



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*February 15, 2019*

## **Skinner focused on present in Buffalo rather than future**

By John Wawrow  
Associated Press  
February 14, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Jeff Skinner knows how much the Sabres and their playoff-starved fans want him to stay in Buffalo beyond this season.

“Ha, ha, I’ve heard,” the forward memorably said with a laugh in December. “I’m having a lot of fun, too.”

And yet, two months later, Skinner is nowhere closer to providing anything resembling a definitive answer regarding where he’ll be playing once his contract expires after this season.

“The present is still where we are, and that sort of thing will play itself out,” he said Thursday. “I think there’s no point in really talking about it now because there’s nothing really to talk about from me on my end.”

Skinner, however, can’t hide his emotions when asked how much he enjoys Buffalo.

His eyes brighten and he breaks into wide, toothy smile in saying: “I like it here. Yeah, I like it.”

Cast off by Carolina as part of the Hurricanes’ latest rebuilding plan, the three-time 30-goal-scorer and 2011 NHL rookie of the year is approaching career-best numbers since being traded to the Sabres in August.

He has a team-leading 34 goals — three short of matching a career high — and is second in the NHL behind Washington’s Alexander Ovechkin (38). His seven game-winning goals are second in the NHL and most in Buffalo since Derek Roy had nine in 2008-09. Skinner has been so consistent, his longest goals drought was four games to start the season.

And he and captain Jack Eichel have been inseparable on a top line that’s played a significant role in keeping Buffalo in playoff contention in a bid to end a seven-year postseason drought, and on a team that finished last in the overall standings in three of the previous five years.

Despite going 11-15-5 since a 10-game win streak in November, the Sabres (28-21-7) already have 63 points — one more than they had last season — and sit 10th in the Eastern Conference, four points behind eighth-place Pittsburgh.

The topic of Skinner’s future is once again rising to the forefront with the NHL’s trade deadline looming on Feb. 25, and after Skinner was spotted having a lengthy conversation with his agent, Don Meehan, following a 3-1 win over the New York Islanders on Tuesday.

“To me it was just checking in,” Skinner said, referring to the meeting. “No details to discuss. Nothing really to report.”

As for the approaching trade deadline, Skinner shrugged and said: “I don’t think about it at all.”

It remains unlikely the Sabres will consider trading Skinner by Feb. 25.

General manager Jason Botterill told The Associated Press in December he didn’t consider that date as being a deadline for contract talks. And there has been no indication — publicly or privately — that Botterill’s stance has changed since.

Botterill has maintained regular contact with Meehan, and has said he wants Skinner to focus on playing and familiarizing himself with his new surroundings. What bolsters Botterill’s hopes is noting how Skinner chose to play in Buffalo by waiving his no-trade clause in a deal the Hurricanes acquired prospect forward Cliff Pu and three draft picks.

Eichel laughed when asked if he’s aware of Sabres fans campaigning for Skinner to stay.

"He has how many goals, 34?" Eichel said as Buffalo prepares to close a seven-game homestand against the New York Rangers on Friday. "I'm sure Sabres fans want him to stay. I mean, would they want him to leave?"

Eichel's certainly on board, too.

"I'm not Skins' agent. I'm not our GM, but he's been a big part of our team this year," he said. "You could probably say we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him."

It will ultimately be up to Skinner to decide.

One positive is how much the Toronto-born player has enjoyed playing closer to home, and having his family attend games in Buffalo (essentially a two-hour drive) as opposed to Raleigh, North Carolina (roughly a two-hour flight).

Coach Phil Housley noted Skinner's proximity to home and family has provided incentive. And it helps playing alongside Eichel.

"Jeff finds that open area, he's a positional player, and Jack seems to find him in those areas," Housley said. "They just seem to have a great chemistry together."

Skinner must also weigh what offers he might command in free agency at a time more teams are spending less in free agency and committing more salary cap-space to re-signing their own players.

All that can wait.

"As a player, you can only sort of control a small number of things," Skinner said. "For us right now, that's moving on to tomorrow's game and getting ready for that."

## **Sabres fans, teammates know the value of Jeff Skinner**

By Jason Wolf  
The Buffalo News  
February 14, 2019

Of course, Sabres fans want Jeff Skinner to remain in Buffalo beyond this season.

