



Buffalo Sabres

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Jack Eichel returns to Sabres practice, 'not a rush' to play

By Jason Wolf
The Buffalo News
January 7, 2019

Jack Eichel returned to practice on a limited basis Monday after missing the previous two games with what's listed as an upper-body injury, raising the possibility the Buffalo Sabres' captain returns to the lineup for Tuesday night's game against the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center.

Whether that's likely is another matter.

"I'm a competitive guy," Eichel said. "I like to be out there every night and it kills me to not be out there. It kills me not to be playing. It kills me not to be hanging out with these guys every day and competing.

"I think the hardest part about it is just the mental aspect, and we've talked about this before the last few years, just not being able to get out there and do it. But it feels good to practice today. It feels good to make strides. I felt good. I'm feeling like myself again. So like I said, just want to try and see what (Tuesday) brings."

Eichel was absent from the ice for the first 20 minutes of practice, and once he skated onto the ice, he did not join a line. He participated in some team drills and spent some time with the top power play unit.

Sabres coach Phil Housley declined to provide much detail on Eichel's timetable but seemed optimistic about his progress.

"Him just coming back and getting the OK to get into practice was a good sign," Housley said, "so we'll know more (Tuesday) on that."

While Eichel is frustrated to miss time, he made it clear there's no rush for him to return.

"I think at this point it's sort of just taking it every day, seeing how I feel," Eichel said. "Obviously, it's not a rush. You don't want to put yourself in a bad position. You want to make sure you're comfortable in every situation that you put yourself in, myself and the team, so I think that's kind of been where it's at now. Just seeing how we are each day, trying to progress.

"I think if you can just get a little better every day, I think it's a positive. For me, it's been that sort of thing. Everything I can do to try and get back and help the team as soon as possible, I want to do. But with that being said, obviously you don't want to rush things and put yourself behind."

Vladimir Sobotka centered the top line Monday, alongside Jeff Skinner and Tage Thompson.

The Sabres have used Evan Rodrigues, Casey Mittelstadt and Sobotka to center the top line since Eichel was injured. The injury first surfaced when Eichel took a maintenance day from practice on Dec. 30, and he skated just four shifts in a home loss to the New York Islanders on New Year's Eve before leaving the game.

"I think anytime you lose a big piece, it's an opportunity for guys to step up and guys get some more opportunity to sort of show what they can do," Skinner said. "I think that's just part of being on a team. ... Teams run into injuries and guys have to respond. It's a long season. It's going to happen with the lineup and you just have to have guys step up."

Mittelstadt said there's no way to adequately replace Eichel's production.

"He's a big part of our engine, obviously," Mittelstadt said. "He does a lot for us and makes a lot of plays, one of the best players in the league. You can't really replace him. You've just got to get some scoring from everyone overall, and everyone's got to do their job a little bit better. That's what it comes down to."

Housley said there's at least some silver lining to Eichel's absence, in that it means more playing time and experience for other players. He pointed to the team's 4-3 victory against Florida on Thursday.

"I think you saw the result against Florida," Housley said. "If we play our team game, even when Jack's in the lineup, we have to play a team game. Some guys stepped up and played more minutes, more meaningful minutes with his absence. We know that, even in Boston, we looked really good at times. And that's a very good team. They're fighting for the same thing we are."

"The minutes are going to be spread around. There's going to be guys in different seats on the bus. But when we do play a meaningful 60-minute team game, we're going to have team success."

As for what Housley is looking for once Eichel returns?

"I think just getting back to his game," Housley said. "I loved the way he was playing the 200-foot game before this absence of him, whether it was D-zone coverage and his awareness at killing plays. But the way he was attacking, coming out of our end through the neutral zone, using his speed, and he was heavy down low in the offensive zone. He's able to protect pucks and fend guys off him and then get that separation he needs to get his eyes up and to make a play. I think just playing a solid 200-foot game."

Eichel said the team needs to play with "desperation" to succeed, regardless of whether he plays.

"Obviously, you need that desperation with or without me in the lineup," Eichel said. "Whoever is in the lineup at that time, you can see how tight of checking the games have become, and it's that second half of the year. Everyone's trying to push towards a spot, so I think for us it's just about every day coming in and trying to get better work and preparing ourselves for the next day."

"There's so many ups and downs in an NHL season, it's important for us to try and stay even-keeled and try to narrow our focus as much as we can, and for the group in here, obviously it's been pretty positive for us. The times where we've played desperate, we've respected the opponent, we've respected our own end, tried to keep the puck out of our end, and obviously worked to get in their zone and get the puck behind their goaltender. It's not an easy league to score in by any means."

