.

Third time's a charm

In his third game this season I was impressed with Matt Hunwick's contributions at both ends of the ice. Playing alongside Marco Scandella, Hunwick joined the rush on multiple occasions and generated some nice scoring chances thanks to his skating ability.

I'm not sure if he'll stick in the lineup with Lawrence Pilut and Nathan Beaulieu patiently waiting to redeem themselves. However, if Hunwick is back in the lineup against Dallas on Wednesday I can totally understand why.

He's 18-years-old

When the Sabres play on national television the broadcasters are quick to remind you that Rasmus Dahlin is only 18-years-old basically every time he's on the ice. Jokes aside, on nights like Tuesday it's amazing to think about Dahlin's potential. He's already one of the most impactful players in every game he plays and that was once again the case against Columbus. With his two assists on Tuesday Dahlin now has eight points [1G, 7A] in the Sabres last seven games.

His partner, Zach Bogosian has also been very impressive during Dahlin's recent tear. As a pair, Dahlin and Bogosian seem to balance each other quite well, looking comfortable at their own end of the ice while providing the ability to quickly break the puck out of their own end.

So-So night for Hutton

If you just looked at the box score you'd probably think Carter Hutton deserved much of the blame on a night where he allowed four goals. Of those four, it's fair to assume Hutton would like a few of them back. The Blue Jackets' third goal from Brandon Dubinsky stands out the most, as Hutton let a redirection sneak behind him and trickle past the goal line. I'd expect Ullmark gets the start on the second half of the back-to-back and if he earns the win, he should be the guy in the blue paint for the Sabres on Friday night against the Blackhawks. That said, Hutton was perfect in the third period and earned the win, which is ultimately what's most important.

Sabres Open Up 2nd Half of Season With 5-4 Win

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

January 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres started the second half of the season on a high note with a 5-4 win over Columbus.

Buffalo jumped out to a 1-0 lead just over two minutes in when Evan Rodrigues finished up a rebound in front.

However just over a minute later, the Blue Jackets would tie the game up when Pierre-Luc Dubois beat Carter Hutton.

Buffalo would bounce back with two goals in under two minutes. Sam Reinhart would fire home a one-timer off a pass from Rasmus Ristolainen. Then Tage Thompson would rifle a sniper top shelf to give the Sabres the 3-1 lead after the first period.

The second period favored the Blue Jackets, as Nick Foligno scored 21 seconds in on the power play. Jeff Skinner would answer for the Sabres just 21 seconds later to give Buffalo the 4-2 lead. That goal was Skinner's 31st of the season, and he moved to 2nd in the NHL in scoring.

Late in the period Columbus would score two goals in three minutes, and both teams would head into the third period knotted at four.

The game winner would come from Conor Sheary when he finished a rebound from Rodrigues.

Sheary and Rodrigues both finished the night with two points. Buffalo heads to Dallas Wednesday for an 8:30pm matchup with the Stars.

Sabres set to play 1st game after bye week tonight in Columbus

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 29, 2019

COLUMBUS - The Buffalo Sabres have had 10 days pass since their last game and they're ready to jump back into action tonight.

Buffalo opens up its post-bye week slate with a game tonight against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena.

"We're ready to go," alternate captain Kyle Okposo said. "You learn in your career how to come back from these breaks. Some guys probably come back a little bit better than others physically, but everybody got a mental breather and everybody should be excited to play tonight."

The Sabres are 3-6-1 in their last 10 games and are now four points behind Pittsburgh for the final Wild Card spot. They'll look to climb back into the race with current playoff teams like the Maple Leafs, Islanders, Capitals and Canadiens currently on their bye weeks.

"As a whole, we need just focus on ourselves, right?" Carter Hutton, who is expected to start in goal, said. "I know it's sometimes easier said than done, especially when you're sitting at home and you're watching other teams win and collect points, and you can't play."

"But we're in that opportunity now where we have some games in hand. We can make up some ground."

"We've just got to get back to having a little tighter focus, just worry about each game and each day. You start looking too far ahead and that may have happened a little bit here. You start worrying too much about things we can't control and things slip away a little bit."

"Just get back to what got us to this point. At the start of the year, if you were to say we're at this point at this time, we'd probably take it, right? It's just the way that things have gone, the ups and downs. For us, [it's about] getting back to the simple things that brought us success early."

This will also be Columbus' first game back from their bye week. The Blue Jackets sit in third place in the Metropolitan Division with 59 points. They're led by winger Artemi Panarin, who has 19 goals and 53 points, and All-Star Cam Atkinson, who has racked up 27 goals and 48 points so far this year.

Panarin scored the overtime winner in the last meeting between these two clubs back on Oct. 27.

Sergei Bobrovsky will be between the pipes.

"I would expect they're going to try to establish their forecheck. That's a really big strength of their team and we're going to have to manage the puck as they transition really well," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "And when it's called for, we're going to have to be good in our D zone. They're a very good possession team down low."

Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550 with Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray on the call. The GMC Game Night pregame show on MSG starts at 6:30.

After the game, the team will travel to Dallas for a matchup tomorrow night against the Stars. Then a seven-game homestand opens up on Friday against Chicago.

Projected lineup

Here's how the team lined up during the morning skate:

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

72 Tage Thompson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 29 Jason Pominville

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo
43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 71 Evan Rodrigues

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
6 Marco Scandella - 48 Matt Hunwick

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

Scratched: 24 Lawrence Pilut, 81 Remi Elie, 82 Nathan Beaulieu

Matt Hunwick will draw back into the lineup tonight. He sustained a neck injury before the start of training camp that caused him to miss the first 33 games of the season. When he returned, he played in two games - on Dec. 16 and Dec. 18 - and has been a healthy scratch in each of the 13 games since.