"How could they not?" Jack Eichel, the Sabres' captain and Skinner's linemate, said after practice Thursday at KeyBank Center. "He has how many goals? Thirty-four? Thirty-four goals. I'm sure Sabres fans want him to stay. I mean, why would they want him to leave?"

The desire to see Skinner signed to a long-term contract extension has created anxiety among the fanbase, as the fear of losing the All-Star forward remains a real if not remote possibility as the schedule draws closer to the NHL's Feb. 25 trade deadline and the team's leading scorer remains a pending unrestricted free agent.

Skinner's agent, Don Meehan, and Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill have been discussing Skinner's future with the organization. Botterill has said he and Meehan planned to talk last month during the Sabres' bye week and Meehan was seen at Sabres games in Calgary before the All-Star break and Tuesday at KeyBank Center. A source told the News on Thursday that a deal is not imminent.

A deal before the trade deadline would be capped at seven years. Afterward, the Sabres could sign Skinner to an eight-year extension.

"I don't think about it at all really," Skinner said. "For us, we have enough things to think about here. We're in the thick of the hunt right now. As a player, you can only sort of control a small number of things in spurts, and for me I think you just try and focus on those as much as you can. For us right now, that's moving on to (Friday's) game and getting ready for that and then going forward, just pecking away, and each game coming to work and trying to get two points."

The Sabres are preparing to close a seven-game homestand by hosting the New York Rangers on Friday night. Buffalo is four points behind the Pittsburgh Penguins for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference with 26 games remaining. The Sabres also trail the Carolina Hurricanes by one point.

Skinner, 26, owns a no-move clause, meaning he would have to approve any trade in the event one was being considered.

Skinner waived the clause to allow the Hurricanes to deal him to the Sabres in August. The deal not only allowed Skinner to play closer to his family in suburban Toronto, but paired him with Eichel and set the stage for the most productive season of his career.

Skinner is on pace to score 50 goals, which would obliterate his career high of 37 goals scored in 2016-17. It would also make him the first Sabres player to reach the milestone since 1993, when Alexander Mogilny had 76 and Pat LaFontaine had 53. The franchise hasn't had a 40-goal scorer since Thomas Vanek in 2008-09.

Skinner ranks second in the NHL with 34 goals, behind only Washington's Alex Ovechkin, and is tied with Toronto's John Tavares and Ovechkin for the most even-strength goals (27) in the league. He's also second in the league with seven game-winning goals, tied with three other players and just one behind Colorado's Gabriel Landeskog.

"I'm not Skins' agent. I'm not our GM. But he's been a big part of our team this year," Eichel said. "Somebody who's scored lots of really big goals for us and made a lot of big plays. We could probably say we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him. But you could probably say that about a lot of guys on the team. It's a team effort and everyone chips in, and he's been a very timely and big-time scorer for us, and we need to score goals to win games."

Skinner joined Eichel at the All-Star Game last month (thanks to fan voting), after being named to the annual showcase for the first time since his rookie season with Carolina in 2010-11.

"Him and Jack have just a great chemistry," coach Phil Housley said. "Jeff, he finds the open area. He's a positional player and Jack seems to find him in those areas. And Jack does a lot of that work down low, protecting pucks and then coming up with the puck, and finding Jeff. But they just seem to have a great chemistry together."

Eichel ranks second on the Sabres with 18 goals and is first with 43 assists. He leads the team with 61 points.

Skinner is second with 51 points (34 goals, 17 assists).

Sam Reinhart, who has played alongside Skinner and Eichel for much of the season, forming one of the most potent lines in the league, has 49 points (13 goals, 36 assists).

In an effort to balance the lines, Reinhart is now skating on the second line with Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary. Jason Pominville is back on the top line with Eichel and Skinner.

"I think it's just worked out well," Skinner said. "Obviously, a lot if not most of the reason (for my production) is sort of who I'm playing with. I think the guys have been a lot of fun to play with for me, and hopefully we can keep it going."

Mittelstadt, Bogosian skating

Casey Mittelstadt and Zach Bogosian were on the ice for practice Thursday, but might not play in Friday's game against the Rangers.

Mittelstadt, who has missed one game with a lower body injury, did not lead a line during rushes. Bogosian, who has missed two games with a lower body injury, skated with Nathan Beaulieu as the fourth defensive pairing.