"It's good that guys are chipping in. I guess you could say we need more from everyone every night, because every team is bringing more every night. It's getting more and more competitive, and that's just how the season goes. As the season amps up, I think we've got to amp ourselves up, too. I think we're ready for the challenge. We've just got to commit to it."

Player updates

Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons returned to practice Monday. He's been listed as week to week with an upper body injury since least playing against St. Louis on Dec. 27.

His availability for Tuesday has not yet been determined.

Girgensons skated on the third line with Mittelstadt and C.J. Smith.

Top-line forward Sam Reinhart is sick, Housley said, explaining his absence from Monday's practice. Reinhart missed the team's Skills Challenge on Sunday after playing 19:14 over 22 shifts against Boston on Saturday.

Defenseman Zach Bogosian received a maintenance day, Housley said.

Glotov to All-Star Game

Cincinnati forward Vasily Glotov, the Sabres' seventh-round pick in 2017, has been named to the CCM/ECHL All-Star Classic and will represent the Western Conference. The game is at 7 p.m. Jan. 21 and will air on NHL Network.

Glotov, in his first full pro season, has seven goals and 16 assists in 31 games for the Cyclones this season. He appeared in six games at the end of last season between Cincinnati and Rochester.

Jack Eichel joins practice, Sam Reinhart out for Sabres

The Buffalo News

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The Buffalo Sabres were on the ice Monday for practice and there was no sign of Jack Eichel or Sam Reinhart in the early going, but Eichel later joined the team.

Eichel has missed the last two games with an upper-body injury. Coach Phil Housley said Eichel practicing was "a good sign" but said he would know more Tuesday in advance of the Sabres game against the New Jersey Devils.

Reinhart is sick, Housley said. He did not practice or participate in the Skills Challenge on Sunday, but played 19:14 over 22 shifts against the Bruins on Saturday night in TD Garden.

Zemgus Girgensons returned to practice. He had been listed as week to week with an upper body injury. Girgensons' status for Tuesday will be determined.

Zach Bogosian did not practice on a maintenance day.

Sabres get Eichel back at practice

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

January 7, 2019

At first, Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel did not take to the ice on Monday morning for practice with his fellow teammates at KeyBank Center. However, about 20 minutes later, Eichel jumped on the ice and joined the rest of the group as they prepared for Tuesday night's matchup with the New Jersey Devils.

The 22-year-old center did not take part in any line rushes once he joined his teammates, but did get to work in a bit on a defensive pairing with Nathan Beaulieu and Scott Wilson. He also got the chance to work in late with some power play drills, taking his usual spot right near the faceoff circle to the right of the net.

Eichel said it was great to get back on the ice after missing some time with his injury.

"Obviously it's tough when you're not on the ice," he said after practice. "It's nice to be back at practice and just being around the guys, obviously competing, doing that sort of thing. It was nice."

In the two games without Eichel, the Sabres went 1-1-0 with a win over the Florida Panthers on Thursday and a loss to the Boston Bruins on Saturday. In those two games, the Sabres have managed to be productive, but the team continues to lack in secondary scoring. Both games were decided by a goal, but in neither game did they show signs of dominating the play for any long stretch of time.

While Eichel is itching to get back into game action with his teammates, he knows that he doesn't want to push himself too much with the possibility of setting himself back more.

"I think at this point it's just taking it every day and seeing how I feel," Eichel said. "Obviously it's not a rush, you don't want to put yourself in a bad position. You want to make sure you're comfortable in every situation you put yourself in. [That's] for myself and for the team. I think that's kind of been where it's at now, just seeing how we are each day and trying to progress. If you can just get a little better every day, I think it's a positive. For me, it's been that sort of thing. Everything I can do and try to get back and help the team as soon as possible I want to do, but with that being said, you don't want to rush things and put yourself behind."

When asked about Eichel's status for Tuesday against the Devils, head coach Phil Housley was very brief in saying that he doesn't know if his captain will be ready to dress.

"I think those questions will be answered tomorrow," Housley said. "With him just coming back and getting the O.K. to get into practice was a good sign. We'll know more about that tomorrow."

The Sabres currently find themselves sitting in the final Wild Card spot in the Eastern Conference with a 22-14-6 record and 50 points. Buffalo sits two spots back of the Bruins for third in the Atlantic Division, while they are currently tied with the New York Islanders for the first Wild Card spot. However, the Islanders have two games in-hand on the Sabres, while also winning two more regulation/overtime games.

