



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Casey Nelson takes a hit and keeps on going in Amerks' conditioning assignment

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2019

ROCHESTER – Casey Nelson couldn't even finish one shift Friday. Just 39 seconds into the defenseman's American Hockey League conditioning assignment, Springfield's Dryden Hunt checked him from behind, knocking his throat into the dasher board.

"Not how you want to start off," Nelson said after the Americans throttled the Thunderbirds 7-1 in Blue Cross Arena. "It woke me up a little bit."

After spending a few minutes in the dressing room, Nelson, 26, returned and kept taking his regular shift beside Brendan Guhle.

Nelson hadn't played since suffering an upper-body injury with the Sabres on Dec. 4.

Waiting 66 days for some game action – "Very antsy," he acknowledged – was difficult.

"I've been out for two months," Nelson said. "It feels like years."

Nelson said his first couple of shifts "felt a little weird."

"But it's definitely coming back pretty quick," said Nelson, who has compiled one goal and five points in 22 outings with the Sabres this season.

Nelson said his conditioning stint will likely be reevaluated after a few games. The Amerks play a road game against the Utica Comets on Saturday.

"He played very well for his first game," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said.

Of course, having played 98 games with the Amerks over the past two seasons, the 6-foot-2, 185-pound Nelson knows the AHL well.

"Very physical, a lot of speed," he said. "A little less structure."

He added: "It's a tough league to come in."

The Amerks made Friday's victory, their 29th this season, look easy.

Winger Victor Olofsson recorded his first hat trick as a professional and added an assist. The Swede, who possesses a lethal shot, scored an even-strength, power-play and short-handed goal.

"He's a game-breaker," Taylor said. "He's one of those guys that loves to score, which is hard these days to find. Guys don't like shooting the puck. He loves shooting the puck and he's good at it."

Olofsson's center, Rasmus Asplund, scored a rare five-on-three short-handed goal in the third period.

The Amerks have a season-long 10-game point streak.

A lower-body injury sidelined Amerks winger Alexander Nylander for the second consecutive game.

Sam Reinhart, Phil Housley clarify comments from Sabres' loss

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2019

Instead of looking ahead to a Saturday matinee against the Detroit Red Wings, the Buffalo Sabres spent Friday afternoon cleaning up the aftermath from a 6-5 overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes.

Sam Reinhart and Phil Housley each arrived for practice knowing reporters would ask them to clarify their postgame comments from Thursday, when Reinhart seemed to blame goaltending for the team's struggles and Housley, in response to a Buffalo News reporter asking if the defensemen were good enough, said: "That's Jason's job," referring to General Manager Jason Botterill.

Reinhart and Housley backtracked on those remarks Friday. First, following a 30-minute practice in HarborCenter, Reinhart said he misspoke at the beginning of his postgame interview and texted both goalies – Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton – to apologize.

Then, Housley addressed the elephant in the room before a reporter could even ask a question.

"For the record, I misunderstood a question yesterday," Housley said. "I took it as if there were any players coming up from Rochester and that's Jason's job. ... Jason and I talk on a day-to-day basis about our team, but I have total faith in our D core that they can get the job done. They've proven it in the past. They've put us in this position, and we're going to correct the mistakes."

The scene inside the home dressing room was unusual Thursday night. Jack Eichel, whose failure to hit the net led to the eventual game-winning breakaway goal, was fuming and shouldered the blame. Evan Rodrigues, typically chipper no matter the result, was irritated.

After all, the Sabres (26-20-7) were tied with Carolina in the Eastern Conference standings and ended the night four points out of the second wild-card playoff spot. Reinhart's comments received the most attention on social media.

The 23-year-old spoke glowingly of Ullmark and Hutton following a 5-4 shootout win over Minnesota on Tuesday night, and five of the Hurricanes' six goals were scored close to the net. Ullmark made a number of highlight-reel saves this week alone, including his Hasek-esque blocker save against Carolina. So, it seemed unusual for a prominent player to point the finger at goaltending.

"Too many mistakes. We can't expect to win hockey games, 6-5, 7-6," Reinhart said following Thursday's loss. "We need more from our goalies and we need it from the start of hockey games. It's frustrating."

Just like the goals against, questions piling up for Sabres

Reinhart was sitting on his couch hours later when Chris Bandura, the team's vice president of media relations, informed him that the postgame answer was being perceived negatively on social media. Reinhart said it was not until he watched the interview again that he realized he misspoke.

"At first I was kind of rattled thinking that something I said was kind of taken the wrong way," Reinhart explained. "Then I watched it again and it came off the wrong way, so that's on me. That's not what I meant at all. ... I was trying to say we need more for our goalies. It doesn't take a hockey genius to know those have been our two best guys all year. So I think that's on me. I was lost in translation. I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all. I was trying to be harder on the guys skating around the ice to come back and defend more."

Hutton and Ullmark said they were unaware of the situation until Reinhart texted them.

"He texted me or whatever. I didn't really care," Hutton said. "He said it came out the way it wasn't supposed to or something, but I'm not really too worried. I try to not worry about the Twitter eggs and whatever's out there."

"I don't know how many times I accidentally misspoke when I've done interviews here or back home," Ullmark said. "It's tough, especially after a loss like that. You want to say one thing and it comes out the other way. We're all good."

The Sabres have won only three of their past 10 games and have allowed the second-most goals in the NHL during that span. They have surrendered four or more goals in eight of those games. Hutton has been pulled early in two of his past three starts, and Ullmark has an .871 save percentage over his last five games.

Buffalo also has the fourth-fewest points in the NHL (23) since its 10-game winning streak ended in Tampa Bay on Nov. 29. While the Sabres' offense has surged over the past 10 games, their defense continues to struggle.

Entering Friday's lone NHL game, they had the fourth-most shots on goal and 15th-most shots against during that span. Yet, this was only the second time since 1995 the Sabres allowed 45 goals over a 10-game stretch. They are allowing too many quality chances around their goalies.

Those postgame comments from Reinhart and Housley were initially perceived on social media as possible discord within the organization, yet the very idea seemed preposterous to defenseman Zach Bogosian.

"People can say whatever to try to disrupt things, but we have a good grasp on our relationship in here and who we are as a group," Bogosian said. "The personal relationships we've built off the ice, those are bonds that will never be broken. I think we just have to do it for each other in here. Make sure we're playing the right way and go from there."

The Sabres have back-to-back matinee weekend games in KeyBank Center, beginning at 1 p.m. Saturday against Detroit. Housley said Hutton and Ullmark will likely each receive a start, and there could be other lineup changes. The team met Friday morning and had an extensive film session to review the breakdowns from the Carolina loss.

Housley said their focus was directed on the ice, rather than what was said to reporters.

"The emotions run high," Housley continued. "There were things said in the locker room after the game that were positive towards that and what we need to do to get better. ... I think Sam did a great job calling our goalies and explaining what it meant. Sam, if you know him, he's not that type of person. Again, it was an emotional game. Sometimes those things come out the wrong way."

'Sandpaper guy' Doug Janik reflects on his unexpected playoff run with Sabres

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2019

Longtime Sabres beat writer Bill Hoppe of BuffaloHockeyBeat.com will be writing about Sabres prospects, the Rochester Americans and related topics this season.

Days before the Sabres began what would quickly become one of the most memorable Stanley Cup playoff runs in franchise history, they added depth to their blue line.

On April 20, 2006, the Sabres recalled Doug Janik to practice as their eighth defenseman after the Rochester Americans' season ended.

Only long-established Sabres fans probably knew much about Janik, who will be inducted into the Amerks Hall of Fame on Friday along with forward Steve Langdon.

At that point, five seasons into his pro career, the former second-round pick had only played 10 NHL games, the last coming more than two years earlier.

But 32 days after getting summoned, a stunning run of injuries forced Janik into regular duty during the Eastern Conference final.

Then, in Game 7 against the Carolina Hurricanes, Janik scored a critical goal – his first in the NHL – in his last appearance with the Sabres.

"Scored a huge goal," said former Sabres defenseman Nathan Paetsch. "I mean, if we had won that game, it probably would've been one of the biggest goals in franchise history."

A nostalgic-sounding Janik kept rattling off names during a phone conversation earlier this week.

"Chris Drury, Danny Briere, Mike Grier," said Janik, who's in his third season as an assistant coach with his hometown Springfield Thunderbirds, the Amerks' opponent Friday.

Those players, of course, comprised some of the Sabres' veteran core in 2005-06. Janik grew up and developed with the younger group – Ryan Miller, Jason Pominville, Thomas Vanek and others – that spent time together in Rochester.

"Amazing guy, well-loved by his teammates, tough player," Briere said. "He was one of those sandpaper guys that brings a lot of intangibles to the table."

Some old friends from those days have reached out to Janik, who played five seasons and 396 games with the Amerks, to congratulate him on his induction.

"All of us talk about how that's some of the funnest times we've had in our lives playing hockey," Janik said of his time in Rochester. "We were all young kids who had come in within one, two, three years of each other, kind of grew up together as people, young professionals."

"You remember the playoff runs, stuff like that. But more you remember the time in the locker room. I don't think we had a practice day all year where somebody wasn't playing a practical joke on someone."

The closeness that group developed transferred to Buffalo, where the upstart Sabres roared out of the lockout in 2005, morphing into one of the NHL's slickest teams.

The genesis of the 2006 Cup run started years earlier in Rochester. By late in the 2002-03 season, Janik said he knew the Sabres possessed a special bunch in the AHL.

In 2003-04, the Amerks reached the Western Conference final.

"That year and that playoff run, a lot of us really grew up as hockey players," Janik said.

A year later during the NHL lockout, a loaded Amerks squad earned a league-high 112 points and won a playoff round.

"Guys were playing a lot of minutes, where ... had they been up in the NHL, they wouldn't have been playing as big of a role," Janik said.

But when many of those players graduated when the NHL resumed play in 2005, Janik stayed in Rochester.

Dmitri Kalinin left the blue line first, suffering a season-ending ankle injury two games into the Sabres' second-round series against the Ottawa Senators.

Rory Fitzpatrick slid into the lineup, leaving Janik as the top spare.

Sabres defensemen kept dropping at an alarming rate. After Teppo Numminen suffered a hip flexor in Game 2 of the Eastern Conference final, Janik played his first NHL game since Feb. 18, 2004.

Henrik Tallinder broke an arm the next game, pressing Jeff Jillson, who had played two regular-season NHL contests, into action.

"There was a group of us that put a lot of work in so that if we did have to step in and play after not playing for a few weeks, our conditioning was there, we were game sharp," Janik said. "It's just a matter of being mentally tough, having some confidence, belief in yourself that you could go in and play at that level."

Janik, meanwhile, was forming a solid tandem with Fitzpatrick as the heated series progressed.

"I remember how well those guys coming up were playing and helping us out," Briere said of the newcomers. "I mean, we're in the conference final and they're still giving us a chance. ... You got to tip your hat for them to be ready to play in that situation after barely playing during the regular season with the big team. That was very impressive."

Then, the day after the Sabres' thrilling 2-1 overtime victory pushed the conference final back to Carolina for a decisive Game 7, word began spreading Jay McKee had suffered an infection in his leg, leaving Brian Campbell and Toni Lydman as the only healthy regulars.

Paetsch, who had one game of NHL experience, would have to dress. The neophyte had been rehabbing from a high ankle sprain and hadn't played in 62 days.

"It was bizarre, just one after another," Paetsch said of the injuries.

Janik still vividly remembers the goal he scored with a trip to the Stanley Cup final on the line on June 1, 2006, in the raucous RBC Center.

With the Sabres trailing 1-0 late in the second period, Jochen Hecht won an offensive-zone draw in the right circle on a four-on-four. Ales Kotalik backhanded the puck to Janik, who quickly unleashed a slap shot at the near point.

A screened Cam Ward tried to spot the puck through traffic by looking to his right, but it sailed by his left side at 15:50, tying the game.

"I just kind of ... took a slap shot and fortunately it went in," Janik said.

Briere said he remembers laughing and "being ecstatic on the bench."

"I still remember the way he picked up the puck and put it on net from the blue line," Briere said. "I ... thought that was a big-time play to come up like that."

Four minutes later, Hecht put the Sabres up 2-1.

The rest of the story is well-known. The Sabres blew the lead, allowing three third-period goals and missing out on a date with the Edmonton Oilers, who would lose to the Hurricanes in seven games.

If the Sabres had triumphed, Janik's goal, one of four he scored over 196 NHL appearances, would probably be famous.

"It was a heck of a first goal," said Janik, who signed with the Tampa Bay Lightning weeks later. "It's almost bittersweet because it's your first NHL goal, but you're one game away from the Stanley Cup finals and you don't get there. I think kind of the disappointment in the loss outweighs anything."

Sabres Notebook: Casey Nelson sent to Rochester for conditioning

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2019

Casey Nelson is one step closer to possibly returning to the Buffalo Sabres' lineup. Nelson, a 26-year-old defenseman, began a conditioning assignment with Rochester on Friday.

Nelson, who has missed the past 24 games with an upper-body injury, was available to play for the Amerks Friday night against Springfield and can appear in up to three AHL games before the Sabres must add him to their active roster. The other option is to try to permanently send him to Rochester, though Nelson would have to pass through waivers.

The Sabres will likely have nine healthy defensemen upon Nelson's return, and they are unlikely to risk losing him to another team. After all, Nelson is right-handed and was having a strong season prior to suffering the injury in a loss to Toronto on Dec. 4.

Nelson had one goal among six points with a plus-6 rating in 22 games for the Sabres. He may have an opportunity to help them following this assignment given the team's defensive struggles. Matt Hunwick and Nathan Beaulieu, whom have been healthy scratches for much of the past month, could be back in the lineup in one of the two maintee weekend games.

The Sabres, like most teams around the NHL, are also low on right-handed defensemen. Hunwick, Beaulieu, Lawrence Pilut, Jake McCabe, Marco Scandella and Rasmus Dahlin are all left-handed. The exceptions are Nelson, Zach Bogosian and Rasmus Ristolainen. It is unlikely Nelson would go unclaimed on waivers.

Nelson began practicing with the Sabres following the All-Star break on Jan. 27, but he estimated that he had been skating for "weeks" with rehab and development coach Dennis Miller.

"Control what you can control. ... You just keep your head down," Nelson said following his first practice with the team. "You just have to get better every day and when your name gets called you have to go out and play. That's about all you can control."

Housley kept his forward lines the same during Friday's practice, with two exceptions.

Tage Thompson, who was a healthy scratch in Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina, skated on the third line with C.J. Smith skating as the extra forward. Kyle Okposo was bumped down to the fourth line, and Vladimir Sobotka was elevated to play with Thompson and Evan Rodrigues.

Smith, who has two goals in his past three games with the Sabres, had one shot on goal in 10 minutes, one second against the Hurricanes.

The two men on the Sabres' new-look top defensive pairing are expected to each achieve a milestone Saturday against Detroit. Ristolainen and Scandella will be playing in their 400th and 500th career NHL games, respectively. The loss to Carolina was Bogosian's 600th career game.

"You don't really think about it but as you're coming up to that number, you do realize the years are flying by when you're having fun and doing something you love," Scandella said. "Some of my friends were calling me the other day reminding me and one said, 'Do you realize what 500 games is? What it means?' It's pretty cool."

The Sabres will host the Red Wings on Saturday at 1 p.m. in KeyBank Center. The Red Wings have the third-fewest points (49) in the Eastern Conference and had their three-game winning streak snapped with a 4-3 home loss to Vegas on Thursday night. Buffalo defeated Detroit in a shootout, 3-2, at Little Caesars Arena to stretch its winning streak to nine on Nov. 24, and the Sabres lead the series, 6-3, over the past three seasons.

"It's hard to say how we'll respond because tomorrow is not now," Linus Ullmark said Friday. "It's a big game. It's a conference game. We have to be sharp."

Red Wings winger Thomas Vanek, who played for the Sabres from 2005 to 2013, has a point in each of his last three games and nine points in his last eight games. He ranks fifth in Sabres franchise history with 254 goals.

Sabres' Housley and Reinhart explain their post-game comments

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 8, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - During the Sabres post-game show on Thursday, Phil Housley was asked about if there needed to be changes on his defense. He answered by saying that was Jason Botterill's job.

Housley starting off his media time on Friday saying he misunderstood what was being asked of him, "I misunderstood a question yesterday. I took it as if there was any players coming up from Rochester and that's Jason's job. That's what I meant about that.

"Jason and I talk on a day-to-day basis about our team, but I have total faith in our D-core that they can get the job done. They've proven it in the past, they put us in this position and we're going to correct the mistakes."

If Saturday's lineup is like Friday's practice, Nate Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick will go into the lineup for Jake McCabe and Lawrence Pilut.

Sam Reinhart also wanted to make a statement about his comments after Thursday's game. Reinhart said they needed more from the goalies. On Friday, Reinhart wanted to set the record straight, "I got a call last night about what I said and at first I was rattled thinking something I said was taken the wrong way, then I watched it again and it came off the wrong way, so that's on me, that's not what I meant at all.

"I think follow through the interview a little bit, near the end I'm saying we need to all come back and defend more. I was trying to say we need more for our goalies."

Reinhart believes they've gotten good goaltending from Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton. He said, "It doesn't take a genius to know they've been our two best guys all year, so I think that's on me, I was lost in translation and I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all."

They've been working with Reinhart to be better with the media because in his first four seasons, he's been at times condescending and surly. There has definitely been an improvement which also comes with maturity. He said, "If you guys look at how I handle myself in the media, I'm probably the most boring guy ever, so that's on me. I sent our goalies a text last night just to warn them what might be coming out today and if you look at Linus, he's already one of the best in the world and the sky's the limit for him."

Ullmark and Hutton will split the two weekend games. Hutton said he's totally fine with his locker neighbor, "He texted me and I didn't really care. He said it came out the way it wasn't supposed to or something, but I'm not really too worried. I try not to worry about the twitter eggs or whatever is out there."

The Sabres only practiced for about 25 minutes at Harborcenter. The lines were:

Skinner Eichel Pominville

Sheary Mittelstadt Reinhart

Girgensons Larsson Okposo

Sobotka Rodrigues Thompson

Smith

Scandella Ristolainen

Dahlin Bogosian

Beaulieu Hunwick

Pilut McCabe

Buffalo hosts Detroit on Saturday and Winnipeg on Sunday. Brian Koziol will have Saturday's pre-game starting at noon when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Sam Reinhart and Kyle Okposo.

In midst of up-and-down stretch, Sabres find a positive in Evan Rodrigues' scoring spike

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

February 8, 2019

Making it to the NHL is hard. Turning it into a long-lasting career is even harder, especially when a player isn't drafted. Add to that an undersized frame, and it's impressive that Evan Rodrigues finding himself in a steady role for the Sabres less than four years later.

The 5-foot-10, 176-pound Toronto native may appear smaller than that on the ice, but after four years at Boston University, the last of which he was linemates with Sabres teammate and captain Jack Eichel, then-Buffalo GM Tim Murray took a swing and signed him in April 2015. After splitting time between Rochester and Buffalo two seasons ago and struggling with an early-season injury last year, Rodrigues is sticking around Buffalo this season and even starting to thrive.

"I think being undrafted you don't really get the opportunities someone who is (drafted) gets, so you feel you continuously have to work yourself up the lineup, work yourself starting in the 'A' and work yourself up the lineup there and finally get a shot and you're playing fourth line," Rodrigues said. "You just have to continuously prove yourself and continuously show people you have what it takes to be a productive player in this league. It's a grind, but it's something I've embraced."

If effort were something that could be measured, Rodrigues would continually be at the top of the list. Being consistent is another thing that's helped him, and while he's been a regular in the lineup, his linemates have varied throughout the season. In the past week, he's been the right wing on a line with Conor Sheary and Casey Mittelstadt as well as the center between C.J. Smith and Sam Reinhart or Kyle Okposo. He'll likely center Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson, but as with all the lines, they're subject to change. Those variations kept Rodrigues ready for anything even when he felt his game wasn't quite there.

"I think maybe earlier on in the year when I wasn't scoring I tried to really focus in defensively. Maybe a little bit too much where I wasn't making the plays that I knew I could make because I didn't want to make a mistake," Rodrigues said. "I felt like ... my confidence wasn't where I needed it to be to be an effective player, and that started to come throughout the year. I've continuously told myself I not only have the ability to not only play in this league but make an impact. It's nice that things are finally starting to turn for me and I can finally be the player I know I can be."

When a player works as hard as Rodrigues has to get to this level, taking a shift or two off could put him in the press box for an extended stay or land him on waivers. Although he's been in more games than not this season, he still found himself out of the lineup a few times. No player is immune from mistakes, but a player in Rodrigues' situation knows the miscues can't happen often and he needs to shake them off when they do.

"You know it's a very fine line when you're in that position," Rodrigues said. "It sucks. It sucks being there and down deep you know you're better than you're playing and you can produce more than what you're producing. You get a little frustrated because I knew I was better than what I was showing. But at the same time, you've got to stay in the lineup or you'll never get that chance so I tried to do all the little things right and be really good defensively. It's nice that it finally turned for me."

In the past eight games, Rodrigues has six goals and an assist. After putting up 25 points in 48 games last season, he has 20 points in 47 already this year. The scoring isn't at the prolific level it was at BU, but on a team that's desperately needed scoring from players not named Eichel, Reinhart or Jeff Skinner, it's been a big help even if the wins haven't come.

"I think anytime you get on a little bit of a run your confidence runs high, and his confidence is at an all-time high right now," coach Phil Housley said. "He's just very poised with the puck. You look at the power-play goal (against Carolina), he could've shot that right way and he just corrals it and puts it in the net. I really like the speed he's bringing to the game, the way he's attacking it through the neutral zone, even off the rush. It's great to see him contribute."

It's not as if professional players need role models in the room, but a player who grinds like Rodrigues does certainly gets noticed.

"He works extremely hard, I think that's pretty obvious to anyone that watches the game," Thompson said. "You can just see how hard he works, he's solid in the 'D' zone, he's willing to block shots, he takes pride in the defensive side of the game. On the flip side of that, he's got a lot of skill and when he gets his opportunities he makes great plays and great passes. He's been hot lately and he's feeling it right now."

Sam Reinhart is another player with a high hockey IQ. Even though Rodrigues might not have the hardest shot or be the fastest skater on the team, having the know-how to make things work is an intangible that isn't lost among his peers.

"I think just the way he thinks the game; he does everything well, really. Every opportunity I get to play with him I really enjoy," Reinhart said. "He thinks the game so well, he's got a good shot, he's quick. He's really got the whole package."

"Obviously, you look at something like the player Jack is, and it's unbelievable playing with him and playing with Roger it's kind of got that feel as well. You don't really need to change too much because, and I'm not comparing the two of them by any means, but just the way they think the game. It's nice having that through the lineup for sure."

Sam Reinhart owns up

After the 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina, Sam Reinhart, like most in the Sabres' locker room, was frustrated about the loss and let his feelings get the better of him. On Friday, he spoke up and clarified what he was trying to say in the heat of the moment.

"At first, I was rattled thinking that something I said was kind of taken the wrong way. Then I watched it again and it came off the wrong way, so that's on me. That's not what I meant at all," Reinhart said. "I think if you follow through the interview a little bit and – obviously, I was frustrated – but I think if you follow around in the interview near the end, I'm saying we all need to come back and defend more. I was trying to say we need more for our goalies. It doesn't take a hockey genius to know those have been our two best guys all year. So I think that's on me. I was lost in translation. I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all. I was trying to be harder on the guys skating around the ice to come back and defend more."

It's not Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson in Tokyo, but the mea culpa from Reinhart helped lower the temperature around the team a bit. Reinhart said he texted Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark last night to give them a heads-up about what he said and what might come their way regarding his comments, but he made it clear he supports his teammates.

"You look at Linus, and in my opinion he's already one of the best in the world and sky's still the limit for him," Reinhart said. "I'm excited to see what he does on a daily basis. I think we've set a record on backdoor saves this year already. And Hutts, I see him all day standing next to him, so I'll say it to his face if I need to."

Sabres clarify comments following tough loss

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 8, 2019

BUFFALO – Calm down, everyone. Sam Reinhart said he simply misspoke following Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss. The winger never meant to call out the performances of Sabres goalies Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark.

Reinhart issued a mea culpa Friday, saying when he learned how his comments were being construed on Twitter, he became rattled thinking his words came off the wrong way.

"That's not what I meant at all," Reinhart said after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's tilt against the Detroit Red Wings inside KeyBank Center.

Following the emotional setback to the Carolina Hurricanes, Reinhart said the Sabres, whose defense has become alarmingly bad, "can't expect to win hockey games 6-5, 7-6."

"We need more from our goalies and we need it from the start of hockey games," Reinhart said Thursday. "It's frustrating."

The Sabres repeatedly hung Ullmark out to dry Thursday.

On Friday, Reinhart, 23, said the rest of the interview showcased his true feelings.

"Near the end, I'm saying we all need to come back and defend more," Reinhart said. "I was trying to say we need more for our goalies. I think it doesn't take a hockey genius to know they've been our two best guys all year. So I think that's on me. I was lost in translation.

"I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all; I was trying to be hard on the guys skating around the ice to come back and defend more. If you guys look at the way I handle myself in the media, I'm probably the most boring guy ever that you guys have come across."

Reinhart said he sent the goalies a text message warning them about his comments. He said the team has already laughed about it.

"Linus, in my opinion, he's already one of the best in the world and the sky's still the limit for him," Reinhart said. "I'm excited to see what he does on a daily basis. I think we've set a record for the amount of backdoor saves this year already."

Reinhart wasn't the only person clarifying his comments Friday.

Coach Phil Housley said he misunderstood a question – he was asked if the Sabres' current defense corps can keep playing – following Thursday's contest. Housley replied by saying it was general manager Jason Botterill's job.

"I took it as are there any players coming up from Rochester and that's Jason's job," Housley said Friday. "That's what I meant by that. Jason and I talk on a day-to-day basis about our team.

"But I have total faith in our D corps that they can get the job done. They've proven it in the past, they put us in this position and we're going to correct the mistake."

Having allowed a whopping 45 goals over the last 10 games, the mistakes have been rampant. No wonder the Sabres are 3-6-1 over that stretch. They've looked nothing like the team that consistently locked down early in the season.

For weeks, opponents have been exploiting the Sabres around their own net.

"We're leaving the front of our net exposed, whether it's our D leaving or our wingers not coming back when it's in that trapezoid, where we can protect that," Housley said. "One, yeah, we've got to tie up and box out better, especially the sticks. But a lot of it's just positional. It's not just all our D, it's a five-man unit out there communicating and getting things sorted out quickly because things happen fast."

At least the Sabres are piling up goals. Having scored 33 times over the last 10 contests, their offense is humming thanks to some consistent secondary scoring.

"We've done a great job with the puck," Housley said. "And I've said it before, we're creating. We're getting enough chances. We out-chanced (Carolina). We out-chanced Minnesota (Tuesday). The things that we're doing with the puck are good. I really like our shot mentality. I like that we're getting to zone one (the net) better. You can see two, maybe three guys in front of the net. ..."

"There are just critical mistakes that we can't afford to happen at this time. But we can continue to focus on the offensive side of our game. When the puck gets turned over, we've got to have a switch now and defend better."

—

Sabres winger Tage Thompson practiced beside center Evan Rodrigues and Vladimir Sobotka on Friday, meaning he will likely return against the Red Wings.

Housley hinted Thompson would likely only sit out one game. Rookie winger C.J. Smith appeared to be the odd forward out.

Housley, Reinhart walk-back postgame comments following 6-5 OT loss to Carolina

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

February 8, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Following their 6-5 overtime to the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday night, frustration boiled over as both head coach Phil Housley and forward Sam Reinhart seemingly took shots at the organization.

When asked about surrendering 17 goals in their last three games and whether the defensive corps is capable of playing, Housley responded with:

"That's Jason's job. Obviously, we're going to take a hard look at this game tonight and evaluate that tomorrow. But we're going to show it to them again. We're going to review it. I think it's important they see it and so they can hear what we're talkikng about. Because to me, those things are very fixable. The defensive part of our game, for the most part, our checking detail, coming back into our zone was really good. But again, it's in and around our net that we've got to take care of."

After allowing Carolina to score five of the six goals from within a few feet of their own crease, Reinhart seemed blunt in his assement with comments aimed at the netminders.

"Too many mistakes. We can't expect to win hockey games 6-5, 7-6. We need more from our goalies and we need it from the start of hockey games. It's frustrating."

Less than 24 hours after their pointed words, both the head coach and the forward walked-back those their comments before taking questions from the media following practice on Friday.

"Before we get started here, just for the record, I misunderstood a question yesterday," Housley said. "I took it as if there was any players coming up from Rochester, and that's Jason's job. That's what I mean about that.

"Jason and I talk on a day-to-day basis about our team, but I have total faith in our D-corps that they can get the job done. The've proven it in the past. They put us in this position and we're going to correct the mistakes. Obviously, we don't have a lot of practice time right now. We showed them and took a very hard look at it -- what we need to do to get better. So from that point of view, I just wanted to make that point."

Reinhart, who was notified by the Sabres' media relations department that his comments were taking off on Twitter, clarified what he said:

"I was just sitting on my couch and (Chris) Bandura gave me a call and told me Twitter was taking what I said and at first I was rattled thinking that something I said was kind of taken the wrong way. Then I watched it again and it come off the wrong way, so that's on me. That's not what I meant at all. I think if you follow through the interview a little bit, obviously I was frustrated, but I think if you following around the interview near the end I'm saying we all need to come back and defense more. I was trying to say we need more for our goales.

"It doesn't take a hockey genius to know those have been our two best guys all year. So, I think that's on me. I was lost in translation. I wasn't trying to be harder on them at all, I was tring to be harder on the guys skaing around the ice to come back and defend more."

Reinhart added he also sent text messages to both Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton to clarifiy his postgame comments.

The Sabres host the Detroit Red Wings and Winnipeg Jets on Saturday and Sunday at KeyBank Center.

Sam Reinhart and Phil Housley clarify their comments after Thursday's loss to Carolina

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

February 8, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Friday morning, Buffalo Sabres forward Sam Reinhart and head coach Phil Housley clarified comments they made Thursday night after the Sabres lost a 6-5 overtime decision to Carolina at the Key Bank Center.

Reinhart appeared to point the finger at the Sabres' goaltenders. He cleared that up by saying he meant that everyone need to do better for the goaltenders, who he said have been the Sabres top two players this season.

Housley said he misinterpreted a question and that's why he answered "That's Jason's job." Thinking he'd been asked if there was defensive help on the way from Rochester. Housley said he has complete faith in his defensive corp.

Reinhart and Housley both explained what they meant to say after Friday's practice session.

Reinhart: Goalie comment 'lost in translation'

TSN

February 8, 2019

said Friday that his comments in the wake of his team's 6-5 overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday night were not indicative of he feels about the team's goaltending.

Reinhart appeared to call out the team's goaltending after the Sabres erased a two-goal deficit in the final five minutes of Thursday's game to force overtime before Teuvo Teravainen scored on Linus Ullmark to hand the Sabres their seventh loss in the past 10 games.

"Too many mistakes," the Buffalo Sabres centre said. "We can't expect to win hockey games, 6-5, 7-6," Reinhart said. "We need more from our goalies and we need it from the start of hockey games. It's frustrating."

He said Friday that he chose the wrong words in attempting to call out the team for better defensive play.

"At first I was rattled thinking that something I said was kind of taken the wrong way. Then I watched it again and it came off the wrong way, so that's on me. That's not what I meant at all," Reinhart said, per the Buffalo News. "I think if you follow through the interview a little bit and - obviously, I was frustrated - but I think if you follow around in the interview near the end, I'm saying we all need to come back and defend more. I was trying to say we need more for our goalies. It doesn't take a hockey genius to know those have been our two best guys all year.

"So I think that's on me. It was lost in translation. I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all. I was trying to be harder on the guys skating around the ice to come back and defend more. I mean, if you guys look at the way I handle myself in the media, I'm probably the most boring guy ever that you guys have come across in your how many years here. That's on me, and that's not what I meant at all. But we're already joking around today, so we're all good.

"Like I said, it was lost in translation, and that's on me. That's not what I meant at all. I sent them a text last night just to warn them of what might be coming out today. That's not what was meant at all. You look at Linus [Ullmark], and in my opinion he's already one of the best in the world and sky's still the limit for him - I'm excited to see what he does. I think we've set a record on backdoor saves this year already. And [Carter Hutton] I see him all day standing next to him, so I'll say it to his face if I need to."

Ullmark gave up six goals on 30 shots on Thursday and the Sabres have conceded 17 goals over their past three games. The team has given up at least four goals in eight of the last 10 outings.

Reinhart's comments on Friday fell in line with those of winger Evan Rodrigues from after the loss.

"It's unacceptable," Rodrigues said. "You're not going to win games playing defence like that. We're scoring enough goals to win games but we're not defending. It's 50 games in. The learning is over. We just have to defend. You're not going to win giving up six goals. It's a valuable point but we should win that game. We gave them five easy ones."

Head coach Phil Housley also pointed out Thursday night that five of the Hurricanes goals on Thursday came from in tight.

"It's a choice you've got to make, protecting your own net and having respect for it," Housley said. "You look at the game and five of the six goals come right in front of our net. That's an area that players from the opposition should be very wary of going into. We've got to be tougher to play against. We've got to start pushing guys out."

When asked if his defensive corps in its current form was sufficient, Housley kicked the question upstairs.

"That's [general manager] Jason [Botterill]'s job," Housley said. "Obviously, we're going to take a hard look at this game tonight and evaluate that tomorrow, but we're going to show it to them again and review it."

After a red-hot start, the Sabres now sit on 59 points through 53 games and are fifth in the Atlantic Division. The team sits four points back of the Pittsburgh Penguins for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot. The Sabres host the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday in a matinee at the KeyBank Center.

Reinhart clearing things up after seemingly calling out goaltenders

By Matt Teague

The Score

February 8, 2019

Buffalo Sabres forward Sam Reinhart is clearing the air after seemingly criticizing his team's goaltenders after Thursday night's 6-5 defeat to the Carolina Hurricanes.

"That's not what I meant at all. ... I'm saying we all need to come back and defend more," Reinhart said according to The Athletic's John Vogl. "I was trying to say we need more for our goalies. It doesn't take a hockey genius to know those have been our two best guys all year."

Following the loss, a frustrated Reinhart appeared to blame the Sabres' goalies as the reason for them falling behind early in games and ultimately struggling to win the subsequent high-scoring affairs. However, the 23-year-old insists he was directing his frustration at the team's defense, not the goaltenders.

"I was lost in translation, I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all," Reinhart said. "I was trying to be harder on the guys skating around the ice to come back and defend more."

The Sabres have allowed four or more goals in four of their last five contests, and have won only five games since Christmas. Despite his comments, Reinhart claims the team is in good spirits.

"We're already joking around today, so we're all good," he said.

Sabres move forward following 'emotional loss' to Hurricanes

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 8, 2019

Following a loss to the Boston Bruins on opening night, Carter Hutton was a voice of reason in the Buffalo Sabres' dressing room.

The Sabres had lost 4-0, and their checking detail was big reason why. For those who had been around the team, it was a reminder of their last-place finish from a year ago. For Hutton, a newcomer and already a member of the Sabres' leadership group, it was what it was: one game in a season of 82.

"For me, it's pretty easy," Hutton said then. "It is what it is, it's no big deal. Whether we lost 10-0 or 1-0, it's just one game. We've just got to move on."

Hutton took the same approach on Friday, when the Sabres returned to practice following their 6-5 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes. It was an emotional game, one in which defensive miscues spoiled another strong offensive outing against a direct competitor in the standings.

Yet the Sabres goalie wasn't willing to look in any direction but forward when breaking down the reality for a young team that still sits just four points out of a playoff spot.

"I don't know, we got a point last night and won the last game," Hutton said. "I understand it hasn't been perfectly clean by any means, but the game's wide open. I think you look across the league, it's a lot of high-scoring games. It's just the way the league's trending.

"... I think we're learning by fire here. We've got a bunch of young guys who are learning how to play tough hockey games. I think a lot of players in this room have never really been in a playoff hunt for a lot of years. So, you kind of learn as you go here in that sense.

"Obviously, there are things we need to clean up but a lot of things we can control. There's a lot of good things in our game as well."

Sabres coach Phil Housley had a similar message as the Sabres got back to addressing the checking errors that have hampered them of late. They managed to outshoot the Hurricanes, 39-30, but the mistakes they did make proved costly.

Housley said they reviewed the film of Carolina's goals to show exactly where defensive breakdowns were occurring.

"We're chasing guys behind the net, the guy that's not a threat," Housley said. "We're leaving the front of our net exposed, whether it's our D leaving or our wingers not coming back when its in that trapezoid, where we can protect that.

"We've got to tie up and box out better, especially the sticks. But a lot of it's just positional. It's not just all our D, it's a five-man unit out there communicating and getting things sorted out quickly because things happen fast."

At the other end of the spectrum, the Sabres have scored 13 goals in their last three games. They were able to establish a consistent presence in front of Hurricanes goalie Curtis McElhinney on Friday, another area Housley has stressed this season.

With that has come secondary scoring. Evan Rodrigues has six goals in eight games. Casey Mittelstadt has six points (1+5) in that same span, while Sam Reinhart has contributed back-to-back two-point efforts since being moved off the top line in search of more scoring balance.

"We've done a great job with the puck," Housley said. "And I've said it before, we're creating. We're getting enough chances. We out-chanced that team last night. We out-chanced Minnesota. The things that we're doing

with the puck are good. I really like our shot mentality. I like that we're getting to zone one better. You can see two, maybe three guys in front of the net.

"... There are just critical mistakes that we can't afford to happen at this time. But we can continue to focus on the offensive side of our game. When the puck gets turned over, we've got to have a switch now and defend better."

The Sabres' next chance to apply those lessons comes on Saturday afternoon, when they host the Detroit Red Wings for the fourth game of their seven-game homestand.

"We need to do a better job in certain areas just like every team needs to do a better job in certain areas," Hutton said. "There's a lot of positives in this room. I think that's stuff we hold onto. Yeah, we need to clean things up and get better. We just keep moving forward.

"We play too many games to dwell on the past. We've just got to keep moving forward and keep getting better. We've got a young group in here and this is our group. We trust each other and we work hard for each other and that's all that matters. We just worry about what's in this room."

Reinhart clears the air

Reinhart was at home on his couch when he received a call from the Sabres' public relations department on Friday night, alerting him to a comment he made after the loss to the Hurricanes.

Here was the comment, which Reinhart gave when asked about loss postgame: "Too many mistakes. We can't expect to win hockey games 6-5, 7-6. We need more from our goalies and we need it from the start of hockey games. It's frustrating."

It wasn't until receiving that call and reviewing the audio from his interview that Reinhart realized what he said.

"At first, I was rattled thinking that something I said was taken the wrong way," Reinhart said after practice on Saturday. "I watched it again and it came off the wrong way. So that's on me. That's not what I meant at all.

"... I was trying to say we need for more our goalies. I think it doesn't take a hockey genius to know they've been our two best guys all year. So, I think that's on me. It was lost in translation. I wasn't trying to be hard on them at all; I was trying to be hard on the guys skating around the ice to come back and defend more."

Reinhart has been supportive of the Sabres' goalie tandem throughout the season, including after the team's win over Minnesota on Tuesday. "I think coming down the stretch especially, it seems like Linus and Hutts, every game we play they're making five or six big, big stops for us," he said that night.

Reinhart said he texted both Hutton and Linus Ullmark on Friday to explain the intention behind his comments.

"You look at Linus, in my opinion, he's already one of the best in the world and the sky's still the limit for him," Reinhart said. "I'm excited to see what he does on a daily basis."

Lines at practice

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

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

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

Sudbury coach on Luukkonen: 'He has a pro mentality'

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 8, 2019

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (second round, 2017) was granted a rare game off upon returning to his junior club in Sudbury after a gold medal run with Finland at the IIHF World Junior Championship in January.

His coach, longtime NHL forward Cory Stillman, shares what happened next.

"I asked when do you want to play?" Stillman said by phone on Thursday. "He's like, 'Now.' He's fit into our community. The fit here has been great. They chant his name and for a young kid, that's got to be something special."

Luukkonen's rookie season in the OHL has been a success by any measure. He leads the league in goals-against average (2.40), save percentage (.921) and wins (28). But one of the greatest strides in his development, according to Stillman, may be the workload he's taken on for the third-place Wolves.

Luukkonen has appeared in 37 games for Sudbury, in addition to the six he played for Finland at World Juniors. That number should only grow with 18 regular-season games remaining on the schedule and a likely playoff berth to follow. By comparison, he played 25 pro games in Finland last season.

"We play a lot of games here," Stillman said. "We play 68 games in a season. He's played in almost all of them. He knows he's going to play. Often, we play Wednesday, Friday, Sunday. He gets into a rhythm, he plays every other day which I think sometimes is a pro mentality.

"This year compared to last year, he knows he's a number one goalie. He knows he's going to start."

It's a job that he's embraced, by all accounts. Stillman said he's seen Luukkonen's confidence grow over the course of the season, something that was apparent in his performance at World Juniors. He stopped a Maxime Comtois penalty shot in overtime of the semifinal against Canada and a breakaway from Jack Hughes - the presumed No. 1 pick in this year's NHL Draft - in the Gold Medal Game vs. Team USA.

He has the physical tools, too. Says Stillman of Luukkonen's 6-foot-4, 196-pound frame: "If you look at the size of the NHL goalies, they're getting bigger and bigger. He fills the net. When he's on his knees, his shoulders are still above the crossbar."

Luukkonen is expected to begin next season in Rochester, but he's embraced his time in Sudbury. He's volunteered his spare time at a local Finnish retirement community. At the rink, Stillman says he's fit in as another one of the guys.

"I think you can see him growing," Stillman said. "He loves to win. He wants to compete. For me, watching a kid like this, he has a pro mentality. He wants to get to the NHL, and he wants to be the starting goalie."

Davidsson stays hot

Make it four points (3+1) in five games for Marcus Davidsson (second round, 2017), who tallied his seventh goal of the season in a 2-1 Djurgarden loss to Lulea on Saturday.

Davidsson found room at the backdoor to bury a crossing feed in the second period:

The third-year SHL forward now has 20 points (7+13) in 39 games, one shy of the career-high he established in the same amount of games last season.

BC advances to Beanpot final

Christopher Brown (sixth round, 2014) and Casey Fitzgerald (third round, 2016) will play for a Beanpot championship after Boston College won its semifinal matchup with Harvard, 2-1, on Monday.

The Beanpot is an annual tournament among four of Boston's Division I hockey programs: Boston College, Boston University, Harvard and Northeastern. Brown and Fitzgerald tallied two shots apiece in the win over Harvard.

Boston College will face Northeastern in the final next Monday at 7:30 p.m.