



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres looking to wipe out a pair of ugly streaks as Leafs come to town

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 19, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have a chance to get rid of a pair of illnesses Wednesday night in KeyBank Center.

They're sick of losing to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

And they're sick of not being able to win two games in a row for more than three months.

A pair of ugly streaks are at play here when the teams meet in what figures to be yet another quasi Leafs home game, with the building full of their fans.

"The games here against the Leafs are a lot of fun to play in," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said after practice Tuesday. "A lot of people from Toronto come down and I know we haven't beaten these guys in a while so I'm really looking forward to a great test."

Indeed, the Sabres have found no success against the Leafs in recent games. They're 0-2-1 this season and in danger of going winless in a season series against Toronto for the first time since 1987. And their current four-game losing streak against Toronto (0-3-1) is their longest since a five-gamer in 1972.

There's more. The Sabres are 19-4-2 in their last 25 home games against Toronto but have lost two straight. And get this: The Leafs have not won three in a row in Buffalo since winning the first six meetings in Memorial Auditorium during the first two seasons after the Sabres entered the NHL in 1970.

The Sabres suffered a 5-4 overtime loss to the Leafs here on Dec. 4, falling on an Auston Matthews' goal inside the final three seconds of the extra period. They endured 5-3 and 5-2 losses in Scotiabank Arena within the last three weeks, giving up goals in bunches in both games.

"The first game we played against them here I thought we played a really strong game," coach Phil Housley said. "It was an up-and-down game and we were aggressive, we were on the forecheck. The last two games we played, it was just a couple little mental lapses, two- and three-minute spans."

"It's definitely not a good feeling," added center Evan Rodrigues. "You don't like to lose to anyone, but especially those guys. We have a chance tomorrow to put that behind us, get a win and keep moving forward."

The Sabres are coming off Sunday's 4-3 shootout victory over St. Louis that snapped their seven-game losing streak. Thus, this is yet another chance to forge a winning streak, something Buffalo hasn't done since mid-December.

Incredibly, the Sabres are 0-10-1 in their last 11 attempts to string two wins together. They've gone 40 games without a winning streak, just shy of the franchise record of 44 set in 1971-72.

"That's just a stat that boggles my mind," Okposo said. "It's a tough one to hang your hat on. We want to finish strong here and this is a huge game."

"You can't really complain. We just haven't done it," Rodrigues said. "It's something you don't want to have be a thing but it is, so we have a chance to get rid of that."

When the Sabres hosted the Leafs in December, they were coming off a back-to-back the previous night in Nashville. So they were adding in travel and a time zone change. The Leafs will be following the same itinerary in this meeting, coming from Tuesday night's game with the Predators in Bridgestone Arena to the showdown in Buffalo.

"We had a hard game in Nashville the night before. ... It was a shame we came out on the losing end of it," Okposo said of the first matchup. "The two games up there haven't been great so we want to make sure we come out and have a great effort and get a win for our fans."

"You always want to jump on a team playing a back-to-back, especially with travel. I don't know what it is but it seems a lot of teams have come out flying, especially if they played the night before. Maybe later in the game you wear them down. We'll have to be ready."

Sabres Notebook: Nylander vs. Nylander, plus power play problems

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 19, 2019

For the second time in their careers, it will be Nylander vs. Nylander on Wednesday night in KeyBank Center. This time, the brothers on opposite sides of the Buffalo Sabres-Toronto Maple Leafs rivalry are coming into the game on good rolls.

Alexander Nylander has made clear progress in his four-game recall with the Sabres and posted his first career multipoint game in the NHL with two assists Sunday against St. Louis. Meanwhile, Toronto's William Nylander entered Tuesday's game in Nashville with five points (all assists) in his last three games, and was working on his first three-game point streak since signing late with the club in December as a restricted free agent.

The brothers met once previously, a 4-2 Leafs win here on April 3, 2017, that saw Toronto score three first-period goals in a 43-second span. Alex Nylander had no points in his NHL debut while William Nylander had one assist.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," Alexander Nylander said after practice Tuesday. "He's been in the league for a while now. I remember my first game didn't go as we wanted. Just hopefully we get the win against him for bragging rights."

William Nylander has just five goals and 17 assists for the Leafs in 44 games since he signed his six-year, \$41 million contract.

"It was tough for him in the beginning of the season, but he's playing better now and doing well," Alexander Nylander said. "I'm happy for him that he's got it going with his team and it's going to be a lot of fun to play against him."