"It was good to see them out there in a real practice," Housley said, "and obviously we'll know more (Friday) after pregame skate, but it's good they were getting up to speed. I'm not ruling either one of them out, but I will make that decision (Friday)."

## **Sabres' Bogosian and Mittelstadt return to practice**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 14, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres had their two injured players return to practice on Thursday. Zach Bogosian and Casey Mittelstadt were back, but somewhat limited. Phil Housley wouldn't rule them out for Friday's game and said, "Things went great, it was good to see them out there in a regular practice and we'll know more tomorrow after pregame skate, but it was good they were getting up to speed."

Bogosian got injured against Detroit and didn't play the Winnipeg or Islanders games. He wouldn't commit to playing Friday, but did say, "It was good, I just tried to fill in in practice today to get a few reps, so I'm just taking it a day at a time, but no word for tomorrow."

Mittelstadt got hurt in Sunday's game and was hopeful when he took the morning skate on Tuesday. He said it became apparent then that he wouldn't be able to go, "I was a little sore after the game and felt better, so I went out there to see how it goes and felt good at first and then it kind of got worse."

Mittelstadt isn't afraid to play with some pain, but he said if it affects what he can do, he can't go out and hurt the team, "I think the most important thing is knowing that you can play your game and not have it in your head. There a difference from having it hurting and being to the point where you're not yourself, so that's where we drew the line."

Before the seven-game homestand started, I felt the Sabres needed to get 11 points. Brian Koziol said they needed 10, while Matt Bove felt nine was enough, so we were all over the place. Phil Housley said no goals were set before the seven games started, "It's a great homestand, but we'd like to get 14, but that's not the case.

"We don't set goals, obviously we knew where we stood coming into that homestand and this is the last game and it puts us in a good position at 4-2-1, but it's going to be tough because New York's playing some very good hockey right now, but we just continue to focus on the day-to-day process and not looking too far ahead."

Mittelstadt knew they needed to do well in this homestand. He said, "No, we didn't set anything, I think you want to win every game and you're going to approach it that way, so I haven't really looked at it too much, but if we win tomorrow, it's definitely caps it off and it gives us some momentum going on the road, so that's always big."

Going into Thursday, the Sabres are four points out of a playoff spot. With Mittelstadt being such a young player, I wondered if he did a lot of scoreboard watching, "Yes I do, I always check on scores and stuff, so we know how they're doing, but we've got to control the things that we can control and that's how we play and how we practice and get ready for every game, so the teams above us are playing well, but it's out of our control, so we just have to go and keep playing games."

Lawrence Pilut played some right defense in Sweden, but never did in the NHL. Against the Islanders, Pilut moved to the right side, while Jake McCabe went to the left. Housley said, "It was really good, I think him and Jake had some really good minutes for us and we just made that subtle adjustment just to see how he'd fit in on that side.

"We had gotten a little too much zone time at times and I think Jake plays a little bit better on the strong side, so we just flipped that to see how Lawrence was going to react."

Thursday's lines:

Skinner - Eichel - Pominville

Sheary - Rodrigues - Reinhart

Smith - Sobotka - Thompson

Girgensons - Larsson - Okposo

Mittelstadt

Scandella - Ristolainen

Dahlin - Hunwick

McCabe - Pilut

Beaulieu – Bogosian

## **'You get in good routines': How the Sabres are helping their rookies avoid the dreaded 'wall'**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 14, 2019

Back when Lindy Ruff was the Sabres coach, the team expanded its dining approach. Buffalo brought in a chef to cook before and after morning practices.

Why?

"Young guys don't eat breakfast," Ruff said.

The hockey lifer had been around long enough to know that rookies and first-year pros roll out of bed, throw on a hat and head to the rink. Their bodies would take a hit as practice sessions and malnourishment multiplied.

Nothing has changed in terms of young guys, but the nutrition has changed a lot. Rookie roommates Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Dahlin are regulars at the Sabres' buffet line.

"That's been good for me," Mittelstadt said Thursday. "I probably needed it a little bit. They do a good job making sure that you always have meals and you're always ready and dialed in. It's nice for us that we can grab a meal because neither of us cook too much. We grab a meal to go and always have something for lunch or something for dinner."

What Mittelstadt and Dahlin haven't had is that dreaded collision with the "rookie wall." This is the time of year when first-year pros can look sluggish because they aren't used to the number of games. The Sabres will soon eclipse the 60-game mark. Last year, Dahlin totaled 41 in Sweden while Mittelstadt skated in 40 with the University of Minnesota and Buffalo.