On Monday, the Montreal Canadiens have the chance to put the Sabres out of a playoff spot with a win or an overtime/shootout loss to the Minnesota Wild on home ice. Montreal is currently one point back of the Sabres with a 22-15-5 record and 20 regulation/overtime wins.

With Buffalo's recent struggles and its decline in the standings, Eichel knows how important each game will be over the next couple of weeks.

"Every game is important. Nothing has changed from the mindset we've had at the beginning of the year," Eichel said. "Every game means a lot for us, and obviously with how tight the race is and everyone seems to be getting points every night in the league, so it's important. You know me, I'm a competitive guy. I like to be out there every night. It kills me not to be out there. It kills me not to be playing, not to be hanging out with these guys every day and competing. I think the hardest part about it is the mental aspect, and we've talked about this for

the last few years - just not being able to get out there and do it, but it feels good to practice today, feels good to make strides. I felt good, feeling like myself again. Just want to see what tomorrow brings."

With Eichel out of the lineup over the past couple of games, the onus is to find ways to plug and place players in the lineup to try and find different ways to score. On Monday, the lines were mixed up a bit to try and change something up.

Here is how the lines looked:

Skinner - Sobotka - Thompson

Sheary - Rodrigues - Pominville

Smith - Mittelstadt - Girgensons

Elie - Larsson - Okposo

Pilut - Ristolainen

Scandella - McCabe

Dahlin - Hunwick

Wilson (Eichel) - Beaulieu

PP1: Skinner - Rodrigues (Eichel) - Thompson / Ristolainen - Okposo

PP2: Sheary - Mittelstadt - Pominville / Dahlin - Pilut

Even with Eichel in the lineup, secondary scoring has been a constant issue that continues to be a major concern moving forward.

With the Sabres starting to struggle and fall out of playoff position, now is the time for some players to step up their game and find a way to come away with some wins in the second half of the season.

"Obviously you need that desperation with or without me in the lineup," Eichel said. "Whoever is in the lineup at that time - you can see how tight of checking the games have become, and it's that second half of the year. Everyone is trying to push towards a spot. I think for us, it's just about every day coming in and trying to get better work and preparing ourselves for the next game. There's so many ups and downs in a NHL season, and it's important for us to try and stay even-keeled, and narrow our focus as much as we can. For the group in here, it's been pretty positive for us. For the times we've played desperate, we've respected the opponent. We've respected our own end, tried to keep the puck out of our end, and obviously work to get into their zone and get the puck behind their goaltender. It's not an easy league to score in by any means, so it's good that guys are chipping in. We just need more from everyone every night, because every team is bringing more every night. It's getting more and more competitive, and that's just how the season goes. As the season amps up, we have to amp ourselves up too. I think we're ready for the challenge, we just have to commit to that."

Zemgus Girgensons also returned to the ice for the Sabres on Monday after missing the last four games with an upper-body injury. Girgensons said the injury was suffered during the game against the Anaheim Ducks on December 22, but would not disclose what the extent of his injury was.

The 25-year-old was happy to be back on the ice, and is hopeful that he will get the green light to suit up for Tuesday's tilt with the Devils.

"It's never fun to be hurt, sitting out and watching it from the outside," Girgensons said. "It's always nice to get back with the guys on the ice and have some fun."

"I thought I made good progress, I feel good. Definitely a little quicker [recovery] than I thought, so it's all good."

Housley also did not give any clarity on Girgensons' status for Tuesday's game against New Jersey.

"I really liked what Zemgus brought today in practice. It was good to see him back," Housley said. "Those decisions will be made tomorrow."

Not practicing on Monday was Sabres forward Sam Reinhart and defenseman Zach Bogosian. Bogosian was given a maintenance day, while Reinhart was feeling under the weather.

The Sabres will return to the ice on Tuesday for the morning skate at around 10:30 a.m.

Sabres' Jason Pominville remaining confident as ice time dips

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Barely two months ago, Jason Pominville was enjoying a renaissance. As his 1,000th NHL game and 36th birthday approached, the affable Sabres winger kept piling up goals and points.

On Nov. 17, Pominville scored his ninth goal and 17th point in the Sabres' 20th game. But since then, he has mustered just one assist.

Pominville, the Sabres' biggest early-season surprise, has a 17-game goal drought entering tonight's tilt against the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center.

