



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Maple Leafs' 4-goal 2nd period sinks Sabres 5-3

Associated Press

February 25, 2019

TORONTO (AP) — Auston Matthews set a franchise record for the Maple Leafs on Monday night.

However his focus is on the rest of Toronto's season.

Matthews scored in a four-goal second period and Toronto downed the Buffalo Sabres 5-3 on Monday night.

Matthews' goal made him the first Maple Leafs player to score 30 or more goals in the first three seasons of his career.

"It's pretty humbling," said Matthews, who had 40 goals in his rookie season and 34 last season. "Luckily my first years I played with great players on any given night. Guys that can move the puck and make plays.

"I just do what I do. I'm kind of a shoot-first guy, try to score, it's how I've always been."

John Tavares, Frederik Gauthier and Tyler Ennis also scored in Toronto's four-goal second period as the Maple Leafs held on for their second straight win. Kasperii Kapanen added some insurance with a short-handed goal in the third.

Toronto general manager Kyle Dubas was fairly quiet on the NHL's trade deadline Monday afternoon, only sending Par Lindholm to the Winnipeg Jets for Nic Petan in a swap of forwards. Toronto's big move came on Jan. 29 when it acquired veteran defenseman Jake Muzzin in a trade with the Los Angeles Kings.

Matthews felt it was important to get a statement win after the trade deadline had passed and to carry some momentum into the final months of the season.

"We have a lot of faith in each other in this locker room," said Matthews. "Looking around we've got a lot of depth and we've got a lot of belief in one another.

"We're hitting that point in the year where we've got to take another step and really dial it in."

Frederik Andersen made 31 saves for his 100th win for Toronto, the eighth goaltender in franchise history to accomplish the feat, requiring the fewest starts to do it.

"I feel good," said Andersen, who has made seven straight starts. "Just trying to take it one game at a time and get some rest when we do get days off and make sure I recover."

Jack Eichel scored twice for Buffalo, while Sam Reinhart added a goal and an assist.

"We had like seven or eight minutes of bad hockey where we let them get behind us, and that was it," Eichel said. "They had too many odd-man rushes in the second period, and it cost us the game."

Carter Hutton started in net for Buffalo, stopping 9 of 12 shots in 25:52 of work. Linus Ullmark replaced Hutton in net, turning aside 19 of 21 shots.

Buffalo also made a deal with Winnipeg on Monday, sending defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to the Jets for a sixth-round pick in the 2019 draft.

The Sabres had acquired veteran defenseman Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday for blue liner Brendan Guhle and a first-round selection in this summer's draft. Montour had not joined the team in time for Monday's game in Toronto.

After Eichel opened the scoring with a power-play goal in the final minute of the first period, the Maple Leafs came out flying in the second.

Tavares redirected a slap shot from Muzzin past Hutton to tie the game 1-1 at the 3:48 mark of the period, 9 seconds after a Sabres penalty expired.

Matthews scored while the announcer was still giving details on Tavares' goal. The puck deflected off a defender's skate and right to Matthews' stick. He made no mistake, swatting it into the net.

Gauthier piled on just 28 seconds later, taking a pass with his back to the net and slipping a backhand shot past Hutton. That ended Hutton's night, with Ullmark coming on in relief.

Ennis made it 4-1 a little over seven minutes later on a breakaway. Gauthier assisted on that goal and on his next shift Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian offered to fight him to complete the Gordie Howe hat trick.

"He kind of smiled when he asked me so I smiled back as I said no," said Gauthier.

The Sabres answered with 2:35 left in the second when Reinhart completed a tic-tac-toe passing play while Buffalo held the man advantage. Eichel scored 9 seconds into the third period, cutting Toronto's lead to 4-3.

Matthews took a tripping penalty late in the third, but Kapanen stole the puck on a turnover and put away his 19th goal of the season on a breakaway with 2:18 left in the game.

NOTES: Sting was in attendance, receiving a Maple Leafs jersey with his name on it in the first period. ... Several players on the Maple Leafs had rainbow-colored tape on their sticks as part of the team's You Can Play initiative that is dedicated to the eradication of homophobia in sports.

UP NEXT:

Sabres: Face the Flyers in Philadelphia on Tuesday night.

Maple Leafs: Host Edmonton on Wednesday night.

Sabres comeback falls short after second-period collapse in Toronto

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

TORONTO -- A 10-game win streak kept the Buffalo Sabres in contention, and their playoff hopes brightened following remarkable performances against Tampa Bay and Washington last week.

However, the Sabres needed only two minutes, four seconds Monday night to show they still have much to correct in order to make a playoff push. That is all the time the Toronto Maple Leafs needed to score three of their four second-period goals in a 5-3 win over Buffalo in Scotiabank Arena.

The collapse prevented the Sabres (29-25-8) from winning back-to-back games for the first time since Dec. 13, and they remain six points behind Carolina for the second wild-card playoff spot.

"We had seven or eight minutes of bad hockey where we let them get behind us and that was it," lamented Jack Eichel, who scored two goals.

Unexpected trade motivates new Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour

The Maple Leafs (38-20-4) scored four of their five goals in less than 10 minutes during the second period, including a breakaway by Tyler Ennis for a 4-1 lead, and the last occurred with 2:18 remaining in regulation when Kasper Kapanen was sprung on a breakaway by a puck ricocheting off an official's skate.

Still, the Sabres were the better team for most of the night. They outshot Toronto, 34-33, including 10-1 during the game's first eight minutes, and had several chances to tie the score in the third period.

Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen made a split save to stop Jason Pominville's chance from atop the crease midway through the period and used his left leg pad to rob Rasmus Dahlin with 2:43 remaining.

Eichel scored his 20th and 21st goals of the season, the latter of which cut the deficit to one goal nine seconds into the third period. Sam Reinhart scored a power-play goal with 2:35 left in the second period to build momentum and make a comeback possible.

The Sabres had 19 more shot attempts and one more scoring chance, yet they allowed four or more goals for a fourth consecutive game and have lost six of their last eight games.

"I think we have to realize they're going to have pushes," said Reinhart. "They have some of the best players in the world over there. We need to find a way to calm down and be composed when they do have those pushes. Try to stop the momentum as quick as possible."

The Sabres' issue continues to be the quality, not quantity, of scoring chances allowed. Buffalo's blown defensive coverages began at the start of the second period, and John Tavares broke through when he tipped Jake Muzzin's shot over Hutton's glove to tie the score 1-1 at 3:48.

Then Auston Matthews shot a puck off Hutton's glove, corralled it, and skated around the back of the net, where he passed toward the slot. The puck bounced off Evan Rodrigues' stick blade and went right back to Matthews, who was left alone to shoot into the open net for his 30th goal of the season.

Frederik Gauthier scored the Leafs' third goal in a span of 2:04 when he gathered a pass from Jake Gardiner and outmuscled Johan Larsson in front of the net before beating Hutton with a backhanded shot.

"We talked about expecting a push from them," coach Phil Housley said. "But it's not really what they did, it's what we didn't do."

Hutton was promptly pulled and replaced by Linus Ullmark, a decision Housley said was to create a "spark" and "send a message." The move did not make much of a difference in the second period.

Ullmark had to make a save on a 2-on-1 odd-man rush moments later, followed by another stop on the Leafs' Zach Hyman. Toronto then created a highlight-reel chance with a drop pass to fool Rasmus Ristolainen, though Ullmark managed to use his chest to block the weak wrist shot.

"He's been such a key part of our team this year, so you can't really blame Hutts for some of the stuff that was happening," Eichel said of Hutton. "He's keeping us in most games that we're in. ... That's on us, not Hutts."

Finally, Gauthier sprung Ennis with an outlet pass that went between Ristolainen and Ullmark, and Ennis scored on the Leafs' 15th shot in the second period's first 14 minutes.

Buffalo is still in the playoff race, despite the ongoing defensive struggles, but its grueling week continues Tuesday night with a game in Philadelphia. The Sabres are running out of time to solve the familiar problems.

"They had too many odd-man rushes in the second period and it cost us the game," Eichel said.

The Wraparound: Maple Leafs 5, Sabres 3

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

TORONTO – Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill's prized trade deadline acquisition watched from the Scotiabank Arena press box Monday night as Buffalo endured one of its ugliest periods of the season.

Now they will hope that Brandon Montour, the 24-year-old defenseman whom they traded for Sunday, can acclimate quickly enough to help with a playoff push.

The Sabres allowed four second-period goals, including three in a span of two minutes, four seconds, and their comeback fell short in a 5-3 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Buffalo (29-25-8), which defeated the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals on Saturday, has not won back-to-back games since Dec. 11-13, yet remain six points back of the second wild-card spot.

Jack Eichel scored two goals, including one nine seconds into the third period, and Sam Reinhart added his 18th goal of the season. Carter Hutton was pulled after allowing three goals on 12 shots.

John Tavares, Auston Matthews, Frederik Gauthier, Tyler Ennis and Kasperii Kapanen scored for the Maple Leafs (38-20-4). Kapanen scored a shorthanded goal with 2:18 left in regulation for a 5-3 lead.

Opening salvo: The Sabres' struggling power play finally broke through 19:07 into the first period, when Reinhart passed to a wide-open Eichel, who scored his 20th goal of the season on a wrist shot from the slot for a 1-0 lead.

Rare air: Eichel joined Rick Martin and Thomas Vanek as the only players in franchise history to score 20 goals in each of their first four NHL seasons.

Fast first: The Sabres were on a 3-for-25 power-play slump when Eichel scored and they outshot the Maple Leafs, 16-6, in the first period. Buffalo also had 15 more shot attempts, including five by Eichel.

Strike one: The Leafs' second-period onslaught began when Jake Muzzin's shot was deflected by Tavares over Hutton's glove to tie the score, 1-1, at 3:48. It was Tavares' 35th goal of the season.

Strike two: Matthews fired a shot that bounced off Hutton's glove and he corralled the loose puck before skating around the back of the net, where he made a centering pass to the slot. The puck bounced off Evan Rodrigues' stick and back to Matthews, who shot into the open net to make it 2-1.

Strike three: Toronto's third goal came when Gauthier received a centering pass from Jake Gardiner and, with his back to Johan Larsson, Gauthier lifted a backhanded shot to beat Hutton for a 3-1 lead at 5:52 into the second period.

S.O.S.: Linus Ullmark didn't get help, either. Gauthier sprung Ennis with an outlet pass between Rasmus Ristolainen and Jake McCabe, and Ennis capitalized with a breakaway goal for a 4-1 lead at 13:07 into the second period.

Lineup: Defenseman Marco Scandella and winger Kyle Okposo, both on injured reserve to start the day, were back in the Sabres' lineup after both missed four games. Rookie center Casey Mittelstadt missed a second consecutive game because of illness, and winger Danny O'Regan was assigned to Rochester after the morning skate.

Next: The Sabres will not hold a morning skate ahead of Tuesday's game in Philadelphia. Puck drop is 7 p.m.