"It's a little different in ways because there's so many more games over here, you know?" said fellow rookie and Swedish import Lawrence Pilut. "You just kind of focus on what you need, just try to keep the body fresh all the time."

The extra attention paid to the body and stomach is paying off. Mittelstadt has five points in his last seven games, while Dahlin has 11 in his last 14. With help from the organization, they're scaling the rookie wall.

"It's a lot with what you eat and how much you sleep, how much you drink water and stuff like that," Dahlin said. "You have to think so much more about that than I did last year. Now I really understand how important it is."

So how much water does Dahlin drink?

"A lot," the defenseman said. "More than I did before I came here."

Despite the increase in games, Mittelstadt finds he has way more time to take care of himself in Buffalo than he did in Minnesota. The Gophers would typically have two games on the weekend and none during the week, but that didn't mean the players were resting.

"College is a different animal because you have class," Mittelstadt said. "Class with practice and study hall makes it a tougher week in other ways. It's been a lot different. Like here, I have more time. I'll get home, and I'll have plenty of time to rest, take a nap, catch up on sleep, work on my body or whatever I need to do.

"College is tough just because the week is such a grind to get to all your classes, get to practice and study hall. Days don't end until late at night. So it's a bit different, but it's good."

Sabres coach Phil Housley has noticed his 20-year-old center getting stronger instead of wearing down.

"He's put the work in," Housley said. "Nobody sees that he's in the gym after, doing extra (in practice), and I think that's why he's built his game up to where it is right now."

The entire team has a challenging physical test ahead. Starting with Friday's game against the Rangers, the Sabres will play seven times in 12 days. The gantlet includes trips to New Jersey, Florida, Tampa Bay, Toronto and Philadelphia.

It's why a rare week with two days away from the rink was so welcomed. Buffalo took Monday and Wednesday off.

"When these days off come, you're really relaxing," Pilut said. "You try to let go of everything. When you get back in the rink, I'm just happy to be back with the boys. You just get back to focusing and getting that game mentality back in you."

Mittelstadt and Dahlin said they have thrived mentally with the increase in games. Rather than being weighed down, they're energized.

"You have a game, and whether you play good or bad, you have one more day maybe in between to work your body back, and then you're ready to go again," Mittelstadt said. "You get in good routines, and then you're ready to go. I've really enjoyed that, for sure."

It's helped them avoid hitting the wall.

"You're in it all the time," Dahlin said. "You're not off a week and then back. You're always in it. It's pretty easy to get back every game.

"You get some recovery, and now it's good to go."

## **Q&A: Daren Puppa on his path to the Sabres, his memorable debut and how the game has changed for goalies**

By Lyndsey D'Arcangelo

The Athletic

February 14, 2019

Daren Puppa still has all of his goalie equipment. His friends in Tampa keep bothering him to play in their recreation league. They're in need of a goaltender, they tell him.

Even though the 53-year-old former netminder retired from the NHL almost two decades ago, he still has the urge to strap on his pads and play.

When the Sabres first drafted Puppa in 1983, he put off the NHL and attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York State instead. The Ontario native left school two years later and signed with Buffalo, where he played for eight seasons. During the 1989-90 season, Puppa posted the best stat line of his Sabres career with 31 wins, a 2.89 GAA and a .900 save percentage. After being traded to the Toronto Maple Leafs during the 1992-93 season, Puppa was picked up by the Florida Panthers in the 1993 NHL Expansion Draft and was promptly dealt to the Tampa Bay Lightning, where he played for the rest of his career.

Puppa is still feeling the effects of a series of back injuries that forced him to retire earlier than he would have liked. He's not sure he'll ever be able to get on the ice again — even if it's just to have some fun with his friends.

The Athletic recently caught up with Puppa to chat about his time with the Sabres, how the game has changed, what it was like to face Wayne Gretzky and the Edmonton Oilers in his first NHL game, and what he really thinks about the trade that sent him to Toronto.

You've been removed from the NHL for almost 20 years now. What have you been doing since you retired back in 2000?