His ice time has declined sharply, falling from about 15 to 18 minutes an outing during a stretch in which he compiled seven goals and 14 points to below nine minutes some nights, including Saturday's 2-1 loss in Boston.

"Everyone's a competitor and ... whether you're playing 10 or 20 or 30 (minutes), you always feel like you can get more," Pominville said Monday. "Obviously, I'm no different. But am I going to sit here and complain and feel sorry for myself? Absolutely not. I'll just go out there and work.

"I know I'll have a chance to play more and I know it will come more. I know they're moving lines all the time, different personnel playing in different roles. I completely understand that. Yeah, my time will come."

Pominville stopped producing offense around the time Sabres coach Phil Housley moved him off the top line beside center Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner.

The Sabres' oldest player has bounced around the lineup for weeks, often skating on the fourth line. His power-play time has also diminished.

"It's just a result there's been a lot of guys squeezing sticks a little tight," Sabres coach Phil Housley said of why Pominville's minutes have dipped.

Pominville practiced at right wing Monday beside center Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary. Housley said Pominville could also skate on the power play again tonight.

Other parts of Pominville's play haven't dipped much or at all recently. His ability to maintain a steady game has been a hallmark over his 14-year career.

"I feel like my game doesn't vary much as far as when I'm going good and when I'm not," Pominville said. "I mean, yeah, I was probably put in different situations that help me produce, whether it was getting to the front of the net, playing the net front on the power play and those kind of situations. Now I'm not."

Pominville, whose versatility has always been an asset, is malleable and willing to embrace any role the Sabres give him.

"I'll do whatever, as long as I'm responsible defensively and compete and go to the net, I'll know that I'll have chances and I'll get looks," Pominville said. "I'll find a way to help the team, because being responsible is how you win games, it's not run-and-gun."

Housley said: "I like the attitude he brings. He wants to win. He's going to do what it takes to win when he plays in those minutes, and he's played some good minutes for us."

While it can be easy to say Pominville benefited from playing with two of the NHL's most dynamic offensive threats, he did plenty to help his linemates, showcasing some supreme scoring prowess around the net.

After finishing dead last a year ago, Pominville, is enjoying the Sabres' best season in nearly a decade. The three-time 30-goal scorer, who's in his second stint in Buffalo, is the only current player who has experienced postseason hockey with the club.

"To see the turnaround that we had, where we are now, to have a chance to take it to that next step and win and win here and see what it means, first, to the guys that have been here and haven't had success, and second, to the city ... how it gets around here when the team wins," Pominville said. "We're in a good spot right now."

The postseason – "I'll do anything to get there," he said – is Pominville's target.

Sabres' Jack Eichel practices, has no return date yet

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 7, 2019

BUFFALO – About halfway through this morning's practice, Sabres captain Jack Eichel stepped out on the ice joined his teammates.

While Eichel, who has missed two games with an upper-body injury, did not take any line rushes inside KeyBank Center, his presence is a good sign.

The Sabres' No. 1 center and leading scorer skated a bit as an extra defenseman and also took some reps on the power play.

Coach Phil Housley said the Sabres will know more about Eichel's status Tuesday.

"Him just coming back and getting the OK to practice was a good sign," said Housley, whose Sabres host the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday.

Eichel hasn't played since leaving last Monday's 3-1 loss to the New York Islanders after taking only four shifts.

"It's sort of just taking every day, seeing how I feel," Eichel said after spending about an extra 45 minutes on the ice following practice. "Obviously, it's not a rush, you don't want to put yourself in a bad position. You want to make sure you're comfortable in every situation you put yourself in, myself and the team."

He added: "I felt good, I'm feeling like myself again."

Naturally, missing just a week of action has been tough on Eichel, who has compiled a team-best 49 points in 40 games and is the Sabres' only NHL All-Star.

"You guys know me, I'm a competitive guy," Eichel said. "I like to be out there every night. It kills me to not be out there, it kills me not to be playing, it kills me not to be out there every day with these guys competing."

Eichel, of course, could need a full practice before he returns. After Tuesday's game, the Sabres don't play again until Friday in Carolina.

In other news, Housley said winger Sam Reinhart missed today's practice because he is ill. Reinhart did not participate in the team's skills challenge Sunday.

Meanwhile, Zemgus Girgensons, out the last four games with an upper-body injury, practiced at right wing today beside center Casey Mittelstadt and C.J. Smith.

Housley said Girgensons' status will be decided Tuesday.