Unexpected trade motivates new Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

TORONTO – A coaching change in Anaheim and weeks worth of trade rumors could not prepare Brandon Montour for the phone call he received while sitting by a pool in Vancouver on Sunday afternoon.

That's when Montour, a 24-year-old defenseman, was told he was traded by the Ducks to the Buffalo Sabres on the eve of the trade deadline. He had less than 24 hours to join his teammates in Toronto, where he would not play Monday against the Maple Leafs.

Montour is not a restricted free agent until next summer, yet his former team chose to part with him for 21-year-old defenseman Brendan Guhle and a first-round draft pick. That didn't sit well with Montour, though he expressed excitement for joining a young, talented team closer to home.

"Nobody wants to get traded," Montour, who is expected to make his Sabres debut Tuesday in Philadelphia, said in Scotiabank Arena. "Obviously sad to leave friends. I was drafted there. ... It's one of those things where I want to prove them wrong. I wanted to stay there for a long time, but it didn't happen. This is home now."

Montour admitted he knew little about the Sabres' players – the Ducks lost to Buffalo both times this season – but knows their short-term plans differ from his former team's.

Ducks General Manager Bob Murray named himself interim coach after firing Randy Carlyle and is slowly overhauling a roster that proved to be too slow. The Sabres, meanwhile, are looking for young, talented players to add to a roster that includes Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Jeff Skinner and Rasmus Dahlin.

Montour ranked third on the Ducks in power-play ice time and averaged 22 minutes, 40 seconds per game while scoring five goals among 25 points this season. A second-round draft pick in 2014, Montour has already played in 21 playoff games, including 17 during the Ducks' run to the Western Conference finals in 2017.

He has scored 16 goals with 47 assists in 169 career NHL games, and is owed just \$3.38 million next season. That skill set and contractual control were a perfect fit for Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill's plan and coach Phil Housley's system.

"He plays the game the way we want to play," Housley said of Montour following the morning skate Monday. He's a highly skilled puck-moving defenseman that can join the rush, and that's the way we want to play. It's going to be a great fit for our team."

Montour agreed, despite being unfamiliar with the roster. He is accustomed to the physical grind of the Western Conference. Additionally, Montour expressed confidence in his progress defensively.

He was minus-16 in 62 games with the struggling Ducks this season after posting a plus-27 in his first 107 NHL games. The Sabres need the latter type of production from Montour. After all, they have struggled defensively for much of the season and dealt defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg for a sixth-round pick after acquiring Montour.

Housley chuckled when a Toronto reporter asked if Montour would be paired with Dahlin, saying those decisions would not be made until their newest player arrived. Montour planned to speak to Housley and the coaching staff about his role.

The Sabres will not hold a morning skate Tuesday in Philadelphia, so Housley's plan won't be revealed until puck drop against the Flyers.

"A lot of people think I just have that offensive game, but over the years, I think, my defensive game has really come a long way," said Montour. "I think the two-way style, I like to play big minutes. When I get up there, I like

to skate, get up there when I can. I'm focused on playing hard defensively, being physical for being a smaller guy."

Montour also was also happy to move closer to Brantford, Ont., where he grew up, and his parents live on the Six Nations reserve. His lacrosse background brought him to Buffalo for Bandits games in the past.

Montour did not arrive at Scotiabank Arena until roughly three hours before puck drop against the Maple Leafs and had little time to meet his new teammates. And as much as he did not want to be traded, he was hopeful he could help the Sabres snap their playoff drought.

"It's huge," Montour said of joining a team in the playoff hunt. "This is the time that guys should be excited about. A young team that hasn't really been in the playoffs the last little bit here so it's new. ... Everybody should be pretty amped up. Hopefully I can bring a positive boost to the dressing room and be vocal as much as I can, as well as on the ice."

Mike Harrington: Botterill crosses key line at right time for Sabres' growth

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

Jason Botterill knows it might be a longshot for the Sabres to make the playoffs, but it was pretty clear the general manager stepped over a line he had yet to cross here with this year's version of the NHL trade deadline.

Botterill isn't dealing with just futures anymore. Getting Brandon Montour was about today, something the Sabres haven't been about nearly enough in a good long while. And when you live in the present, you send a message to your dressing room that's pretty clear.

"It's always important. It's exciting when you get your players excited about the teammates that are coming into the organization," Botterill said Monday during his post-deadline briefing in KeyBank Center. "To be honest, it was something that I underestimated this summer in bringing Jeff Skinner into the group.

"When he came into the group, it wasn't a situation talking about futures or a prospect. He was a player that helped our group right now and I know that got our players very excited."

I was not in Toronto for the game Monday night, but the word was that there was quite the buzz in the visiting dressing room at Scotiabank Arena over the move. This team has needed help for several weeks. Botterill was probably late in providing some, but this kind of deal may have only come up in the last few days once Anaheim GM/interim coach Bob Murray decided to go behind the bench and see what he had and what he needs down the road.

Montour checks every box for the Sabres. He's a right-shot defenseman. He's young (24), relatively cheap (cap hit of about \$3.4 million), under contract for next season and only a restricted free agent after that.

He can skate and carry the puck out of his zone and shoot it, the kind of defenseman Phil Housley had at his disposal in Nashville. It was no surprise when Botterill revealed Housley's input was key, with the coach recounting his positive impressions of Montour when the Predators beat the Anaheim Ducks in the 2017 Western Conference finals.

He's exactly how you use your asset chips. Brendan Guhle, who just never got over the hump to become an NHL regular but might be fine in Anaheim, and a first-round draft pick is a big giveback. But it's what you do to get a proven NHL player now and cut out the development time.

The Sabres have gone through the development process with Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Rasmus Ristolainen. It's ongoing for Rasmus Dahlin and Casey Mittelstadt.

Montour immediately steps into the team's core group.

"A young player that's already established himself in the National Hockey League but we think there's more of a ceiling to him," was Botterill's assessment. "It's the balance we're always trying to work here. For the long-term success of our organization, we have to develop young players within our organization and develop depth.

"But it's also having young players in the National Hockey League right now. We want to support them as much as possible. We felt this was a move that helps our group right now but also is someone who can grow, someone who can develop into a better NHL player."

When he spoke to reporters last week in Tampa, Botterill said he trusted his players and that's why he had not made a big move. This trade doesn't show a lack of trust. If anything, the Sabres grew quite a bit in the games against Tampa Bay and Washington. Given the chance to show he trusted his current group even more, Botterill seized on the opportunity.

"We weren't getting the results the last couple weeks that we wanted to but we were impressed and happy with some of the things we were seeing behind the scenes: Our practice habits, our interactions with our coaching

staff," he said. "That then carried over to our last couple games, where you saw finally the results against two excellent teams.

"It's going to be very difficult getting into the playoffs but that's what this league is all about. ... As I said last week, this is the next challenge for our group here, to find ways to win games in the second half of the season."

Botterill said he didn't have many opportunities to get involved with bringing in a forward. Perhaps he didn't share this corner's affinity for Minnesota center Charlie Coyle, who went relatively cheaply to Boston. And the only move he made Monday was the expected selloff of disgruntled blue-liner Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg for a sixth-round pick.

That's a loss leader move, as Botterill gave up a third-rounder to get Beaulieu from Montreal 20 months ago. Montour's arrival gave the Sabres nine defensemen. The only guy who was dissatisfied with his playing time was the easy choice to move and the Jets have been looking for blue line depth, a fact augmented by a shoulder injury to Josh Morrissey on Sunday.

Another better move for today.

Sabres trade Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg for sixth-round pick

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres loosened some of their logjam on defense just as the NHL trade deadline hit Monday afternoon, sending Nathan Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets for a sixth-round pick. The deal was announced about 3:40 p.m. on TSN, and the Sabres confirmed it 90 minutes later.

Beaulieu, 26, was scheduled to be in the Sabres' lineup for Monday's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs in Scotiabank Arena. He has played the last three games after being a healthy scratch for 22 of the previous 26 games.

The Sabres had nine defensemen with the acquisition of Brandon Montour from Anaheim and defense is a strength in both the AHL and their prospect pool, so Beaulieu was expendable.

"We wanted to just cut down on the numbers there," said General Manager Jason Botterill. "The addition of Montour added the right-shot help to our NHL depth but we've been very happy with the development of Lawrence Pilut and our strength on the left side. If we could find a better spot to to give Nate more of an opportunity, we were looking for it. Internally he handled himself very well. He did a very good job when he went back in the lineup."

Beaulieu, who reportedly requested a trade last month, has three goals and four assists with a plus-1 rating in 30 games. He is making \$2.4 million in the final season of his contract and will be a restricted free agent.

"We had dialogue with his agent and I didn't think it was earth-shattering news when parts of those discussions become public knowledge," Botterill said. "It was never a hard demand to get out because I don't like the situation. He's a competitive player who's an NHL veteran who wanted to continue to be in the lineup every day. It was just a tough dynamic with Rasmus Dahlin coming in this year and Lawrence Pilut's development."

Beaulieu will be heading to a Winnipeg team that has a one-point lead over Nashville in the Central Division. The Jets made a big move earlier in the day by acquiring center Kevin Hayes from the New York Rangers.

With Beaulieu gone and Marco Scandella remaining on injured reserve, Casey Nelson will step in on defense tonight and play his first game since Dec. 4. Nelson, who has been out for more than two months with an upper-body injury, did a conditioning assignment in Rochester before rejoining the Sabres last week.

Sabres Notebook: Kyle Okposo returns to lineup after suffering concussion

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

TORONTO – Kyle Okposo smiled at his stall in the Scotiabank Arena visitors dressing room Monday morning and uttered three words that would have been shocking hours earlier.

"Ready to go," Okposo beamed ahead of rejoining the Buffalo Sabres for their game against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Okposo's teammates and coach expressed elation after he joined them for the morning skate. They are aware of the angst he endured in 10 days since suffering a concussion, his third in less than three years, during a fight with the New York Rangers' Anthony DeAngelo.

Okposo, a 30-year-old winger, waited and hoped his symptoms would not worsen. He resumed skating Thursday and did not require a practice for coach Phil Housley to insert him back into the lineup.

"A little bit," Okposo said when asked if he feared for his condition. "I think there's a psychological component, too. You get hit and I obviously know my history better than anybody. There's definitely that component of, 'Am I OK?' ... You just have to find a balance. You have to be in tune with your body and your mind. Be really honest with yourself and how you feel. I feel great now."

Okposo was punched in the left jaw after failing to grab DeAngelo by the collar in the third period of a 6-2 loss to the Rangers.

Following the fight, Okposo joined the Sabres on their trip to Newark, N.J., and skated with a few teammates last Sunday. He did not participate in the pregame warmup and was sent back to Buffalo for further evaluation.

The Sabres announced Tuesday that Okposo was diagnosed with a concussion, and he was placed on injured reserve Friday. He resumed skating Thursday and attended the team's 5-2 win over Washington on Saturday.