I did a lot of parenting. Watched my kids grow up, which was nice. I go to all of their events. Still in real estate right now. My wife's been doing it for 16 years, and I've been doing it for six years now. And I do a lot of alumni stuff with the Lightning, and I'm doing some more stuff with the Sabres. Last year, I did the wine tasting and meet and greet. I go up to Buffalo a lot, actually. I'll be up there in March again for the wine tasting event.

I'm sure you've gotten to watch a lot of hockey over the years. Do you think the game has changed?

Ah, let's see ... they took out hitting, fighting, all the rough stuff out. It's let speed take over. So guys that have a lot of speed are excelling in the game, where maybe back when I played, they'd get beat up a little bit. Everybody is in great shape, it's a business. It's totally a business now. The goalies are taught to play a certain way. Everybody goes down, everybody plays butterfly. There's no more standup goalies in the league. They were teaching that when I played — "stand up, stand up, stand up." And I wasn't one of those guys who would stand up, so I like the way they play now.

You were originally drafted in the OHL, but you decided to come to the States for school instead. What was your motivation behind that move?

Growing up with my dad, we were definitely education first. And you never know if you're going to make the NHL or not. So I was definitely going to college. I told everyone I was going to college and they still drafted me. But, my cousin was actually the head coach at Denver University and I was supposed to go there. He wouldn't let me take engineering so I had to go to RPI, which is one of the top three engineering schools in the world. Wasn't a bad trade off, but he didn't like the fact that I didn't go to Denver. Wasn't too happy with my decision.

When you were at RPI, did you expect to have a career in engineering?

Oh, absolutely. I was doing industrial engineering at the time. My whole family is basically — most of them are engineers. And that was the path that I was going down for sure. I got drafted by Buffalo, but I didn't know if I

was going to make it or if I'd have any chance to play. You just never know if you're good enough ... until you get there. I left after my second year.

Sabres GM Scotty Bowman got word about you and sent some scouts to check you out. Is that how it all happened?

There's a story behind it, but I'm not sure if it's true. I was playing in a men's league when I got drafted, so I wasn't even at college yet. Scotty overheard some scouts talking about me I guess and decided to make the draft pick. I think Montreal was interested and Edmonton was interested. I don't know if Buffalo knew about that or not, but (Scotty) kind of got word of it over a conversation in the bathroom. Or at least that's the story.

In your first game in the NHL, you shut out the Oilers and hockey legend Wayne Gretzky. What do you remember most about that game?

They were just so good. A fantastic team. They won four out of five Stanley Cups in a row — probably one of the greatest NHL teams of all time. So, we were in Edmonton and they just threw me in to see what I was made of, I guess. And it worked out (laughs). I got lucky. All afternoon I was pacing in the locker room with my Walkman waiting for the game to start. There's a little bit of pressure on you, for your first game ever. It was a good way for me to break into the league and have some respect. I was actually Player of the Week that week, and I only played one game.

You were a fan favorite here in Buffalo, but were eventually traded in 1993 to the Maple Leafs. Were you surprised by the trade and how it unfolded?

I was not surprised, no. I think the writing was on the wall. Dominik Hasek was there, and John Muckler wanted Grant Fuhr. So he made the trade with Toronto. It was probably a good trade for me. Toronto had a great team and we went to the semifinals. I would have stayed in Toronto for a while but the 1993 expansion draft is why I ended up in Tampa. Florida picked me up and then traded me to Tampa. It worked out and I had a good time in Toronto for the four months that I was there.

You remained with the Lightning for the rest of your NHL career. What was it like going from a hockey city to one where the sport is relatively new?

When I was in Buffalo, everyone knows who you are. You don't go anywhere without them knowing. In Tampa, they still don't know who you are. They leave you alone, they don't bother you. They've got the best team in the league right now and I think guys can still walk around without people coming up to them. It's just different.

But hockey has taken over this town, which is unbelievable for a Florida town when football and baseball were kings. Hockey is the number one sport in Tampa now in fans' minds, which you never would have thought in a million years that would happen. They love hockey now.

As for the Sabres, they've been struggling in the defensive zone. How does that directly impact the goalie when your defense is having a rough time?

You're only as good as the guys in front of you, basically. You have a great defense, you have a great goalie. If you don't, you have to work harder. Got to keep playing and as the team gets better, you'll get better as a goalie.

I had a great time in Buffalo. It's a great city. Great for hockey. You're not going to get a more passionate city for the game. They love their hockey. You just wish that Buffalo would win the championship for them.