"I really like what Zemgus brought today," Housley said.

Housley also said defenseman Zach Bogosian had a maintenance day today.

Jack Eichel Returns To Practice After Missing Two Games

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

January 7, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - After missing two games due to an upper body injury Jack Eichel returned to the ice at KeyBank Center for practice. Eichel talked with the media after practice, saying he does understand he needs to be patient when it comes to his recovery.

"You guys know me, I'm a competitive guy," said Eichel. "I like to be out there every night and it kills me not to be out there, it kills me not to be playing, it kills me not to be hanging out with these guys every day and competing so. I think the hardest thing about it is just the mental aspect and we've talked about this before the last few years just not being able to get out there and do it. It feels good to practice today, it feels good to make strides. I felt good, I'm feeling like myself again so like I said just want to try and see what tomorrow brings."

"When a guy like that goes down with an injury, everyone has to pick up the slack a little bit, especially at centerman," noted Evan Rodrigues. "We all got a pretty big bump in ice time with him out, and I think we handled it pretty well. At the same time it's obviously nice seeing him back out there."

"Anytime you get a guy back it's nice, obviously he's a big piece so we'll see how it goes," added Jeff Skinner.

The Sabres are expected to provide an update on Eichel Tuesday, ahead of the team's matchup with New Jersey.

Reinhart missing from Sabres practice, Eichel joins late

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

January 7, 2019

As the Sabres took the ice for practice Monday morning at Key Bank Center the status of a few key players was unknown.

Jack Eichel who has missed the past two games with an upper-body injury, joined Monday's practice late. Sam Reinhart did not take part in the practice and missed Sunday's skills contest as well.

The Sabres are home Tuesday night against the New Jersey Devils.

While Eichel did return to practice with his teammates there's no decision on his availability for the Devils. Coach Phil Housley said after practice "I think those questions will be answered tomorrow. Him just getting the ok to come back and practice was a good sign so we'll know more tomorrow on that."

Eichel who stayed on the ice long after his teammates were done with practice said he's being smart about his return. "At this point I think its taking it every day and seeing how I feel. Its not a rush you don't want to put yourself in a bad position. You want to make sure you're comfortable in every situation that you put yourself in. Everything I can do to try and help the team I want to do as soon as possible but with that being said you don't want to rush things and put yourself behind."

Eichel added not being able to play takes a toll on him. "You guys know me, I'm a competitive guy. It kills me to not be out there, it kills me not playing, it kills me not to be hanging out with these guys every day and competing so I think the hardest part about it is just the mental aspect."

Eichel has been listed as day to day since before last Thursday's Florida game. The Sabres have won one and lost one without their captain in the line.

Housley said Sam Reinhart missed practice because he's sick. Forward Zemgus Girgensons returned to practice. He'd been out with an upper body injury. Defenseman Zach Bogosian sat out practice with a maintenance day.

Buffalo currently holds the last playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Eichel practices with Sabres, no return date set

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

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BUFFALO -- The Buffalo Sabres got a pleasant surprise during practice Monday when captain Jack Eichel joined the group.

It was the first time the center skated with his teammates since sustaining an upper-body injury in the first period against the New York Islanders on Dec. 31. His status for the game Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils is unknown. Buffalo coach Phil Housley said they'll know more on Tuesday.

"At this point, it's just sort of taking it every day, seeing how I feel," Eichel said. "If you can just get a little better every day, it's positive so for me, it's been that sort of thing. Everything I can do to try to get back and help the team as soon as possible, I want to do. But that being said, obviously, you don't want to rush things and put yourself behind."

Eichel said it hasn't been easy to be sidelined.

"It kills me to not be out there, it kills me not to be playing, it kills me not to be hanging out with these guys every day, competing," he said. "The hardest part about it is just the mental aspect and not being able to get out there and do it. But it feels good to practice today. ... [I'm] feeling like myself again."

Eichel joined the practice about 20 minutes in, wearing a regular jersey. He mixed into drills but wasn't on a line. He stayed on the ice with a rehab coach after practice.

"Him just coming back, getting the OK to practice was a good sign," Housley said.

The Sabres are 1-1 in Eichel's absence, defeating the Florida Panthers on Thursday and losing to the Boston Bruins on Saturday. They're 5-9-3 in their past 17 games after their 10-game winning streak Nov. 8-Nov. 27.