While Okposo and doctors monitored his progress, he said neck discomfort proved to be the worst part of the injury and called his four-game absence "precautionary." He did not second guess his decision to fight DeAngelo, either.

"No," Okposo said when asked if he wished he didn't fight. "I probably should [second guess the decision]. It's part of the game. I missed a grab and that's what happened. It's part of the game. I didn't think we were playing well, just trying to give the team a little spark. It is what it is."

A concussion suffered during practice in March 2017 and severe reaction to medication landed him in Buffalo General Medical Center's Neurological Intensive Care Unit.

Okposo was unable to resume off-ice training immediately after his release from the hospital. He returned to the lineup in time for the start of the season but suffered another concussion in March after a collision with Ottawa's Bobby Ryan. Okposo missed three games after the hit but played in the final 11 games of the season.

"Obviously with his history, you don't want to see a guy like that miss any games with a concussion or whatever he had, but obviously it was nice to see him have a quick recovery and be back out there with us," said Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues.

...

The Sabres made a paper move with the league to make forward Tage Thompson eligible to play with the Rochester Americans in the AHL Calder Cup playoffs. Thompson was demoted to the Amerks, only to be officially recalled in time for Monday's game in Toronto.

Additionally, winger Danny O'Regan was assigned to Rochester by the Sabres and goalie Adam Wilcox cleared waivers after signing a one-year, two-way contract Sunday. Wilcox has rejoined the Amerks.

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Cliff Pu, the 20-year-old winger sent by the Sabres to Carolina in the Jeff Skinner trade, was dealt by the Hurricanes to the Florida Panthers before the deadline. Pu has one goal in 44 AHL games and was demoted to the ECHL. He will join the Panthers' AHL affiliate, the Springfield Thunderbirds.

Five Things to Know: Sabres at Maple Leafs

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2019

TORONTO – When the Buffalo Sabres' dressing room in Scotiabank Arena was nearly empty Monday morning, forward Evan Rodrigues asked a few reporters for the latest trade updates from around the NHL.

While players are intrigued by the trade deadline, none particularly care for the day. They didn't want to lose a teammate, though the Sabres benefitted by acquiring defenseman Brandon Montour from Anaheim Sunday night.

There is also a rivalry game to play. The Sabres (29-24-8) will face the Maple Leafs (37-20-4) at 7 p.m., and neither coach would confirm their lineup.

Both teams have no choice but to focus on an important Atlantic Division game.

"This day is never easy for anybody, for players," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said following the morning skate. "It's something that as I kinda go down this road, this is my 11th year, I've seen a lot of friends go and you realize, 'Hey, it is a business.' ... It's a tough day. It's also an exciting day and you have to just play. Play with the team you have and management's going to do what they feel is in the best interest of the team."

Here are Five Things to Know about tonight's game:

1. Late arrival: Montour, who was acquired from Anaheim for Brendan Guhle and a first-round draft pick, will not play against the Leafs but will be in the lineup Tuesday in Philadelphia. He is expected to speak to reporters upon arriving in Toronto.

Coach Phil Housley declined to say if Montour could possibly be paired with Rasmus Dahlin but expressed excitement over the addition, calling Montour a "good fit." Players echoed that sentiment.

"I think it shows [management believes] in this group," Rodrigues said. "I think we have a big belief in here and obviously adding someone like that is going to make us more dynamic, especially offensively. He's a good puck-moving defenseman."

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

2. Lineup: The Sabres traded defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg shortly before the deadline, though the move was not announced until almost 4 p.m. That clears the way for Casey Nelson to play for the first time since Dec. 4.

Housley declined to confirm his forward lines or defensive pairings following the morning skate but did tell reporters Okposo would be back in the lineup against Toronto. Okposo, who will need to be activated from injured reserve, has missed the past four games because of a concussion sustained during a fight against the New York Rangers' Anthony DeAngelo on Feb. 15.

Okposo began skating on his own Thursday but has not practiced with the team since the injury. He skated on the third line with Tage Thompson and Vladimir Sobotka during the morning skate. Nelson will likely skate alongside Matt Hunwick since Marco Scandella is still on injured reserve:

Additionally, Casey Mittelstadt (illness) skated but did not participate in line rushes and the same with winger Danny O'Regan.

3: Hutton's net: Carter Hutton will start against Toronto – the first time he's played three consecutive games since Dec. 27-31. He has stopped 70 of 73 shots over the past two games, including a 5-2 win over Washington.

4: Rivalry: The Leafs will enter the game third in the Atlantic Division, 20 points behind first-place Tampa Bay and three behind Boston, and have lost three of their last four games. They beat the Sabres in overtime, 4-3, behind Auston Matthews' overtime goal on Dec. 4.

Toronto has three players with 21 or more goals -- Mitch Marner (21), John Tavares (34) and Matthews (29) -- and rank fourth in the NHL in goals scored. Nazem Kadri, who has 15 goals among 35 points, will be out of the lineup against Buffalo because of a concussion.

Still, the Leafs are dynamic offensively and their transition game gave the Sabres fits during their last meeting.

"They're very powerful up front," Housley said. "They've got a lot of skill and speed and they play a fast game. The last two games we played, I think we had urgency and desperation in our game. I think we really managed the puck well against these teams that like to transition well. That's going to be important tonight."

5. By the Numbers: The Maple Leafs have a 47-40-17 all-time series lead in games played in Toronto, while the Sabres are 64-31-12 in 107 games played in Buffalo. ... Toronto ranks 10th in the NHL on the power play and penalty kill. ... Jack Eichel has 13 points in 10 career games against the Maple Leafs, and Sam Reinhart has 13 points in his last 13 games against them. ... Rasmus Dahlin's three game-winning goals this season are the most ever recorded by a Sabres rookie defenseman. His total also ties for ninth-most by any Sabres rookie and eighth-most in a season by any defenseman in franchise history.

Sabres' Botterill didn't cave to outside pressure and found the trade he wanted

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 25, 2019

Toronto, ON (WGR 550) - I was expecting Jason Botterill to be pretty quiet for the trade deadline, but he was able to pull off a hockey trade on Sunday. Acquiring Brandon Montour, to me, was a risk worth taking.

I call it a risk because he can be a tad inconsistent, but he definitely fits the game that Botterill and Phil Housley want to see. He's a north/south skater and he moves the puck up ice quickly and accurately.

When Tim Murray acquired Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane and Robin Lehner, many fans complained that he gave up too much. Some might think Botterill gave up too much, but I disagree.

The Sabres held three first round picks in a draft that some people say falls off at pick No. 15. I call it currency, and I've been reporting for months that Botterill would be willing to part with one of those picks if the right deal came along and this was the right deal.

Most of you know I've been very high on Brendan Guhle ever since I saw him in his first prospects camp. The kid can skate like the wind, but at age 21, he seemed to have hit a wall. He struggled mightily in Rochester this season, but honestly, I wasn't that worried about it. I think he will find his way and become a pretty good NHL defenseman.

I've always said I really don't want to see Guhle traded, but if the right deal came along, I'd be all for it. In my mind, this was the right deal.

The other thing that Botterill liked about Montour is he still has another year left on an affordable contract before becoming a restricted free agent.

Many fans are ripping Botterill for paying Montreal a third round pick to acquire Nate Beaulieu only to get a sixth round pick back from Winnipeg. In my mind, Beaulieu's agent put him in a really bad position by putting out that he wanted to be traded.

Beaulieu had to stand in Vancouver and answer the tough questions, not his agent. It also made it more difficult for Botterill to get the value that he would've liked to. In the end, Botterill did Beaulieu a favor and just found him a different team.

What the armchair Twitter know-it-alls don't realize is word gets around when players are treated the right way. Players talk when they're treated well and it creates a culture that many can't comprehend. There was no reason to keep Beaulieu when he felt the way that he did.

There really wasn't any selling to be done on Monday unless Botterill could find a deal for Jason Pominville.

Montour will make his Sabres debut Tuesday in Philadelphia.

Maple Leafs hold off Sabres 5-3

WGR 550

February 25, 2019

Jack Eichel found the net twice, and Sam Reinhart and Rasmus Dahlin added two points each, but a late shorthanded goal by Kasperii Kapanen stifled a Buffalo Sabres' comeback attempt on Monday evening at Scotiabank Arena. After an impressive first period for the Sabres, they were out-played, out-shot and out-scored by the Toronto Maple Leafs in the second as part of a 5-3 loss. John Tavares, Auston Matthews and Frederik Gauthier all found the net in a span of 2:04, giving the Leafs a comfortable lead in the second.

Buffalo opened the scoring on Eichel's 20th goal of the season as part of a dominant first period that saw the Sabres out-shoot the Maple Leafs 16-6. The tables turned drastically in the second period, starting at the 3:48 mark on a Tavares tip-in. Toronto's leading goal scorer added his 35th of the season, catching enough of Jake Muzzin's shot to deflect the puck past Sabres goalie Carter Hutton.

Just 1:36 later, it was Matthews sweeping a shot into a wide-open Buffalo net following a defensive breakdown. Evan Rodrigues mismanaged the play in front of Hutton, sending the puck right to Matthews' stick for his 30th goal and the 2-1 lead. Toronto made it 3-1 only 28-seconds later on Gauthier's third of the year, sending the Toronto crowd into a frenzy and Hutton to the bench.

Linus Ullmark came on in relief, was immediately pelted with shot after shot, and finally cracked after, yet, another defensive lapse. Former Sabres forward Tyler Ennis cut through Rasmus Ristolainen and Jake McCabe for a clean breakaway and his ninth goal of the year.

Buffalo clawed its way back into the game on the backs of Reinhart and Eichel. A power play goal by Reinhart -- his fourth goal in two games -- cut the deficit in half at 17:25 of the second period. Eichel nearly added his second of the evening moments later, but fired a shot off the post.

The Buffalo captain didn't miss in the opening seconds of the third period, however, rushing down the ice after winning the faceoff and snapping a shot over Frederik Andersen's blocker. Eichel's second goal of the game made it 4-3 and also gave him 10 goals in 11 career games against the Maple Leafs.

Dahlin nearly tied it late in regulation on a slick pass from Eichel, but Andersen sprawled across the crease to keep the rookie defenseman out of the net. Moments later, Eichel tried another pass to Dahlin at the point, however the puck bounced off a referee's skate and sprung a breakaway for Kapanen, making it 5-3.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 19:07 - Jack Eichel (20) (PPG) (Sam Reinhart, Rasmus Dahlin)
TOR: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 17:25 - Sam Reinhart (18) (PPG) (Jeff Skinner, Rasmus Dahlin)
TOR: 3:48 - John Tavares (35) (Jake Muzzin, Travis Dermott); 5:24 - Auston Matthews (30) (Kasperii Kapanen, Andreas Johnsson); 5:52 - Frederik Gauthier (3) (Jake Gardiner, Trevor Moore); 13:07 - Tyler Ennis (9) (Frederik Gauthier, Morgan Rielly)

Third Period:

BUF: 0:09 - Jack Eichel (21) (Jason Pominville, Rasmus Ristolainen)
TOR: 17:42 - Kasperii Kapanen (19) (SHG) (Unassisted)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 13:10 - John Tavares (Slashing - 2 min.); 19:00 - John Tavares (Too many men on the ice- 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 1:39 - Tage Thompson (Tripping - 2 min.)