"I was talking to him a bit (during his contract stalemate), not as much as I usually do, but he was with my family the whole time and he had all the support he needed. I kind of left him alone to do his thing but now that he's back over here, we talk every day again."

Alexander Nylander has been thriving on a line with Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues. They will skate as Buffalo's second unit again in this game.

"He's taking advantage of the opportunity," coach Phil Housley said of Nylander. "Each and every game he's seems to get better. His linemates are helping him out, they play a fast game. He's just getting more confident down low in the corner. He's driving on cycles, he's making plays up ice and he's using his speed."

Alex Nylander helps Sabres snap skid in 4-3 win over Blues

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The Sabres' power play has hit a massive rut of late, going 0-for-12 over the last six games and 1-for-17 over the last eight games. The Sabres have slipped to 18th in the NHL for the season at 18 percent and are 23th in the league in March at 10.5 percent.

"You have to simplify it," Housley said. "I think shot volume creates, shot mentality creates. We're just holding on to pucks, we're overpassing the puck. We've got to think about just getting pucks to the net and simplifying that part of the power play."

Housley agreed that the slump might have some players spooked about shooting.

"They just try to overhandle it, they try to make the perfect play," he said. "The more you handle the puck, it just gives the other team time to get into position more. We're not fooling anybody. We just got to move the puck quick, get it off to the flank area and start developing that."

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Based on practice Tuesday, it looks like the Sabres will keep the same lineup as in Sunday's win against St. Louis. That means forwards Jason Pominville and Scott Wilson and defenseman Matt Hunwick will be healthy scratches.

Pominville, who has 15 goals this season, is likely on the outside looking in despite good career numbers against the Leafs. He's on a six-game point streak against Toronto (4-3-7) and his 57 career points against them are his most against any NHL opponent.

Meanwhile, Jack Eichel's gaudy numbers against the Leafs are up to 15 points in 12 career games (10-5-15), and seven points in five home games (5-2-7). He's had a pair of two-goal games against Toronto this season.

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Now that his season is over with Barrie of the Ontario Hockey League, the Sabres have reassigned 2018 fourth-round pick Matej Pekar to the Rochester Americans.

But that doesn't necessarily mean Pekar is going to see any action the rest of the season or in the Calder Cup playoffs.

Pekar has not played for Barrie since Jan. 10 due to a broken collarbone and the trip to Rochester is likely just going to be a rehab assignment combined with a watch-and-learn mission for the young forward.

"We're pleased that Matej will be joining us in Rochester as part of continuing his development process," Sabres assistant general manager/Amerks GM Randy Sexton said in a statement. "He is coming off a long-term injury, so whether he plays games remains to be seen. More importantly, he'll have the opportunity to immerse himself in the pro hockey environment, which we believe is a critical component of any young player's development."

Pekar, 19, has 36 points in 33 games for Barrie (14-22-36). He compiled five three-point games and nine multipoint games in his first season of junior hockey.

Sabres assign rehabbing Matej Pekar to Amerks

By Mike Harrington

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March 19, 2019

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Pekar earned immediate notice here last June for his physical play in development camp against the likes of Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Dahlin, and even from taking a massive from Dahlin in a 3-on-3 drill that went viral.

Housley: Nylander has earned his ice time on the second line

WGR 550

March 19, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres broke their seven-game losing streak on Sunday with a 4-3 shootout win over the St. Louis Blues in front of an energized crowd at KeyBank Center.

While not mathematically eliminated just yet, Buffalo is far from playoff contention, sitting 13 points back of the final Wild Card spot in the Eastern Conference with 10 games remaining. With the Sabres likely missing the playoffs for the eighth consecutive season, the team is starting to give an extended look at some of their young players in the organization like 2016 first round pick Alex Nylander. The 21-year-old registered his first career multi-point game in the NHL on Sunday with two assists, and was playing on a line with Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary. Over the past three seasons, Nylander has scored one goal and registered four points in 11 career games with the Sabres.

Sabres head coach Phil Housley joined Howard Simon and Jeremy White on Tuesday morning to talk more on Nylander, as well as the recent struggles of goaltender Linus Ullmark, the possibility of other young players getting the call up from Rochester and more.

Here is some of what Housley had to say:

Housley on the progress of Alex Nylander:

"Right now, he's earned some ice time and he's been put on our second line with Rodrigues and Sheary. We're going to still give him an opportunity here. We really want to put him in a position to succeed and those decisions will be made as we move throughout the season here. It's going to be interesting how he responds to now having two to three pretty good games, how he continues to develop. That's what I'm looking for, to continue to show what he can bring to our team."