With the loss to Boston and the Islanders' win against the St. Louis Blues, Buffalo dropped to the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference, tied with the Islanders with 50 points and one point ahead of the Montreal Canadiens. The Sabres are fourth in the Atlantic Division, two points behind the Bruins and six behind the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"Nothing's changed from the mindset that we've had from the beginning of the year," Eichel said. "Every game means a lot for us with how tight the race is, and everyone seems to be getting points every night."

Eichel leads the Sabres with 49 points (15 goals, 34 assists). He had 30 points (11 goals, 19 assists) in the 23 games since his line with Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart began playing together Nov. 13. The Sabres were 12-7-4 during that stretch; at least one of the three scored in all but four of those games.

Reinhart was sick and missed practice Monday.

There's been some contribution from secondary scoring of late, with forwards Kyle Okposo and Tage Thompson ending long goal droughts and Johan Larsson and defenseman Marco Scandella also getting on the scoresheet.

"It's not an easy league to score in, by any means," Eichel said. "It's good that guys are chipping in; it's just that we need more from everyone every night because every team's bringing more every night."

"It's getting more and more competitive, and that's just how the season goes. As the season amps up, I think we've got to amp ourselves up too. I think that we're ready for the challenge, we've just got to commit to it."

Eichel, Girgensons return to practice with Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 7, 2019

It took until about halfway through their practice at KeyBank Center, but Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel was back on the ice with his teammates on Monday for the first time since aggravating an upper-body on New Year's Eve.

Eichel skated as an extra defenseman during the latter portion of practice in addition to taking reps on power-play drills. He stayed on for an extended session with rehab and development specialist Dennis Miller after practice concluded.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said Eichel's status for the team's home game against New Jersey on Tuesday will be decided in the morning. The same goes for Zemgus Girgensons, who was a full participant in practice for the first time since sustaining an upper-body injury on Dec. 22.

"Obviously it's tough when you're not on the ice," Eichel said. "It's nice to be back at practice and just being around the guys, competing, doing that sort of thing."

"I think at this point it's sort of just taking every day, seeing how I feel. It's not a rush. You don't want to put yourself in a bad position. You want to make sure you're comfortable in every situation that you put yourself in, myself and the team."

The Sabres have split the two games they played in Eichel's absence, a 4-3 win over Florida at home on Thursday and a 2-1 loss in Boston on Saturday. Those scores, Housley said, are indicative of the tight play they'll need to expect as opponents make playoff pushes down the stretch.

Eichel stressed the importance of staying even-keel through the ups and downs and keeping their foot on the gas pedal, whether he plays or not.

"You need that desperation, with or without me in the lineup," he said. "Whoever's in the lineup at that time, you can see how tight checking the games have become. It's that second half of the year, everyone's trying to push towards a spot. I think for us it's just about every day, coming in and trying to get better, work and preparing ourselves for the next game."

"... It's good that guys are chipping in. I guess you could say we need more from everyone every night, because every team's bringing more every night and it's getting more and more competitive. That's just how the season goes. As the season amps up, I think we've got to amp ourselves up too. I think that we're ready for the challenge. We've just got to commit to it."

Monday's practice

After a lighthearted, family-oriented afternoon at the inaugural Sabres Skills Challenge on Sunday, Housley was vocal during an up-tempo practice session on Monday.

"I just think we continue to try to raise our standard, not only in the games but in practices too," he said. "You have to pay attention to detail. That is what's gotten us success to this point. So, it was just to reinforce that we've got to play fast, we've got to go play harder defensively. We've got to get to our checks. It's just pushing the pace."

Sam Reinhart did not skate for the second straight day due to an illness, while Zach Bogosian was absent for a maintenance day.

Girgensons, meanwhile, was a full participant on a line with C.J. Smith and Casey Mittelstadt.

Housley has been complimentary of Girgensons' game this season, which has seen him establish a consistent checking role mostly alongside Johan Larsson. His 51.45 Corsi-for percentage ranks first among Sabres forwards.

"[Mittelstadt's] a skilled guy," Girgensons said. "Smith has good puck vision and good handling, so I've just got to keep doing my job, create space for them, and good things will happen."

Here's how the Sabres lined up on Monday:

53 Jeff Skinner - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 72 Tage Thompson
49 C.J. Smith - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 28 Zemgus Girgensons
43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville
81 Remi Elie - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

24 Lawrence Pilut - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
19 Jake McCabe - 6 Marco Scandella
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 48 Matt Hunwick
20 Scott Wilson* - 82 Nathan Beaulieu
9 Jack Eichel*

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

*Extra forwards skating on defense