TOR: 15:28 - Jake Muzzin (Interference - 2 min.); Nikita Zaitsev (Tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 15:53 - Auston Matthews (Tripping - 2 min.)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 34 (16, 10, 8)

TOR: 33 (6, 17, 10)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 19 saves; Carter Hutton - 9 saves

TOR: Frederik Andersen - 31 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 2 for 5 (40%)

TOR: 0 for 1 (0%)

Three Stars:

Frederik Gauthier - TOR

Kasperii Kapanen - TOR

Jack Eichel - BUF

What's Next:

The Sabres head right to Philadelphia for their second game in as many nights. New Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour is expected to make his debut in Tuesday's game against the Flyers. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. with pre-game coverage on WGR 550 starting at 6 p.m. with the Bulldog.

Sabres assign O'Regan, Wilcox to Rochester

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

February 25, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have assigned three players to the Rochester Americans on Monday, making all three of them eligible to play in the Calder Cup playoffs at the end of the season.

The Sabres have sent forward Danny O'Regan and goalie Adam Wilcox to the Amerks, while making a paper transaction (according to the AHL's transactions page) to send Tage Thompson down to the Amerks.

O'Regan returns to the Amerks after just one game with the Sabres on Saturday against the Washington Capitals. Sabres forward Kyle Okposo is expected to return to the lineup on Monday against the Toronto Maple Leafs, leaving the 25-year-old winger as the odd man out. In his only game with the Sabres this season, O'Regan went pointless in 11:56 of ice time.

In 53 games with the Amerks this season, O'Regan has scored 18 goals and has registered 16 assists for 34 points.

Wilcox heads back to the Amerks after clearing waivers on Monday. The Sabres signed him to a one-year, two-way contract on Sunday after it was announced that goalie Jonas Johansson underwent season-ending surgery on Friday. In 21 games this season in Rochester, Wilcox has posted a 9-7-1 record with a 2.89 goals-against average and a .896 save percentage.

Thompson will likely remain with the Sabres for the remainder of the 2018-19 season, but the transaction made on Monday will allow him to play with the Amerks during the Calder Cup playoffs. Thompson made the Sabres' roster to start the season, and has since appeared in 53 games, scoring seven goals and registering 11 points.

The Sabres and Maple Leafs drop the puck at 7 p.m. from Scotiabank Arena in Toronto. Pre-game coverage on WGR starts at 6 p.m. with the Bulldog.

Beaulieu traded to Winnipeg

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

February 25, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have traded defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets on Monday just before the 3 p.m. NHL Trade Deadline.

In exchange, the Sabres acquired a sixth round pick in the 2019 NHL Draft from the Jets.

In 30 games this season, Beaulieu scored three goals and registered four assists for seven points as a depth defenseman on the Sabres blue line. In parts of two seasons with the Sabres, Beaulieu scored four goals and picked up 12 assists in 89 games.

Earlier this season on January 17, Renaud Lavoie from TVA Sports in Quebec reported that Beaulieu had requested a trade, but it was later clarified that him and his agent suggested that the Sabres explore a trade if nothing changes about his playing time. At the time, Beaulieu had played in 26 games.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill acquired Beaulieu from the Montreal Canadiens before the 2017-18 season in exchange for a third round pick in the 2017 NHL Draft. In 225 career NHL games, Beaulieu has scored seven goals and registered 60 points.

The 26-year-old left-handed defenseman was a first round pick (17th overall) of the Canadiens in the 2011 NHL Draft.

Montour's skills and history of winning were worth the stretch for the Sabres

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Deadline day for the Sabres wasn't going to be a busy day to begin with. With the team caught in the gray area between wanting to be buyers and not able to really be sellers, the annual "get in or get out" marketplace didn't appear to have much of a seat for GM Jason Botterill's team, stuck in a playoff purgatory of sorts. The Sabres are not quite in the race anymore, but they're also not fully out.

Deadline day itself didn't bring much suspense. The Sabres sent defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg for a 2019 sixth-round pick. More interesting was what they got done the day before, when Botterill acquired defenseman Brandon Montour from Anaheim in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle and one of the three 2019 first-round picks the Sabres possessed. The Ducks now own the higher of the picks the Sabres got from the Blues and the Sharks. That's the deal that will bring judgment on Botterill.

The lure of adding the 24-year-old Montour to the lineup was too tantalizing to resist. While Guhle's potential and upside are gone to Southern California, Montour, now in his third NHL season and a known young product, joins an already youthful and experienced bunch with the Sabres.

"We understand for the long-term success of our organization we have to develop young players within our organization and develop depth, but it's also where we have young players in our organization right now, and we want to support them as much as possible," Botterill said. "We felt this was a move that helps our group right now, but also is someone who can grow and is someone that can develop into a better NHL player just like we've talked a lot this year about developing Rasmus Dahlin, developing Casey Mittelstadt. We've also focused in on developing a player like Sam Reinhart, and I think you're seeing it evident this year. We see the same thing with Brandon Montour. We see a young player who's established himself in the National Hockey League, but we see more of a ceiling there, too."

Adding Montour means getting a guy who's had a lot of development already at the NHL and AHL levels. In a season and a half with AHL's San Diego Gulls, he scored a ton from the blue line, with 89 points (25 goals and 64 assists) in 104 games. At the NHL level, he has 63 points (16 goals, 47 assists) in 169 games with the Ducks.

On top of being young, he skates fast and checks a lot of boxes the Sabres were looking to mark with their young group. Although Botterill said ahead of the trade deadline that he wasn't actively looking to trade any of his three first-round picks, Montour's abilities changed his mind.

"(It's) the right-shot ability, his skating ability to get up with the play, his ability to get out of the zone, whether it's a pass or carry it out of the zone, and to me with so much backchecking it's so difficult to create offense off the rush, but here's a player who has the ability to get up in the rush and create opportunities," Botterill said. "And I think you've seen it just with the addition of Rasmus Dahlin to our back end and improving our transition game. We're hopeful that Brandon can also help us out in that area and just add another element to our back end."

The Sabres' defense has needed help in moving the puck, period, for some time.

The addition of Dahlin improved that ability greatly, as did the signing of Lawrence Pilut, who was recently sent back to Rochester. But they needed more, in particular from right-handed defenders. Rasmus Ristolainen and Zach Bogosian are more physical players and shoot the puck hard. Casey Nelson, while decent with possession, has been injured for a good part of the season. Ideally, Montour slides into that position to give the Sabres another player on the opposite side of the ice who can carry the puck and start generating offense for everyone.

"I think you look at it from so many different angles. Our analytic department that we look at, we look at our scouting department, and also, too, we bring in our coaches," Botterill said. "Phil (Housley) has a familiarity with this player when he was in Nashville; they had a good playoff series against Anaheim there (in 2017). At least there's a familiarity there from a coaching standpoint. You look at with our scouting staff, what they liked was his sheer speed, ability to get the puck out of the zone, his ability to get into the offensive zone and create chances,

and that's what we looked at a lot from our analytic standpoint was just his ability to get the puck out of our zone and then create chances in the offensive zone."

The majority of Montour's time in Anaheim was spent paired with Hampus Lindholm, but early in his career he also played a lot next to Francois Beauchemin and Cam Fowler. Eric Stephens wrote about why it didn't work out in Anaheim. This season, while Montour has spent the majority of ice time again with Lindholm, he's bounced around the lineup a bit to play with the more inexperienced depth players like Jaycob Megna, Marcus Pettersson (now in Pittsburgh) and Josh Mahura.

"A lot of people think I just have that offensive game, but over the years I think my defensive game has really come a long way," Montour said. "I like to play big minutes. When I get up there, I like to skate and join when I can, but I'm focused on playing hard defensively and being physical for being a smaller guy. The competitiveness and the speed, creating as much as I can, is kind of the way I go."

Since Randy Carlyle was fired and Ducks GM Bob Murray took over Feb. 10, Montour's playing time has plummeted. He went from playing 23:16 per game under Carlyle to 17:03 in his final six games with Murray in charge. The Ducks have been horrible defensively this season and have routinely been caved-in in the shot department. We've seen in the past in Buffalo the effect that can have on young players, especially defensemen, when they're perpetually under fire, but Montour says he is eager to take it all on.

"I'm going to talk to these guys obviously in the next couple days here," Montour said. "I like to play my game, but whatever role comes about, I'll kind of just fit in as easy as I can and bring my strengths. Hopefully, that will translate to a lot of wins in the next couple weeks here."

As Botterill noted in his talk with the media Monday, the wins haven't been coming consistently. The Sabres sit six points out of a wild-card spot headed into Monday night's game against Toronto. Their lone consistency is that they've preached about going with the players they have and helping them grow and developing the team into a perpetual contender. Adding Montour to the mix fits with that approach.

"Guys are hungry, and I think you've seen it after the games, after the losses, people are certainly disappointed and we've tried to stay a little more even-keeled, but with a young group there are certainly highs and lows," Botterill said. "I've been really impressed how we've handled some adversity over the last couple weeks with the response the last couple games, but now it's important that we put that together. It's very evident we haven't won back-to-back games in a long time, and we have to understand there's going to be highs and lows throughout the entire month. The more we can stay even-keeled and bring that consistent effort, it will eventually get us, hopefully, into the playoffs."

Montour arrives in Buffalo with four rounds of playoff experience the previous two seasons, including a run to the Western Conference final in 2017. As a younger player who had been a part of only winning teams until this season, he provides another example for a group still trying to figure out how to win consistently.

"This is the time that guys should be excited about, you know," Montour said. "A young team that hasn't really been in the playoffs the last little bit, so it's new, but I have some experience now in the playoffs. I know we've had some races coming down and trying to get in last year, and everybody should be pretty amped up. Hopefully, I can bring a positive boost to the dressing room, be vocal as much as I can, and on the ice have some positive attitude toward that."

The Sabres sent Danny O'Regan back to Rochester to activate Kyle Okposo, who returns from a concussion. John Vogl caught up with Okposo on Monday morning. Buffalo also made a paper transaction of sending forward Tage Thompson to Rochester and immediately recalling him so he'll be able to play in the postseason with the Americans. He hasn't played in the AHL since last season, but he'll be valuable for Rochester in the Calder Cup playoffs with the experience he's picked up this season and gives the team a younger player to go along with the key veterans who have led them to the top of the North Division.