"I think he's stronger on the puck, he's getting in on the forecheck, making contact, he's getting his body over the puck and he can create in small spaces. He's just getting more comfortable being in those situations where he's a lot stronger now. He's using his feet now to attack the game, he's got tremendous speed when he really digs in and confidence exudes all of that talent coming out of him. In the tight games, we're going to need him to, obviously, create some offense for us. I just feel that he's using his speed a lot more right now."

Housley on possible plans for more call-ups from Rochester:

"[General manager Jason Botterill and I] continue to talk and have conversations about our players in Rochester. We'll make decisions on a day-to-day basis. Those conversations have been had, what type of player, what players we'd bring up, that's yet to be seen, but we're going to continue that conversation."

"It just all depends on where our team is at with injuries and opportunity. We're going to try to make some decisions here to get some guys some opportunity, depending on the way our team is playing. They're having a great season and we don't want to try to disrupt their chemistry and their team, but we need to get some players up here at the right time to give them an opportunity, give them some games."

Housley on the recent struggles of Linus Ullmark:

"Linus has done a really good job this year giving us an opportunity to win and I know he's played some really good hockey for us. I just think his last outing (against the Carolina Hurricanes) leaves a bad taste in your mouth because of the way the goals went in. For the most part, he's provided us with some good goaltending. A lot of it has to do with we haven't given him a lot of goal support and our margin of error is so slim that every play, every mistake is so important. For the most part, he's been covering up a lot of our mistakes. He's got to fight through it, that's part of his development, he's got to be mentally tough and he's going to get another opportunity coming up here."

Sabres' Dahlin is working to improve his one-time shot

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 19, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Many of you have mentioned to me that you've noticed one big flaw in Rasmus Dahlin's game. There aren't too many so if there is something he doesn't do well, it sticks out.

Dahlin has a tendency to mishit one-timers. He plays a lot in the right wing circle on the power play and he has missed many opportunities to blast that particular shot. I asked Dahlin if he wasn't asked to take a lot of one-time shots in Sweden and I was shocked by his answer, "I was never shooting one-timers, but now I realize how important it is, I'm working on it every day and of course you can't be good at things that you're doing the first time."

When players are setting up for a one-timer, the puck will come at them from different angles and different speeds. Dahlin said one of those two things messes him up at times, "When it comes like hard passes. Everyone passes the puck so much harder here.

"In practice, I feel like I can shoot it, but when it's game time, it's a fast game and pucks come fast and I just need to learn it and work on it this summer."

Dahlin needs to get the timing down, but he also thinks that the shot needs to be hard. The kid said, "I need to put on some strength on my arms and upper body, so I can shoot the puck."

Dahlin knows he has to get that skill down and watching the way he works, I have no doubt that he will. Dahlin said, "It's going to be a part of my game, to be a threat in the O-zone with a great one-timer, it's dangerous."

Dahlin has played 72 games in his first NHL season. He had only played 67 games total in his two years in the SHL, including just 41 last year. He has been working really hard to be able to get through the late grind in a NHL season, "To play a full season here, it's not easy, so I've learned small things that I have to do every day like last year I didn't really take care of my body the way I do this year. I realize how important it is to eat good, sleep well, stuff like that."

Dahlin likes being in Sweden and he will spend some of the summer at home, but he also realizes that if he wants to get better at hockey, he needs to be in Buffalo working with the strength and conditioning staff too, "Yes, I'll be here. 100-percent, and I of course will work hard in Sweden too, but I will come here and put in some work too."

Since the Sabres beat St. Louis, chances are pretty good that Jason Pominville will, once again, be a healthy scratch on Wednesday. The team wants to get a look at Alex Nylander and continue to give Tage Thompson ice time and Pominville gets that, "Everyone wants to play, I know I'm older, I still know I can play, but I'm sure they have their reasons, they want to see guys and I get that, I know where we're at and I've been around long enough to understand those situations."

Of course Pominville is angry, but being a former captain, he is never going to bring that into the room, "No, it's not good for me, it's not good for the group. I think I've been a part of trying to help this culture change and by not playing and coming in and sitting here and pouting is not going to do me any good, it's not going to do my teammates any good."

