



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Brendan Gallagher scores twice, Canadiens beat Sabres 7-4

Associated Press

March 23, 2019

MONTREAL (AP) — The Montreal Canadiens refused to be satisfied — or comfortable — not with so much at stake.

Brendan Gallagher had two goals and an assist, and the Canadiens beat the Buffalo Sabres 7-4 on Saturday night for their third straight win.

Max Domi and Tomas Tatar each had a goal and two assists as the Canadiens (40-28-7) moved three points ahead of idle Columbus in the race for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference. Artturi Lehkonen, Andrew Shaw and Paul Byron also scored.

"That's our team identity right there to be resilient and to be consistent," Domi said. "(Buffalo) is a really good hockey team. They have a lot of firepower up front, good defense, great goaltender. They weren't giving up and we knew that. We just found a way to keep going."

Making his seventh start in a row, Montreal star Carey Price made 23 saves.

Sam Reinhart, Alexander Nylander, Marco Scandella and Jack Eichel scored for the Sabres (31-34-9), who were officially eliminated from playoff contention. Carter Hutton stopped 37 shots.

The Canadiens remain two points behind Carolina for the first wild card. The Hurricanes beat Minnesota 5-1 on Saturday night. Montreal plays Carolina on Sunday.

"We gave up a couple of goals, but our team did a great job responding," said Byron, who netted his 14th of the season.

The game was tied at 3 before Byron got his 14th of the season with 1:57 left in the second period. Byron skated in for a 2-on-1 with Jordan Weal, whose shot was saved by Hutton before bouncing off Byron's skate and in.

Gallagher got his 33rd goal 8:35 into the third before Eichel got one back for the Sabres at 13:13.

Domi sealed it with a power-play goal with 4:30 remaining. Tatar, playing his 500th NHL game, added an empty-netter with 2:13 to go.

"In the third period, we didn't sit back, we kept chasing the game and trying to score," Byron said. "Huge two points for us. We're fighting for the playoffs. Every game is pretty intense out there. It was a playoff atmosphere."

The Sabres have one win in their past 10 games, and were officially eliminated from playoff contention.

"It's been a long year," Eichel said. "These same issues seem to continue to haunt us. We have to be better these next few games. There's still a lot of pride on the line. We represent our city, this organization. That should be enough right there. We should play for each other more."

Reinhart got the game's first goal when he beat Price 12:26 into the first period.

The teams combined for six goals in a back-and-forth second.

Montreal tied it at 5:09 when Lehkonen took a feed from Shaw and scored while crashing into the net. Lehkonen only had one point in his previous 22 games.

Domi earned his 200th NHL point on the goal with a stylish pass to Shaw.

Alone in the slot, Gallagher gave the Canadiens their first lead at 9:12 after a remarkable one-handed pass from a sprawled-out Phillip Danault behind the net. It was Gallagher's career-high 32nd goal.

The Canadiens opened a 3-1 advantage when Shaw took a saucer pass from Domi and beat Hutton blocker side with a wrist shot at 14:23.

The Sabres responded instantly, scoring 30 seconds later on Nylander's power-play goal.

A turnover by Jonathan Drouin led to Scandella's equalizer on a fast break at 16:08 on Buffalo's 14th shot of the game.

The Sabres failed to complete the season sweep after winning the first three games against the Canadiens this year.

"It was good enough that we came back, but we made mistakes that they capitalized on," Nylander said. "We have to clean that up."

NOTES: Jason Pominville was back in the Sabres lineup after being a healthy scratch the last two games.

UP NEXT

Sabres: At New Jersey on Monday night.

Canadiens: At Carolina on Sunday night.

Sabres hope to finish strong before another long offseason of reflection

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 24, 2019

NEWARK, N.J. — Sam Reinhart dashed toward the blue line, braced for Rasmus Dahlin's shot and fell to the ice when the puck struck him.

Dahlin quickly skated over to check on Reinhart, who stood up and skated to center ice before the Buffalo Sabres concluded a fast-paced practice Sunday in Prudential Center. Their playoff hopes ended with a 7-4 loss in Montreal one night earlier, yet the Sabres feel there is much to play for over their final eight games, beginning Monday night against the New Jersey Devils.

The situation can be challenging for a team that had played for one singular goal since the onset of training camp. While they will eventually reflect on the Sabres' collapse following a 10-game win streak, their motivation has shifted now that the franchise's playoff drought reached eight years.

"You always have something to play for," Carter Hutton said. "It's the NHL. Truthfully, for me, I clawed and fought my whole career to make it here, so every time you get a chance to play in the NHL, it's an honor. You should never take it for granted. ... When you're out of the playoffs it's tricky but everyone is playing for a job. Everyone is playing for their life. That's something guys need to be aware of for sure."

They also are trying to discover how their play rapidly deteriorated following a one-day stint atop the NHL standings. Since winning their 10th consecutive game Nov. 27, the Sabres are tied with the Ottawa Senators for the fewest points (35) while scoring the fifth-fewest goals and allowing the third most.

Additionally, the Sabres are just 11-21-5 away from KeyBank Center and have lost 11 straight, going 0-9-2 since their 5-4 win in Columbus on Jan. 29. Only two NHL teams have performed worse on the road: Ottawa (10-27-2) and New Jersey (13-20-5).

The Sabres' collapse is dotted with troubling trends. They have allowed 93 second-period goals this season, which ranks 29th in the league, and their minus-29 differential in the period ranks 30th. They have not won back-to-back games since Dec. 13, and one goal against tends to snowball.

Coach Phil Housley wants to address their 5-on-5 struggles over the season's final two weeks. The Sabres have a negative-30 goal differential in those situations since the winning streak, compared to plus-5 in their first 25 games. Entering Sunday's games, every team occupying a playoff spot had a positive goal differential at 5-on-5.

"It's so important," Housley said. "If you look at every team that's in playoff position right now, their 5-on-5 is on the plus side, so that's what we need to focus on. The games we've had success we've been on the right side of that, and we haven't had a lot of success, so those are some of the areas we need to focus on. What does that mean? That means playing well without the puck. When we don't have it, we have to have an urgency without it."

Housley pointed to youth as a reason for the Sabres' ugly defensive performance Saturday in Montreal; however, many of their errors were committed by players with a wealth of NHL experience, including Reinhart and Jack Eichel. The team is allowing too many scoring chances, while making the opposing goalie's job easy.

Prior to practice Sunday, the Sabres' coaches illustrated that fact by showing players video of traffic in front of Hutton compared to that in front of Montreal's Carey Price. The difference was remarkable. Sabres rookie center Casey Mittelstadt could be a healthy scratch Monday, as Housley tries to reinforce the importance of defensive awareness, yet it's a team-wide issue.