'I understand why people were scared for me': Kyle Okposo returns to the Sabres after sustaining latest concussion

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 25, 2019

TORONTO – As soon as the Sabres confirmed Kyle Okposo suffered a concussion, messages flooded his phone.

"It was a lot," he said.

It was also understandable. The hockey world is aware of the hell he went through following a concussion in 2017. Now that he'd suffered a third in less than two years, the worst thoughts invaded the brains of friends, teammates and people he's never met.

The fears came to Okposo's head, too, but they were fleeting.

"Just because one experience happened to me, it doesn't mean that it's going to happen again," Okposo said Monday. "Obviously, that's a fear in the back of your mind, for sure. You know what the brain is capable of. I know better than most people what it's capable of from a negative standpoint, so there's always that fear in the back of your mind."

But within three days of the Feb. 17 diagnosis, Okposo was feeling good. He'd received treatment on his neck, a therapy that provided a huge breakthrough two years ago. By the fourth day, the right winger was back on the ice.

He officially returned to the team Monday after missing just over a week.

"I understand why people were scared for me and thinking of me, and I really appreciate those thoughts," Okposo said in the Maple Leafs' visiting dressing room. "But I know my body well and I'm able to regulate it."

The 30-year-old smiled while saying he was ready to play. He later added with earnestness that he's sure he's ready. He's talked it over with his wife, Danielle, and she's ready, too.

Retirement pleas were made by many, but the Okposos didn't have those thoughts.

"No, not really," Okposo said. "I mean, well, there's always doubt, I guess. But it's all predicated on how I feel. I've got the right people in place to help me if I need something. I know when I feel good, how my neck feels especially, and it definitely helps my head. I just saw the right people, and I feel really good."

"She's knows me better than anybody else in the world, so she was definitely worried," he said of his wife, "but as the time progressed her mind was at ease that I was back to normal."

Okposo felt OK following the incident that started the latest drama. He fought the Rangers' Tony DeAngelo on Feb. 15, and he suffered a one-punch technical knockout midway through the third period.

Despite his history and the consequences, Okposo doesn't regret dropping the gloves.

"No – I probably should – but no," he said. "I don't know. It's part of the game. I missed a grab, and that's what happens. It's part of the game."

"I didn't think we were playing very well. Just trying to give the team a little spark, but it is what it is."

Okposo went directly to the trainers' room with a bloody mouth following the Friday night knockdown and didn't play the final 12 minutes. He didn't practice the next morning but took a flight with the team to New Jersey that afternoon.

After skating Sunday morning, he met with an athletic trainer and was sent back to Buffalo for further evaluation.

"I was all right," he said of the decision to fly to New Jersey on Saturday. "I skated the next morning and just felt a little off. It happens. When you have concussions you get some neck issues, and it can come on later. It was just better to be safe than sorry.

"I just felt in the back of my mind that I wasn't ready to go play in a game and take a hit. That was it. If I felt like that right now, I wouldn't be playing."

Studies have shown that flights can exacerbate concussion symptoms, but the Sabres insist they used proper precautions.

"Whether he was in Buffalo or whether he was in New Jersey, he was in constant communication with the doctors," general manager Jason Botterill said. "With these things, symptoms come on at different times. Eventually, our doctors felt it was important for him to get back to Buffalo, saw him, and obviously it was diagnosed with a concussion.

"I'm not going to go detail-by-detail, but he was always in communication with our doctors about what to do from an exercise standpoint and how he was feeling."

Once Okposo determined the injury was more neck-related, his exercise progressed well. He was skating on his own while people were still worrying. Even though he's cleared, people will still worry. The stories of the long-term effects of brain injuries are heartbreaking and harrowing.

But Okposo is confident he's healthy enough to play.

"You get hit, and I obviously know my history better than anybody," he said. "There's definitely that component of, 'Am I OK?' And then you start second-guessing.

"You've just got to find a balance. You've got to just be in tune with your body and your mind, be really honest with yourself and how you feel, and I feel great now."

Stimson: How AHL development for several players may have cost the Sabres at the NHL level this year

By Ryan Stimson

The Athletic

February 25, 2019

With all eyes and ears on Twitter for the latest trade deadline news this past week, I thought it would be a nice change-of-pace to look at internal transactions the Sabres could have executed earlier in the season to stop the bleeding in the standings. Many have written about the Sabres' influx of young talent at the start of this season, both at the NHL and AHL level. The Sabres still have a ways to go to be among the league's best, but the Rochester Americans are currently sitting in first place in the North Division. Which players from that group have been deserving of a call-up? How much of an impact could they have made this season had they started at the big club? How much worse have other fringe players been? And what are some of the limitations of evaluating AHL players? Let's get to it.

To do this, I'm going to revisit NHL_e, which I introduced to Athletic readers last summer. If you need a refresher on what NHL_e, I encourage you to read that piece and notes by Emmanuel Perry, who answered a few questions on it for me. Briefly, it measures the differences in league quality in terms of scoring using league equivalency rates.

Last summer, I was all-in on Lawrence Pilut, whose numbers have been exemplary in the limited games he's played in. Rasmus Dahlin has obviously been great. But the AHL forwards haven't seen much action at the big club apart from CJ Smith, who himself has been limited. But how many goals have the Sabres left off the ice giving minutes to the likes of Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons and others over the likes of Victor Olofsson or Smith?

Here's an updated table looking at the Amerks' scoring rates using NHL_e. First, let's look at the forwards.

These are sorted by NHL_e, which is their adjusted per-game scoring rates at the NHL level. Smith is approaching his peak years and likely deserves an extended look at the NHL level. 0.4 points per game is very good for depth players, and while the level of competition is a step up, so is the level of teammates. In the 11 games he's played with the Sabres this season, Smith has been worse than Vladimir Sobotka, but better than Tage Thompson by Goals Above Replacement metrics (you read about the EvolvingWild Twins WAR metric here). In a limited span that hardly means much, but given his decent scoring rate at the AHL, good numbers in his cameo with the Sabres and his age, it's time to see what Smith can do at the NHL level on a regular basis.

The obvious standout is Olofsson. Using NHL_e, Olofsson and Smith could have added almost 40 points to the Sabres' scoring depth this season, something that was lacking as early as October. The 23-year-old Olofsson may never project more than complementary scoring player who can improve a power play, but he's wasted in the AHL. Find out if he can handle the NHL.

Now let's compare with the fringe of the NHL roster to see where these two players would have ranked.

Smith and Olofsson's AHL rates would equate to roughly the same level of offensive production. This would be about double that of the rest of the listed skaters. We're comparing points in all situations since that's what we have for the AHL. Simple, right?

Not quite. AHL data is limited and it makes even more difficult to measure defensive impact, so as a rule we don't like to say Smith and Olofsson would definitely have had better seasons than players with strong overall impact. This leaves Mittelstadt, Larsson, and Girgensons safe as their GAR60 rates, which account for everything within a player's environment, are positive on the team according to EvolvingHockey. However, Thompson and Sobotka have been negative players all season, some of the worst performers on the Sabres this year actually.

Had the Sabres given those minutes to Smith and Olofsson all year, it's likely more goals would have been scored, which would translate to more wins. According to the site EvolvingHockey, it takes about 5.8 goals to equal a win for the 2019 season. I do think Olofsson's shot would be worth five or six goals on the PP this season, so does he net out as a neutral player at 5v5 and contribute an extra win to the season? Does Smith

offer similar value at 5v5? I think it's a fair question to ask. It's difficult to know just what their overall impact would be as we do not have measures for defensive impact at the AHL like we do at the NHL level, but the bar is pretty low with Sobotka and Thompson.

On the back end, let's have a look.

Zach Redmond will be playing in the NHL next year. He's definitely earned that next contract. Brendan Guhle will get to ply his trade in Anaheim after the recent acquisition of Brandon Montour. Pilut has been sent back to the AHL, which is puzzling as he could have added value all season. After that, there's not much here.

Pilut is a NHL player, without question. He should be in the lineup. His scoring was obviously down at the big club due to not getting a ton of power play time on the top unit compared to his minutes there in Rochester earlier in the season. Even still, his per-game scoring rate is equal to Zach Bogosian, who has played lots of his minutes with Dahlin and only 0.07 behind Dahlin and Ristolainen. Not to mention his numbers from the regression models in the community show him as having huge impacts. He still leads the Sabres blue line in GAR60 after 25 games.

It's fair to assume there would have been a significant positive impact had Pilut gotten all of Marco Scandella's minutes this season, as Scandella is a negative by GAR metrics and scores less often than Pilut as well.

Conclusion

Had the Sabres played Olofsson and Smith over Thompson and Sobotka all season and Pilut played all year over Scandella, I would gamble that the Sabres would have a couple more wins right now. Does this matter in the large scheme of things? Probably not, but I think teams should always seek to optimize their roster within the organization to operate at maximum efficiency.

This isn't a foolproof way to approach this type of evaluation, again, as the AHL data is limited. However, if players are having negative impacts at the NHL level and aren't lightning up the score sheet, it's fair for the organization to ask itself if there are internal moves they can make to get better without giving up assets.

Finally, I'm sure there will be many readers that point to this idea of development as a necessary step for players. Unfortunately, no one can ever offer up concrete analysis of that. We know from aging curves that players peak earlier than most teams realize, so it's entirely within the realm of possibility that a team's approach to "development" may actually miss some of a player's early impactful years because they are playing in the AHL. I think these are good conversations to have around the team as there is value to be gained from each roster spot, not just the top two lines and top two pairings. Improving in the margins is the difficult part and one where teams can certainly be more efficient.

Sabres hope adding established player in Brandon Montour buoys them

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2019

TORONTO – When Jason Botterill acquired high-scoring winger Jeff Skinner last summer, the general manager said he underestimated how much adding an established NHL talent to the Buffalo Sabres would excite his players.

“It wasn’t a situation talking about futures or a prospect,” Botterill told reporters Monday in Buffalo. “He was a player that helped our group right now.”

Botterill’s latest acquisition before Monday’s trade deadline, puck-moving defenseman Brandon Montour, could have the same effect for the Sabres.

While Montour, 24, is young, having compiled 16 goals and 63 points over 169 games, he’s a proven NHL performer. Adding him to the mix Sunday was a significant move for a playoff push.

“It shows they believe in this group,” Sabres center Evan Rodrigues said prior to Monday’s 5-3 loss to the Maple Leafs, a game Montour sat out after traveling. “I think we have a big belief in here and obviously adding someone like that is going to make us more dynamic, especially offensively.”

Without Montour, the Sabres roared out of the gate Monday, outshooting the Leafs 16-6 in the first period and grabbing the lead on captain Jack Eichel’s late power-play goal, his 20th score this season.

Then the Sabres imploded early in the second period before the capacity crowd of 19,026 inside Scotiabank Arena, allowing three goals in about a two-minute span.

“But it’s not really what they did,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said. “It’s what we didn’t do.”