The Sabres have assigned 2018 fourth round pick Matej Pekar to the Amerks. Injuries have limited his time in Barrie of the OHL this season, scoring 14 goals and 22 assists for 36 points in 33 games. Since he hasn't played in over two months, it's not known if he'll get any games.

Goalie Carter Hutton adapting to Sabres, getting better results

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 19, 2019

BUFFALO – Earlier this season, goalie Carter Hutton reacted to the Sabres' struggles by trying to steal every game.

Hutton, 33, quickly learned overcompensating wouldn't work.

"I don't think you can really play that way," Hutton said Tuesday inside KeyBank Center. "I think I need to just control what I can. I think when I'm playing (like) that, just controlling what I can, I think that's when I'm at my best."

Hutton has adapted this season. Having spent most of his six-year career backstopping established teams, he was used to operating within a more structured game.

The Sabres, of course, often play loose defensively. So handling the bulk of their goaltending duties – he has played a career-high 44 times – has been a new and sometimes difficult experience.

"I feel like I've had to kind of change how I play a little bit compared to years past with an older, veteran defensive group," said Hutton, who will likely start Wednesday's home contest against the Toronto Maple Leafs. "I thought things were a little bit more predictable in years past for me. Where I thought this year, there's a lot of young guys and sometimes a little bit more breakdowns and a little bit more offensive chances, so I think you have to be a little more free reign with your game."

After enduring a rough stretch in which Linus Ullmark began outplaying him and earning more action, Hutton has started showcasing some of his early-season form.

Hutton looked solid throughout Sunday afternoon's 4-3 shootout win over his old team, the St. Louis Blues, making 30 saves. Given Ullmark's recent struggles, Hutton might be the Sabres' No. 1 goalie again over the final three weeks.

In his last 11 outings, Hutton has compiled a 2.92 goals-against average and a .912 save percentage. In 11 appearances before that stretch, Hutton posted a 3.56/.889.

"He's just got the attitude he's going to go back to where he was at the beginning of the season and doing what he can do best, control what he can control and stopping that first puck and not allowing that second and third opportunity," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I think he's just gotten comfortable. He went through a spell there where he was trying to do too much."

Overall this year, Hutton has compiled a 17-20-5 record with a 2.88 goals-against average and a .910 save percentage.

"I've played well," Hutton said. "I think, overall, it's been a pretty good year. I think you go as the team goes. There's a lot of things you can't control. I thought at times I was trying to do too much because we were struggling."

While the numbers don't back it up, Hutton believes his game has been stronger this season than a year ago, when his 2.09 goals-against average and .931 save percentage both led the NHL.

"There's a reason why I had like a .930 save percentage last year," Hutton said. "We didn't really give up as much, right? It was a much more predictable game."

That standout season earned him a three-year, \$8.25 million contract from the Sabres on July 1.

Hutton roared out of the gate, winning 12 of his first 18 appearances. He won eight contests during the Sabres' 10-game winning streak in November.

But Hutton doesn't believe wins, losses, goal-against average or save percentage truly illustrate how well a goalie has played.

"You have to look at deeper analytics, to be honest with you," Hutton said. "I don't know if you can judge it by a box score every night. You have to judge it by the quality of chances we give up. I think some nights it's been up and down. I think generally for the most part I give this team a chance to win when I'm in there. I do my share."

Still, Hutton said "everyone gets so worried about" stats.

"The traditional save percentage is ancient now," Hutton said. "A guy can shoot the puck from outside the blue line, it's a save, and a guy can have a backdoor tap-in and you make a save and it's the same. I feel like you need to get into deeper analytics to understand goaltending, in my opinion."

Sabres' Alexander Nylander believes he can stick in NHL: 'I'm ready for this'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 19, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres winger Alexander Nylander mentioned it a few times during his short chat with the media this afternoon.

"I'm ready for this," the rookie said following practice inside KeyBank Center.

So far, through four outings, it would be tough to argue with Nylander. The former eighth overall pick has been showcasing his slick skill and looking more comfortable each game beside center Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary.

In Sunday afternoon's 4-3 shootout win, the Swede played his best NHL contest, registering two assists.

The Sabres, of course, promoted Nylander, 21, from the Rochester Americans late in each of his first two AHL seasons.

This year, however, the enigmatic prospect appears to finally be seizing his chance.

"He's taking advantage of the opportunity," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "Each and every game he's seems to get better. His linemates are helping him out, they play a fast game. He's just getting more confident down low, in the corner. He's driving on cycles, he's making plays up ice and he's using his speed.