"He's been a great teammate and has bought his time right now," Housley said. "Coming off a break, I think a little bit more experience right now coming into this game is going to be important."

With eight healthy defensemen on the roster, Lawrence Pilut and Nathan Beaulieu are expected to be the scratches tonight.

Pilut has five points (1+4) in 16 games this season. The 23-year-old blue liner was the Swedish Hockey League's Defenseman of the Year in 2017-18.

"Lawrence's game has been pretty solid for us. He's had some games where he's made mistakes. That's going to be part of his development, just learning from those things," Housley said. "He's going to get another opportunity, but tonight, we're going to with the six guys we feel give us a good chance to win.

"But I think Lawrence has done a terrific job just getting accustomed to the North American game. He still has a good swagger about his game and I just think it's in those times of just keeping it simple and making better decisions."

Pilut is one of four skaters on the roster - along with Rasmus Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson - who is in the midst of his first full NHL season.

"It is a learning experience and we've been patient all along not only with Lawrence, but [all of] our young players. We know they're going to make mistakes and I thought our young guys were playing very good hockey before the break. Hopefully that transfers into tonight," Housley said.

"We have eight very good defensemen that can play. It's a game-by-game decision that we're going to look at and evaluate. Hunny's bought his time and has earned his due to get back in the lineup."

Defenseman Casey Nelson is also nearing a return from an upper-body injury that has sidelined him for the past 19 games.

Stick around during the 1st intermission

Part 1 of "The Tandem" will air tonight on the broadcast. The second part of the newest installment of Beyond Blue and Gold presented by New Era will debut tomorrow night during the game in Dallas.

Sheary's 3rd-period goal lifts Sabres to victory over Columbus

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 29, 2019

COLUMBUS - Coming out of the bye week, Buffalo Sabres coach Phil Housley wanted to hit the reset button. His club had gone 3-6-1 in the 10 games before the break and he used the two practices and the morning skate before their game against the Columbus Blue Jackets to try to get back to basics.

The result was a 5-4 win over Columbus on Tuesday at Nationwide Arena. Conor Sheary, Jeff Skinner, Evan Rodrigues and Tage Thompson scored for Buffalo. Carter Hutton finished the game with 33 saves.

The Sabres carried a 3-1 lead into the second period, but the Blue Jackets battled back. Columbus captain Nick Foligno scored on the power play 21 seconds in, and while the Sabres answered back almost immediately with a breakaway goal from Skinner, Columbus scored twice in the final 3:08 of the period to tie it 4-4.

The players said they maintained a positive vibe in the dressing room between periods and Hutton credited captain Jack Eichel with rallying the troops before they took the ice for the third.

Then, Sheary scored what turned out to be the winner 2:12 into the final frame and Buffalo was able to hang on to earn the two points.

"We had a good response. Giving up two quick ones on the road, it's tough," Skinner said. "We come into the intermission and regroup a little bit and get off to a great start. Shears gets a big goal for us and we were able to shut it down from there."

The final minutes of the game featured a feverish attack by the Blue Jackets, but the Sabres were able to hold their ground, get sticks and bodies into shot lanes and play well defensively.

"That's the price you have to pay to win," Housley said.

Line work

The Sabres really benefited from one new line combination in particular: Casey Mittelstadt between Sheary and Rodrigues. Sheary and Rodrigues each recorded a goal and an assist in the game. Rodrigues now has goals in four straight contests.

Sheary's goal was his first since Dec. 22 and his first non-empty net goal since Nov. 8.

"I went through a big drought of not scoring," Sheary said afterwards. "I think that was something people were telling me: Just get to the net. Those guys on my line were good at it too tonight. When you get pucks there, you get those second-chance opportunities and we were fortunate tonight."

The line found some instant chemistry and was, in Sheary's words, buzzing around Sergei Bobrovsky and the Columbus defense all night.

"I thought our line overall played really well. We were making plays, but at the same time, we were managing it, too, not making too risky of plays," Mittelstadt, who picked up an assist on Rodrigues' game-opening goal, said. "We had good support all over the ice, some little passes that opened up space for each other. I thought our line did really well as a whole and try to keep it rolling into Dallas."

Sheary's goal was the result of staying in front of the net and he was able to tap in a shot from Rodrigues that rebounded off Bobrovsky's pad.

"That's a mindset that you have to have when things aren't going your way. If you go there, things are going to happen and it happened for Conor Sheary," Housley said.

Gaining ground in the East

With 56 points through 49 games played, they're now two points back of Pittsburgh for the second Wild Card spot. Columbus remains one point ahead of the Penguins in the Metropolitan Division.

"Even though they're not in our division, we're still chasing them down," Sheary said of Columbus. "We're trying to move into that Wild Card spot and then eventually into the top of our division so these were a big two points for us."

Dahlin continues to make history

Rasmus Dahlin recorded two assists for his sixth multi-point game of the season.

According to @PR_NHL, only two other defensemen in NHL history have had at least six before their 19th birthdays: Phil Housley (13) and Bobby Orr (8).

He's also climbing the all-time points list for 18-year-old defensemen.

Coming up

The Sabres are in Dallas for a game Wednesday night against the Stars. Faceoff is scheduled for 8:30 p.m. ET on MSG and WGR 550.

They'll then return home to open up a seven-game homestand starting Friday against Chicago.