## **Jason Pominville moving up among Sabres' all-time leaders**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 14, 2019

BUFFALO – It has become a regular occurrence this season, Jason Pominville's 14th in the NHL and 10th with the Sabres. Every few weeks or so, the popular winger seems to reach a new milestone or move up among the franchise's all-time leaders.

Pominville, whose focus has been a huge asset over his splendid 1,037-game career, hasn't paid much attention to any of it.

"I try to just enjoy the moment, live in the moment," Pominville said Thursday inside KeyBank Center.

The other day, Pominville, 36, said defenseman Zach Bogosian congratulated him on hitting another mark.

"He's kind of chirping me a little bit about it," Pominville said after the Sabres prepared for Friday's tilt against the New York Rangers, the end of a seven-game home stand. "So I was like, 'What are you talking about?'"

Make no mistake, everything – the milestones, the special names he now stands beside – holds special meaning to Pominville, who will likely be regarded as one of the best players in Sabres history after he retires.

"To be in that category with some of the guys, I see some of those guys mentioned up in the room, it's pretty surreal," Pominville said. "I never in my wildest dreams would I have expected that."

As Pominville spoke, he glanced toward a photo of Mike Foligno across the room, one of about 20 pictures of Sabres greats coach Phil Housley had hung this season.

Pominville just passed Foligno on the franchise's all-time points list, moving into eighth place when he registered his 512th in last Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina. Pominville passed Danny Gare and Thomas Vanek in points earlier this season.

Pominville has compiled 214 goals over his two stints with the Sabres. His 212th goal moved him past Alexander Mogilny into 11th place on the franchise's goal list.

Pominville needs two more goals to tie Don Luce for 10th place in Sabres history.

Overall, Pominville has recorded 299 assists and 513 points in 710 appearances (ninth all-time) with the Sabres, putting him 11 assists and 13 points shy of tying Luce for seventh all-time in both categories.

Pominville's next even-strength goal, his 189th, will move him into a tie with Rene Robert for ninth in team history.

"Once you're done, you'll probably fully appreciate it a little bit more, enjoy it a little bit more and maybe think back on it," said Pominville, who played his 1,000th NHL game Nov. 1.

At times this season, Pominville has struggled offensively. He scored just once over a 24-game stretch from November to January. Housley even scratched him Jan. 30.

Still, Pominville has compiled 13 goals and 23 points in 50 outings, including three goals over the last six games. Only one NHL player over 35, Carolina's Justin Williams, who's 37, has scored more goals this season (14).

Pominville went on an early-season tear playing beside ultra-talented center Jack Eichel and 34-goal winger Jeff Skinner, two NHL All-Stars.

"I feel like we've been good on the forecheck, good sticks, keep pucks alive," said Pominville, who scored 290 career goals. "That's led to us being able to play more offense when we're together. I feel like I can be trusted

defensively, too, with those guys and not cheat the offense and try to be the guy that's back if they're on offense."

When Housley reunited the trio earlier this month, the veteran started showcasing his scoring prowess again.

"Pommer's game is very simple," Housley said. "He gets pucks out, he attacks the game and he goes to the net. You look at a lot of his goals, they're five to 10 feet around the net. He does a good job of going there, whether it's a net-front presence or it's off a rush. He gets rewarded for doing that."

In Tuesday's 3-1 win over the New York Islanders, Pominville converted Eichel's nifty backhand feed in close for the go-ahead goal.

Eichel's adroit passing has wowed Pominville since Day One. In his first game back in Buffalo last season, Eichel slickly created two Pominville goals.

"He makes plays a lot of guys probably wouldn't try," Pominville said. "He can make them going full speed or slowing the game down. He can make them at different speeds."

Even during his prime, Pominville never made many dazzling plays. Supreme smarts and a sturdy all-around game helped buoyed him.

"As a linemate, he's really easy to read off," Skinner said. "I think he's always in the right spot and he obviously makes strong plays and he's got high-end skill, so those kind of things, they all play a part of it.

"But for me, I think what sticks out the most is sort of his consistency to always be in the right spot and sort of as a line that makes it easy to read off of him."

## **Injured Sabres Zach Bogosian, Casey Mittelstadt practice**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 14, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian and center Casey Mittelstadt practiced today for the first time since suffering lower-body injuries over the weekend.