"I really like his shot mentality last game. Coming off the wing, he was thinking about shot entering the offensive zone. He's got to continue to shoot pucks."

While Nylander will likely return to the AHL for the playoffs, he might've played his last regular-season game. He could force the Sabres to keep him.

"I had a really good training camp this year," Nylander said. "I'm obviously here to prove that I can stay. I think I'm obviously ready for this."

He added: "I feel just really good. I'm just going to keep going the way I'm playing."

Nylander should face his brother, Toronto Maple Leafs forward William Nylander, on Wednesday in Buffalo.

Check back later for more on the brothers and the Leafs, who have beaten the Sabres four straight meetings for the first time since 1971-72.

In other news, Sabres forward prospect Matej Pekar, 19, has been assigned to the Amerks from the Ontario Hockey League's Barrie Colts.

Pekar, a fourth-round pick in 2018, 94th overall, hasn't played since breaking his collarbone Jan. 10. The Colts' season recently ended.

The Czech, whose agitating style stood out during development camp, might spend his time in Rochester practicing.

"We're pleased that Matej will be joining us in Rochester as part of continuing his development process," Amerks general manager Randy Sexton said in a statement. "He is coming off a long-term injury, so whether he plays games remains to be seen. More importantly, he'll have the opportunity to immerse himself in the pro hockey environment, which we believe is a critical component of any young player's development."

Pekar scored 14 goals and 36 points in 33 games in his first junior campaign.

NHL Rumor Roundup: Re-signing Jeff Skinner at top of Sabres to-do list

Lyle Richardson

Sporting News

March 19, 2019

Can't get enough NHL rumors? Lyle Richardson's Rumor Roundup column serves as a one-stop guide to the latest rumblings around the league.

Sabres GM facing a busy offseason

After several years of fitful rebuilding, the Buffalo Sabres got off to a promising start this season. They sat atop the Atlantic Division by late November and seemed well on their way to reaching the playoffs for the first time since 2010-11.

But it was not to be. A porous defense plus the lack of secondary scoring coupled with no established starting goaltender sent the Sabres tumbling down the standings and out of postseason contention.

With yet another disappointing season on the books, there's an expectation general manager Jason Botterill will be busy this summer tinkering with his roster. TSN's Bob McKenzie reports he'll be under pressure to do whatever's necessary to turn things around.

Topping his "to-do" list is re-signing Jeff Skinner. The 26-year-old left wing, acquired last summer from Carolina, quickly established tremendous chemistry with center Jack Eichel. Having tied his career-high of 37 goals, he should reach 40 by season's end.

However, Skinner is slated to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1 and, as per Cap Friendly, he's completing a six-year contract. His performance this season ensures he'll get top dollar this summer. Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman noted the lack of an extension for Skinner, suggesting the longer he goes unsigned, the more folks could wonder if a deal will get done.

Friedman also added he's heard term might be an issue. Meanwhile, McKenzie believes the Skinner camp will seek a long-term deal worth over \$9 million per season, while the Sabres might be more comfortable with something in the \$8 million range.

The Buffalo News' Lance Lysowski expects Botterill will get Skinner re-signed but doesn't see him making any big splashes in this summer's free-agent pool. Instead, he thinks the Sabres GM could attempt to shop some assets, including a few prospects, for immediate roster help.

Lysowski didn't rule out the possibility of Botterill drawing upon his blueline depth for trade bait. He noted Rasmus Ristolainen has surfaced this season in the rumor mill. Given his age (24), upside and reasonable \$5.4-million salary-cap hit through 2021-22, Ristolainen could fetch an attractive return.

Moving Ristolainen, however, might not be the best course of action. The Sabres' blueline depth drops sharply beyond Ristolainen, rookie Rasmus Dahlin and recently acquired Brandon Montour. Veterans Zach Bogosian and Marco Scandella are under contract for next season but both have long injury histories.

Unless Ristolainen has grown weary of the constant losing and seeks a change of scenery, it would be best to hang onto him. He could prove to be a crucial part of the Sabres' defense next season.

Nylander growing comfortable alongside Rodrigues, Sheary

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 19, 2019

Alexander Nylander made his NHL debut with his older brother, William, on the opposite bench. The Toronto Maple Leafs won that game in Buffalo, 4-3, with the elder Nylander tallying an assist on an Auston Matthews goal in the first period.