"I think we just have to give up less," Hutton said. "We give up a lot of high-quality chances that end up in our net sometimes. Managing the emotions of the game. Lately we'll play well, we give one up and all of a sudden it snowballs on us. We can't seem to make those plays. It's little mistakes, too. Not getting pucks out, losing blue lines and good teams make you pay. For us, the urgency has to be getting to the other team's net and making it harder on other goalies."

Still, Kyle Okposo doesn't buy the notion that a non-playoff team can build momentum toward the following season since change is inevitable. Players will be added and subtracted. Systems can change. A different message is typically delivered during the offseason. The 31-year-old winger thinks the Sabres should play well, regardless if the playoffs are within reach.

No amount of success will absolve the Sabres of their historic fall, Okposo said. They are one of only two teams in NHL history to miss the playoffs in the same season in which they won 10 games in a row, and no one is sure how they continue to make the same mistakes.

For now, they intend to focus on the season's 13 days before a long offseason of reflection.

"There has definitely been progress off the ice," Okposo said. "I think that last year there was no way we would have been able to win 10 games in a row or have the start that we did. The first two and a half months of the season were really, really big steps. I don't think we can forget that. That's not easy to do in this league. ... We're going to have to look in the offseason to see what we can do better. See why we seemed to run out of steam in the second half of the year. There are going to be a lot of different conversations and a lot of reasoning to try to figure out what happened."

Sabres recall defenseman Lawrence Pilut as a precaution

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 24, 2019

NEWARK, N.J. -- With Zach Bogosian and Matt Hunwick both absent from practice Sunday in Prudential Center, the Buffalo Sabres recalled defenseman Lawrence Pilut from Rochester.

Pilut, a 23-year-old defenseman, joined the team as a precaution because Bogosian and Hunwick are dealing with injuries. However, it remains unclear if Pilut will be needed when the Sabres play the New Jersey Devils on Monday at 7 p.m.

Buffalo coach Phil Housley said Bogosian is expected to be available against the Devils, and Pilut's arrival was simply a precaution because Hunwick has missed three consecutive games with an upper-body injury.

"We're sort of depleted with Matt Hunwick's situation as well," Housley said following practice. "We felt we needed some insurance and those decisions will be made at game time tomorrow."

Bogosian has been dealing with a lower-body injury and regularly has sat out practice the last couple of weeks. He played 19 minutes, 18 seconds in Saturday's 7-4 loss at Montreal and is averaging 21 minutes, 38 seconds in 65 games this season.

The Sabres also are without defenseman Jake McCabe, whose season ended earlier this month because of an upper-body injury, and the team had only six available defensemen with Hunwick day-to-day. Pilut was a natural fit for a recall despite the Amerks trying to improve their playoff position.

Pilut had one goal with six assists and a minus-3 rating in 25 games for the Sabres earlier this season. He was sent down because of recurring defensive lapses, but the rookie was able to make an impact with the puck on his stick.

He has four goals and 22 assists in 28 games for the Amerks, with a plus-21 rating and .93 points per game ratio that both rank second among Rochester skaters. Still, Pilut has been displeased with his play since returning to Rochester.

"I think I had great consistency in the beginning of the season, and I went back and struggled a little bit," Pilut said. "I'm finding my way back slowly. I thought yesterday was a good game for me. That somehow gave me a little push."

Pilut was referring to his performance in the Amerks' 5-2 victory over the Toronto Marlies Saturday night, when he had four shots on goal and a plus-1 rating. Despite bouts of inconsistency, the Sabres had a 51.15 percent 5-on-5 shot differential with Pilut on the ice this season, which ranks second behind Rasmus Dahlin among the team's defensemen.

The Sabres signed Pilut to an entry-level contract in May and he was recalled by Buffalo after he was tied for the AHL lead with 22 points through 15 games with the Amerks. A left-shot defenseman, Pilut will be a restricted free agent after next season.

"I try to learn from the bad things and keep the good things in mind," Pilut said of his first stint with the Sabres. "I just want to keep working on my consistency out there and just try to play as good as I can. That's what I have on my mind right now."

Mittelstadt could sit

Sabres rookie center Casey Mittelstadt filled in on defense with Pilut a late arrival and could be a healthy scratch Monday against the Devils despite assisting on Sam Reinhart's first-period goal against Montreal.

Mittelstadt, 20, has 11 goals with 12 assists and a minus-15 rating in 70 games. While his skill has tantalized at times, his defensive awareness has remained inconsistent. Tague Thompson is expected to draw back into the lineup if Mittelstadt sits.

"I think Casey's given us some really good games and sometimes in a player's development it's not a bad thing to take a step back," Housley said. "You look at our games, we're giving up way too much right now. And it's not what you make, it's what you leave on the table. Right now we're leaving way too much. In Casey's defense, it might be a good thing to just take a deep breath. He's played a lot of hockey up to this point, so we'll make that decision tomorrow."

Finality hits Sabres hard as playoff fate becomes official

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 23, 2019

MONTREAL – It was less than four months ago that the Buffalo Sabres were on top of the hockey world. Seems like years ago.

From first overall in the NHL after 25 games to out of the playoffs just 49 games later. It's the stunning epitaph to what rates as one of the league's historic collapses.

The Sabres' fate was clearly written a few weeks before Saturday's 7-4 loss to the Montreal Canadiens in Bell Centre. But there was a certain finality to this game, as it officially eliminated Buffalo from the postseason chase and forever linked them to the 2017 Philadelphia Flyers as the only teams in league history to miss the playoffs in a year they posted a 10-game winning streak.

The Sabres continue to be terrible in the second period, allowing four goals in this one. They wilt in the face of adversity on the road, where they're 11-21-5 and have lost 11 straight. They make mistake after mistake on defensive coverages and give the puck away with impunity.

Right now, they're not remotely close to being a postseason team. The clock is ticking on everyone.

Eight years with no playoffs and counting for owners Terry and Kim Pegula. Two years of complete failure for coach Phil Housley and General Manager Jason Botterill. Multiple years off the slate for many players.

There are eight games left in the season and yet another series of changes is sure to happen before the long NHL grind kicks into gear again come September.

"It's not an easy situation to be in," said a solemn Sam Reinhart, who was drafted No. 2 overall in 2014. "When you go through a couple years of it and they start adding up, it just adds to the frustration. When you do have a little bit of success at the start of the year, it makes it that much more difficult to lose."

Captain Jack Eichel, drafted a years after Reinhart, stood to face the media and spoke eloquently at times about the team's failure. When he was done, he sat back on the bench in front of his locker and quietly stared at the ground for a few minutes in the empty room.