Now, will the regulars be ready to play Friday against the New York Rangers, the end of a seven-game home stand?

“Not ruling either one out,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said inside KeyBank Center.

Both players said they responded well to the session. Neither, however, skated on a regular pair or line.

Bogosian, 28, has missed the last two games. Meanwhile, Mittelstadt, 20, has sat out one.

Mittelstadt was hurt in Sunday afternoon’s 3-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets.

“I was a little sore after the game then felt better,” Mittelstadt said. “I think the most important thing is knowing that you can play your game and not have it in your head. I guess there’s a difference between hurting and feeling to the point where you’re not yourself. That’s kind of where we drew the line.”

## **Sabres eye rare winning streak as Rangers visit**

WABC

February 14, 2019

Their longest homestand of the season began with some shaky defensive performances, but the Buffalo Sabres have tightened up their defense in recent games.

The Sabres aim to continue their defensive improvement and get consecutive wins for the first time in over two months on Friday night when they conclude a seven-game homestand against the New York Rangers.

The Sabres began the homestand by allowing 17 goals and going 1-1-1 in three games against Chicago, Minnesota, and Carolina. Since then, they have won two of three games by sandwiching 3-1 victories over the Detroit Red Wings and New York Islanders around a 3-1 loss to Winnipeg.

"It's probably been a bit inconsistent, but we have a good test on Friday against a team that's playing good hockey," Buffalo center Jack Eichel said. "It's going to be important for us to come out and have a good effort on home ice to end this homestand."

On Tuesday, the Sabres (28-21-7) reached 63 points to surpass their total from last season by beating the Islanders, allowing only 25 shots on goal. It was their third straight game allowing under 30 after giving up 105 shots in the first three games of the homestand.

"It's the time of year you need to defend to win games," Buffalo right winger Jason Pominville said. "I think everybody's starting to realize that."

Pominville scored the game-winning goal 6:49 into the second period against the Islanders and has three goals on the homestand. Jack Eichel had two assists Tuesday and has two goals and six assists in his last six games.

Jeff Skinner scored his 34th goal Tuesday and is three shy of his career-high set two seasons ago.

The Sabres last won consecutive games Dec. 11-13 when they beat Los Angeles and Arizona at home. Since then, they are 9-12-3.

They are hoping to continue defending well before playing eight of their next 11 on the road.

"The way that we were giving them up, just kind of standing around in front, not taking our guys, it was a big wake-up call for us, because if we're going to make the playoffs, we need to be really, really good defensively," Buffalo right winger Kyle Okposo said.

While the Sabres enter Friday four points behind Pittsburgh for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, the Rangers (24-24-8, 56 points) are 11 points back, and trade rumors are starting to surface ahead of the Feb. 25 deadline.

One candidate to be moved is Mats Zuccarello, who of late is forming strong chemistry with Mika Zibanejad.

Zuccarello recorded two assists in Tuesday's 4-3 loss at Winnipeg and has 19 points (five goals, 14 assists) in his last 12 games. He also has a multi-point game in six of his last 11 contests and has 24 points (six goals, 18 assists) in his last 25 contests.

"We're playing so many games now, it's not hard to keep my focus on the ice," Zuccarello told reporters. "I'm keeping a clear mind about things. It's not like I'm waiting to be told that I'm traded. We'll all find out soon enough."

Zibanejad scored twice against Winnipeg and has 13 goals in his last 11 games. He also has 21 points in his last 13 contests and leads the team with 25 goals and 56 points.

"It's obviously nice to see the bounces go in," Zibanejad said. "But we didn't win, so it doesn't really matter."

Another candidate to be moved by the deadline is Kevin Hayes, whose 38 points are third on the team.

The Rangers and Sabres split a pair of 3-1 games earlier in this season. Buffalo goaltender Carter Hutton made 43 saves in Buffalo's home win on Oct. 6, while Henrik Lundqvist stopped 39 shots in New York's home win on Nov. 4.

Overall, New York is 12-2 in the last 14 meetings with the Sabres.

## **Skinner, Sabres have had 'good conversations' about extension**

TSN

February 14, 2019

Jeff Skinner's camp and the Buffalo Sabres have had some "good conversations" about the forward possibly signing an extension with the team, according to TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun.

The negotiations between the two parties comes with just a little over a week remaining before the Feb. 25 trade deadline.

According to LeBrun, the deadline will not factor into how negotiations between Skinner and the Sabres play out, as Skinner has a full no-move clause in his current contract which means he would have to approve any possible trades the Sabres would want to make. And as things stand now, there aren't any indications that Skinner would want to be traded anywhere, per LeBrun.

Skinner, 26, is set to become an unrestricted free agent at season's end. The nine-year NHL veteran has 51 points (34G, 17A) this season, his first with the Sabres after the team acquired him from the Carolina Hurricanes last off-season.

## **Hunwick has made strong impression in Sabres' dressing room**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 14, 2019

Matt Hunwick slid to the middle of the ice, complying to the demands of teammates who were prodding him to lead their post-practice stretch at KeyBank Center on Thursday afternoon.

Although he's appeared in just five games this season, the veteran Hunwick has earned the respect of his teammates and coaches for his preparedness and professionalism. Take it from Zach Bogosian, for whom Hunwick has filled in the past two games due to a lower-body injury.

"He's a hell of a teammate, hell of a guy," Bogosian said. "[He's] brought that veteran presence. Just a super nice person, a guy that guys want to be around and joke around with. He brings a lot to our locker room."

Marco Scandella, another veteran on the Sabres defense corps, had similarly nice things to say.

"He's pretty quiet, but just a goodhearted guy, a good guy to have on your team," Scandella said. "He's a good teammate. He's been around a long time. He's a great skater out there. He helps out with communication, keeping everyone calm."

Hunwick's assimilation into the Sabres dressing room was delayed due to a neck injury he sustained during the offseason, forcing him to miss the first 33 games of the season. He didn't appear in a practice with the team until Nov. 29 and didn't make his season debut until Dec. 16.

Since then, his ice time has been sporadic. He played the next game after making his season debut, then waited until Jan. 30 before dressing a third time. Five contests passed after that before Bogosian's injury created a void for Hunwick to fill in Buffalo's last two games against Winnipeg and New York.

Next home game: Friday vs. New York

Through it all, Phil Housley has maintained that the lack of consistent ice time has boiled down to the team's depth on the back end. The Sabres have eight defensemen on the roster, with a ninth in Rochester for a conditioning stint in Casey Nelson.

When Hunwick has been called upon, he's fit in well. Housley complimented the defenseman's game after he returned to the lineup against Winnipeg on Sunday, skating on a pair with Rasmus Dahlin.

"He was very steady, his gaps were good, he was very good in the defensive zone, he was strong on the puck," Housley said. "I like the way he was passing the puck on the outlet. He just looked like his normal self out there."

Hunwick found himself in a similar situation last season, his lone with the Penguins, when he sustained an early-season concussion and went on to play just 42 games.

"You just have to stay ready as much as you can, you try and work on as much as you can after practice and stay sharp mentally," Hunwick said. "It's not necessarily easy, but at the same time you're excited to get back into the lineup and help contribute."

The work he's put in has made an impression.

"I feel like he's just a really good pro about focusing every day on just getting better," Scandella said. "He was in a position where he didn't play that much for a while but stepping in and being ready, that's part of being a good pro, being a veteran guy. I think he's done a great job."

Hunwick was part of back-to-back defensive efforts in which the Sabres held the Jets and Islanders to a combined four goals, stemming from a team-wide emphasis on improved play without the puck. He matched his season-high with 18:24 of ice time against the Islanders.

"I think the teams that we've played lately too, you see Winnipeg, they're a Stanley Cup-contending team," he said. "New York's the same way, the Islanders. So, those are the fun games. I enjoy playing teams that are heavy and battling. It engages you early on and makes for a fun game, in my opinion."

Thursday's practice

Bogosian was back on the ice with his teammates, skating on a fourth defense pair with Nathan Beaulieu. The same goes for Casey Mittelstadt, who was back skating as an extra forward after missing the game against the Islanders with a lower-body injury.

Housley did not rule either player out for Friday's home game against the New York Rangers.

"It was good to see them out there in a real practice," Housley said. "We'll know tomorrow at the pregame skate, but it's good that they're getting up to speed."

Here's how the Sabres lined up on Thursday:

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville  
43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 23 Sam Reinhart  
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo  
49 C.J. Smith - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 72 Tage Thompson  
37 Casey Mittelstadt

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

35 Linus Ullmark  
40 Carter Hutton