The Sabres didn’t pick up guys in front or do much of anything for goalie Carter Hutton, hanging him out to dry.

Housley yanked Hutton, who played two terrific games last week, after Frederik Gauthier made it 3-1 at 5:51.

“Trying to spark our team, maybe send a message,” Housley said of pulling Hutton for Linus Ullmark.

The move hardly ignited the Sabres. Tyler Ennis’ breakaway goal later in the period made it 4-1.

“He’s been such a key part of our team this year, so you can’t really blame Hutts for some of the stuff that was happening,” Eichel said. “He’s keeping us in most games that we’re in. They get a breakaway. They’re scoring their goals from right inside the hashmarks. That’s on us, not Hutts.”

Still, the Sabres fought back later. Winger Sam Reinhart scored a power-play goal late in the second period. Then Eichel scored nine seconds into the third.

“I really like our fight and push in the third period, Housley said.

The Sabres nearly tied it in the waning minutes, but goalie Frederik Andersen stymied defenseman Rasmus Dahlin’s point-blank chance on the power play.

Later in the man advantage, the puck hit an official’s skate, Dahlin fell down and Kasperii Kapanen roared by and scored a short-handed breakaway.

“It’s a fluky thing,” Housley said of the goal.

So with 20 games left, the Sabres trail the eighth-place Carolina Hurricanes by six points for the Eastern Conference’s final playoff spot.

Botterill made one other move shortly before Monday's 3 p.m. deadline, trading defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets for a sixth-round pick in 2019.

Beaulieu, 26, requested a trade last month during a stretch in which he sat out 21 of 25 games as a healthy scratch. Montour's arrival gave the Sabres nine defensemen.

Hours before the deal, Beaulieu acknowledged sitting out "was definitely the toughest thing I've had to deal with."

"I never thought I'd find myself in that position," said Beaulieu, who played three straight games last week. "Obviously, it was very difficult. Sometimes you don't always get the reasoning or the answer you want. But there's going to be ups and downs for careers."

In Montour, Botterill believes he snagged a youngster whose career could be on the upswing.

"We see a young player who has established himself in the National Hockey League but we still think there's more ceiling there, too," Botterill said.

He added: "That's why we felt good about making this move: short-term, helping our team get in the playoffs; long-term, helping our team grow."

But has Botterill done enough to help the Sabres make the playoff this year? He dodged that question, searching for words before talking about how the team is hungry to make the postseason.

Botterill said Montour will play in tonight's road contest against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Sabres notes: Trade puts chip on Brandon Montour's shoulder

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2019

TORONTO – Buffalo Sabres newcomer Brandon Montour doesn't turn 25 for another six weeks. Over his three NHL seasons, he has established himself as the rarest of commodities, a right-handed, puck-moving defenseman.

Still, the Anaheim Ducks, who have imploded this season, dished Montour to the Sabres on Sunday, a day before the NHL trade deadline.

Not surprisingly, Montour said getting dealt has put a chip on his shoulder.

"It's one of those things where I want to prove them wrong," Montour said prior to Monday's 5-3 loss to the Maple Leafs. "I wanted to stay there for a long time. I guess this is home now."

The Sabres paid a steep price for Montour, sending Anaheim a first-round pick in 2019 and defense prospect Brendan Guhle.

Montour flew from Vancouver to Toronto on Monday. He met his new teammates late in the afternoon and sat out the contest inside Scotiabank Arena.

General manager Jason Botterill said Montour will make his Sabres debut in tonight's road game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Botterill did not want Montour to take a red eye across Canada and play later in the day.

"We're trying to set him up for success," Botterill told reporters in Buffalo.

While Montour wanted to stay in Anaheim, joining the Sabres has clearly energized him.

Montour said he grew up outside Windsor, Ontario, and moved to Brantford, about 90 miles from Buffalo, when he was in high school.

"It's never a good thing to be traded ... but you got to look at the positive, and Buffalo's a team that wanted me and ... I'm excited to be here," Montour said. "It's close to home, that's a big thing."

Montour's playoff experience – he has played 21 games in three seasons – was a big thing to the Sabres, whose core group of youngsters have never sniffed the postseason.

"I've had some experience in the playoffs," Montour said. "I know we've had some races coming down, trying to get in last year. Everybody should be pretty amped up. Hopefully I can bring a positive boost to the dressing room."

Naturally, Montour, who is pegged as offensive defenseman, believes his game has evolved.

"A lot of people think I just have that offensive game, but over the years, I think my defensive game has really come a long way," Montour said.

Montour has one season and a \$3.25 million salary cap hit left on his contract.

–

In a paper move, the Sabres sent winger Tague Thompson to the Rochester Americans on Monday afternoon so he will be eligible for the AHL playoffs.

Thompson, 21, was "recalled" and played against the Leafs. He hasn't appeared in the minors since last season.

The Sabres also sent winger Danny O'Regan back to the Amerks on Monday.

In other Amerks news, goalie Adam Wilcox, who signed a one-year, two-way contract Sunday, cleared waivers Monday.

Wilcox had been playing in Rochester on an AHL deal.

—

The Carolina Hurricanes dealt ex-Sabres prospect Cliff Pu to the Florida Panthers for future considerations Monday.

Pu, 20, was a notable piece of the Jeff Skinner trade with Carolina in August.

But Pu has struggled as an AHL rookie, compiling only one goal and six points in 44 games with the Charlotte Checkers this season. The forward even spent five games in the ECHL.

The Panthers assigned Pu to their AHL affiliate, the Springfield Thunderbirds.

Meanwhile, the Nashville Predators also traded another ex-Sabres prospect, Nick Baptiste, to the Leafs for future considerations Sunday.

Baptiste, 23, compiled 12 goals and 22 points in 55 AHL games with the Milwaukee Admirals this season.

The Leafs sent the winger to their AHL affiliate, the Marlies.

Notes: Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella returned Monday after an upper-body injury sidelined him four games. ... Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt skated Monday morning but missed his second straight game (sick). ... Sabres defenseman Casey Nelson skated in the pregame warm-up but was scratched again (healthy).

Sabres' Nathan Beaulieu on trade deadline: 'No one really likes this day'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2019

TORONTO – Last month, during a stretch in which he sat out 21 of 25 games as a healthy scratch, Buffalo Sabres defenseman Nathan Beaulieu requested a trade.

But suddenly, Beaulieu, 26, has started earning regular action again, playing three straight games entering tonight's contest against the Maple Leafs.

So perhaps the Sabres will keep Beaulieu past today's 3 p.m. trade deadline.

Update: The Sabres have traded Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets for a sixth-round pick in 2019.

"No one really likes this day, to be honest," Beaulieu said this afternoon inside Scotiabank Arena. "I'm just going to try to keep everything to myself. There's an important hockey game tonight, so I'm going to try to look toward that.

"As of now, I'm a Buffalo Sabre, so I have to worry about the game tonight. There are a lot of distractions right now, so it's obviously tough. It's new ground for me as well. You just kind of want the day to be over."

Update: Earlier today, Beaulieu acknowledged sitting out "was definitely the toughest thing I've had to deal with."

"I never thought I'd find myself in that position," Beaulieu said. "Obviously, it was very difficult. Sometimes you don't always get the reasoning or the answer you want. But there's going to be ups and downs for careers."

Sabres center Evan Rodrigues said of the acquisition: "It shows they believe in this group. I think we have a big belief in here and obviously adding someone like that is going to make us more dynamic, especially offensively. He's a good puck-moving defenseman."

So far, after acquiring defenseman Brandon Montour from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday night, the Sabres have stayed quiet on the trade front today.

Montour, 24, won't play tonight, according to the Sabres. He is scheduled to meet the team in Toronto.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said Montour "plays the way we want to play."

"He's a highly skilled puck-moving defenseman that can join the rush, and that's the way we want to play," Housley said. "It's going to be a great fit for our team."

Check back later for more on Montour.

The Sabres will make one lineup change tonight, inserting winger Kyle Okposo for Danny O'Regan, who was sent back to the Rochester Americans this afternoon.

Sabres goalie Carter Hutton will start, his third straight nod.

In others news, Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt (sick) and defenseman Marco Scandella (upper body) skated this morning, although neither will play.

Update: In a move that will make Tage Thompson eligible for the AHL playoffs, the Sabres sent the winger to the Amerks this afternoon.

Sabres' Kyle Okposo ready to play after suffering concussion

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2019

TORONTO – The smile on Buffalo Sabres winger Kyle Okposo's face said everything.

After missing four games due to a concussion – “More precautionary than anything,” he said – Okposo will play again tonight against the Maple Leafs.

“Definitely more neck than anything,” an excited Okposo said this afternoon inside Scotiabank Arena. “Got that work done and I feel good.”

Okposo's quick return is surprising. The likable veteran, who suffered another concussion fighting New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo on Feb. 15, has a concerning history of head injuries.

While Okposo has been skating on his own, he hadn't practiced since suffering his third concussion in less than two years.

“He's ready to go,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said. “He gave me the thumbs up, he's been itching to get back in the lineup.”

After accompanying the Sabres on their last road trip, the Sabres sent Okposo home for more examination and announced on Tuesday he had suffered another concussion.

But Okposo said he started skating again Thursday.

“I felt good every day, progressed from there,” Okposo said.

This morning, Okposo skated at right wing beside center Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson.

Does Okposo, who has fought five times since joining the NHL 11 years ago, second-guess his decision to take on DeAngelo?

“No,” Okposo said. “I probably should.”

Naturally, Okposo said the injury worried him a little bit. After suffering a concussion two years ago, he was hospitalized in intensive care.

Okposo said he dealt with a “physiological component.”

“You get hit and ... there's definitely that component of, ‘Am I OK?’” Okposo said. “And then you start second-guessing. You just got to find a balance. You got to really be in tune with your body and your mind and be really honest with yourself and how you feel. I feel great.”

Bove: Quiet Monday shouldn't overshadow strong deadline for Sabres

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Sabres general manager Jason Botterill made a deadline deal on Monday, it just wasn't nearly as big as the shakeup he made Sunday. Despite discussions with other teams, the Sabres made only one trade in the final hours before the 3:00 p.m. deadline, sending Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg in exchange for a sixth-round pick.

Beaulieu appeared to be the player the Sabres were most likely to move and less than an hour after the clock hit 3:00 p.m. the news broke on Twitter. When speaking with reporters, Botterill couldn't comment on the Beaulieu deal because it hadn't been made official with the league.

This season, Beaulieu has been a healthy scratch more than 20 times. Earlier in the year, reports surfaced that the defenseman preferred to be moved to a team where he'd receive more playing time. With an expiring contract this summer and a crowded blue line, the former first-round pick became expendable, especially after the Sabres added Brandon Montour on Sunday evening.

When Botterill added Beaulieu last summer it was a low-risk move with upside. It didn't work out how the Sabres had hoped but I give them credit for taking a swing at the former first-round pick. Adding a sixth-round pick after you gave away a third-round pick isn't an ideal return but it's better than nothing.