The younger Nylander, now nearly two years removed from that original meeting, will have the result on his mind when the two brothers meet for their first rematch during the Sabres' home game against the Maple Leafs on Wednesday.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," he said following practice at KeyBank Center on Tuesday. "I remember my first didn't go as we wanted. I just hope we get the win against them."

Tickets for Wednesday vs. Toronto

Nylander could play a pivotal role if the Sabres are to end their four-game winless streak against their rivals to the north. He's joined with Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues to form one of Buffalo's most effective lines over the past two games, including a two-assist outing against St. Louis on Sunday.

Nylander, Rodrigues and Sheary have shared the ice for 30:00 at even strength, according to Natural Stat Trick. They've out-attempted opponents 50-17 in that span, generating a 74.63 Corsi-for percentage, and outscored opponents 2-0.

"I've played with E-Rod for a while now, so I think we've grown a little bit of chemistry," Sheary said. "He likes to play a fast game, as do I. I think Nyls brings a little bit of skill to our line. He's got some pretty good vision and he's got a pretty good shot, so he creates opportunities that way."

"I think we all want to play fast, move the puck quickly and [produce] scoring chances," Nylander added.

The trio combined for 11 shots and 14 attempts against the Blues. Rodrigues and Sheary both scored goals, while Nylander's two assists marked the first multi-point outing of his NHL career.

Rodrigues and Sheary both said after that contest that they could see Nylander growing more comfortable, now four games into his third NHL stint. Sabres coach Phil Housley echoed that sentiment on Tuesday.

"He's taking advantage of the opportunity," Housley said. "Each and every game he seems to get better. His linemates are helping him out, they play a fast game. He's just getting more confident down low, in the corner.

"He's driving on cycles, he's making plays up ice and he's using his speed. I really like his shot mentality last game. Coming off the wing, he was thinking about shot entering the offensive zone. He's got to continue to shoot pucks."

Rodrigues said he's made a concerted effort to communicate with Nylander on the ice, letting the 21-year-old winger know how much time he has to make plays particularly in his own zone.

"It helps in the D-zone when you know your outs, when you get the puck on the wall [you know] if the D is pinching or not," Nylander said. "It's been really helpful, talking. We're just all trying to communicate."

It also helps that Sheary and Rodrigues had formed a connection even before adding Nylander on the right wing. Sheary tallied six shots and four scoring chances with Rodrigues as his center against Pittsburgh last Wednesday and has six points (4+2) in nine games since the beginning of March.

"During the middle of the season, I was kind of going through a rough patch," Sheary said. "I didn't feel like myself, I wasn't playing like myself. Honestly, after the bye week, I think I just had a refreshed mindset. I think I just started working harder and competing, getting to the dirty areas and that all spiraled into better play."

The trio's effective play will keep them together against the Maple Leafs. It could be the second of many matchups between the Nylander brothers, if Alex has his way.

"I've been working really hard for this," Nylander said. "I obviously feel like I was ready. I had a really good training camp this year. I'm obviously here to prove that I can stay. I think I'm ready for this. I just want to keep playing my game and keep it simple."

For the fun of it

The atmosphere in KeyBank Center late in the game against the Blues was raucous enough to rival the Sabres' 10-game winning streak in November, and it started with a physical shift from the line of Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson and Kyle Okposo.

Okposo said the Sabres are looking to recapture that feeling over this last stretch of the season, and it begins with playing the type of hockey that inspired it.

"I think I said it after the first period when I walked into the room, like, 'How much more fun is that, to play like that?'" Okposo said. "Just to be into it, to be intense, to have everybody on the same page working for each other. And it's not like we weren't working, there was just an added intensity in the last game.

"We've got to find that. We've got to find that consistency. I think we had it early and it's been inconsistent since. It is fun."

The Sabres will be looking to win two straight games for the first time since December when they host the Maple Leafs, a factoid they'd be glad to leave in the past.

"That's just a stat that boggles my mind," Okposo said. "It's a tough one to hang your hat on. We want to finish strong here. Tomorrow's a huge game."

Tuesday's practice

The lineup remained the same from the game against the Blues, with Scott Wilson, Jason Pominville and Matt Hunwick rotating as extra skaters. Here's how it looked:

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 92 Alexander Nylander
17 Vladimir Sobotka - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 72 Tage Thompson
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

Extra: 20 Scott Wilson, 29 Jason Pominville

4 Zach Bogosian - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 62 Brandon Montour
6 Marco Scandella - 8 Casey Nelson

Extra: 48 Matt Hunwick

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark