



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 25, 2019

Sabres acquire defenseman Montour in trade with Ducks

By John Wawrow
Associated Press
February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Sabres coach Phil Housley's blue line received another injection of speed and offense with the acquisition of Brandon Montour in a trade with the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday night.

Montour joins Buffalo's group of defensemen that already includes Rasmus Dahlin, the No. 1 draft pick, who leads rookie blue-liners in points this season.

The Ducks acquired defenseman Brendan Guhle, a promising play-making prospect, and a 2019 first-round draft pick in a deal struck a day before the NHL's trade deadline.

Anaheim conditionally acquired the first-round pick Buffalo acquired in trading Evander Kane to the San Jose Sharks a year ago. However, the Ducks will have the option to land the first-round pick Buffalo acquired in trading Ryan O'Reilly to St. Louis last summer.

Buffalo elected to land a proven player in the third-year and 24-year-old Montour rather than wait for the 21-year-old Guhle to continue developing in the minors.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," Sabres general manager Jason Botterill said in a statement.

Montour has five goals — three on the power play — and 20 assists in 62 games this season. And his 25 points led Ducks defensemen. Montour was selected by Anaheim in the second round of the 2014 draft, and has 16 goals — 11 power play — and 63 points in 169 career games.

Buffalo remains in the playoff picture despite going 12-18-6 since a 10-game winning streak in November. The Sabres began the day in 10th place, six points behind Carolina, which holds the Eastern Conference's eighth and final playoff spot.

Guhle is a swift, play-making defenseman who has had limited NHL experience since Buffalo selected him in the second round of the 2015 draft. The 21-year-old has five assists in 23 NHL career games, while spending a majority of the past three seasons developing in the minors.

He ranked second among AHL Rochester defensemen with 27 points (five goals, 22 assists) in 50 games this season.

Guhle was the odd man out for much of this season with Buffalo carrying between seven and eight defensemen on its roster. He now joins a rebuilding team in the Ducks, who are second-to-last in the Western Conference and in jeopardy of missing the playoffs for the first time in seven years.

"Brendan Guhle is an excellent skater who is ready to take the next step in his career," GM and interim head coach Bob Murray said. "Adding Guhle and a first-round pick is an important step as we retool our team moving forward."

In a separate move, the Ducks acquired minor league defenseman Patrick Sieloff in a trade that sent journeyman forward Brian Gibbons to the Ottawa Senators.

Sieloff has two goals in two NHL games since being selected by Calgary in the second round of the 2012 draft. He had a goal and eight assists in 45 games with Ottawa's AHL affiliate this season.

Gibbons joins his fifth NHL team since the undrafted free agent broke into the league with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2013-14. He's also played for Columbus and New Jersey, and had two goals and three assists in 44 games with the Ducks this season. Overall, Gibbons has 19 goals and 34 assists for 53 points in 169 career games.

Sabres star Jeff Skinner returns to game after hurting leg

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Jeff Skinner has returned for the start of the third period against Washington after the Buffalo Sabres' leading scorer needed help getting off the ice in the second period.

It was a remarkable turn of events for Skinner. The forward was unable to place any weight on his left leg and at one point attempted to crawl off the ice before play was stopped 4:42 into the period.

Skinner was hurt when he and Capitals forward Carl Hagelin were in the slot and turned at the same time to follow the play to their left. The two touched skates and Skinner was tripped up and fell heavily when Hagelin's stick got caught between his legs. Hagelin was penalized for tripping.

Skinner began the day with 36 goals, tied for third in the NHL, and one short of matching a career high.

Reinhart's hat trick leads Sabres to 5-2 win over Capitals

By John Wawrow
Associated Press
February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — No one was referring to the Buffalo Sabres as being soft on Saturday.

Jeff Skinner remarkably returned a period after a hush fell through the crowd at the sight of Buffalo's leading scorer attempting to crawl off the ice with an injury to his left leg. Sam Reinhart picked up the offensive slack by scoring three times.

And Carter Hutton held the Washington Capitals to scoring just twice on 33 shots in leading the Sabres to a 5-2 victory.

"I just like the urgency and the desperation in our game right now," coach Phil Housley said. "It's good to see that we could string another game of 60 minutes of just hard work."

Housley's assessment was a reversal from eight days earlier, when he referred to his team as soft following a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers.

Coming off a 2-1 shootout loss at Tampa Bay on Thursday, the Sabres snapped a 0-3-1 skid in a game they opened with a 2-0 lead and never trailed.

Buffalo responded with a goal each time the Capitals cut the lead to one and overcame the initial dread of losing Skinner to a major injury.

"Yeah, obviously, you think the worst when he's down there and he's in a lot of pain like that," captain Jack Eichel said. "But it was great to see him come back, and it's great to see he's all right."

Skinner was hurt five minutes into the second period when he tripped over Washington's Carl Hagelin's stick, which got caught between his legs. Skinner was unable to put weight on his left leg while being helped off the ice and taken to the locker room.

The 36-goal-scorer then drew a loud cheer upon returning to the ice to start the third period.

"Good training staff, I guess," Skinner said. "I don't know. It was a bit of a weird feeling at first. And then I obviously kind of tested it out and it settled down a bit. It was good to get back out there."

Eichel had two assists in picking up his 66th point — two more than the fourth-year player's career high set last season. Rookie Rasmus Dahlin and Jason Pominville also scored.

Alex Ovechkin scored his league-leading 44th goal for the Capitals, extending his goal streak to five games. Andre Burakovsky also scored for Washington, which squandered a chance to win three straight for the first time since Jan. 6-10.

Coach Todd Reirden said the Capitals' inconsistent performance against Buffalo reflected how the team performed in closing a six-game road trip with a 3-3 record.

"We had a couple of games on this trip where we had everybody all in, and a real solid team effort," Reirden said. "Tonight, I didn't feel that was the case. It's too difficult a league to win in if you don't have everyone playing to their best abilities."

The team's inconsistencies are reflected in goalie Braden Holtby's numbers. After stopping 40 shots in a 3-2 win at Toronto on Thursday, he gave up four goals on 37 shots against Buffalo.

Holtby hasn't won back-to-back starts since Dec. 21 and 27, and he has gone 6-8-2 since.

Holtby pinned the blame on the Capitals' overall defensive breakdowns.

"It's on us to make sure we get everyone on the same page," he said. "You don't get that by getting mad at each other or anything like that. It comes from coming together."

The outcome was decided in the third period, and after Burakovsky cut Buffalo's lead to 3-2 by tipping in Christian Djoos' point shot 4:16 into the frame.

Reinhart scored his second goal of the game 1:23 later by deflecting in Matt Hunwick's shot from the blue line. And Reinhart capped his third career hat trick by scoring into an empty net in the final minute.

NOTES: Sabres F Kyle Okposo told The Associated Press that he's feeling good while recovering from his third concussion in less than three years. Okposo has begun skating on his own and spoke while watching the game from the press box, eight days after being felled by a punch to the face during a fight with New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo. ... Sabres C Casey Mittelstadt did not play due to illness. ... Hagelin made his debut with the Capitals, two days after the eighth-year player was acquired in a trade with the Los Angeles Kings. ... Capitals D Nick Jensen did not play a day after being acquired in a trade with Detroit. Reirden wanted to ease Jensen in and expects him to play against the New York Rangers on Sunday.

UP NEXT

Capitals: Host Rangers on Sunday.

Sabres: At Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday.

Reinhart's hat trick lifts Sabres past Capitals 5-2

Associated Press

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Sam Reinhart scored three goals and the Buffalo Sabres snapped a four-game skid with a 5-2 victory over the Washington Capitals on Saturday.

Jack Eichel had two assists in picking up his 66th point — two more than the fourth-year player's career high set last season. Rookie Rasmus Dahlin and Jason Pominville also scored for the Sabres.

Carter Hutton stopped 31 shots, and Buffalo snapped a 0-3-1 slump.

The Sabres avoided a major scare when leading scorer Jeff Skinner was helped off the ice five minutes into the second period and was unable to place any weight on his left leg. Skinner returned for the start of the third period.

Alex Ovechkin scored his league-leading 44th goal for the Capitals, while extending his goal streak to five games. Andre Burakovsky also scored for Washington.

Sabres' Okposo feels good as he recovers from 3rd concussion

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres forward Kyle Okposo tells The Associated Press he's feeling good while recovering from his third concussion in less than three years.

A smiling Okposo made the comment Saturday while making his way through the press box to watch Buffalo's home game against Washington.

His appearance came after coach Phil Housley said Okposo has begun skating on his own a little over a week since being felled by a punch to the face during a fight with New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo.

Okposo was cleared to travel for the team's game at New Jersey on Feb. 17. He did not play against the Devils and instead was sent home, where he was diagnosed with a concussion.

Housley didn't provide a timetable in saying he imagines Okposo returning to play this season.

"He skated again today and those are all good signs for us," Housley said.

Okposo's concussion history includes him missing the final two weeks of the 2017-18 season and spending nearly a week in a hospital after what he called a routine hit in practice. He also missed three games last March after suffering a concussion in a collision with Ottawa's Bobby Ryan.

Sabres acquire defenseman Brandon Montour from Anaheim for Brendan Guhle, 1st-round pick

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
February 24, 2019

Buffalo Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill waited until the eve of the NHL trade deadline to upgrade his roster, acquiring defenseman Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday night.

The Sabres parted with defenseman Brendan Guhle and one of their three first-round picks in the upcoming draft to acquire Montour, a 24-year-old who has five goals among 25 points in 62 games this season.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the uptempo style we are looking to play," Botterill said in a statement released by the team. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

Botterill has said for weeks that he did not want to spend assets on a rental and did not deviate from that plan. Montour won't be a restricted free agent until next summer and is owed a modest \$3.87 million in 2019-20, according to CapFriendly.com.

A second-round draft pick in 2014, Montour has recorded 16 goals among 63 points in 169 NHL regular-season games over three seasons and played roughly two AHL seasons before becoming a mainstay on the Ducks' roster. He has a minus-16 rating this season but was a plus-27 over the previous two seasons. Additionally, Montour has eight assists in 21 playoff games, helping the Ducks reach the Western Conference Finals in 2017.

Montour has played on Anaheim's top pairing this season and is averaging 22 minutes, 40 seconds per game. He ranked fourth on the team in power-play ice time.

Guhle, 21 years old and left-handed, was a 2015 second-round draft pick by former General Manager Tim Murray and played only 23 regular-season games over three seasons with the Sabres, including two this year. He had five goals among 27 points in 50 games in Rochester this season and became expendable with the emergence of 23-year-old rookie Lawrence Pilut, who rejoined the Amerks this week. Guhle is expected to join the Ducks immediately and could be in their lineup in Vancouver on Monday.

In a recent interview with The Buffalo News, Guhle was candid when asked about the departures of Nicholas Baptiste and Justin Bailey, two prospects who were drafted by Botterill's predecessors.

"You see it all the time," Guhle said in Blue Cross Arena. "It's a business. Every guy is kind of playing for himself in that way, but you have to do everything you can to put yourself in a position to succeed."

Botterill may not be done, either. In addition to the injured Marco Scandella, the Sabres have eight healthy defensemen: Montour, Rasmus Ristolainen, Rasmus Dahlin, Zach Bogosian, Jake McCabe, Nathan Beaulieu, Matt Hunwick and Casey Nelson.

Beaulieu, a 26-year-old pending restricted free agent, requested to be traded last month if his playing time did not increase but fared well in a 5-2 win over Washington on Saturday. The team has two pending unrestricted free agents: wingers Jeff Skinner and Jason Pominville.

The Sabres still own two first-round picks, their selection and a conditional choice. The Amerks' roster still includes forwards Victor Olofsson, Rasmus Asplund and Alexander Nylander, as well as defenseman Will Borgen.

Buffalo did not lose a player off its NHL roster or deplete its prospect pool to acquire a player many regarded as one of the top remaining available defensemen.

The Sabres (29-24-8) are six points behind Carolina for the second wild-card spot with a grueling schedule ahead, beginning Monday night in Toronto. Botterill has until the deadline at 3 p.m. Monday, to make any trades for the playoff push.

Mike Harrington: Sabres stray from the norm as deadline day approaches

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 24, 2019

When it comes to the NHL trade deadline, it really doesn't matter who's running the Buffalo Sabres. You usually have to temper your expectations.

Here's a list of names for you: Dainius Zubrus, Steve Bernier, Dominic Moore, Raffi Torres, Brad Boyes, Cody Hodgson, Chris Stewart, Michal Neuvirth, Chad Johnson, Torrey Mitchell.

Their common thread? Those are the big names the Sabres have acquired at the deadline since 2007. Getting Anaheim defenseman Brandon Montour certainly outranks any of them.

So when the bell rings to close business around the NHL Monday afternoon at 3, the Sabres already have one new piece. Maybe there will be more.

Many of the recent years, of course, the Sabres have been sellers, dumping off bigger names like Ryan Miller, Steve Ott and Evander Kane. They haven't been in much of a position to be a buyer, and they don't figure to be one this year.

General Manager Jason Botterill's approach is patience and methodical analysis, and he seems far more comfortable formulating deals or making them at the draft and in the summer than on the fly at the deadline. This one is a little out of character for Botterill, but it's a strong move.

It's how Botterill sent Ryan O'Reilly to St. Louis in a July trade that currently looks like an utter disaster, but also how he swindled Jeff Skinner from Carolina in August to rekindle memories of the 2003 Darcy Regier classic of Chris Gratton for Daniel Briere.

When he spoke to reporters Wednesday in Tampa, Botterill reinforced his philosophy. He said the Sabres haven't made any big moves, even though they're 12-18-6 since their winning streak, because he trusts his players and his development model.

It's why most observers expected the Sabres to be relatively quiet and there were zero rumors about the team through Saturday night. The relationship between the Sabres and defenseman Nathan Beaulieu, who has looked good since he returned the lineup three games ago after weeks in the press box, is soured after word leaked that Beaulieu wanted out if he didn't get more playing time.

You wonder if Botterill and mentor Jim Rutherford in Pittsburgh would be talking about Beaulieu for defense depth after the Penguins lost Brian Dumoulin and Kris Letang during their Stadium Series game Saturday night in Philadelphia.

The Sabres have two pending unrestricted free agents in Skinner and Jason Pominville. The team is negotiating a long-term extension with Skinner so he's not going anywhere, and Pominville has a modified no-trade clause and likely would not be that interested in leaving.

Pominville also carries a \$5.6 million cap hit, so the Sabres likely would have to pick up a good chunk of salary in any deal.

The Sabres' restricted free agents are Beaulieu, Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson, Evan Rodrigues, Jake McCabe and Linus Ullmark. They are almost certainly going to want to retain the latter three.

With Brendan Guhle off to Anaheim, it will be interesting to see if there's any deal involving struggling 2016 first-round Alexander Nylander. He's the last No. 1 pick of former general manager Tim Murray. Botterill, like many GMs, has seemed to move the organization away from many of Murray's key players (O'Reilly, Evander Kane, Robin Lehner) as well as other picks of Murray and Regier.

As for the rest of the league, there should be some interesting names afoot.

We wait and see what Ottawa does with Mark Stone now that Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel are gone to Columbus. It seems like the Blue Jackets have sent a message they're not inclined to move Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, making a win-it-now statement and risking the free agent decimation no NHL team has endured since Briere and Chris Drury left the Sabres on July 1, 2007.

There are other big names to watch like Philadelphia's Wayne Simmonds, Kevin Hayes and Adam McQuaid of the New York Rangers (both of whom were held out of Saturday's game), Eric Staal of Minnesota, Marcus Johansson of New Jersey.

Most people thought Carolina would be selling forward Michael Ferland or defensemen Justin Faulk and Brett Pesce. Hard to see it now. The Canes got Nino Niederreiter from Minnesota and entered play Sunday holding the second East wild-card, even in points with Pittsburgh but ahead on tiebreakers.

San Jose, which needs help in goal, should be pondering a move for Detroit's Jimmy Howard. There's talk that Florida is telling people that Mike Hoffman or Jonathan Huberdeau could be available, with the Panthers clearing the way for a Panarin-Bobrovsky free agent splash come summer.

A lot has already happened the last couple of weeks aside from Columbus.

Toronto got a badly needed defenseman in Los Angeles' Jake Muzzin. Charlie Coyle, who would have fit in nicely with the Sabres, went from Minnesota to Boston. Dallas got Mats Zuccarello from the Rangers. Washington got Carl Hagelin, a former Stanley Cup champion in Pittsburgh who was likely on Botterill's radar, from Los Angeles. Nashville got Brian Boyle from New Jersey.

Lots of pieces moving about. Good to see the Sabres in the mix for once.

'Rally' begins with Carter Hutton making big saves for Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 24, 2019

Carter Hutton prefers to not call this a comeback. The Buffalo Sabres' goalie feels he has played "pretty well for a while," despite serving as a backup in 10 of 15 games before Thursday.

Still, Hutton's performances against Tampa Bay and Washington, the latter of which the Sabres defeated 5-2 in front of a sold-out crowd Saturday in KeyBank Center, were reminiscent of his mastery during a 10-game win streak in November.

Hutton stopped 70 of 73 shots against the Lightning and Capitals, including 31 against the defending Stanley Cup champions. His spectacular saves energized his teammates and kept the Sabres' fading playoff hopes alive.

"He's had his shots, he's seen them early, and he's made the huge save for us later on in the game, which has been really important for us," Sam Reinhart said following his hat trick against the Capitals. "You've got to find those little things throughout the game to rally around. Those little saves, and that highlight-reel [save] is something you can really rally around."

Reinhart said following a 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina earlier this month that the Sabres needed more from their goalies, beginning at puck drop, only to backpedal on that comment following practice the next day.

The 23-year-old winger's remark seemed misguided at the time given the Sabres' continued defensive lapses. However, neither Hutton nor Linus Ullmark were making the sort of timely saves that carried the team during their memorable November.

Hutton allowed a few uncharacteristic soft goals and was pulled twice in three starts, which allowed Ullmark, 25, to take hold of the job. But Ullmark posted a paltry .885 save percentage while starting 10 of 13 games.

He was supposed to be in net against the Lightning but was held out because of a lower-body injury. Hutton, a 33-year-old signed to a three-year contract by the Sabres in July, proceeded to stop 39 of 40 shots during regulation and overtime. His lone non-shootout goal allowed was a 2-on-1 snipe by Nikita Kucherov, the NHL's leading scorer with 100 points in 62 games.

"He had a little bit of an attitude that he still knows he can play this game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said of Hutton's performance in Tampa Bay.

That earned Hutton his first consecutive starts in over a month, and he provided the Sabres with momentum-swinging saves against Washington, including a highlight-reel stop on Lars Eller in the second period. A breakdown by Zach Bogosian and Rasmus Dahlin left Eller alone backdoor, and Hutton quickly shuffled to his left before making a split save.

His only two goals allowed were a breakaway from Alex Ovechkin, the NHL's leading goal scorer with 44, and a deflection by Andre Burakovsky. Hutton posted a .959 save percentage over the two games and is expected to get the start Monday night in Toronto.

"I think the biggest thing is staying within myself," Hutton explained. "Not being too aggressive. It's kind of a happy medium, walking that line. If you get too aggressive, they can zip the puck so fast and next thing you know they're passing the puck around you. For me, it's giving myself a good chance."

Hutton has struggled when he is either too passive or too aggressive, particularly when an opponent rushes through the neutral zone. That has left him out of position and affected his rebound control. As a result, Hutton had a .893 save percentage in 14 starts following the winning streak. His save percentage was .936 during the Sabres' 10-game run to first place in the NHL.

His last four starts have raised his season save percentage to .912, which is tied with Pittsburgh's Matt Murray for 13th among goalies with at least 30 games. That ranks well above league average (.904), and the Sabres had a combined .904 save percentage last season.

"I'm just trying to compete," Hutton added. "There are lots of things I can and can't control. I think that's something I can control, is my attitude and my compete level. It's something I try to bring all the time no matter what."

Housley noted that Hutton is at his best when aggressive, which helps him pounce on opponents' second chances. Hutton ranks first in the NHL in fewest rebounds allowed per save, according to the analytics site MoneyPuck.com.

Led by Ovechkin, the Capitals' power play entered Saturday tied for 10th in the NHL, yet they went 0-for-2 against the Sabres because Hutton stopped all five of their shots on goal. Buffalo's defensive-zone coverage limited Washington's time and space, and Hutton was there to clean up any mistakes.

He was not dejected when sitting behind Ullmark in recent weeks. After all, this season is Hutton's first legitimate opportunity to be a starter in the NHL, and he intends to make the most of it.

"I just like his attitude," Housley said following Saturday's win. "He's attacking it. He's got that focus right now that he's going to stand big and stand tall. His last two games were really exceptional."

Wilcox signs two-way contract

The Sabres announced Sunday that they signed goalie Adam Wilcox to a one-year, two-way NHL contract and then placed him on waivers with the purpose of keeping him in Rochester.

Wilcox, 26, has a .896 save percentage in 21 games with the Amerks and serves as a backup to Scott Wedgewood. Wilcox previously was on an AHL deal and the roster move would allow the Sabres to add him to their roster.

Wilcox has compiled a .900 save percentage in 126 career AHL games and stopped all 14 shots he faced in his NHL debut with the Sabres against Florida in April.

Mike Harrington: Skinner scare should remind Sabres to live more in the present

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 23, 2019

In about a half-hour Saturday afternoon, you saw exactly why the Buffalo Sabres have to be more about the present and stop always looking at the future.

Play out the worst-case scenarios in your head for a minute. What if Jeff Skinner hadn't pulled a Willis Reed act and come back out for the third period of the 5-2 win over the Washington Capitals?

Imagine if his ankle was completely blown out from the weird collision with Washington's Carl Hagelin. Or maybe there were tears in the ACL of the knee, which it appeared Skinner was grabbing as he was writhing and sliding on the ice. Or what if the torquing of the ankle ripped a bunch of ligaments or led to a torn Achilles?

All those scenarios seemed possible, looking at the gruesome video and GIF files of the play. And it's not far-fetched to play things out from there.

It could have easily been season over for Skinner and thus season over for this team, even though the latter is close to reality anyway. Perhaps GM Jason Botterill has to go into full sell mode more than we'd expect at Monday's trade deadline because no Skinner would mean absolutely no hope going forward.

And what about the little problem of negotiating a long-term contract extension for Skinner in the \$70 million range? A serious injury like that would certainly grind those talks to a halt, at least temporarily, until the team had a better picture of Skinner's health going forward.

Thankfully for all parties involved, it appears Skinner emerged with just a close call. It was, frankly, stunning to see him on the ice in the third period. The KeyBank Center crowd didn't initially notice him for the first few seconds of his shift but when he touched the puck in the Washington zone, a roar went up.

"When I first saw him go down, I thought he got high-sticked," said Jack Eichel. "But when I got over closer to him, obviously I figured out that it wasn't a high stick. Obviously you think the worst when he's down there and he's in a lot of pain like that but it's great to see him come back and it's great to see he's all right."

Eichel should know. He's suffered two serious high ankle sprains his career. The first one came eight minutes from the end of practice the day before the 2016-17 season opener. It cost him 21 games and was a death knell for the Buffalo season before it ever started.

You just never know in sports. Injuries happen. Sometimes life intervenes, as we've seen the last couple of years with Kyle Okposo and Robin Lehner. Injuries, illnesses and off-ice problems are all part of the game. You can't plan for them but you can't act like they're not possible either.

Skinner said he had moments just like you did. The pain in his left leg was a weird one.

"There's a lot of things going through your mind," he said. "At first, kind of just wondering what's wrong with it. Once you get past that initial stage and you get back here, there's a pretty open line of communication going on. They're kind of explaining what's going on, what they're seeing when they're testing stuff out. The tests went pretty well and I was able to come back so that was fortunate."

Sabres players said they saw Skinner walking around in the locker room in the second intermission and knew things would be OK. Then the fans got their view and the mood brightened again.

The Sabres have been terrific the last two games, going toe-to-toe on the road in a shootout loss at Tampa Bay and then taking it to the defending Stanley Cup champions here Saturday.

They just don't play like that enough. They were first overall in the NHL in late November but the entire hockey world knew it was a bit of fool's gold with seven overtime or shootout wins.

Botterill should have gotten his team more help as the season went on. The thought that they weren't ready to win was a foolish one when they were already doing it.

Teams seize opportunity when it presents itself. Columbus fell out of a playoff spot for the first time in months on Thursday and one day later, the Blue Jackets made a trade with Ottawa for Matt Duchene.

Now, Columbus' situation is different in that they could be in an all-or-nothing scenario with Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky potentially heading for free agency. But it still shows how the Jackets are attacking their playoff situation. Same for Carolina getting Nino Niederreiter for the likes of Victor Rask and Boston adding Charlie Coyle.

Instead, Botterill said he was going to trust his players. Most of them haven't proven trustworthy on a consistent basis.

Saturday was one of those what-if days. How can the Sabres be so bad against the likes of New Jersey and Florida and so good against Tampa Bay and the defending Cup champs?

The defense was strong and the penalty kill stopped both Caps attempts. The power play got a sensational goal from Rasmus Dahlin. Sam Reinhart continued his burgeoning season with his third career hat trick. Danny O'Regan looked like he should have been up from Rochester weeks ago and Scott Wilson showed why he's been missed all season.

And Carter Hutton's aggressive goaltending was in view right from the opening faceoff, making the key stops when the Sabres needed them.

When this team plays hard, it looks good. When it's soft — Housley's word — it's one of the worst in the league. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed. It would have looked a lot different if Skinner had suffered a serious injury. This season will always have the feeling it should have been something more but the Sabres sat back and didn't do enough to worry about today.

Sabres sign goalie Adam Wilcox to one-year, two-way contract

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 24, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres gave themselves some added insurance in net by signing goalie Adam Wilcox to a one-year, two-way NHL contract Sunday.

Wilcox, a 26-year-old who has appeared in 21 games with Rochester this season, was placed on waivers by the Sabres with the purpose of keeping him on the Amerks' roster. He was previously on an AHL contract and the roster move will allow him to be recalled to the NHL in the event of an injury.

The roster move came two days after the team announced goalie prospect Jonas Johansson underwent successful season-ending surgery, though the nature of the injury was not disclosed. Johansson and Scott Wedgewood were the only non-roster goalies in the Sabres' system signed to NHL contracts.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, a 19-year-old drafted in the second round in 2017, signed a contract with Buffalo but is still playing for Sudbury of the Ontario Hockey League and is not expected to join the Amerks until the completion of his junior season.

Wilcox, a sixth-round draft pick of Tampa Bay in 2011, made his NHL debut with the Sabres last April, when he stopped all 14 shots he faced in the season finale against Florida. He has a .900 save percentage in 126 career AHL games and has a .896 save percentage while serving as Wedgewood's backup in Rochester this season.

Sabres Notebook: 'No surprise' Sam Reinhart nets hat trick in win

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 23, 2019

Hats were thrown onto the KeyBank Center ice for the first time in 14 months Saturday afternoon when Sam Reinhart scored an empty-net goal with 56 seconds left in regulation.

The 23-year-old's hat-trick-clinching goal, the Buffalo Sabres' first on home ice since Dec. 15, 2017, sealed a 5-2 victory over the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals and snapped a four-game losing streak.

Reinhart, drafted second overall in 2014, has blossomed into a dynamic two-way player during his fourth full season with the Sabres. He has 17 goals among a career-high 55 points in 61 games this season.

"Anytime time you can do it at home, it's that much more special," Reinhart said of the hat trick.