As for the deadline as a whole, despite only a minor move Monday, I think Botterill did a very nice job. Adding Montour is a bigger splash than many of us expected they'd make.

"We felt this was a move that helps our group right now but also is someone who can grow and someone who can grow into a better NHL player," Botterill said Monday afternoon.

Not only does Montour make the Sabres a more talented team in the short term, but it also makes them a bigger threat for years to come.

Sabres trade Nathan Beaulieu to Winnipeg for 6th round pick

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres have traded defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets for a 6th round draft pick. The news was first reported by Pierre LeBrun of TSN and later confirmed by the team.

Beaulieu has played in 30 games this season for the Buffalo Sabres and has three goals and four assists.

That wasn't the only transaction the Sabres made before the NHL Trade Deadline. On Sunday night, the Sabres sent Brendan Guhle and a 1st round 2019 NHL Draft pick to the Anaheim Ducks for defenseman Brandon Montour.

Eichel's Two Goals Not Enough

By Josh Reed

WIVB

February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB)- - The second period was a backbreaker for the Sabres during Monday's 5-3 loss.

Jack Eichel gave Buffalo a 1-0 advantage with a power play goal in the first period.

Toronto would answer with four straight goals in the 2nd period to open up a 4-1 lead.

John Tavares, Auston Matthews, Frederik Gauthier, and Tyler Ennis scored goals for the Maple Leafs in the period.

Buffalo head coach Phil Housley pulled goalie Carter Hutton following the third goal and replaced him with Linus Ullmark.

Sam Reinhart scored a goal to close out the scoring in the 2nd period and pull the Sabres within two goals.

Eichel scored his second goal of the game to open the third period to make the score 4-3 but the Maple Leafs put it away on a goal by Kasper Kapanen.

The Sabres next game is Tuesday in Philadelphia.

Sabres have quiet deadline day with focus on the present and future of the franchise

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - 24 hours after looking like buyers at the trade deadline, the Sabres -- like much of the rest of the league on Monday -- kept their roster in tact as the 3 p.m. deadline passed.

The lone move the Blue & Gold made on Monday was shipping Nathan Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets in exchange for a sixth round pick in this year's NHL draft.

General manager Jason Botterill's big deal took place Sunday night.

He sent a first round pick and defenseman Brendan Guhle to Anaheim in exchange for defenseman Brandon Montour.

The 24-year-old right shot d-man will not play tonight in Toronto.

The Sabres, who are six points back of the final wild card spot heading into tonight's game against the Maple Leafs, are still in search of secondary scoring as their playoff push continues.

"It's a balance we're always trying to find here. We understand the long-term success of our organization. We have to develop young players within our organization and develop depth. It's also where we have young players in the national hockey league right now and we want to support them as much as possible," said Botterill, who also mentioned the growth of players like Rasmus Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt and Sam Reinhart.

"We felt like this was move that helped our group right now, but is someone who can grow and someone who can develop into a better NHL player. We see the same thing with Brandon Montour. We see a young player who has established himself in the National Hockey League but there's more of a ceiling there, too."

Buffalo hasn't won back-to-back games since mid-December or won back-to-back regular wins since the opening month of the season.

Since their 10-game winning streak ended in late November, Phil Housley's skaters have managed just 12 wins and a 12-18-6 overall record. They did register a point against the Lightning and beat the defending Stanley Cup champions from Washington 5-2 to earn three out of a possible four points over the weekend.

"We understand the importance of getting to the playoffs and this is a great step right now where we're at. Nobody is sitting in here saying, wow this great we're in some games. Guys are hungry. And, I think you've seen it after the games," Botterill said. "After the losses, people are certainly disappointed. We've tried to stay more even keeled but with a young group there are certainly some highs and lows."

"I've been really impressed with how we've handled adversity and the response the last couple of games. Now it's important we put that together. It's evident we haven't won back-to-back games in a long time. We have to understand there are going to be highs and lows throughout this entire month. The more we can stay even keeled and have a consistent effort will eventually hopefully get us into the playoffs."

Sabres trade Nathan Beaulieu to Jets in exchange for 6th round pick

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

February 25, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres have reportedly traded defenseman Nathan Beaulieu to the Winnipeg Jets in exchange for a 6th round selection.

When general manager Jason Botterill spoke to the media on trade deadline, he would not discuss the specifics of the deal since it had not become official with the league office.

Beaulieu, who had been a healthy scratch in 22 of the previous 26 games. The defenseman suited up against Florida, Tampa Bay and Washington this past week but had openly discussed his displeasure in playing time earlier in the season.

The blueliner has seven points in 30 games this year, which includes three goals.

Brandon Montour excited to join Sabres

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

February 25, 2019

TORONTO, ON — It didn't take long for Sabres new defenseman Brandon Montour to get a warm welcome from his new teammates.

"I've been here just over an hour now and guys seem pretty excited so I'm happy to be here," Montour told reporters in Toronto before the Sabres played the Leafs on Monday night.

The Sabres acquired Montour in a trade with the Ducks the night before the NHL trade deadline. In exchange, Anaheim got defenseman Brendan Guhle and a 2019 first-round draft pick.

Montour was in Vancouver with the Ducks when he got the news he was going to be a Buffalo Sabre.

"This is my first time around with this side of the business but I'm excited. We were in Vancouver, a couple of us were at the pool and with the situation going on there, there was going to be some change," Montour explained.

Montour joined the Sabres in Toronto but won't make his debut until Tuesday night. Head coach Phil Housley said Montour is expected to be in the lineup tomorrow when they play the Flyers in Philadelphia.

Montour leaves the team that drafted him in the second round back in 2014 but says he's looking forward to what's ahead.

"It's obviously never a good thing to be traded but you've got to look at the positives. Buffalo's a team that wanted me and was excited to have me and I'm excited to be here," Montour said.

Phil Housley praised Montour's style of play and said that was a big reason he'll make a good fit.

"He plays the game the way we want to play. He's a highly skilled puck moving defenseman that can join the rush and that's the way we want to play," head coach Phil Housley said after the team's morning skate on Monday in Toronto.

But Montour says there is more to his game.

"I think a lot of people think I just have that offensive game but over the years I think my defensive game has really come a long way. I think the two-way style, I like to play big minutes, when I get up there I like to skate and join when I can but I'm focused on playing hard defensively, being physical," Montour explained.

He even said the trade has given him a little extra motivation.

"It's one of those things where I want to prove them wrong. I wanted to stay there for a long time but it didn't happen and this is home now. This is where I'm striving to be a player and have some success and help this team have success," Montour said.

New Sabres D Montour won't face Leafs

TSN

February 25, 2019

Newly acquired defenceman Brandon Montour will not make his Buffalo Sabres debut on Monday against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Montour, who was traded from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday for defenceman Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick, will join the team in Toronto, but will not play the team announced Monday.

In 62 games this season, Montour has 25 points (five goals, 20 assists).

The 24-year-old was originally drafted by the Ducks in the second-round (55th overall) of the 2014 NHL draft.

Sabres unable to overcome 2nd-period slump in loss to Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 25th, 2019

TORONTO - Jack Eichel scored a pair of goals to continue his strong production against the Toronto Maple Leafs, but the Buffalo Sabres were unable to overcome a lopsided second period in a 5-3 loss at Scotiabank Arena on Monday.

The Maple Leafs strung together four straight goals in the second period, including three in a span of 2:04, to erase a 1-0 deficit and take control of the contest. The Sabres nearly tied the game on a power play late in the third period, but Frederik Andersen robbed a one-time attempt by Rasmus Dahlin at the back door.

"We had seven or eight minutes of bad hockey where we let them get behind us and that was it," Eichel said. "... They're a good transition team. We all know that. It's something we scouted before the game, so you have to take care of the puck and whenever they get the puck they're looking to go.

"They had too many odd-man rushes in the second period and it cost us the game."

The Sabres dominated the first period to the tune of a 16-6 shot advantage, punctuated by a power-play blast from the high slot by Eichel that opened the scoring with 51.5 seconds remaining. They expected the Maple Leafs to make a push in the second, but they were unable to weather the storm.

John Tavares sparked Toronto's rally with a high tip at 3:48 in the second. Auston Matthews buried an odd bounce off Evan Rodrigues at 5:24, and Frederik Gauthier buried a backhand shot from in front of the net at 5:52.

The Sabres pulled Carter Hutton following Gauthier's goal, with the goalie having stopped nine of 12 shots. Tyler Ennis slipped behind the Sabres defense and beat Linus Ullmark on a breakaway for the Maple Leafs' fourth goal with 6:53 remaining in the period.

"I think we've got to realize they're going to have pushes," Sam Reinhart said. "I mean, they've got some of the best players in the world over there. But we need to find a way to calm down and be more composed when they do have those pushes and try to stop the momentum as quick as possible."

Sabres coach Phil Housley said the decision to pull Hutton had more to do with the team's defensive play than it did the goaltender.

"I was thinking about taking a timeout, just getting a goalie change, trying to spark our team, maybe send a message," Housley said.

The Sabres were able to stage a near-comeback, beginning with a 5-on-3 goal from Reinhart with 2:35 remaining in the second period. Eichel buried a shot across the body of Andersen on a 2-on-1 rush to pull them within a goal just nine seconds into the third.

The push continued throughout the period, with Reinhart drawing a tripping call against Matthews with 4:07 remaining. The Sabres possessed the puck for the majority of the ensuing power play, up until Andersen made a scrambling stop on Dahlin's one-time attempt at the back door.

Andersen covered the puck for a draw in the Toronto zone, after which the puck deflected off an official's skate and past a diving Dahlin at the blue line. Kasper Kapanen scooped up the puck and scored on a shorthanded breakaway to extend Toronto's lead with 2:18 remaining.

"It's a fluky thing," Housley said. "We had two or three quality looks. Give Andersen credit, he made some big saves. It's unfortunate, because they were tired, and it happens to hit the official's skate and go to those guys."

The Sabres will play the Maple Leafs again in Toronto on Saturday. The lesson on Monday was that two strong periods won't be enough.

"I think we got a little soft in our coverage," Reinhart said. "You can't do that against a team like that. The majority of the game I thought we played really well, the way we wanted to. You can't give that team a six, seven, eight-minute span. They're going to capitalize."

Eichel's goals were his 20th and 21st of the season, joining Rick Martin and Thomas Vanek as the third player in Sabres history to record 20 goals or more in each of his first four seasons.

The Sabres captain also continued his hot streak against the Maple Leafs, now with 15 points (10+5) in 11 career matchups with Buffalo's cross-border rival.

Up next

Brandon Montour is expected to make his Sabres debut when the team plays in Philadelphia on Tuesday. The game will be nationally televised on NBCSN, with puck drop scheduled for just after 7 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will have the call on WGR 550.

Montour joins Sabres: 'It's a tight race and that's what it's all about'

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 25th, 2019

TORONTO - Brandon Montour had only been at Scotiabank Arena for a little over an hour by the time he met with the media on Monday, but he could already feel the enthusiasm from his Buffalo Sabres teammates who were thrilled to have him for a potential playoff push.

Montour was acquired from the Anaheim Ducks in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick on Sunday. He expressed the emotions you'd expect from someone leaving an organization that drafted him in the second round in 2014, then got on a plane from Vancouver and looked forward.

"I felt like my name was kind of out there as a guy that teams might need, especially with how the team in Anaheim is going right now," Montour said. "It's one of those things where me and my agent were talking, and the possibility was there.

"Come yesterday, we heard the news, and that's over with now. I think these guys are what, [six] points out? It's a tight race and that's what it's all about. There's 20 games or so left and I'm excited."

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill went into the deadline with the goal of acquiring players who could improve the roster now and in the long term. He saw that potential in the 24-year-old Montour, who led Anaheim defensemen with 57 points (14+43) in 142 games since the start of last season

"We felt this was something that really added value to our team and hopefully improve our ability to get out of our own zone, get the pucks up to our forwards and help our defense create some offense from the back end," Botterill said.

"...We see a young player who has established himself in the National Hockey League, but we still think there's more of a ceiling there to him."

Montour is known for his puck-moving ability and willingness to join the offense down low, assets that should allow him to fit well in Phil Housley's system. His average shot length of 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) in that category, while Rasmus Ristolainen ranks 17th (46.3).

That said, Montour emphasized his defensive growth when asked about his playing style on Monday.

"A lot of people think I just have that offensive game, but over the years, I think, my defensive game has really come a long way," he said. "I think the two-way style, I like to play big minutes.

"When I get up there, I like to skate, get up there when I can. I'm focused on playing hard defensively, being physical for being a smaller guy."

Next home game: Friday vs. Pittsburgh

Botterill emphasized Montour's playoff experience in addition to his on-ice qualities, with 21 playoff games already on his resume through three NHL seasons. Montour expressed a willingness to step up in that sense, which should be valuable for a young team now learning what it takes to win games in the heat of a playoff race.

"This is the time guys should be excited about," he said. "A young team, haven't really been in the playoffs the last little bit here, so it's new. But I've had some experience now in the playoffs and I know we've had some races coming down to it, trying to get in last year.

"Everybody should be pretty amped up. Hopefully I can bring a positive boost to the dressing room, being vocal as much as I can."

Montour admitted he's come to Buffalo with a chip on his shoulder, looking to prove his old team wrong and vindicate the belief of his new team.

"Whatever role comes about, kind of just fit in as easy as a I can and bring my strengths," he said. "Hopefully, it translates to a lot of wins in the next couple weeks here."

Botterill sees promise in Montour growing with young Sabres group

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 25, 2019

Deadline Day: Jason Botterill

Sabres GM Jason Botterill speaks with the media after acquiring defenseman Brandon Montour ahead of the 2019 NHL Trade Deadline

As the 2019 NHL Trade Deadline passed at 3 p.m. on Monday, the Buffalo Sabres sat six points out of a playoff spot. Their big move came Sunday night, when they acquired defenseman Brandon Montour from Anaheim for defensive prospect Brendan Guhle and a 2019 first-round pick. They also added a sixth-round pick in the 2019 NHL Draft from Winnipeg for defenseman Nathan Beaulieu.

The push for the playoffs will continue tonight as the Sabres are in Toronto for a 7 p.m. faceoff against the Toronto Maple Leafs. While Montour will not be in the lineup against Toronto, he's expected to suit up tomorrow night against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill has talked consistently about the necessity to develop both the teenagers on the roster like Rasmus Dahlin and Casey Mittelstadt while also working to help make slightly older players like Sam Reinhart better each day. He feels that the move to acquire Montour, who at age 24 is also under contract for next season, helps in both of those areas.

"It's motivation to help our team right now because you want to get into the playoffs and then you're also looking long-term with this team and this organization," Botterill said Monday afternoon at KeyBank Center. "That's why we felt good about making this move. Because it solidified both things: short-term - helping our team getting into the playoffs - and long-term - helping this team grow."

Montour's skillset, especially being a coveted right-hand shot, was also valued.

"We felt this was something that really added value to our team and hopefully improve our ability to get out of our own zone, get the pucks up to our forwards and help our defense create some offense from the back end," Botterill said.

"...We see a young player who has established himself in the National Hockey League, but we still think there's more of a ceiling there to him."

After the team's morning skate at Scotiabank Arena, players and coaching staff expressed their approval of the deal and were looking forward Montour's debut Tuesday in Philadelphia.

Botterill compared today's reaction to the sentiment when the team acquired Jeff Skinner in August.

"It's exciting when you get your players excited about the teammates that are coming into the organization. To be honest, it was something I underestimated this summer in bringing Jeff Skinner into the group," he said.

"It wasn't a situation about talking about futures or a prospect or anything. He was a player that helped our group right now and I know that got our players very excited."

Botterill is pleased to see his team in the playoff hunt (and that they've just earned three of four points against Tampa Bay and Washington), but as he learned in the Pittsburgh Penguins front office during three Stanley Cup-championship runs, being close is not the ultimate goal.

"We understand the importance of getting to the playoffs and this is a great step right now where we're at, but no one's sitting in here saying, 'Wow, this is great that we're playing in some games.' Guys are hungry," he said.

"I think you've seen it after the games, after the losses, people are certainly disappointed. We've tried to stay a little bit more even-keel, but with a young group, there are certainly highs and lows. ...The more we can stay even-keel and bring that consistent effort, it'll eventually get us into, hopefully, the playoffs."

Botterill opened the press conference with some kind parting words for Guhle, who was selected in the second round of the 2015 NHL Draft.

"Our entire staff has really enjoyed working with Brendan over the last couple years, whether it be in Buffalo or in Rochester," Botterill said. "His dedication to the game, his professionalism was very impressive, and I know Brendan's going to have a very bright future in the National Hockey League. It reflects upon an excellent selection by Tim Murray and his staff."

Housley on Montour: 'He plays the game we want to play'

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 25, 2019

TORONTO - They'll have to wait one more day to add him to the lineup, but members of the Buffalo Sabres expressed excitement over the addition of defenseman Brandon Montour prior to their game in Toronto on Monday.

The Sabres acquired Montour from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle and a 2019 first-round pick. Montour will meet the team in Toronto but won't make his franchise debut until the Sabres visit the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday night, according to coach Phil Housley.

Housley said he expects Montour to fit well into the Sabres' system, which utilizes a five-man cycle in the offensive zone and calls for defensemen to join the rush. The 24 year old led Anaheim defensemen with 57 points (14+43) and 286 shots in 142 games since the start of last season.

"He plays the game the way we want to play," Housley said. "He's a highly skilled, puck moving defenseman that can join the rush, and that's the way we want to play. It's going to be a great fit for our team."

Read more about Montour and his offensive abilities [here](#).

The Sabres have only faced Montour four times over the past two seasons, but that short sample was enough for the defenseman to make an impression on his new teammates.

"He's a really good skater," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said. "Obviously, he's really good with the puck. We only play him a few times a year but he's a guy who plays fast, he can skate with it, he makes a lot of big plays. It's a big addition for our team. We're excited to have him."

"I'm excited," Kyle Okposo added. "Good, young right-handed defenseman. I think he can help our team. We're definitely excited to have him. I know he's a competitive guy from what I hear."

The team also announced Montour will become the first player in Sabres history to wear No. 62. He wore No. 26 in Anaheim, which belongs to fellow defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

Okposo to return to lineup in Toronto

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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TORONTO - Kyle Okposo will be back in the lineup for the Buffalo Sabres when they play the Toronto Maple Leafs tonight at Scotiabank Arena. The forward has missed four games since sustaining a concussion during a fight with New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo on Feb. 15.

Carter Hutton will be in net for the Sabres, while newly acquired defenseman Brandon Montour is traveling to Toronto but will wait until the team's game in Philadelphia on Tuesday to make his franchise debut. The rest of the lineup will be game-time decisions, with the NHL's Trade Deadline coming up at 3 p.m.

Okposo admitted to initial concerns about his well-being, given his history with head injuries. He spent time in Neuro Surgical ICU at Buffalo General after sustaining a concussion late in the 2016-17 season, then missed three games with another concussion in March of last season.

That said, Okposo affirmed that he felt OK while skating on his own in recent days.

"I think there's a physiological component to it, too," he said. "You get hit and obviously I know my history more than anybody. There's definitely that component of, 'Am I OK?' And then you start second guessing. You just got to find a balance.

"You've got to really be in tune with your body and your mind and be really honest with yourself and how you feel. I feel great."

Next home game: Friday vs. Pittsburgh

Okposo skated on a line with Tage Thompson and Vladimir Sobotka this morning. He'd tallied three goals in 10 games prior to his injury.

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.

Scouting the Maple Leafs

It will be the second of four meetings between the cross-border rivals, with the Sabres and Maple Leafs set to meet again in Toronto on Saturday. The Maple Leafs won the first matchup in overtime, a back-and-forth affair in Buffalo on Dec. 5 in which Jack Eichel and Auston Matthews each tallied two goals.

The Maple Leafs rank fourth in the NHL with an average of 3.54 goals per game, but the Sabres can lean on strong performances in their last two games against high-powered offenses in the Tampa Bay Lightning and Washington Capitals. The Sabres took the first-place Lightning to a shootout on Thursday, then earned a 5-2 win over the Capitals on Saturday.

"I like how we're establishing our forecheck," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "Once we do that and make contact, it leads to good, quality offensive zone time so that's going to be critical.

"... We're trying to get the puck up quick and get back on the attack and create that three-quarter ice game. When we do that, we apply pressure."

Frederik Andersen is expected to start in net for Toronto.

Numbers to know

13 - The rivalry has brought out the best in Eichel, who has 13 points (8+5) in 10 career games against the Maple Leafs. He scored a pair of goals in the last meeting between the two teams on Dec. 5.

"It's an exciting game," Eichel said. "It's always very emotional and you never need any help getting up for them. I know we enjoy playing them, they enjoy playing us, so that shouldn't be any different tonight."

21.9 - The Maple Leafs rank 10th on the power play at 21.9 percent. Matthews is tied for eighth in the league with 11 power-play goals.

.930 - That's Hutton's save percentage in three career games against the Maple Leafs, in which he's 3-0-0 with a 1.99 goals-against average. The goaltender is coming off a 31-save outing in the win over the Capitals on Saturday.

Lines at morning skate

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 23 Sam Reinhart
72 Tage Thompson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 21 Kyle Okposo
20 Scott Wilson - 22 Johan Larsson - 28 Zemgus Girgensons

Extra: 37 Casey Mittelstadt (illness), 65 Danny O'Regan

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 48 Matt Hunwick
6 Marco Scandella (upper body) - 8 Casey Nelson