Reinhart has also set career highs in assists (38) and multi-point games (16), and the Sabres are 30-4-7 in his career when he records at least two points. Entering Saturday's game, he was on pace for 19 goals with 52 assists and could go a second consecutive season without missing a game.

Reinhart has proven he doesn't need to play with Jack Eichel to succeed and has helped balance the Sabres' scoring since moving to the second line, proving he too can make those around him better.

Skating alongside Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues with Casey Mittelstadt out because of an illness, Reinhart gave the Sabres a 2-0 lead by beating Braden Holtby high blocker at 12:51 into the first period.

"He's been playing great for us all year," said Eichel. "It's no surprise. He goes to the front of the net, he makes a lot of small plays that I think go unnoticed, so it was great to see him get rewarded with a hat trick tonight. I couldn't be happier for him."

The Capitals cut their deficit to one goal when Andre Burakovsky scored 4:16 into the third period. However, the Sabres answered one minute, 27 seconds later. Reinhart fought his way to the front of the net, maneuvered around Washington center Nicklas Backstrom before deflecting Matt Hunwick's shot into the net for a 4-2 lead.

Reinhart then added the empty-net goal to help the Sabres improve to 29-24-8.

"I think he's finally getting rewarded," Housley said of Reinhart. "How many pucks did he tip on the power play that haven't gone in? Finally he gets one. He's in the right position. He's very, very good down there in front of the net."

Rasmus Dahlin needed two one-timers to score the Sabres' third goal. The 18-year-old defenseman snapped his stick on the first attempt, forcing him to retrieve a backup shaft from the bench.

There was one problem: Dahlin forgot to tape his backup stick. That did not stop him from one-timing a pass from Eichel over Holtby's glove with 31 seconds left in the second period.

"He didn't have any tape on it, so [the shot] sort of knuckled on Holtby," Housley recalled with a laugh. "It's funny but that's the type of player he is, he can make adjustments on the fly."

Wingers Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson, both recalled from Rochester Friday, played 11:56 and 11:52, respectively, in their first game with the Sabres this season. O'Regan nearly scored a goal in the third period but was unable to push the puck past the goal line, and Wilson was tied for a team-high four shots on goal.

"We had some guys play some big games for us tonight," said Eichel. "It was good to see [Wilson] get back out here. It was a physical game. I thought he was a big part of that. ... It was good to see Dano playing. I thought he chipped in and had a couple chances. You could say a lot about the full team effort. We're happy to get two points at home."

Sabres, Jeff Skinner avoid disaster, pull away for win over defending Cup champs

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 23, 2019

Jack Eichel feared the worst. He wasn't the only one, either.

The sold-out crowd in KeyBank Center went silent as Jeff Skinner, the Buffalo Sabres' leading goal scorer, clutched at his left knee and needed to be helped to the bench Saturday afternoon.

While Skinner was being examined by the team's medical staff, his teammates persevered and the 26-year-old winger returned for the third period to help secure an important two points on home ice.

Sam Reinhart had a hat trick, including the Sabres' fourth and fifth goals, and Carter Hutton made 31 saves to beat the Washington Capitals, 5-2, and snap a four-game losing streak. Buffalo, 29-24-8 with 66 points, kept pace in the Eastern Conference playoff chase after falling to this season's Cup favorites, Tampa Bay, in a shootout two nights earlier.

Not only can the Sabres rest easy with Skinner appearing to avoid serious injury, they saw again how they will need to play during this late-season playoff push.

"We know what we're capable of, but at the same time any team in this league is capable of having a performance like that," said Reinhart, who had the Sabres' first hat trick on home ice since Dec. 2017. "We're just trying to be more consistent. Learn how to do that."

After scoring six goals in its previous four games, Buffalo had 38 shots on Capitals goalie Braden Holtby. Jason Pominville and Rasmus Dahlin scored goals, the latter occurring on the power play with Skinner still in the dressing room late in the second period.

Ten different Sabres had at least one point — including a team-high two assists for Eichel, who has set a new career-high with 66 points — and they did not buckle after the Capitals (34-21-7) twice cut the lead to one goal.

More important, Buffalo did not give Washington much room in the defensive zone. Alex Ovechkin scored a breakaway goal, his NHL-leading 44th of the season, at 2:28 into the second period, and André Burakovsky made it 3-2 by deflecting Christian Djoos' shot into the net with 15:44 remaining in regulation.

Otherwise, the Sabres limited the Capitals' chances to the outside and had few blown coverages in the defensive zone. Buffalo also did a better job managing the puck and avoided disaster by executing the game plan coach Phil Housley has been drilling since the onset of training camp.

"They can see it's effective," Housley said. "Sometimes it's not pretty and we have to make the right decisions. Obviously, we tell them they have to make plays, just make the right decisions. ... Usually when we're managing the game we're going north, we're not chasing anything and using our energy in the right area."

Hutton, making his second consecutive start, bailed the Sabres out when mistakes were made, including his highlight-reel stop on Lars Eller early in the second period. However, they were dealt a blow at 4:42 into the second period when Carl Hagelin tripped Skinner away from the puck.

Skinner's left ankle buckled and he fell to the ice after initially trying to skate to the bench on his own. An unrestricted free agent at season's end, he recalled feeling an intense pain and surprised his teammates by joining them in the dressing room during the second intermission.

"There's a lot of things that go through your mind," said Skinner, who assisted on Pominville's goal. "At first you're just wondering what's wrong with it. ... The tests went pretty well and I was able to come back. That was fortunate."

Shaken but not defeated, the Sabres held the Capitals scoreless for the rest of the second period, despite allowing 15 shots on Hutton. Conor Sheary, filling in for Skinner, kept an offensive-zone power-play possession alive, and Buffalo capitalized when Dahlin scored on a one-timer shot with 31 seconds left in the second period.

The Sabres lacked any sort of snarl or emotion in losses to New Jersey and Florida earlier in the week, failing to finish checks or execute offensively. This time, Reinhart fought his way in front of Holtby and deflected Matt Hunwick's shot through Holtby for a 4-2 lead only one minute, 27 seconds after Burakovsky's goal.

The Capitals (34-21-7), who were playing the final game of a six-game road trip, went six minutes without a shot on goal in the first period and had only eight shots in the final 20 minutes. This after the Sabres nearly beat the NHL-leading Lightning on the road Thursday night.

"Yeah, I mean I thought we've done a good job the last two games for sure," Eichel said. "I thought we've defended when we need to, we've worked hard, we played pretty desperate. Obviously, two good teams, I thought we had two good performances, so I think that's something to be happy about for us. We've just got to build off of it."

The Wraparound: Sabres 5, Capitals 2

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 23, 2019

Holding the stick he retrieved from the Buffalo Sabres' bench moments earlier, Rasmus Dahlin pumped his right fist forward and let out a roar Saturday afternoon in front of a sold-out KeyBank Center crowd.

Moments earlier, Dahlin, the Sabres' 18-year-old defenseman, failed on his first shot attempt because his stick snapped in half. His second, a one-timer from the right-wing circle, beat Braden Holtby for a power-play goal with 31 seconds left in the second period and helped the Sabres defeat the Washington Capitals, 5-2.

Buffalo (29-24-8) beat the defending Stanley Cup champions two days after they nearly outlasted this season's Cup favorite, Tampa Bay, on the road. As a result, the Sabres snapped a four-game winless streak to keep their playoff hopes on life support.

As important, Jeff Skinner, the Sabres' leading goal scorer, returned for the third period Saturday after he needed to be helped off the ice in the second period.

Skinner, who has 36 goals among 55 points in 61 games, clutched at his left knee after being tripped by the Capitals' Carl Hagelin. Skinner, 26, assisted on Jason Pominville's first-period goal.

Sam Reinhart had a hat trick, including the Sabres' fourth of the game and an empty-netter, and Dahlin's eighth of the season made it 3-1 with 31 seconds left in the second period. Carter Hutton made 31 saves, and the Sabres had 38 shots on goal.

Alex Ovechkin and Andre Burakovsky had goals for Washington (34-21-7), which was 7-3-1 in February.

Opening salvo: The Sabres broke the scoreless tie at 3:40 into the first period, when Skinner made a no-look, backhanded pass to the slot. Pominville collected the puck and beat Holtby for his 14th goal of the season. With a secondary assist on the play, Jack Eichel set a new career-high with 65 points.

Response: Reinhart gave Buffalo a 2-0 lead at 12:51 in the first when he retrieved a puck poked by Evan Rodrigues, and fired a shot over Holtby's blocker.

Okposo update: Winger Kyle Okposo, who was placed on injured reserve Friday after being diagnosed with his third concussion in less than three years, skated on his own Saturday morning and attended the game. There is no timeline for his return.

Lineup: Sabres rookie center Casey Mittelstadt was scratched because of an illness, while defenseman Casey Nelson was a healthy scratch. Wingers Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson, both recalled from Rochester Friday, made their NHL season debuts.

Demotion: Winger C.J. Smith was sent back to Rochester Saturday after failing to score in six consecutive games for the Sabres.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to practice Sunday before they depart for Toronto, where they will play the Maple Leafs Monday night.

Sabres' Jeff Skinner returns after injury scare against Capitals

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 23, 2019

Jeff Skinner, the Buffalo Sabres' leading scorer, made a surprising return to the KeyBank Center ice in the third period Saturday after he suffered what initially appeared to be an ugly leg injury earlier in the game.

Skinner, the 26-year-old winger who has 36 goals in his first season in Buffalo, needed to be helped to the bench in the second period after he was tripped by the Washington Capitals' Carl Hagelin.

Both players were skating toward the slot near the Capitals' goal, when Hagelin appeared to inadvertently hook the blade of his stick around Skinner's left leg, causing Skinner's ankle to buckle. Skinner clutched at his left knee after hitting the ice.

Skinner, an unrestricted free agent at season's end, assisted on Jason Pominville's first-period goal to give the Sabres a 1-0 lead over the Capitals. Skinner has 54 points in 61 games after being acquired by Buffalo in August.

His agent, Don Meehan, has been negotiating a possible long-term contract extension with the Sabres.

Casey Mittelstadt out for Sabres vs. Capitals; Danny O'Regan, Scott Wilson debut

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 23, 2019

Casey Mittelstadt was out of the Buffalo Sabres' lineup because of an illness Saturday afternoon in KeyBank Center, clearing the way for Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson to make their season debuts.

Mittelstadt, a 20-year-old rookie center, played the previous three games after missing two games with a lower-body injury. Prior to Saturday's game, coach Phil Housley told reporters "we have a couple guys that are questionable."

Mittelstadt played 16 minutes, 11 seconds Thursday in Tampa Bay, and the Sabres did not practice Friday. He was not on the ice for pregame warm-up Saturday. Additionally, winger C.J. Smith and defenseman Casey Nelson were healthy scratches. Carter Hutton started in goal.

O'Regan, a 25-year-old acquired from San Jose in the Evander Kane trade last February, had 18 goals among 34 points in 53 games with the Amerks, and Wilson, 26, had three goals among seven points in 17 games in Rochester after clearing waivers.

"Danny's been doing a great job down there with the line of [Rasmus] Asplund and [Victor] Olofsson," Housley said. "He's been making a lot of solid plays, and Willy is just that type of guy we need right now. He's physical, he's fast. He can play a fast game. They're going to get an opportunity, but we'll know more after pregame warmup."

To make room on the roster for both forwards, the Sabres sent defenseman Lawrence Pilut to Rochester and placed winger Kyle Okposo on injured reserve, though the latter skated on his own Saturday morning after being diagnosed with a concussion. Pilut, 23, is expected to be in the Amerks' lineup tonight.

Hutton has not started back-to-back games since Jan. 8-11, but his 39-save performance in a 2-1 shootout loss Thursday in Tampa Bay earned him the nod against Washington. Linus Ullmark was originally supposed to start against the Lightning, however, he suffered a minor lower-body injury during the morning skate and was replaced in the lineup by Hutton.

Housley said Ullmark could play against the Capitals if needed.

Mittelstadt was held without a point in his previous three games and has eight goals among 19 points in 58 games this season.

The Sabres make a big trade, getting a defenseman from the Ducks

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 24, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres have acquired the type of player that Jason Botterill has been talking about. Brandon Montour is a right-handed shooting, puck moving defenseman and is only 24-years-old. In return, Anaheim gets the Sharks' No. 1 pick unless the Blues pick is between 21 and 30. If that's the case, the Ducks get the higher pick. Anaheim also gets defenseman Brendan Guhle.

In a statement, Jason Botterill said, "Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play. He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

Montour was in his third season with Anaheim and has netted five goals and 20 assists for 25 points in 62 games. He's put in 169 NHL games, scoring 16 goals and 47 assists for 63 points. Montour also has playoff experience, participating in 21 games. He was taken by the Ducks in the second round of the 2014 Entry Draft.

Guhle was a second round pick in the 2015 draft and is a great skater. Despite struggling mightily this season in Rochester, this is the kind of trade I thought it would take if the Sabres were to part with him. With his speed, it's possible he could've eventually fit into Phil Housley's system.

He's only 21-years-old with plenty of time to develop. Guhle played in the AHL All-Star game because Lawrence Pilut was up in Buffalo and Zach Redmond was injured. The AHL wanted an Amerk on the squad, so Guhle was next guy up.

Guhle has played 23 NHL games with no goals and five assists. In 112 AHL games, Guhle had 15 goals and 44 assists for 59 points. Ducks GM Bob Murray said in a statement, "Brendan Guhle is an excellent skater who is ready to take the next step in his career. Adding Guhle and a first-round pick is an important step as we re-tool our team moving forward."

The Sabres had three first round picks to use as currency, and I think this was an excellent way to use one of them. I still think Guhle has a chance to be good too, but we already know Montour is good.

Montour has one more year left on his contract that will pay him \$3.3875 million.

Monday is trade deadline day and our coverage starts at 6 am with Howard Simon and Jeremy White. I'll be live down at the arena all day before leaving for the Sabres game in Toronto.

The Sabres give goalie Adam Wilcox a NHL contract

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 24, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Adam Wilcox had been on an AHL contract with Rochester, but he has now earned a NHL deal. Buffalo has inked Wilcox to a one-year, two-way contract for \$650,000. Wilcox has been waived so he can be sent to the Amerks.

Wilcox was a sixth round pick of the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2011 and has played one NHL game with the Sabres against Florida. He played 39 minutes and stopped all 14 shots he faced.

This season in Rochester, Wilcox is 9-7-1 with a 2.89 goals-against and .896 save percentage.

Last season with the Amerks, he was 12-7-2 with a 2.79 goals-against and a .903 save percentage.

The University of Minnesota product is 26-years-old.

The Sabres canceled practice so they could leave Sunday morning for Toronto to avoid the predicted high winds for Western New York and Southern Ontario.

The Sabres string together two excellent games

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 23, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres spent three periods in Tampa and the first period against the Capitals showing us what they are capable of. They skated, they hit and best of all, they played with urgency.

On Saturday, the Capitals couldn't handle what was thrown at them in the first 20 minutes. Jack Eichel went right to work getting on a puck fast in the offense zone. As he cycled it to Jeff Skinner, I could hear Jason Pominville yell from the press box. He was wide open and Skinner put the pass right on his stick. Pominville isn't going to miss very often from there.

Zemgus Girgensons drove Washington crazy with the way he was on them every time they touched the puck. He finished every check and worked hard to get the puck when he didn't have it. He did make one mistake on the penalty kill that led to Carter Hutton having to stop Evgeny Kuznetsov wide open in front.

Girgensons easily could've cleared the puck out of the zone, but he saw John Carlson flat-footed and tried flipping it by him. Carlson knocked it out of the air, but Hutton bailed his teammate out.

Overall, that penalty kill was excellent with many Sabres hurling themselves in front of pucks and getting into passing lanes. Hutton made big saves too.

Casey Mittelstadt missed the game due to illness and Evan Rodrigues took his place on his line. Rodrigues did a great job through the neutral zone to spring Sam Reinhart, who beat Braden Holtby short side.

The first half of the second period wasn't as good. A bad decision by Matt Hunwick allowed Alex Ovechkin in alone and he scored his 44th goal.

Hutton came flying across his crease twice to stop Jakub Vrana and Brett Connolly. Both thought they had wide open nets. Hutton has looked confident against two of the best teams in the NHL in Tampa Bay and Washington.

I think the injury to Jeff Skinner rattled this group for a few minutes, but they got their game back late in the period.

On a late power play, Rasmus Dahlin's stick blew up on a one-timer. He quickly went to the bench for a new twig and kept a puck in that looked like it was going to be cleared. Eichel put another one right in his wheelhouse and Dahlin didn't miss that one to give the Sabres its two-goal lead back.

In that period, Jeff Skinner was tripped by Carl Hagelin. It was a gruesome injury and he had to be helped to the room. I was thinking about what the team was going to do to replace this guy in March. Somehow, some way, Skinner came back out and played the third period, not looking slow at all. I don't think I've ever witnessed an injury that looked that bad and seen the player return in the same game.

I thought the fans got a real treat watching their team in the third period. At 4:16, the Capitals cut the lead to one, but it didn't deter the Sabres in the least. They kept moving forward, they kept showing urgency to keep the lead and just 1:27 later, Reinhart is in front to tip home his second goal of the game.

Buffalo out-shot Washington 12-8 in that all important third period and had 38 shots overall. That's 68 shots and three out of four points against two of the best teams in the NHL.

I'm just going to keep saying, the last two games are why fans are so upset and frustrated with this team. They are perfectly capable of playing games like this and had they played the majority like this, we wouldn't be taking about if they're going to make the playoffs, we'd be talking about when playoff tickets go on sale.

Lawrence Pilut was sent down to Rochester on Friday, while C.J. Smith went down on Saturday. As far as why Pilut went down, Phil Housley said, "Lawrence's development is right where it should be. He's played a lot of

good hockey for us, he's played 25 games for us up to this point, but I think his play has slipped and just get him back down to Rochester and play some more meaningful minutes and we'll see where that takes him."

Sabres defeat Washington 5-2

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

February 23, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres, behind a Sam Reinhart hat-trick, were able to get a much-needed 5-2 win over the Washington Capitals on Saturday afternoon at KeyBank Center. With the win, Buffalo snaps a four-game losing streak.

Jason Pominville's 14th goal of the season came less than four minutes into the game to give Buffalo a 1-0 lead over the Capitals. The goal was a result of a nice pass on the backhand by Jeff Skinner while he was below the goal line. Both Skinner and Jack Eichel assisted on the game's first goal.

Reinhart extended the Sabres' lead to 2-0 with a wrist shot on the right wing side of the ice that beat Braden Holtby. It was the forward's 15th goal of the season, after Evan Rodrigues made the pass that sprang the forward.

Each team had a power play chance in the opening twenty minutes, but failed to score. Vladimir Sobotka was called for a tripping minor shortly after Buffalo's first goal, but his teammates were able to kill off the man advantage.

Carter Hutton stopped all 10 Washington shots on goal in the first period as well.

A turnover in the neutral zone early in the second period resulted in a Washington goal to cut their deficit to 2-1. Alexander Ovechkin was able to pick up a loose puck outside of the Capitals' zone and break in on Hutton for his 44th goal of the season. The even strength goal was assisted by Evgeny Kuznetsov.

Skinner left the game less than five minutes into the middle stanza after being tripped by Carl Haeglin in front of the net. The forward was down on the ice and was attended to by trainers before being helped off the ice. However, he was able to come back in the third period.

Buffalo's lead was extended back to a pair thanks to a late power play goal by Rasmus Dahlin. He was able to complete a one-timer opportunity after a nice pass by Eichel from across the ice. The rookie defenseman has scored two goals in as many games for the blue and gold. Eichel and Rasmus Ristolainen assisted on the special teams' score.

The Capitals were able to score to get back within a goal, 3-2, early in the third thanks to a tip in front of the net. Andre Burakovsky was able to tip home the shot for his eighth goal of the season. However, Reinhart and the Sabres answered back less than two minutes later to move the lead back to two goals, 4-2. Reinhart tipped home a Matt Hunwick shot from the point for his second goal of the game. Reinhart would seal the game with an empty net goal for his hat-trick.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 3:40 - Jason Pominville (14) (Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel); 12:51 - Sam Reinhart (15) (Evan Rodrigues)
WSH: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 19:29 - Rasmus Dahlin (9) PPG (Jack Eichel, Rasmus Ristolainen)
WSH: 2:28 - Alexander Ovechkin (44) (Evgeny Kuznetsov)

Third Period:

BUF: 5:43 - Sam Reinhart (16) (Matt Hunwick, Conor Sheary); 19:04 - Sam Reinhart (17) (Carter Hutton)
WSH: 4:16 - Andre Burakovsky (8) (Christian Djoos, Michal Kempny)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 5:53 - Vladimir Sobotka (Tripping - 2 min.)
WSH: 18:02 - Jakub Vrana (Hooking - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 13:56 - Nathan Beaulieu (Delay of Game - 2 min.)
WSH: 4:42 - Carl Hagelin (Tripping - 2 min.); 17:44 - Nic Dowd (Tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE
WSH: 1:26 - Nicklas Backstrom (Hooking - 2 min.)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 38 (13, 13, 12)
WSH: 33 (10, 15, 8)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 31 saves
WSH: Braden Holtby - 33 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 for 4 (25%)
WSH: 0 for 2 (0%)

Three Stars:

Sam Reinhart - BUF
Carter Hutton - BUF
Jack Eichel - BUF

What's Next:

The Sabres head to Toronto on Monday night to face the Maple Leafs at seven o'clock on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pre-game coverage with the Bulldog begins at 6 p.m.

Roundtable Reaction: Sabres acquire Brandon Montour from Ducks

By Katie Strang

The Athletic

February 24, 2019

It's been a crazy few days as Monday's 3 p.m. trade deadline draws near, with the market heating up in a big way, teams like Columbus going all-in with a couple of big acquisitions and basically anyone who is anyone being scratched for the Ottawa Senators. The latest deal to go down? A Ducks-Sabres swap that has Buffalo acquiring 24-year-old defenseman Brandon Montour and sending back 21-year-old defense prospect Brendan Guhle and a conditional 2019 first-round pick.

We asked a collection of our NHL experts at The Athletic to break down the elements of the trade. Each writer was asked to give the trade an impact score between 1-5, with one being a minor deal and five a blockbuster. Here's how they assessed the deal and its overall impact:

JOSH COOPER: Montour was a weapon that I felt the Ducks never properly utilized. He was a great skater who had excellent passing skills and a phenomenal shot. It was almost like his skill set was too unique for them to fully figure out.

I think he'll really flourish in Buffalo with a fresh start. He'll give the Sabres yet another puck-moving defenseman. Meanwhile, the Ducks did turn him into two assets between Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick. But if I was looking to deal a blueliner, he wouldn't have been the guy I would have traded.

Impact Score: 3

JOHN VOGL: Guhle was once the Sabres' top defensive prospect, a guy who made such a first impression that Buffalo signed him a month after drafting him. Since 2015, Rasmus Dahlin, Marco Scandella and Lawrence Pilut have flown past him on the left-side depth chart.

Enter Montour, who fills a need on the right side. He played on all three pairings in Anaheim. And he's a playmaker, which coach Phil Housley needs for his system. The pick surrendered will be late in the first round, so this gives Buffalo a needed player now. They still have two first-rounders, too.

Impact Score: 3.5

ERIC STEPHENS: Trading Montour to Buffalo for Guhle and a first-round pick in this June's draft is Anaheim GM Bob Murray not waiting until this summer to make a significant shake-up to his disappointing team.

Anaheim could be burned in the long run if the risk-taking Montour turns into a 50-point defenseman. But Murray and his staff also wondered if he'd smooth out the big swings in his play. A recent drop to the third pairing and well-traveled veteran Michael Del Zotto getting more and more ice time was becoming an ominous sign.

Guhle can skate but doesn't have Montour's offensive upside. The key going forward is how Murray manages that extra first-round selection acquired in the deal, along with what could be a top-10 pick in their own pick.

Impact Score: 3

CRAIG CUSTANCE: For as much as teams are constantly scouring the league for good, young defensemen, it's pretty amazing how many have gone the other way out of Anaheim in recent years. The Ducks lost Shea Theodore in the expansion draft process. They traded Sami Vatanen to get Adam Henrique. And now Montour is gone, in part because he was one of the few moveable contracts that would bring back a strong return. The net gain on these Ducks defensemen deals hasn't been great but this one has the potential to be the most fruitful.

From a Buffalo perspective, this is smart. GM Jason Botterill is trading from his surplus of picks not on a rental but on a 24-year-old, right-shot defenseman who provides offense on a reasonable contract. Those aren't easy to find. You can't help but wonder how many other potential buyers might prefer to follow that strategy.

Impact Score: 4

SCOTT WHEELER: Montour's season fits into some kind of weird juxtaposition in that he has played a ton (his 22:40 average ice time ranks 36th among all NHL defensemen) but with really poor results, both in terms of raw outcomes and possession.

Part of that can certainly be attributed to the Ducks' failure to be even reasonably good, and Randy Carlyle's coaching style and structure – neither of which protects defensemen from being shelled. There are redeeming raw tools in Montour's game and he's still reasonably young at 24, but that doesn't mean he's magically going to turn around his results in a different system.

And the price paid isn't insignificant. A first-rounder is a first-rounder, even if the Sabres have insulated themselves well with high picks. This feels rushed, when the long game provides safety for a dependable future. It seems, to me, a high price to pay for a defender who may not give you what you're hoping he gives you. The loss of Guhle isn't a major factor (he's a fine young AHL defenceman who may become a low-pairing defender in the NHL) but the first-round pick seems a lot.

Impact Score: 2

DOM LUSZCZYSZYN: At first blush, I was befuddled by a team unlikely to make the playoffs trading a first-round pick and an OK prospect for a defenseman from one of the league's worst defensive teams. That the pick being traded is not Buffalo's own 2019 first makes the deal slightly more palatable, especially for a team desperate for defensive help, though still likely a slight overpay for a player who doesn't really move the needle at 5-on-5.

To his credit, Montour is a very strong puck-mover – a valuable trait that's sorely missing from Buffalo's back end from every defender not named Dahlin – but his play-driving results have been rather pedestrian despite his skill set. Montour is on pace for back-to-back 30-point seasons, but that's mostly due to opportunity. At 5-on-5, his points-per-60 of 0.76 over the past two seasons ranks 107th. Combine that with his average or worse possession numbers and it paints Montour as a decent second-pairing defender, nothing better, but nothing worse either.

That's a player the Sabres could definitely use as they aim to become competitive, but still likely an overpay especially considering how promising Guhle looked last season (and who hasn't received much of a chance this season).

Impact Score: 3

SCOTT BURNSIDE: I must admit I don't really get the motivation for Murray to unload a 24-year-old, right-hand shot defenseman who was averaging almost 23 minutes a night in ice time and still has another year on his contract before becoming a restricted free agent. Maybe he felt he really had no other options in trying to shake up his moribund Ducks roster. But I really get why Botterill was more than happy to take on such a player in Montour.

The Sabres not only get a talented player who can step in and help this team perhaps make a late push to the playoffs this year but can also become a fixture on a Sabres blue line that already has lots of attractive pieces but needs to get better. The Sabres gave up a prospect in Guhle and a first-round pick (either St. Louis' or San Jose's but not their own) but they were trading from a position of strength in that regard and so it is an acceptable risk.

It will be interesting to see how Montour responds to playing on a team that has lots of speed and youthful talent, including Dahlin, with whom he may end pairing with. My guess is this is a game-changer for Montour and maybe the Sabres, too.

Impact Score: 3.5

KATIE STRANG: Montour is under contract until 2020, comes at a reasonable price tag, fills a need for Buffalo, can log significant minutes on the back end and can chip in offensively; he has five goals and 25 points in 62 games this season for the Ducks. Giving up a first-round pick is steep but we all know that there's an insane premium on right-handed defensemen at this time of year.

Guessing the Sabres feel this is a young guy who will turn out to be the beneficiary of a change of scenery, and you certainly can't rule that out given the way Anaheim has played this season. Additionally, Montour can certainly eat up minutes, considering he's averaging almost 23 minutes for game this season for Anaheim, but there are at least some underlying numbers that should provide some cause of concern.

This is a steep price, in my opinion, but the Sabres had a trio of first-round picks so can afford to take a gamble here, particularly considering this isn't a rental.

Impact score: 3

Positives pile up for the Sabres: No significant injury for Skinner, another strong game from Hutton

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Comebacks have been at the heart of the successes of the Buffalo Sabres this season. Bouncing back from early deficits helped them out in racing out to a hot start at the beginning of the season.

While things have cooled off to the point that fret and worry have been the dominant feelings among the fan base, goalie Carter Hutton and forward Jeff Skinner have shown that a few comebacks are still to be had.

Skinner's entire season has been a comeback of sorts. After he was a superstar for a time in Carolina, new players and a new regime left him as somewhat of an afterthought even though his production was still very good. His breakout in Buffalo this season has been nothing short of incredible, and seeing him fall to the ice injured in the first period brought a harsh blast of reality that anything, including the worst of the worst things, can happen.

"It was a good amount of pain, so I don't know what went on," Skinner said. "It kind of got twisted up and it kind of felt like my leg was supposed to have kept turning and I got blocked by a stick or I don't know what it got blocked by, and then just sort of a sharp pain and fortunately it settled down and let me get back in."

Yeah, that looked gross, and it seemed as if that could be it for Skinner's season. In a flash, his future seemed doubtful. Considering his mastery at scoring goals and his assist on Jason Pominville's goal that made it 1-0 in the first period, his fate seemed cruel until it wasn't.

Skinner re-emerged from the locker room at the start of the third period. He generated a scoring chance seconds into the frame ("I'd like to have that chance back — I think I kind of maybe rushed it a little bit," he said) and played a normal period with seven shifts.

Going from a gory injury to playing as if nothing happened made no sense and all the sense in the world considering the rabbits Skinner has pulled out of his hat on some of his goals this season.

"There's a lot of things going through your mind," Skinner said. "At first, you're just kind of wondering what's wrong with it. Once you get past that initial stage and get back here (in the locker room), there's a pretty open line of communication going on and they're explaining what's going on, what they're seeing, what they're testing stuff out on. The tests went pretty well and I was able to come back. That was fortunate."

Skinner, who's due to be an unrestricted free agent this summer and in negotiations with the Sabres to get re-signed, could have been looking at an anxious summer ahead if the injury had been more serious. He could wake up Sunday and feel terrible and things could go back to square one, but for now he and the Sabres avoided disaster.

"I think it was great to see him back there for his own personal-being, knowing that he could come back and just keep our rhythm between our shifts and the four lines we were rolling," coach Phil Housley said. "It was good to see him come back, albeit it was a great effort by him."

Hutton turned in his second consecutive impressive start Saturday in the 5-2 win against the Washington Capitals. His 31-save win came on the heels of a 2-1 shootout loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday during which he made 39 saves. The Capitals and Lightning are two of the NHL's best teams and highest-scoring offenses, and Hutton was semi-pressed into duty because Linus Ullmark suffered a minor injury in Tampa. Hutton seized the chance to show what he's got. Having a pair of strong games after going 3-11-2 with a .894 save percentage in his previous 16 goes a long way to getting confidence back.

"There's a lot of things I can't control, and I think at times, you know, it's a long season," Hutton said. "I've played a lot of games and in a sense maybe it was a bit of a lull; it wasn't physical, maybe mental a bit, it's a long season and just maybe you miss a couple games and you get that fire back a little more just to compete and

play. I think just getting back to, and I say it a lot, controlling what I can control. I think in some games you try to do too much, and I can't score goals, I can't do anything outside of my realm, and I think just getting back to what I do best and it has really helped me really get back into it here."

Yeah, Hutton can't score goals, although he had the lone assist on Reinhart's empty-net hat-trick goal against Washington. But in moments when the Lightning and Capitals pressured their hardest and brought their biggest offensive weapons, he stood tall or kicked his legs out to rob a chance and give the Sabres a point to rally.

"I just like his attitude. He's attacking it," Housley said. "He's got that focus right now that he's going to stand big and he's going to stand tall. These last two games have been really, really exceptional."

The workload for Hutton this season has been the heaviest of his career. Saturday was his 36th start of the season. He made 34 starts in his first full season, 2013-14 with the Nashville Predators while Pekka Rinne was out of action. He came to Buffalo knowing he'd be the No. 1 for a time, but it's still an adjustment.

"It's fun, you know, I don't really try to overthink it — it's just hockey," Hutton said. "It's the same idea, just go out, compete, do whatever I can, and I think the biggest thing right now is staying within myself and not being too aggressive."

Headed into the game against Tampa Bay, things were bleak for Buffalo, to say the least. They'd lost three in a row and had fallen dangerously behind the main pack for the wild card. That's not to say it's all sunshine and happiness now, but after the Sabres earned a point against Tampa Bay and beat a road-weary Capitals team, there's a chance to catch a breath and enjoy the sight of some elusive consistency.

"I think I've been playing pretty well here for a while, not to sell myself short by any means, but yeah, it's different," Hutton said. "The game that gets thrown at you when you're playing these teams, right. Tampa, Washington, they come at you full tilt, really offensive, so you kind of have to be engaged in that sense where some of the other games you play aren't that — I can only control what I can."

How Sam Reinhart has turned himself into a steady points producer

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 23, 2019

Evan Rodrigues tilted his head, narrowed his eyes and gave a wary look.

"I feel like that's a trick question," he said.

The question — why is Sam Reinhart able to consistently put up points? — was vague for a reason. Rather than guide anyone toward a predetermined conclusion, the open-ended query was designed to learn why a Sabres forward with average size, average speed and an average shot shows up on the scoresheet time and again.

Once Rodrigues was assured that no one was fishing for an answer — like, say, Reinhart gets points because he plays with Jack Eichel — the forward smiled and summed it up:

"Because he's a hell of a player."

Reinhart continues to show it, adding a third career hat trick to his résumé Saturday. He upped his season totals to 17 goals and 55 points in 61 games. Since blossoming in the middle of last season, Reinhart has 37 goals and 94 points in 105 games. That's the same number of points as Gabriel Landeskog and just two fewer than Nicklas Backstrom and Anze Kopitar.

In other words, Reinhart is putting himself in special company.

After a trip around the Sabres' dressing room, here's why teammates say Reinhart is able to consistently put up points, plus Reinhart's response to common themes.

Eichel: "He just understands the game, understands the right way to play. He just makes a lot of little plays that other people don't recognize. His head's up. He reads plays before they happen. He's really easy to play with.

"I really enjoy playing with him. He's a guy that you can play a two-man game with, and he's really good at reading off you and lets you read off him. He's versatile. He can go up and down the lineup.

"I mean, he's a pretty underrated player."

Reinhart, selected with the No. 2 overall pick in 2014, is often in the shadow of Eichel, the No. 2 pick from 2015. It leads many to believe that Reinhart is merely a product of Eichel. While skating alongside the franchise center certainly helps, Reinhart also produces without his good friend.

Reinhart has been on the ice for 321 Buffalo goals during the past four seasons. He's been with Eichel for 188 of them, and he's been without Eichel for 133, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

"He boosts any line he plays with," Eichel said. "It's a testament to his skill level, his ability to be adaptable."

Left wing Jeff Skinner: "He's so smart. He always knows where guys are on the ice. I think that helps a lot with his playmaking ability. Then you see lately he's got the hands and the skill to sort of finish plays off.

"A lot of guys have great skills, great physical skills, but what stands out for me is sort of his hockey sense or how he always knows what's going to happen before it happens. The game's so fast that sometimes if you're just reacting to the play, it's tough to sort of gain separation or tough to make a play against an opposing player because they're there. If you sort of read what's going to happen and anticipate it beforehand, maybe you get a little better body positioning, maybe you have a little bit better awareness of where you want to pass the puck before you get it.

"That's just kind of the way you sum it up. I think he's got an awareness about him, and it allows him to anticipate plays, and that gives him a little extra time and space. He's got good enough skill to take advantage of that kind of thing."

Center Johan Larsson: "He's skilled, and he sees the game really well out there. He's got a lot of confidence now, so it's fun to see. He's always in the right spot. He's not the fastest guy, but he's always in the right spot."

Skinner and Larsson both referred to Reinhart's hockey IQ, which has been lauded since the forward's days in junior hockey.

"I guarantee there's not many guys out there that people say they have high hockey IQ and they can really tell you what they're thinking out there," Reinhart said. "At least for me, I can't really say what I'm thinking out there. It's just kind of playing the game."

"There's certain instances, certain players that you can watch video and learn from, but there's certain times where the game's too fast. So it's just kind of reading and reacting. Some things you can't always teach, but for the most part you can try and get better at certain areas."

Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin: "He has very good vision for the game. He's a very good passer, too. It seems like he gets chemistry with everyone he's playing with."

"He doesn't move so much. He's always looking and trying to find passes. I kind of like how he plays. It looks easy, but to play like that is really hard because when you stand still, players are coming against you, but he makes plays and is really skilled."

Left wing Conor Sheary: "He's really poised with the puck. He makes a lot of good plays, kind of little plays that maybe people don't see, good wall plays and good plays off the rush. He's always in front of the net, finding rebounds. Those are some of the strengths of his game."

"Playing alongside him, he makes the game easier. That's all you can ask for from your linemates."

Rodrigues, to illustrate the poise mentioned by Dahlin and Sheary, instantly recalled a December play in Boston.

"It's a two-on-two in the neutral zone, and he draws the left D all the way over, pulls the right D in, drops it to Eichs, and he has pretty much a partial breakaway and snaps it high," Rodrigues said. "Some people just look at that as an average play, but he hangs onto the puck long enough to draw that left D up with him and gives Eichs the whole lane to drive wide. It's little things like that that people don't notice, but it seems like he's always making those type of plays."

"People look at maybe his speed or skating. To the eye, it may look like he's not moving out there, but he plays with Jack and he always keeps up with him. He's never behind the play."

Though Reinhart takes part in power-skating clinics during the offseason, he knows he's not the fastest guy on the ice.

"I've never been the fastest by any means," he said. "That's something I've kind of had to work on. I feel comfortable with where I'm at right now. As I keep getting bigger and stronger, I'm only going to get faster. But I think that I've always played better with fast players around me, going back to early in junior."

Goaltender Carter Hutton: "You can tell he grew up in a hockey family and learned things the right way right away. He's got a really good skill set, good hands. I don't think he's an overly good skater — I think he'll be the first guy to tell you that — but he never looks slow out there because he's smart getting to positions and doing the right things. I think he has a lot of poise in tough areas, too. He makes a lot of key plays with that little extra patience. Sometimes that's things that you can't really teach. He grew up around the game, and I think it's something that definitely shows."

"Honestly, most kids that you see that are generational players where their parents played, they learn the game the right way early on, so it's kind of embedded."

Reinhart's father, Paul, played 11 years in the NHL. Sam wears No. 23 in honor of the defenseman.

"I've watched a little bit of the ESPN Classics and I always have a great time watching him, but there's a lot of his tendencies out there that I bring to my game," the 23-year-old said. "That's not from watching him. That's probably just from growing up and him coaching me every day, him talking about the game every day, and it just kind of implanted into my brain."

Coach Phil Housley: "He's been finding ways to contribute in and around the net, whether it's net-front presence, providing his teammates with a screen of the goalie or making those little plays around the net."

Center Casey Mittelstadt: "He just does a good job winning battles and making little plays. He's so good around the net. I think he doesn't get enough credit for what he does in the neutral zone, kind of slowing plays down and hitting guys coming with speed or getting around guys one-on-one. I think that's what he does really well, and obviously he's great around the net."

"He's probably our best net-front guy, especially on the power play. You give it down to him, he's not just tipping and screening. He's making little passes, making good release plays. Skinny's got 10 goals probably — which is a credit to both of them, I'm not trying to take anything away from Skins — but Reino making a nice pass to him in the middle on the power play, I think Reino probably does that better than anyone. There's a lot of guys that are good at it, but Reino definitely does it really well."

When the Sabres drafted Reinhart, it wasn't so he could stand in the crease. But as he searched for ways to excel in the NHL, he found a calling in front. He continues to practice it, which is why he's able to make unreal plays like his second goal Saturday.

"I mean, when have I ever been net-front before I came into the league?" Reinhart said. "But as soon as Jack was drafted second overall, what, am I going to try and be on the half-wall? You kind of need to adapt to those sort of things and help yourself and help the team."

Forward Tage Thompson: "Sam's unbelievable. You see a guy like that who's got incredible skill — just through-the-roof amount of skill — and you compare that with his work ethic — he works probably one of the hardest on the team. He's willing to work at both of the ends of the ice. When he gets pucks, he's dangerous and can make plays. He's so smart, and he sees plays coming before they even happen."

"Those are things you notice as to why he keeps coming up on the scoresheet."

Sabres' acquisition of Brandon Montour shows they want to win now

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 24, 2019

TORONTO – On Sunday night, Sabres general manager Jason Botterill made a significant trade for this season, sending a 2019 first-round pick and defense prospect Brendan Guhle to the Anaheim Ducks for defenseman Brandon Montour.

Think about that, the Sabres, a team seemingly in perpetual rebuilding mode, dealt futures for an established NHL player before today's 3 p.m. trade deadline.

But for the first time since 2011-12, the Sabres are in the playoff chase at the deadline. They apparently don't plan to dump assets this year.

Botterill's move sends a strong message the 10th-place Sabres, who have suffered a stunning fall, dropping from first overall to out of a playoff spot, want to win this season.

The Sabres, who play the Maple Leafs tonight, trail the Carolina Hurricanes by six points for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot.

Botterill has never operated as a GM in this situation as the deadline approached. In his first season in charge a year ago, the Sabres hit rock bottom, finishing dead last. He simply traded Evander Kane, whose contract was set to expire, prior to the deadline.

For months, as the Sabres struggled this season, Botterill stayed quiet, making no notable moves.

Right now, the Sabres are 29-24-8 (66 points). On Nov. 27, the day they won their 10th straight game, they were 17-6-2.

Since then, they've earned the third-fewest points in the league, just 30.

Still, Botterill recently expressed confidence in his team.

"We're going to trust our players, we're going to trust our group," Botterill told reporters in Wednesday in Tampa Bay.

The first-round pick sent to Anaheim is the one the Sabres received from the San Jose Sharks for Kane last year, according to TSN. If the pick is between 20 to 31, the Ducks have the option of taking the other first-rounder the Sabres received from the St. Louis Blues in the Ryan O'Reilly trade last year.

The 6-foot, 193-pound Montour, 24, offers the Sabres immediate help. The UMass product has scored 16 goals and 63 points in 169 NHL games. He has compiled five goals and 25 points in 62 contests this season.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," Botterill said in a statement. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

Montour, a second-round pick in 2014, 55th overall, recorded nine goals and 32 points, both career highs, in 80 games last season. This is his second full NHL campaign.

The Brantford, Ontario, native has one season and a \$3.25 million salary cap hit left on his contract.

Montour's presence creates a logjam on the blue line. Right now, the Sabres have eight healthy defensemen on the roster. Regular Marco Scandella is also hurt.

The Sabres could possibly deal defenseman Nathan Beaulieu, who requested a trade last month, to create space. But Beaulieu, 26, has recently started playing again after sitting out for long stretches as a healthy scratch.

Meanwhile, Guhle, once the Sabres' top defense prospect, spent most of the past two seasons with the Rochester Americans. Guhle, 21, has played 23 NHL games, including two this season.

Still, the Sabres' old regime drafted him in the second round in 2015, 51st overall. Botterill had no investment in Guhle, a youngster many expected would be in the NHL by now.

Two years ago, the Sabres needed Guhle's puck-moving skills so badly they recalled him from junior during the season. Many thought he would bypass the AHL and jump right to the NHL.

This season, newcomer Lawrence Pilut jumped past Guhle on the depth chart.

Plenty of holdovers Botterill did not acquire are still in the organization. Perhaps he isn't done reshaping the Sabres.

"We've had a lot of conversations going on," Botterill said Wednesday. "Whether those things come to fruition over the next couple days, it's always hard to predict. As I think we saw last year, sometimes you look at the draft and then things can move into July 1 and things can move into the summer. I can't predict when it's going to happen."

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The Sabres have signed goalie Adam Wilcox to a one-year, two-way contract, the team announced Sunday.

Wilcox, 26, has played with the Amerks this season on an AHL deal.

The Sabres placed him on waivers Sunday, something that accompanies signing a new contract.

They likely gave him an NHL contract because goalie prospect Jonas Johansson underwent season-ending surgery last week.

Having only three healthy goalies in the organization under NHL contracts can be risky.

Wilcox played one game with the Sabres last season.

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The Sabres had Sunday off.

Sabres acquire Brandon Montour from Ducks

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 24, 2019

BUFFALO – General manager Jason Botterill made a significant trade tonight to help the Sabres this season, sending a 2019 first-round pick and defense prospect Brendan Guhle to the Anaheim Ducks for defenseman Brandon Montour.

The first-round pick is the one the Sabres received from the San Jose Sharks last year, according to TSN. The Ducks have the option of taking the Sabres' first-rounder from the St. Louis Blues if it's between pick 20 to 31.

Montour, 24, has scored 16 goals and 63 points in 169 NHL games. The former second-round pick has compiled five goals and 25 points in 62 contests this season.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," Botterill said in a statement. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

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Still, the Sabres' old regime drafted Guhle in the second round in 2015, 51st overall. Botterill had no investment in Guhle, a youngster many expected would be in the NHL by now.

Stay tuned for much more! The NHL trade deadline is 3 p.m. Monday.

Jeff Skinner's return helps boost Sabres in win over Capitals

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 24, 2019

BUFFALO – Right away, the fans noticed Jeff Skinner's unlikely presence. So when the Sabres' leading goal scorer touched the puck seconds into the third period, the crowd roared.

Earlier in Saturday afternoon's 5-2 win over the Washington Capitals, Skinner's season and the Sabres' slim playoff hopes looked finished.

Less than five minutes into the second period, Carl Hagelin put his stick around Skinner's lower left leg, causing his ankle to bend awkwardly as he fell to the ice.

The NHL All-Star clutched his knee and writhed in pain for a good minute. He tried crawling to the bench before two teammates helped him off.

The crowd fell silent watching what appeared to be a grim situation.

"There's a lot of things going through your mind," Skinner said. "I think at first, you're kind of just wondering what's wrong with it."

In the end, nothing was wrong. As the Sabres built a 3-1 lead, doctors examined Skinner and ran tests.

Following the second period, a surprise awaited the Sabres.

"You see him kind of walking around periods, I'm sure that was huge for the morale and I'm sure it relaxed the crowd a little bit," said Sabres winger Sam Reinhart, who recorded his third career hat trick.

Then Skinner stunned the capacity crowd of 19,070 by starting the third period.

"You never know what's going to happen," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "But reports were that he was going to come back for the third period."

The 36-goal winger heard the crowd's reaction as he skated into the Washington zone.

"That was pretty cool," Skinner said. "Obviously they're paying attention to the game, which is nice to see."

Skinner's return nearly overshadowed the end of the Sabres' four-game losing streak (0-3-1).

The Sabres pounced on the reigning Stanley Cup champions early, opening up a 2-0 lead by the 12:51 mark after Reinhart and Jason Pominville scored.

Whenever the Capitals pushed back – they moved to within one goal twice – the Sabres responded.

"We didn't let it affect us," Housley said. "We know that's a very dangerous team. I thought at times we let guys get to the open (ice), but for the most part, we were pretty solid in our checking detail."

The genesis of Saturday's victory started Thursday in Tampa Bay. While the Sabres lost a 2-1 shootout, simply playing well and taking the NHL's best team down to the wire generated some confidence.

"You don't want to have to rally around a loss, but the position we were in and still are in, it took that effort against a team like Tampa," Reinhart said. "It (was) really important for us to follow it up against another one of the best teams."

Housley added: "I just like the urgency and the desperation in our game right now."

The 10th-place Sabres trailed the Pittsburgh Penguins by five points for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot entering Saturday night's games.

After Alex Ovechkin's second-period goal narrowed it to 3-2, the Sabres responded, getting a power-play goal from rookie defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

Shortly before Dahlin scored at 19:29, he broke his stick and quickly received a new one from the bench.

The stick, however, wasn't quite ready for game action.

"There wasn't any tape on the stick," Housley said.

The puck, Housley said, "sort of knuckled" by goalie Braden Holtby.

"That's the type of player he is," Housley said of Dahlin. "He can make adjustments on the way."

Sabres goalie Carter Hutton has made adjustments over his last two outings, showcasing his early-season form following a rough stretch.

After Thursday's 39-save effort, Hutton stopped 31 shots against the Capitals.

"He was solid again, not much going on after the shot was delivered," Housley said. "He's fighting for the puck in traffic, trying to get a squeeze on it."

That aggressiveness tells Housley that Hutton is zeroed in.

"He's attacking it," Housley said. "He's got that focus right now that he's going to stand big and stand tall. His last two games have been really, really exceptional."

Hutton hadn't started back-to-back contests since Jan. 8 and 11. He hadn't won since Jan. 29.

"I just try to compete," Hutton said. "There's lots of things I can and can't control, and I think that something I can control is my attitude and my compete level."

Sabres notes: Sam Reinhart enjoys first hat trick in Buffalo

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 24, 2019

BUFFALO – On the first of his three goals Saturday afternoon, Sabres winger Sam Reinhart showcased a little flash.

After grabbing center Evan Rodrigues' nifty one-handed pass, Reinhart unleashed a wicked wrist shot from the right circle, beating Washington Capitals goalie Braden Holtby over the right shoulder 12:51 into the 5-2 win.

Later in the contest, Reinhart put the Sabres up two goals again, sealing the game by tipping defenseman Matt Hunwick's shot in front 5:43 into the third period.

The score, a response 1:23 after Andre Burakovsky got the Capitals to within 3-2, resembled so many of Reinhart's goals over his four-year career.

While it likely won't make any highlight reels, Reinhart positioned himself perfectly in front of Holtby and tipped the puck, no easy task.

"He's finally getting rewarded," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "How many pucks did he tip on the power play that haven't gone in? Finally he gets one. He's in the right position. He's very, very good down there in front of the net."

Reinhart added: "Hunwick does a really good job of being patient at the blue line, allowed me to get body position. It's not easy battling in front of the net."

The former second overall pick completed the hat trick with just under a minute left, hitting an empty net from the right wall just below the circle in his own zone.

Many fans responded by throwing hats on the ice to celebrate Reinhart's first three-goal outing inside KeyBank Center.

"Anytime you can do it at home, it's that much more special," Reinhart said. "We appreciate the support."

At times this year, Reinhart, 23, has been overshadowed by captain Jack Eichel and winger Jeff Skinner, the Sabres' two NHL All-Stars. Still, Reinhart has enjoyed a career-best season.

Through 61 outings, he has scored 17 goals and 55 points, putting him on pace for 23 goals and a career-high 74 points.

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Sabres wingers Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson, just up from the Rochester Americans, both made their NHL season debuts Saturday.

"Danny's been doing a great job down there with the line of (Rasmus) Asplund and (Victor) Olofsson, he's been making a lot of solid plays," Housley said. "Willie's just that type of guy we need right now. He's physical, he's fast."

To make room, the Sabres scratched center Casey Mittelstadt (sick) and winger C.J. Smith, who was sent back to the AHL during the game.

O'Regan skated 11 minutes, 56 seconds, mostly at right wing beside center Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson. Wilson, meanwhile, played 11 minutes, 52 seconds, mostly at left wing with center Johan Larsson and Zemgus Girgensons.

–

Sabres winger Kyle Okposo, out since suffering a concussion last Friday, skated Saturday morning, coach Phil Housley said.

“That’s a great sign,” Housley said. “He’s got a smile on his face. So those are all good signs for us.”

Okposo, 30, has a concerning history of concussions. The veteran hasn’t played since suffering another fighting New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo.

Housley believes Okposo will play again this season.

“I would imagine, but we’re not putting any timetable with that,” Housley said.

–

After a 25-game run, the Sabres sent defenseman Lawrence Pilut back to the Amerks on Friday.

Pilut, 23, compiled one goal and six points in his first NHL action. At times, the Swedish rookie showcased the offensive skills that helped him dominate the AHL earlier this season. Other times, however, he struggled. Housley scratched him Thursday.

“Lawrence’s development is right where it should be,” Housley said. “He’s played a lot of good hockey for us. ... I think his play has slipped. Just get him back down to Rochester and have him play some more meaningful minutes.”

Pilut, an AHL All-Star, compiled three goals and 22 points in 16 early-season appearances with the Amerks. Smith and Pilut played for the Amerks on Saturday.

Notes: Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark, who missed Thursday’s start because of a lower-body injury, was well enough to back up Carter Hutton. ... Hutton recorded an assist on Reinhart’s empty-net goal. ... Hunwick’s assist on Reinhart’s second goal was his first point with the Sabres. ... The Sabres also scratched defenseman Casey Nelson (healthy).

Sabres strike gold with deal for Brandon Montour

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 24, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — When the Anaheim Ducks came to KeyBank Center in late December, Sabres fans cheered when Brandon Montour touched the puck, knowing he was a player the team had rumored interest in. Two months later those rumors came true. On Sunday evening, less than 24 hours before the NHL trade deadline, the Sabres added the skilled 24-year-old defenseman from Anaheim in exchange for Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick [either from the Blues or Sharks].

Montour, a 2014 second round pick, has played in 169 games with the Ducks, scoring 16 goals and adding 47 assists [63 points]. This season, Montour has 25 points [5 goals, 20 assists] in 62 games.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," said General Manager Jason Botterill. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

Bove's take:

I love this move for the Sabres and general manager Jason Botterill. Despite improved play on the blue line this year, the Sabres have been inconsistent and looking to get younger.

Montour checks both of those boxes and carries a team friendly deal, with one year left on his current contract [\$3.38 cap hit] before becoming a restricted free agent in 2020-2021.

To say this makes the Sabres a much better team right away might be a bit of a stretch. Montour has proven in his first few years to be a very capable and solid two-way defender. However, the real reason this deal should make Sabres fans excited is the potential of having a guy like Montour slotted on the right side for years to come.

For example -- these combinations next year look pretty good to me:

Dahlin - Montour

McCabe - Ristolainen

Pilut - Bogosian/Scandella

Don't get me wrong, Guhle was a solid prospect and could very well end up as an above average NHL defenseman. That said, Montour is already a little further along in his development and appears to be the safer bet to be a top-four guy for years to come.

As for Montour's style of play -- he's a smooth skater and has an offensive spark. According to The Point Hockey, an analytics website breaking down NHL advanced stats, Montour ranks fifth in the NHL amongst defenseman in zone entries per-game with 2.2. The only defenders with more entries per game are Roman Josi, Erik Karlsson, Nick Leddy and Thomas Chabot. If we've learned anything this year with the addition of Dahlin, this is an area that helps drive offense and Montour can help that.

The Brantford, Ontario native isn't a shut-down defenseman but his offensive upside and all-around game make him an asset that's worth acquiring.

Every trade comes with a risk and this deal is no different. That said, I think this is a smart move for the Sabres and will make them a better team not just this season but for years to come.

Sabres acquire Brandon Montour from Anaheim

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

February 24, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The NHL trade deadline isn't until Monday at 3 p.m. but the Buffalo Sabres have already made a move.

The Sabres have acquired defenseman Brandon Montour from Anaheim for prospect Brendan Guhle and a first round pick.

Montour has five goals and 25 points this season for the Ducks.

Sabres snap losing streak, knock off Capitals 5-2

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres desperately needed a win and on Saturday, they got one. The Sabres topped the Washington Capitals 5-2 at home and are now 29-24-8 on the season.

Sam Reinhart scored a hat trick in the win while Jason Pominville and Rasmus Dahlin also scored. Carter Hutton stopped 31 of 33 shots.

There was a small moment of uncertainty in the second period when Jeff Skinner suffered what looked like a lower body injury. He left the game with some assistance but ended up returning to the game for he start of the third period.

The Sabres will play Toronto on Monday, the same day as the NHL trade deadline.

Skinner returns to game following second period injury

By Anthony Reyes

WKBW

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Buffalo Sabres forward Jeff Skinner left Saturday's game against the Washington Capitals during the second period with what appeared to be a lower body injury.

Skinner got tangled up with a Capitals player and then went down to the ice, when he went down he was favoring his left leg and needed assistance to get to the locker room.

Skinner returned to start the third period and played the remainder of the game.

Following the game Skinner spoke to reporters and said when he left the ice the medical staff performed some tests and determined he was cleared to return.

Sabres Acquire Anaheim Defenseman Brandon Montour

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

February 24, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Sabres have acquired Anaheim Ducks defenseman Brandon Montour in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle, and a first round pick.

According to a press release from the Sabres, "Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," said General Manager Jason Botterill. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

The trade was initially reported by TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun.

Montour has five goals and 25 points with the Ducks this season.

Reinhart nets hat-trick as Sabres keep playoff hopes afloat

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Sam Reinhart tallied his third career hattrick, while Jason Pominville and Rasmus Dahlin each found the back of the net as the Buffalo Sabres picked up a much needed 5-2 win over the Washington Capitals to snap a four game losing streak on Saturday.

"I mean, you don't want to have to rally around a loss but the position we're in and still are in, it took that effort against a really good team in Tampa and really important for us to follow it up with another one of the best teams in the league," Reinhart said after the game. "We're going to enjoy it and get ready for Toronto."

The Sabres can breathe a sigh of relief after not only picking up two important points in the wild card race, but after the injury to star winger Jeff Skinner wasn't as serious as it initially looked.

Leading 2-1 in the second period and skating through the slot, Skinner was tripped up by Carl Hagelin and immediately fell to the ice clutching his knee. He would have to be helped off the ice and to the locker room, but returned for the start of the third period and looked no worse for the wear with a dangerous scoring chance seconds in to the final period of play.

"A good training staff I guess," Skinner said of the injury. "It was a little bit of a weird feeling at first and then tested it out and it settled down a bit. It was good to get back out there."

The Sabres continued the strong play they showed in their shootout loss to Tampa and had a stellar opening frame against the Capitals.

Less than four minutes in Jason Pominville found the back of the net to collect his 14th goal of the season as he finished off a beautiful passing game sequence for Jack Eichel and Skinner.

Reinhart picked up his 15th goal of the season, rifling a shot over the shoulder of Braden Holtby to give Buffalo a 2-0 lead 10 minutes later.

Alexander Ovechkin would pull the defending Cup champs to within 2-1 with a breakaway goal in the second before Rasmus Dahlin blasted home a power play goal near the end of the frame to push the lead back out to two.

"I thought it was timely saves and just battling," Carter Hutton said. "Sam did the rest here tonight. He was huge for us and obviously Dahlin with a big goal. I think it was a big character win here."

"We worked hard, we played pretty desperate," added Jack Eichel "Two good teams, I thought we had two good performances. So, there is something to be happy about we just got to build off of it.

Reinhart would add his second of the game, re-directing a shot from Matt Hunwick to make it a 4-2 game. He would also add the empty netter.

Skinner leaves game with lower body injury

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, NY - OCTOBER 25: Jeff Skinner #53 of the Buffalo Sabres during the game against the Montreal Canadiens at the KeyBank Center on October 25, 2018 in Buffalo, New York. (Photo by Kevin Hoffman/Getty Images)

The Sabres will be without star winger Jeff Skinner the remainder of Saturday's game against the Washington Capitals due to a lower body injury.

Skinner, who leads the Sabres with 36 goals, went down midway through the second period as he was tripped up by Caps winger Carl Hagelin while skating through the slot.

After falling to the ice, Skinner stayed down in pain and tried to inch himself toward the bench before being helped by trainers.

The 26-year-old Toronto native was acquired last summer by Sabres general manager Jason Botterill and is scheduled to be an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season. His agent and the Sabres' front office have discussed the possibility of a new contract to keep the star winger in the Queen City.

Buffalo led 2-1 in the second period at the time of the injury with goals courtesy of Jason Pominville and Sam Reinhart.

Washington's Alexander Ovechkin pulled the defending Stanley Cup champions to within one netting his 44th goal of the season on breakaway.

Ducks trading Brandon Montour to Sabres for 1st-round pick, prospect

Emily Kaplan

ESPN

February 25, 2019

The Anaheim Ducks traded defenseman Brandon Montour to the Buffalo Sabres for a first-round pick and prospect Brendan Guhle.

The Sabres have three first-round picks in the 2019 draft, and Anaheim gets a choice of the first-rounders Buffalo obtained in past trades with San Jose and St. Louis.

Montour, 24, has a \$3.3875 million cap hit and is under contract through the 2019-20 season. The right-handed-shooting defenseman has five goals and 20 assist in 62 games this season while averaging a career-high 22 minutes, 40 seconds per game.

The Ducks are in transition after firing coach Randy Carlyle earlier this month; general manager Bob Murray has taken over coaching on an interim basis for the rest of the season. Murray said he needed to be around the team every day to diagnose why the Ducks had gone into a tailspin. Anaheim had lost 19 of 21 games when Carlyle was fired Feb. 10. At 24-29-6, Anaheim is currently out of a playoff spot, while its .460 points percentage is the fifth-worst in the league.

Buffalo, meanwhile, has not made the playoffs in seven seasons, the second-longest drought in the league. After riding a 10-game winning streak in November that put Buffalo atop the NHL standings, the Sabres have tumbled. Since that streak was snapped Nov. 29, the Sabres have gone 12-18-6. Only the Red Wings, Ducks and Senators have worst records in that span.

The Sabres are currently six points out of the second wild card in the East.

Guhle, 21, is a defenseman who was drafted 51st overall by the Sabres in 2015. He has played mostly in the AHL this season, but has appeared in 23 NHL games over the past three seasons.

Sabres' Jeff Skinner helped off ice after hurting leg, later returns

ESPN

February 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Sabres leading scorer Jeff Skinner returned to action in the third period Saturday, just one period after he required assistance to leave the ice after hurting his lower left leg in a 5-2 victory against the Washington Capitals.

Jeff Skinner had to be helped off the ice after being injured in the second period vs. the Capitals on Saturday. Photo by Bill Wippert/NHLI via Getty Images

It was a remarkable turn of events for Skinner. The forward was unable to place any weight on his left leg and at one point attempted to crawl off the ice before play was stopped 4:42 into the period.

The injury occurred when both he and Capitals forward Carl Hagelin were in the slot and turned at the same time to follow the play to their left. The two touched skates and Skinner was tripped up and fell heavily to the ice when Hagelin's stick got caught between both of his legs.

Skinner was in immediate pain and, after play was stopped, was helped off the ice and led to the dressing room.

Hagelin was penalized for tripping.

Skinner began the day with 36 goals, tied for third in the NHL and one short of matching a career high.

Sabres add Montour from Ducks for first-round pick, prospect

By Steven Psihogios

Yahoo! Sports

February 24, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres showed fans that they're not giving up on their playoff aspirations for this season just yet.

The club has added defenseman Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks for a first-round pick and prospect Brendan Guhle. The first-round pick Buffalo is sending is the San Jose Sharks', but Anaheim has the option to select with the St. Louis Blues' first-rounder if it falls between picks 20-31, according to Frank Seravalli.

Buffalo owns their own first-round pick, St. Louis', and San Jose's for the upcoming draft.

Montour, 24, comes to Western New York with an affordable price tag of \$3,387,500 through the end of next season. The former second-round draft selection has played top line minutes for Anaheim this season but is better suited to slot into a second pairing. He has recorded five goals and 25 points to go with a mark of minus-16 through 62 games with the struggling Ducks in 2018-19.

Guhle, 21, has spent most of this season in the AHL with the Rochester Americans, appearing in just two games with Buffalo. He has posted five goals and 27 points across 50 games in the minors this year.

Sabres bolster back end after acquiring Montour from Ducks

By Scott Billeck

Pro Hockey Talk

February 24, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have moved to bolster their defensive corps, trading for minute-muncher Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday.

Montour, 24, comes to the Sabres with five goals and 20 assists in 62 games this season, tops among Ducks d-men, while averaging 22:40 of ice time per night.

The move fills a need for a right-handed defenseman on the Sabres. The team had been leaning hard on Rasmus Ristolainen (nearly 25 minutes per night) and Zach Bogosian (close to 22). Montour is used to playing heavy minutes up and down the lineup, so it should ease some of the load off the two men in front of him. It appears Montour will slide into the team's third pairing alongside Nathan Beaulieu.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," Sabres general manager Jason Botterill said. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

The Ducks prospect defenseman Brendan Guhle, 21, and a conditional first-round pick in the 2019 NHL Draft. The pick will come via either San Jose or St. Louis (Buffalo owns both of their first-round picks) and will be based on the final order in the first round. The Sabres will have the option of St. Louis' pick if it's between No. 20 and No. 31. =

"Brendan Guhle is an excellent skater who is ready to take the next step in his career," Ducks general manager and interim head coach Bob Murray said in a release from the team. "Adding Guhle and a first-round pick is an important step as we retool our team moving forward. We also thank Brandon Montour for his efforts and wish him the best of luck in Buffalo."

The Sabres sit six points back of the final wildcard in the Eastern Conference. They have one game in hand over the Carolina Hurricanes, who are tied with the Pittsburgh Penguins on 72 points.

Montour has another year left on a two-year bridge deal that's paying him just under \$3.4 million per season. He will be a restricted free agent at the end of next season. He was a second-round pick by the Ducks in 2014.

Guhle, who was taken in the second round of the 2015 draft by the Sabres, has five assists in 23 games played with the club. He's currently playing in the American Hockey League this season with Rochester Americans. There, he has five goals and 27 points in 50 games.

He was named an AHL all-star earlier this year.

It appears he could be in the Ducks lineup on Monday against the Vancouver Canucks.

Skinner leaves game after leg injury, makes third period return

By Scott Billeck

Pro Hockey Talk

February 23, 2019

For a second there, it looked horrible.

Jeff Skinner, writhing in pain on the ice after a gruesome-looking leg injury and having to be helped off the ice by teammates and then helped down the tunnel by trainers, seemed to be in bad shape.

The 26-year-old got tangled up with newly-acquired Washington Capitals forward Carl Hagelin during the second period of Saturday's game.

Hagelin got his stick between Skinner's shin pads and the latter's left skate picked into the ice, twisting his ankle in ways it should not.

Skinner was in obvious pain as soon as he hit the deck, at one point trying to push with his right leg toward the Sabres bench.

He missed the rest of the second period but remarkably, given the video you just watched, returned for the third, much to the surprise of everyone.

Skinner laughed when he told Buffalo News Sports' Lance Lysowki that the team has good training staff. Skinner said he felt pain immediately after the play but was fine once he got to the room to test it.

"There's a lot of things that go through your mind," Skinner said. "At first you're just wondering what's wrong with it. ...The tests went pretty well and I was able to come back."

Skinner has been a godsend for the Sabres with 36 goals, just one off his career-high set two seasons ago when he was with the Carolina Hurricanes. The Sabres splashed for Skinner in the offseason and he's been worth every penny in the final year of his six-year, \$34.350 million contract.

The Sabres sit seven points back of the Pittsburgh Penguins for the final wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference and had just three wins in their past 10 games heading into Saturday.

NHL trade news: Sabres acquire Brandon Montour from Ducks

By E.Jay Zarett

Sporting News

February 25, 2019

Brandon Montour is heading to Buffalo.

The Sabres have acquired the 24-year-old defenseman from the Ducks, the team announced Sunday. Anaheim received Brendan Guhle and a 2019 first-round draft pick in the deal.

"Brendan Guhle is an excellent skater who is ready to take the next step in his career," Ducks GM and interim coach Bob Murray said in a statement. "Adding Guhle and a first-round pick is an important step as we retool our team moving forward."

Montour made his NHL debut for the Ducks in 2016-17. He has tallied five goals and 20 assists in 62 games this season.

Meanwhile, Guhle was the 51st pick in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft. He has appeared in 23 games over three seasons for Buffalo.

The Sabres entered play Sunday in fifth place of the Atlantic Division standings with a 29-24-8 record. The Ducks stand at 24-29-9.

Ducks trade Montour to Sabres for 1st-rounder, Guhle

Josh Wegman

The Score

February 24, 2019

TORONTO, ON - FEBRUARY 04: Anaheim Ducks Defenceman Brandon Montour (26) in warmups prior to the regular season NHL game between the Anaheim Ducks and Toronto Maple Leafs on February 4, 2019 at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto, ON.

The Anaheim Ducks have traded defenseman Brandon Montour to the Buffalo Sabres in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick, the team announced Sunday.

The first-rounder going to Anaheim won't be Buffalo's. The Ducks will receive the first-round pick of either the San Jose Sharks or the St. Louis Blues (both owned by the Sabres) based on the final order of the 2019 NHL Draft. Buffalo received San Jose's first-rounder in last year's Evander Kane trade, and collected St. Louis' in the Ryan O'Reilly deal.

Montour, 24, is a puck-moving blue-liner with a right-handed shot. He's collected 25 points in 62 games while averaging 22:40 of ice time per night.

Guhle has skated in just two games with the Sabres this season, but the 21-year-old has registered 27 points in 50 games in the AHL.

WILD-CARD CONTENDING SABRES DON'T STAND PAT, ACQUIRE MONTOUR FROM DUCKS FOR GUHLE, FIRST-ROUND PICK

By Jared Clinton
The Hockey News
February 24, 2019

Six points out of the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference and filled with the belief that there's still time to make a run at snapping a seven-season playoff drought, the Buffalo Sabres have upgraded their defense ahead of Monday's deadline, acquiring defenseman Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks in exchange for blueline prospect Brendan Guhle and a conditional first-round pick in this year's draft.

This is a move made with immediate impact in mind, make no mistake. Montour, 24, is a defender that some considered a future cornerstone of the Anaheim blueline, the kind of piece a franchise that is in need of some retooling should be looking to build around, which should tell you about all you need to know about Montour's ability. In three short seasons, Montour has shown time and again that he's an offensively gifted rearguard — he's produced 16 goals and 63 points in 169 career games, including five goals and 25 points in 62 games this season — but he had also proven himself to be steady at both ends of the ice, not necessarily a top-tier play-driver but a defender who can be relied upon defensively and skate consistent top-four minutes.

That's a great addition for Buffalo, too. Barring a subsequent deal that sends recently rumored trade chip Rasmus Ristolainen packing, the Sabres will now trot out a top-four that includes Ristolainen, Montour, Jake McCabe and rookie standout Rasmus Dahlin. Already with a defense that was 16th-ranked in the NHL in terms of goals against and had mid-range underlying metrics, Montour is the type of defender who can help turn the tide further in Buffalo's favor.

In some ways, the trade is a statement-maker for Sabres GM Jason Botterill, who very easily could have stood pat or made only minor moves ahead of the deadline. Instead, he's brought aboard a legitimate top-four defenseman who isn't even yet in the prime of his career and has averaged upwards of 20 minutes per night as part of a deep defense corps. And in order to make the move, Botterill did the one thing few would have expected from the Sabres at this point in the organization's hopeful trajectory: he traded futures.

Guhle, 21, was a second-round pick by the Sabres, 51st overall, at the 2015 draft who has shown some upside though hasn't yet shone through at the NHL level. His AHL production has been impressive — with five goals and 27 points in 50 games this season, he's up to 15 goals and 44 points in 112 career games on the farm — and moving him along was part of the required price for present-day production. As was the first-round selection, which could end up being the higher of the two first-round selections not originally belonging to Buffalo.

According to TSN's Frank Serravalli, Anaheim will have the option of taking San Jose's first-round pick, originally acquired by the Sabres as part of last season's Evander Kane trade, or the first-round selection that formerly belonged to the St. Louis Blues, which Buffalo possessed by way of the Ryan O'Reilly deal in the off-season. However, the option is only available should the Blues' pick fall between the 20th and 31st selection. You can rest assured the Ducks will take whichever is the higher of the two picks should the option present itself.

Undoubtedly, it will strike some as odd that Anaheim is acquiring assets and taking the longview while simultaneously moving a young defender of Montour's caliber who could have been an important piece to the retooling process. It should be said, though, that if Anaheim is going to make an earnest attempt at rejuvenating a roster on the cusp of foundering, they have to begin somewhere, and the best place for the Ducks to begin moving out pieces, particularly those that would fetch a quality return around which a future can be built, is from a defense corps that has a wealth of talent.

Even after moving out Montour, Anaheim still possesses a quality one-two-three at the top half of their defense in Cam Fowler, Hampus Lindholm and Josh Manson. Reinforcements are on the way, too, in the form of Jacob Larsson and Josh Mahura. Ducks GM Bob Murray hasn't stripped his blueline bare with this move, and the expectation — or hope — is that AHL all-star Guhle can develop from project prospect to consistent NHL rearguard. There are building blocks here.

Maybe the most notable thing about this deal isn't the pieces involved, though. Rather, it's that if told ahead of the season that these two teams would be involved in deadline dealings, the assumption would have been that the roles would be reversed. But that's not the case, is it? Because in this instance, it's Anaheim buying for the future, while the Sabres are showing some gumption and getting better in the immediate.

Sabres add 'young, offensive-minded' defenseman in Montour

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 24, 2019

Jason Botterill stated last week that he was pursuing trade options to improve the Buffalo Sabres roster not only now, but in the long term. He made a move to that end on Sunday, acquiring 24-year-old defenseman Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks.

The deal: Buffalo acquires Montour in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick in 2019.

The NHL's Trade Deadline is 3 p.m. on Monday.

"Brandon is a young, offensive-minded defenseman who can play the up-tempo style we are looking to play," Botterill said in a press release. "He's a right-shot defenseman that brings additional playoff experience to our club."

The addition of Montour gives the Sabres eight healthy defensemen on the NHL roster, with a ninth on injured reserve in Marco Scandella. Montour is one of four right shots in that group, along with Zach Bogosian, Casey Nelson and Rasmus Ristolainen.

Next home game: Friday vs. Pittsburgh

Regarding the long-term picture, Montour is in the first year of a two-year contract, set to become a restricted free agent in the summer of 2020.

Montour led Anaheim defensemen with 57 points (14+43) and 286 shots in 142 games since the start of last season. He averaged a career-high 22:40 this season, third on the Ducks behind Hampus Lindholm and Cam Fowler. Last season, he tied for eighth among NHL defensemen with five power-play goals.

His willingness to jump down low in the offensive zone is supported by his average shot length, which at 44.1 feet is the sixth-lowest mark among league defensemen (minimum 30 games played), according to NHL.com. Rasmus Dahlin ranks eighth (44.8) while Rasmus Ristolainen ranks 17th (46.3).

Montour also has eight assists in 21 playoff games on his resume, an asset for a young Sabres core in the thick of its first playoff race.

The Sabres play in Toronto on Monday, an hour drive from Montour's hometown of Brantford, Ont. The team returns home to host the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday.

Reinhart's hat trick propels Sabres to win over Capitals

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 23, 2019

For a brief period on Saturday afternoon, it felt as though the lasting image of the game between the Buffalo Sabres and Washington Capitals might be that of Jeff Skinner down on the ice, crawling in pain after a trip forced him to fall awkwardly on his left ankle.

Instead, the defining scene was that of hats being cleared off the ice, a nod to a memorable performance from Sam Reinhart.

Skinner returned from his second-period scare, Reinhart recorded his third career hat trick and the Sabres brought the same desperate intensity that helped them earn a point in Tampa on Thursday, this time winning 5-2 over the reigning Stanley Cup champions.

"I thought we've done a good job the last two games for sure," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said. "I thought we've defended when we need to, we've worked hard, we played pretty desperate.

"Obviously, two good teams, I thought we had two good performances, so I think that's something to be happy about for us. We've just got to build off of it."

Jason Pominville and Rasmus Dahlin also scored goals for the Sabres, while Eichel tallied two assists. Carter Hutton made 31 saves in his second straight start in net.

The Sabres took a 2-0 lead in the first period on the strength of goals from Pominville and Dahlin and stayed ahead the rest of the way despite the Capitals twice bringing themselves within one.

When Alex Ovechkin made it 2-1 on a partial breakaway in the second, the Sabres' answered with Dahlin's power-play goal late in the period. Andre Burakovsky's third-period deflection was followed less than two minutes later by a well-earned tip at the net-front by Reinhart.

"We just went back to work," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We didn't let it affect us. We know that's a very dangerous team. I thought at times we let guys get to the open, but for the most part, we were pretty solid in our checking detail. That's why we were able to get that go-ahead goal when we needed it and get that two-goal cushion."

Next home game: Friday, March 1 vs. Pittsburgh

The win snapped a four-game winless streak for the Sabres, who once again proved their ability to compete with good teams when they stick to their game plan and work defensively.

"We know we're capable, but at the same time, any team in this league is capable of a performance like that," Reinhart said. "So, we're just trying to be more consistent within that."

Skinner's scare

As quiet as the KeyBank Center crowd was when Skinner went down late in the second period, it livened at the sight of the forward chasing down a puck to begin the third.

"Obviously, they're paying attention to the game, which is nice to see," Skinner said afterward, flashing his trademark smile. "Yeah, it's nice to see the support."

Eichel admitted to fearing the worst when he saw Skinner go down after being tripped by Capitals forward Carl Hagelin. Skinner initially crawled toward the bench before being met by the team's medical staff and helped to the dressing room.

Skinner said he felt his leg turn, followed by a sharp pain that began to subside when he was being tested by trainers.

"There's a lot of things going through your mind," he said. "I think at first, you're kind of just wondering what's wrong with it. Once you get past sort of that initial stage and you get back here, there's a pretty open line of communication going on."

"They're kind of explaining what's going on, what they're seeing, when they're testing stuff out. The tests went pretty well, and I was able to come back, so that was fortunate."

The apparent injury occurred at the 4:42 mark of the second period. Eichel said Skinner was back in the dressing room with his teammates during the second intermission.

"He came in and he seemed like he was ready to go again, so it was definitely good for us," Eichel said. "He's a huge part of our team."

Skinner also managed to leave a mark offensively, delivering a no-look, backhand pass through two defenders that set up Pominville's goal in the first period:

Reinhart's hat trick

Reinhart utilized his full bag of tricks to earn his hat trick, the first by a Sabres player at KeyBank Center since Eichel scored three goals against Skinner's Carolina Hurricanes on Dec. 15, 2017.

The forward found himself with space to shoot after Evan Rodrigues hustled to poke the puck loose in the Washington zone, then picked the far-side corner to beat Braden Holtby from the inside edge of the right faceoff circle for his first goal of the day.

After nearly setting up Conor Sheary for a goal on a 2-on-1 rush, Reinhart scored his second goal to make it 4-2 at 5:43 in the third period. This one came in the spot where he's made the bulk of his living in the NHL, directly in front of the opposing goaltender.

Reinhart spun off Nicklas Backstrom as he battled for position in front of Holtby and tipped a shot from the point by Matt Hunwick, who earned his point as a Sabre with the primary assist.

"I think he's finally getting rewarded," Housley said. "How many pucks did he tip on the power play that haven't gone in? Finally, he gets one. He's in the right position. He's very, very good down there in front of the net."

Reinhart lofted a shot from the half wall in his own end to score into an empty net and complete the hat trick with 56 seconds remaining. It was the continuation of what's been a career season for the winger, whose 55 points are already five more than his previous career high.

"He's been playing great for us all year," Eichel said. "It's no surprise. He goes to the front of the net, he makes a lot of small plays that I think go unnoticed, so it was great to see him get rewarded with a hat trick tonight. I couldn't be happier for him."

New heights

Speaking of career years, Eichel established his own career high with his 65th and 66th points in his 58th game of this season. It took him 67 contests to reach his previous mark of 64 points a season ago.

After earning the secondary assist on Pominville's goal, Eichel delivered a one-touch pass through the middle of the ice to set up Dahlin's one-timer on the power play. Dahlin's stick had broken earlier in the shift, leading to a funny anecdote about the replacement he grabbed from the bench.

"There wasn't any tape on the stick," Housley said. "... It sort of knuckled on Holtby. That's the type of player he is. He can make adjustments on the way."

Class is in session

Members of the Academy of Hockey joined the broadcast on MSG throughout the afternoon to break down technical aspects of the Sabres. You can learn more about the Academy [here](#) and check out the breakdowns in the clips below.

Up next

The Sabres visit the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.

O'Regan, Wilson will make season debuts vs. Capitals

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 23, 2019

Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson will make their season debuts when the Buffalo Sabres host the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center this afternoon.

O'Regan and Wilson were recalled on Friday, with defenseman Lawrence Pilut reassigned to Rochester in a corresponding move. Sabres coach Phil Housley said that who comes out of the lineup to make room for the two forwards will be a game-time decision.

"Danny's been doing a great job down there," Housley said. "... He's been making a lot of solid plays. And Willy is just the kind of guy we need right now. He's physical, he's fast, he can play a fast game. They're going to get an opportunity, but we'll know more after pregame warmup."

O'Regan scored 34 points (18+16) in 53 games with the Amerks this season. The 25-year-old winger appeared in 21 NHL games last season, including two with the Sabres after being acquired from the San Jose Sharks at the trade deadline.

Wilson underwent surgery to repair a fractured ankle in early October. He was assigned to Rochester on Jan. 9 and scored seven points (3+4) in 17 games with the Amerks. He scored 14 points (6+8) in 49 games for the Sabres after being acquired from the Detroit Red Wings in December of last season.

The Sabres still have seven healthy defensemen on the roster with Casey Nelson back from an upper-body injury. Housley said the decision to assign Pilut to Rochester was made to allow the rookie to continue his development playing consistent minutes.

Before joining the Sabres, Pilut tallied 22 points (3+19) in 16 games with the Amerks.

"Lawrence's development is right where it should be," Housley said. "He's played a lot of good hockey for us. He's played 25 games to this point. I think his play has slipped. Just get him back down to Rochester and play some more meaningful minutes, and we'll see where that takes it."

The Sabres also placed Kyle Okposo on injured reserve Friday, but Housley said the forward did skate this morning. Okposo sustained a concussion during a fight with New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo on Feb. 15.

"That's a great sign," Housley said. "He's got a smile on his face, so those all are good signs for us."

Carter Hutton will start in net for the Sabres, coming off a 39-save effort in Tampa on Thursday.

It will be the series finale between the Sabres and Capitals. Each of the first two matchups were one-goal affairs won by the Capitals in Washington.

"I feel that we're going to have to be a little bit heavier in the battle tonight," Housley said. "They've got a heavy team. They protect the puck well. We have to get geared up for that type of game."

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 12:30 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 1.