"It's been a long process here, it's been a long year," Eichel said. "These same issues seem to continue to haunt us. We have to get better here for the next few games. I think there's a lot of pride on the line, there's a lot to play for. We represent our city, we represent each other and this organization. That should be enough right there. We've got to play for each other more."

One problem the Sabres have is their alleged core simply hasn't been good enough.

Eichel scored a third-period goal to cut Buffalo's deficit to 5-4 but it was his first in six games. Reinhart's first-period goal opened the scoring but was his first in 12 games. Jeff Skinner has one goal in 17 games.

The Sabres gave up three second-period goals to fall behind, 3-1 but battled back to tie the game on goals in a 75-second span by Alex Nylander and Marco Scandella. But Reinhart tried to do too much with the puck and was stripped inside the Montreal blue line and the play resulted in Paul Byron's tap-in with 1:57 left in the second that put Montreal in front, 4-3. The Habs never relinquished the lead.

"I'm kind of in between trying to keep it to myself," Reinhart said. "I probably should have dished it off earlier. That one's on me for sure."

Eichel had a similar feeling on the fifth Montreal goal, by Brendan Gallagher at 8:35 of the third period. He was caught watching Shea Weber in the corner and failed to tie up Gallagher in front.

"I thought Weber might be taking it to the net," Eichel said. "He makes a good play and I've got to be better, be tighter on Gallagher and not let him get that shot away."

It was a tough night as well for No. 1 overall pick Rasmus Dahlin, who was on the ice for three Montreal goals and was stripped behind the net by Phillip Danault to directly lead to Gallagher's second-period goal.

Coach Phil Housley was frustrated to see his team blow a decent first period that ended with Buffalo holding a 1-0 lead. Housley then reverted to his old standby of calling the Sabres a young team, but that's pure folly.

Skinner (653 career games) and Zach Bogosian (617) are 1-2 in the NHL among active players for most games played without appearing in the postseason. And key players like Rasmus Ristolainen (420), Reinhart (323) and Eichel (278) have combined to play more than 1,000 games with nary a playoff start.

"I believe they have it in them," Housley said. "I believe in that group that's in the room. We have to stick together right now. It's obviously not where we want to be and that's the frustrating part."

Ristolainen rang up yet another minus-3 to spiral his league-worst rating to minus-42 for the season. He's an astonishing minus-26 over his last 18 games and foolishly tried to rush with the puck while killing a penalty in the last five minutes.

He got caught in the Montreal end and could never get back in the play, allowing Max Domi to beat Carter Hutton with a screened shot for a 6-4 Montreal lead. Par for the course over the last three months.

"Just mistakes, critical mistakes," Housley said.

The Wraparound: Canadiens 7, Sabres 4

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 23, 2019

MONTREAL — It's now over for real.

The Buffalo Sabres' playoff hopes, left for dead weeks ago, were officially put to rest Saturday night with a 7-4 loss to the Montreal Canadiens in Bell Centre.

At 71 points, the Sabres are 16 behind both Montreal and Columbus with eight games left. And even in the highly unlikely scenario of winning all of those games to finish with 87 points, Buffalo would only equal those teams' total and will still be behind them on the regulation/overtime wins tiebreaker.

The Sabres have missed the playoffs eight straight years, dating to 2011. If Carolina makes the postseason this season — and the Hurricanes currently join the Habs in holding the East wild-cards — Buffalo will have the longest postseason drought in the NHL.

Montreal won Saturday's game with a four-goal second period as Max Domi and Andrew Shaw collected two points apiece. Brendan Gallagher had two goals, one in the second and another in the third. Domi and Tomas Tatar finished with a goal and two assists apiece, with Tatar wrapping up the game on an empty-net goal with 2:13 to go.

The Sabres fell to 31-34-9 overall. They are 1-6 in their last seven games, 1-8-1 in their last 10, and 3-13-2 in their last 18. And for deeper perspective, they are 14-28-7 since their end of their 10-game winning streak on Nov. 27. That's 30th in the NHL in that span.

It was also Buffalo's 11th straight road loss (0-9-2) and prevented the Sabres from recording their first season series sweep of the Habs since 1983-84.

Middle-period blues: The Habs' four-goal second period outburst gave Buffalo 93 goals against this season in the middle 20 minutes, tied with Detroit for 30th in the league. The only team that has given up more is Ottawa (102). The Sabres' minus-29 goal differential in the period is 30th and ahead of only Detroit's minus-30. Montreal outshot Buffalo, 20-7, in the period.

Jumping in front: The Sabres took a 1-0 lead at 12:26 of the first period on Sam Reinhart's quick shot from the slot off a Casey Mittelstadt feed. It was Reinhart's 19th goal of the season -- and first in 11 games. It was also his 200th NHL point.

Beauty to tie it: The Habs made it 1-1 at 5:09 of the second as Artturi Lehkonen had a tap-in at the goalmouth on an Andrew Shaw feed. But the real play was the spin-o-rama pass from Max Domi to Shaw for Domi's 40th assist of the season.

Habs seize control: Gallagher scored his 32nd of the season alone in the slot at 9:12 after Phillip Danault stripped Rasmus Dahlin behind the net and Montreal took a 3-1 lead as Domi fed Shaw in front at 14:23

Sabres get it back: Alex Nylander took a Dahlin feed for a howitzer of a one-timer at 14:53 and Marco Scandella went bar down off a Johan Larsson drop pass to tie it at 16:08.

Sizzling Swede: Nylander has scored in consecutive games for the first time in his NHL career and has points in a career-best three straight games with two goals and two assists.

The go-ahead goal: Former Sabre Paul Byron snapped the 3-3 tie with 1:57 left in the second period, tipping home a rebound on another 2-on-1 after a terrible giveaway by Reinhart at the Montreal blue line sent the Habs away.

Brief hope from Eichel doused: Sabres captain Jack Eichel scored his 26th of the season with 6:47 to go to bring Buffalo within 5-4. The goal was the first of Eichel's career against Montreal in 16 games against the Habs, and

means he has now scored against all 30 NHL opponents. But Montreal took its two-goal lead back as Domi scored on a screened shot on a power play with 4:30 to go.

In the house I: Former Sabres and Habs defenseman Josh Gorges, who retired last year after his fourth season in Buffalo, got a big hand from the crowd when he was shown on the jumbotron in a suite. He was in town for an afternoon fantasy camp.

In the house II: More big cheers came when former members of the Montreal Expos were shown in another suite, including Larry Walker, Dennis Martinez and Bill Lee. Olympic Stadium, the Expos' former home, will host an exhibition series Monday and Tuesday night between the Toronto Blue Jays and Milwaukee Brewers.

Up next: The Sabres headed to New Jersey after the game and will practice Sunday in Prudential Center. They meet the Devils there Monday night and complete a back-to-back Tuesday night in Ottawa.

Sabres Notebook: Pominville pumped to return to lineup in hometown

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 23, 2019

MONTREAL — Jason Pominville said his pass list here Saturday night was pushing three dozen family members and friends. And that was the number he had after the morning skate, several hours before faceoff in Bell Centre.

"Some people got tickets on their own too. That's normal," Pominville said. "My dad just texts me every time, 'Hey, can you throw this name on the list' and I'm like 'All right.' But I know the garage after the game will be packed with visitors to say hello to. I'll be a big part of that."

Pominville is from Repentigny, Quebec, a suburb about 25 miles northeast of downtown. Just as he hoped, he was back in the lineup in his hometown Saturday night after sitting out the last two games as a healthy scratch.

Pominville said earlier this week he was disappointed to be a healthy scratch and reiterated that stance Saturday, although he said he understood the Sabres were looking at players like Alexander Nylander in their lineup. At age 36 and with an expiring contract, Pominville doesn't seem to be heading to retirement but it's uncertain if he'll be back with the Sabres next season.

There was at least a small possibility that Saturday was going to be Pominville's last chance to play in his hometown. And he admitted he was happy and relieved to get back in the lineup.

"I don't know if they put thought into that putting me back in for it. I didn't really, to be honest with you," Pominville said. "I just try to enjoy the moment, go with it, go day by day. But when I saw my name, I was definitely happy. I knew we were coming here. You see Montreal coming up and you're thinking it would be nice to have a chance to play there for sure. I was pretty excited to see I was in the lineup."

Sabres coach Phil Housley has been asked about scratching his fourth-leading goal scorer multiple times this week and was clearly wary of the topic when it was brought up again Saturday by Montreal reporters. To Housley, moving Pominville back into the lineup in place of Tage Thompson was simply a reaction to Wednesday's 4-2 loss to Toronto.

"He's done the right things but we weren't getting results," Housley said cryptically of Pominville. "We didn't get the result against Toronto and we made some changes, but I'm glad that he's back in the lineup coming back to Montreal."

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With Pominville back in the lineup, Thompson and Scott Wilson were the healthy scratches at forward. The injured Matt Hunwick was a scratch on defense.

Between healthy scratches and a three-game stint on the injured list, Pominville has played 66 of the Sabres' 74 games this season. Sam Reinhart, Rasmus Dahlin, Rasmus Ristolainen and Jeff Skinner are the only Sabres to play in every game thus far.

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The Sabres entered the game with a 12-9 overtime record, and both the 12 wins after regulation and 21 games played past regulation were second in the NHL. Tampa Bay has gone 13-4 in OT/shootouts, the most wins after 60 minutes, while Florida's 22 OT/shootout games are the most in the league. The Panthers are 10-12 in them.

The Sabres entered Saturday 7-6 in game-deciding goals, including Rasmus Ristolainen's slapshot that beat the Habs here Nov. 8 in the opener of Buffalo's 10-game winning streak, and 5-3 in shootouts. That's third behind the six wins of Tampa Bay (6-1) and the New York Rangers (6-4).

The Sabres are 75-69 all-time in shootouts and the 75 wins are three behind the New York Islanders for the most by any team since the shootout began in 2005. Pittsburgh and the New York Rangers have both won 77.

Sabres at Canadiens: Five Things to Know

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 23, 2019

MONTREAL – There's been a lot of negative history brought up about the Sabres recently. A win tonight in Bell Centre against the Montreal Canadiens could give the Blue and Gold a rare dose of historic goodwill.

The Sabres have won all three previous matchups this season, but they were all completed by Thanksgiving weekend as Buffalo was headed to No. 1 overall in the NHL standings. A win tonight would give the Sabres just their second season sweep of Montreal in their history, joining the 8-0 mark Buffalo rang up on the Habs in 1983-84.

The Sabres have also gone without a regulation loss to Montreal in 1974-75 (4-0-1), 1994-95 (2-0-2) and 1996-97 (3-0-2). The Sabres have not won four in a row against Montreal since taking six straight from Jan. 18, 2011-Jan. 31, 2012.

Faceoff is 7:15 on MSG and WGR Radio.

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

1. Long time, no see: The Sabres trailed in the third period of all three previous meetings and won them all. They took the two games in Buffalo by scores of 4-3 (Oct. 25) and Nov. 23 (3-2), and posted a 6-5 overtime win here on Nov. 8 on a Rasmus Ristolainen slapshot. That was the first victory in the team's 10-game winning streak.

2. The Habs' situation: Montreal is presently sitting in the second Eastern Conference wild-card slot, one point ahead of idle Columbus and two behind Carolina, which is hosting Minnesota. The building features a rollicking atmosphere in November. In late March with a playoff race in full gear, it should be wild.

"I think it's great. Any time you get to play an Original Six team on a Saturday night, it's a great challenge," said Sabres coach Phil Housley. "Just where we're at right now as a group, it's something to build on and we've had pretty good success against this team this season. We were a smart team. We managed the puck well. We tried to take away their speed because they have an excellent transition game."

3. Lineup news: The Sabres are returning Jason Pominville to the lineup after two games as a healthy scratch. Scott Wilson and Tage Thompson will be healthy scratches and injured defenseman Matt Hunwick will also sit. In goal, it will be starters Carter Hutton (17-21-5, 2.88/.911) vs. Carey Price (31-22-5, 2.50/.917). Hutton is 4-0-2, 1.69/.935 in his career against Montreal

Pominville's future is uncertain but he's stoked to get one more chance to play in his hometown. He said his usual corp of around three dozen friends and family will be in the house.

"I just try to enjoy the moment, go with it, go day by day," Pominville said today as he conducted interviews in both English and French, like he always does when he visits. "But when I saw my name (on the forward lines), I was definitely happy. I knew we were coming here. You see Montreal coming up and you're thinking it would be nice to have a chance to play there for sure. I was pretty excited to see I was in the lineup."

4. Sabres not taking to the road: The Sabres are just 11-20-5 away from KeyBank Center this season and have lost 10 straight, going 0-8-2 since their 5-4 win Jan. 29 in Columbus. The only NHL teams doing worse on the road are East sadsacks Ottawa (9-27-2) and New Jersey (10-25-3). Montreal, meanwhile, is 21-12-4 at home.

5. By the numbers: Max Domi leads the Canadiens in goals, assists and points (25-39-64). Jack Eichel leads the Sabres (25-48-73), although he has just one assist in his last five games. Montreal is the only NHL team Eichel has not scored a goal against in his four seasons. ... Jeff Skinner has 37 goals but his slump has reached one goal in 16 games. ... The Sabres are 12-9 after regulation (7-6 in OT, 5-3 in shootout) and the 12 wins are second in the NHL, one behind Tampa Bay. ... The Sabres are 2-7-1 in March.

After enduring slump, Conor Sheary using his speed to make impact for Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 22, 2019

For all Conor Sheary has experienced during four NHL seasons, from winning back-to-back Stanley Cups in Pittsburgh to playing alongside Sidney Crosby, even the 26-year-old Buffalo Sabres winger has trouble ignoring the score sheet following games.

There have been many nights this season where he hasn't liked the outcome. Sheary scored only four goals over a 43-game span during the Sabres' winter slide, and the angst of failing to produce crept into the rest of his game.

Finally, under the self-induced pressure of needing to score, Sheary had two goals against his former team March 1, and has four goals and three assists over his last 11 games, while being a menace defensively. When the Sabres begin a three-game road trip Saturday night in Montreal, Sheary will skate on a new-look top line with Jack Eichel and Alex Nylander.

"Personally, I feel like I'm playing a little bit better," Sheary said following practice Friday. "I'm starting to use my speed a little bit more, and I'm creating a lot more turnovers than I was maybe earlier in the season. That's the way I'm going to be effective. I may not show up on the score sheet every night, but if I can help my team win in other ways, that's going to be a good thing."

Sheary scored 41 regular-season goals over his final two seasons in Pittsburgh before he was dealt to the Sabres last June. He ranks sixth on the team with 32 points in 69 games, surpassing his total of 30 in 79 games last season with the Penguins.

However, Sheary has fallen short of his own expectations. Six of his 13 goals were scored during the Sabres' first 16 games, as he was initially given the opportunity to play on Eichel's left wing. Jeff Skinner was elevated to the first line and scored 10 goals during the Sabres' 10-game winning streak, while Sheary failed to produce in a lesser role.

As Sheary's struggles worsened, he wasn't using his speed to strip pucks from unsuspecting opposing forwards and was not forechecking with the type of tenacity that helped him during that fast start.

Though Sheary has 19 points in 47 career playoff games, including two Cup runs, his confidence wavered. Even the sport's elite players can't fend off the frustration of failing to score.

"I don't know the reason," he recalled. "Maybe I was a little bit stressed out about not scoring. Once I got through the fact that I don't need to do that every game, I think it freshened my mindset and I'm approaching each game with a little bit better mindset than I was before."

Sheary is not unfamiliar with such slumps. He had only four goals during a 44-game span last season with the Penguins and did not break out until he was reunited with Crosby and Jake Guentzel. Sheary didn't need a similar assignment to spark change.

Since Feb. 26, he leads all Sabres forwards with a 52.40 percent on-ice 5-on-5 shot-attempt differential and has shown why General Manager Jason Botterill thought he could be a solution to the team's need for secondary scoring.

"It's always good to score and you get more confidence," coach Phil Housley said of Sheary. "You can see it in his strides. He's using his speed to get in on the forecheck. He's turning over pucks and it's good to see him finally contribute offensively."

Housley broke up his top line during a 4-2 loss against Toronto on Wednesday night and has separated Eichel, Skinner and Sam Reinhart. The hope is Sheary's recent play and chemistry with Eichel can help spark the offense.

Eichel has no goals in his last five games, while Skinner has one in his last 16 and Reinhart is goalless in his last 11. Sheary and Eichel have played only 115 minutes, 19 seconds together at 5-on-5 but had a shot-attempt differential of more than 50 percent and generated more scoring chances than their opponents.

"I'm going to approach it the same," Sheary said of playing with Eichel. "A few instinct things will be a little bit different, especially in the offensive zone and off the rush. He obviously has the ability to find you in places that sometimes you wouldn't even expect the puck. Try to get open and find that soft area for him."

With the Sabres 14 points out of a playoff spot entering Friday's games, they hope to simply build momentum over their final nine games. Nylander and Casey Mittelstadt are being given prominent roles. As important, Botterill is evaluating who can be part of the solution for next season.

Sheary will be an unrestricted free agent next summer and will count \$3 million against the cap in 2019-20. His playoff experience and leadership can be valuable for a team that is in need of both. This is the first time in his short NHL career that he is not playing meaningful games in late March, but Sheary does not think those struggles will last for long.

He believes the best is yet to come in Buffalo.

"I think we know we have a good core group of guys in there," he said. "As far as the end of the season, we want to make sure we're striding in the right direction and building towards the future. I think we're a team that's going to be around for a little while and not just make a splash, so this is a big learning process for us and hopefully we can build off that."

Hunwick day-to-day

While defenseman Zach Bogosian returned to practice Friday, the Sabres will be without Matt Hunwick in Montreal. Hunwick, 33, is day-to-day with an upper-body injury, Housley said.

Hunwick has been a healthy scratch the past two games and has two assists with a minus-7 rating in 48 games this season.

The Sabres bring back Pilut

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 24, 2019

Newark, NJ (WGR 550) - Zach Bogosian has been nursing an injury that has taken him out of most practices lately. Bogosian wasn't at practice on Sunday in New Jersey. Phil Housley said, "He's just day-to-day maintenance. Just being cautious with his lower-body and I plan on him being in the lineup tomorrow."

Just in case he isn't, Lawrence Pilut was brought up because Matt Hunwick is out. Housley said, "He's here as a precaution, we're depleted with Matt Hunwick's situation as well so we felt we needed some insurance and those decisions will be made at game time tomorrow."

Pilut played very well when he first got up to Buffalo, but when teams figured him out, they started going straight for him with speed and he was making a lot of mistakes. Housley said, "I think his overall game was really good when he got here. He played some really good minutes for us in a lot of different situations.

"Sometimes in a young man's development, you take a step back and you're not at the speed, I didn't think he was moving his feet as well, his defensive reads weren't as sharp as they needed to be, so we brought him back down to Rochester to find his game."

Pilut arrived as practice was ending, so Casey Mittelstadt filled in with Rasmus Ristolainen on defense. That usually means that Mittelstadt isn't playing on Monday. Housley said he just wants to give the kid a chance to exhale and relax, "Sometimes in a player's development it's not a bad thing to take a step back. We give up way too much and it's not what you make, it's what you leave on the table and right now we're leaving way too much and in Casey's defense, it might be a good thing to take a deep breath, he's played a lot of hockey, so we'll make that decision tomorrow."

Pilut knew his play had slipped drastically and that's why he got sent down after 25 games in Buffalo. He said, "I tried to learn from it, learn from the bad things and keep the good things in mind. I want to keep working on my consistency."

After Pilut went back down, he continued to struggle. He said, "I think it's been better. I think I had great consistency in the beginning of the season, but when I came back now, I struggled a little bit, but I've been finding my way back slowly and I thought yesterday was a good game for me."

One of the most important analytics that Housley pays attention to is 5-on-5 differential. It is something that the Sabres are not good at and Housley believes that's why they haven't been winning games, "It's so important. If you look at every playoff team or teams in playoff position, their 5-on-5 is on the plus side, so that's what we need to focus on.

"The games where we've had the most success, we've been on the right side of that and what does that mean? That means playing well without the puck. If we don't have it, we have to have an urgency without it."

Sunday's Lines:

Sheary - Eichel - Nylander

Skinner - Rodrigues - Reinhart

Thompson - Sobotka - Pominville

Girgensons - Larsson - Okposo

Wilson

Mittelstadt - Ristolainen

Dahlin - Montour

Scandella – Nelson

The Sabres are officially out of the playoffs

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 24, 2019

Montreal, QC (WGR 550) - If Carolina makes the playoffs this season, the Sabres will have the longest playoff drought in the NHL. Buffalo was officially eliminated from the playoffs on Saturday for the eighth straight year. For me, it's not that they're out, it's they weren't good enough to play any meaningful games in March. Considering they led the NHL on November 29th, that is completely unacceptable. There are too many players that don't listen to their coach and their coach can't find a way to get them to execute his game plan.

How many times have I said this season, "The Sabres gave up four goals in the second period?"

Buffalo is one of the worst second period teams in the NHL. They did fight back and tied up the game at three when they got two goals in 1:15, but Sam Reinhart over handled the puck out at the blue line and they're behind again after Montreal converts a 2-on-1. That goal came 1:55 after the Sabres had tied the game.

I asked Phil Housley after the game why his team couldn't sustain the momentum after tying it up at three and he tersely told me they did sustain the momentum, but then turned the puck over to give up the fourth goal.

The same thing happened in the third period after Jack Eichel pulled them to within one at 5-4. Montreal took its two-goal lead back just 2:17 later.

This team scored four goals on the road, but gave up four in the second period and three in the third, that's not sustaining momentum. If they score four on the road, they should almost always win.

Carter Hutton was hung out the dry again as the Sabres gave up 44 shots. Montreal scored 2-on-1 and even 4-on-2. There was a goal where a defenseman was afraid to get hit and turned the puck over, there was a goal where they tried to flip a puck out but didn't and Max Domi skated around the Sabres zone like he was Connor McDavid, Domi was allowed to pretty much do whatever he wanted.

Eichel failed to cover his man in front on one of the late Canadiens goals. He took responsibility for that and added, "There's a lot of pride on the line, there's a lot to play for. We represent our city, we represent each other and this organization. That should be enough right there."

I know that is what he's hoping for from his teammates, but pride has not been in big abundance with this team since November 29. They get another chance Monday in New Jersey.

Sabres fall in Montreal 7-4

WGR 550

March 23, 2019

Brendan Gallagher, Max Domi and Tomas Tatar all had three-point nights while Carey Price made 23 saves, lifting the Montreal Canadiens over the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday 7-4. With the regulation loss, Buffalo is officially eliminated from playoff contention, marking eight straight years without a postseason appearance.

Casey Mittelstadt fed Sam Reinhart from behind the net on the game's opening goal. Reinhart moved from the far wall to the slot and tapped it home for his 19th goal and his first in 11 games. Buffalo headed to the first intermission with the 1-0 lead, despite being outshot by Montreal 12-8, closing out a strong period for Carter Hutton.

The Canadiens broke through at 5:09 of the 2nd period on Artturi Lehkonen's 9th of the season, capping a tic-tac-toe play in front of the net. Some sharp passing courtesy of Max Domi and Andrew Shaw ended on the stick of Lehkonen and into the net, tying the game 1-1.

Montreal took the lead just a little over four minutes later on Brendan Gallagher's 32nd goal of the season. Left alone in front, Gallagher roofed a shot over Hutton's glove for the 2-1 lead. Later in the period, Andrew Shaw snapped a shot past Hutton for the two-goal lead. Exactly 30 seconds later, however, Alexander Nylander's power play goal pulled the Sabres back within one. Jack Eichel managed to maintain possession in the Montreal zone, working the puck to Rasmus Dahlin who found Nylander alone for a one-time blast that ended up in the Canadiens net. The goal gave Nylander four points (2 G, 2 A) in three games.

Moments later, Marco Scandella tied things up with his 5th of the season. The Buffalo defenseman accepted a drop pass from Johan Larsson and ripped a shot by Carey Price, making it 3-3. Less than three minutes later, Montreal was back on top thanks to Paul Byron. The former Sabres draft pick forced a turnover at the Canadiens blue line and finished off an odd-man rush with goal number 14.

After Gallagher's 2nd of the evening made it 5-3, Eichel lifted a shot by price at 13:13 of the final frame for his 26th of the season. The goal marked a single-season career-high for the Buffalo captain and also gave him goals against all 30 teams in the league. Eichel became the second-youngest player to achieve that milestone, behind Aleksander Barkov. The Canadiens went back up by two once again just a little over two minutes later on Max Domi's power play goal. Tomas Tatar added an empty netter for the 7-4 lead, Tatar's 23rd of the season.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 12:26 - Sam Reinhart (19) (Casey Mittelstadt, Brandon Montour)
MTL: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 14:53 - Alexander Nylander PPG (2) (Rasmus Dahlin, Jack Eichel); 16:08 - Marco Scandella (5) (Johan Larsson)
MTL: 5:09 - Artturi Lehkonen (9) (Andrew Shaw, Max Domi); 9:12 - Brendan Gallagher (32) (Phillip Danault);
14:23 - Andrew Shaw (18) (Max Domi, Brett Kulak); 18:03 - Paul Byron (14) (Jordan Weal, Nate Thompson)

Third Period:

BUF: 13:13 - Jack Eichel (26) (Unassisted)
MTL: 8:35 - Brendan Gallagher (33) (Shea Weber, Tomas Tatar); 15:30 - Max Domi (26) (Jeff Petry, Tomas Tatar); 17:47 - Tomas Tatar EN (23) (Brendan Gallagher, Phillip Danault)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 12:42 - Kyle Okposo (Slashing - 2 min.)
MTL: 16:09 - Artturi Lehkonen (Holding - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE
MTL: 14:43 - Christian Folin (Delay of game - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 14:26 - Zemgus Girgensons (Holding - 2 min.)
MTL: 9:06 - Andrew Shaw (Charging - 2 min., Roughing - 2 min.)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 27 (8, 7, 12)
MTL: 44 (12, 20, 12)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 37 saves
MTL: Carey Price - 23 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 for 4
MTL: 1 for 2

Three Stars:

1. Max Domi - MTL
2. Brendan Gallagher - MTL
3. Jack Eichel - BUF

What's Next:

Now officially out of the playoff race, the Sabres remain on the road for a game at New Jersey on Monday. The Devils have also been eliminated from playoff contention. Faceoff at Prudential Center is set for 7:00 p.m. on WGR 550, with pregame at 6:00 p.m.

The Sabres could be eliminated from the playoffs in Montreal

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 23, 2019

Montreal, QC (WGR 550) - The last time the Sabres played Montreal, Buffalo was in the middle of a 10-game winning streak and beat the Canadiens 3-2. My how things have changed.

The Sabres were on their way to first place in the NHL and looked like they were a can't miss for the playoffs. It's kind of ironic that if Montreal wins this game in regulation, the Sabres will be officially eliminated from playoff contention.

The teams haven't seen each other in four months, and Montreal is currently holding down the second wild card position in the East, two back of Carolina and one in front of Columbus.

The Canadiens have won two in a row since losing four of five games.

Carey Price has played in 21-of-22 games and has given up just one goal in two games. In his last five games, Price has allowed six goals. Overall, Price's numbers aren't impressive with a 2.50 goals-against and .917 save percentage. Buffalo scored six on Price in the only game they faced him this season.

Montreal doesn't have one guy that's a big points producer as Max Domi leads them in scoring with 64 points in 74 games. Domi has 25 goals, while Brendan Gallagher has 31.

Carter Hutton is 3-0-0 against Montreal this season with a 2.07 goals-against and .917 save percentage. Hutton can expect to see a lot of shots as Montreal is third in the NHL with 33.7 shots per-game.

Montreal has the worst power play in the league, while the Sabres are 18th.

Jeff Skinner has enjoyed playing Montreal this season, picking up four goals and seven points in three games. The problem for Skinner is he has one goal in 16 games.

Evan Rodrigues gets a lot of ice-time in the top six along with power play time. He has one goal in 20 games.

Looking at the rest of the top-six, Sam Reinhart hasn't scored in 11 games. He has just two assists in that time.

Conor Sheary has one goal in eight games, while Jack Eichel has one point in five games. If you'd like to add Jason Pominville to that mix, he has one goal in 10 games.

This could be Pominville's final game in his hometown as the 36-year-old's future in up in the air. Pominville has played 63 games against Montreal and has scored 17 goals and 24 assists for 41 points.

Scott Wilson, Tage Thompson and Matt Hunwick will be scratched.

Join Brian Koziol for the pre-game starting at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Alex Nylander and Conor Sheary.

Sabres' Nylander getting a chance with Eichel

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 22, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Not only are the Sabres getting a look at Alex Nylander, but on Saturday he's going to get an opportunity to play with Jack Eichel. In his last two games, Nylander has a goal and two assists. He said this is going to be a great opportunity, "It's great for me to play with a player like that, so I've just got to keep moving my feet and playing a simple game getting pucks to the net and try to create plays to Jack and Sheary."

Phil Housley really has nothing to lose by giving Nylander this chance. He said, "We're going to give him the opportunity with Jack and see what he can do."

"Jack's excited to play with Alex because he brings a skill set and I think he's just got to attack the game like he did in the third period and when he does that, he's effective."

I had wondered if playing with a player of Jack Eichel's abilities is harder. Nylander said quite the opposite, "I think it's probably easier because you know what he's going to do, you know he can make plays and he can shoot the puck too, so you have to be aware at all times because when he has the puck it'll be right on you tape."

Conor Sheary will be the other winger on the line and Sheary thinks in just five games, Nylander has evolved, "When he came up he was a little bit nervous, but I think in the last few games he's really found himself. I think he's a skilled player and has a really good shot and it was good for him to get his first one the other night."

Sheary's been around, winning the Stanley Cup in Pittsburgh. He said the veterans on this team did help to calm Nylander down, "I think it's a comfortability thing and I think if us older guys can help him and make him feel comfortable and let him know that he can just play his game and be successful, I think that will help him."

Sheary has had experience playing with not only Eichel, but Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin too. He said you can't do things differently, "I'm going to approach it the same. Maybe a few instinct things will be a little bit different, especially in the offensive zone and off the rush because he has the ability to find you in places that you won't even expect the puck, so I'll just try to get open and find that soft area for him."

Sheary has looked like he's been flying for the last few games and it paid off with a goal against the Blues. He agrees that he needs to use speed to be effective, "I feel like I'm playing a little bit better, I'm starting to use my speed a little bit more and I'm creating a lot more turnovers than I was and I think that's the way I'm going to be effective."

The Sabres will play two games in Sweden this November. It won't be the first time Phil Housley has been there, "It was in 1989 in the World Championships in the new Globe rink in Stockholm, which was a beautiful facility and it was exciting to be a part of it."

Zach Bogosian returned to practice, but Matt Hunwick missed again with an upper-body injury. He's day-to-day and won't play Saturday.

Alternate reality: Could we build a playoff-caliber roster with talent from the past eight Sabres teams?

By John Vogl

The Athletic

March 23, 2019

The Sabres' reality bites.

Let's alter it.

As an eighth straight finish without the playoffs arrives, we'll try to envision a postseason with the guys who fell short. Buffalo has used 134 players during its record-shattering drought: 118 skaters and 16 goaltenders. Can we build a 23-man roster with enough talent to compete for a playoff spot?

It was fun to find out.

Here are the ground rules:

- The players had to be part of the Sabres during the skid of 2011-12 to 2018-19.
- We'll take each player's best season. For example, Jason Pominville has 15 goals and 28 points this year. He had 30 goals and 73 points in 2011-12. We'll take the 2011-12 version.
- Everyone from Luke Adam to Nikita Zadorov is fair game, as long as they played 25 games in the season being used.
- Positions matter. We can't pick six left wingers and move two to center.
- There's a salary cap. (We need a little dose of reality.) The cap hit corresponds to the year chosen. Reusing Pominville, we'd get him at \$5.3 million – not his current \$5.6 million – because that's what he made in 2011-12.

The average of the last eight salary caps is \$69,562,500. To make it simpler, we'll round up to \$70 million. But nothing is simple with the collective bargaining agreement.

Like the real Sabres, our team will have its share of rookies. Teams need to account for entry-level bonuses when figuring the salary cap. While Rasmus Dahlin technically earns the rookie max of \$925,000, the Sabres have to assume he'll hit his bonuses — which means at the start of the season they budget him at \$3.775 million.

The CBA has a clause that allows teams to exceed the cap by 7.5 percent for entry-level bonuses. So we ultimately have a \$70 million cap that adjusts to \$75.25 million for rookies.

We used it all after using way too much. This Sabres team should play into late April ... but probably not June.

Filling the net, Part I

Our team started with goaltending for two reasons: The Sabres have a shot differential of minus-2,589 since 2011, and there weren't many choices. The only real question was which Ryan Miller did we want?

(For all stats, we used the tools at NHL.com, NaturalStatTrick.com, Evolving-Hockey.com and CapFriendly.com.)

Miller was 31-21-7 with a .916 save percentage in 2011-12. He posted a .923 save percentage in 2013-14 but went 15-22-3. That record sounds subpar — until you consider the other goalies were 6-29-7. The 2013-14 Miller carried the Sabres much more than the '11-12 version, which [Evolving-Hockey](http://Evolving-Hockey.com) confirmed with its metric for goals saved above expected (6.0 compared to 0.67).

The search for a backup landed on Chad Johnson from 2015-16 (22-16-4, .920) or Anders Nilsson in 2016-17 (10-10-4, .923). While Nilsson's advanced stats were slightly better, it's just nice to have a backup who wins. Johnson gets the nod.

Goalies: Miller ('13-14, \$6.25 million), Johnson ('15-16, \$1.3 million). Combined cap hit: \$7.55 million.

Thin blue line

As the build shifted to defense, we were immediately reminded that Buffalo's blue line has been bad (to say the least). Andrej Meszaros ranks in the top dozen for production, and he was banished to Europe for being so awful.

Among the stats we relied upon for defensemen were goals, points, five-on-five goal differential (individually and compared to teammates), Corsi, defensive-zone starts and right- or left-handed shot. Ten players had a case, a list we wanted to narrow to seven.

The final cuts were Zach Bogosian from 2015-16 (seven goals, 24 points in 64 games), Marc-Andre Gragnani in 2011-12 (12 points in 44 games, plus-14 goal differential at five-on-five) and Mike Weber from 2015-16 (best goal differential among blue-liners at plus-1, a 50.8 Corsi despite offensive-zone starts under 49 percent).

Locking down the first spots were Rasmus Dahlin (eight goals, 39 points, plus-5 goal differential at five-on-five), Christian Ehrhoff from lockout-shortened 2012-13 (five goals and 22 points in 47 games, plus-4) and two players from 2011-12: Jordan Leopold (10 goals, 24 points, plus-8 at five-on-five) and Tyler Myers (eight goals, 23 points, plus-7).

Rasmus Ristolainen made the squad, but determining which version of Ristolainen was important. His top season was 2016-17, when he established career bests in points (45) and five-on-five goal differential (minus-10 ... yes, that's his best). But he also started his new contract that season with a cap hit of \$5.4 million.

In the final year of his entry-level deal (2015-16), Ristolainen had nine goals, 41 points and a minus-16 differential. Those numbers are comparable and come with a much more manageable salary (\$925,000 base, \$1.775 million with entry-level bonuses), so 2015-16 Ristolainen is the choice.

Zadorov earned a spot by standing out on the 2014-15 Sabres. His five-on-five goal differential was minus-2, which makes him look like Mike Ramsey compared with the seasons put up by Tyson Strachan (minus-29), Ristolainen (minus-27), Weber (minus-26), Josh Gorges (minus-21), Andre Benoit (minus-14), Myers and Meszaros (both minus-11).

Our seventh defenseman is Taylor Fedun, who had seven assists and a plus-4 goal differential in 27 games in 2016-17. He brings balance, joining Myers and Ristolainen as the righties, and a bargain price.

Defense: Ehrhoff (2011-12, \$4 million), Dahlin ('18-19, \$925,000 and \$3.775 million with bonuses), Leopold ('11-12, \$3 million), Ristolainen ('15-16, \$925,000 and \$1.775 million), Zadorov ('14-15, \$894,167 and \$1,744,167), Myers ('11-12, \$875,000 and \$1.3 million) and Fedun ('16-17, \$600,000). Combined cap hit: \$16,194,167 (with base salary of \$11,219,167).

Filling the net, Part II

Buffalo fans don't just want goals. They need them.

During the past eight seasons, the Sabres are last with 1,425 goals. That's 509 fewer than Pittsburgh. If the Penguins stopped scoring now and the Sabres kept the same pace, they'd catch them in 2022.

That's ridiculous.

So we're going all-out for offense with Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Thomas Vanek, Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane, Pominville, Sam Reinhart, Drew Stafford, Tyler Ennis, Cody Hodgson, Brian Gionta, Evan Rodrigues, Marcus Foligno and Steve Ott. Here's what that looks like in goals and points (with Vanek, Hodgson and Ott adjusted for the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season).

Left wing	Center	Right wing
Skinner	Eichel	Pominville
37-59	25-73	30-73
Vanek	O'Reilly	Reinhart
38-78	20-55	18-59

Kane	Hodgson	Stafford
20-40	25-58	20-50
Ennis	Ott	Gionta
15-34	16-41	12-33
Foligno	Rodrigues	
10-23	9-27	

Some amazing numbers stand out from a group that could steamroll anyone:

- Three 30-goal scorers.
- Eight players with at least 20.
- Thirteen players in double digits, and Rodrigues can make it a perfect 14 before this season ends.
- \$84,578,691.

So, yeah, we blew past the salary cap by almost \$10 million. Got a little excited there. Sorry (not sorry).

Firm in the belief that we had the right goaltending and defense in terms of players and money, we looked for cost-cutting measures up front.

We immediately re-examined Eichel. We'd chosen this season with his \$10 million salary rather than last year at his entry-level price of \$925,000/\$3.775 million. But his raw numbers are better this year ...

... and so are his analytics, which show substantial increases in goal differential, scoring chances and high-danger chances.

Despite the raise, we're going with this year's Eichel, absorbing the \$10 million and building around him.

Next, we locked down this year's Skinner (37 goals, plus-10 goal differential at five-on-five, \$5.725 million) and Vanek from 2012-13 (20 goals, 41 points in 38 games, \$7,142,857). That eliminated fellow left wing Kane and his \$5.25 million salary.

The two other must-haves were Pominville from 2011-12 (30 goals, 73 points) and O'Reilly in 2016-17 (20 goals, 55 points, \$7.5 million). With nine spots remaining and just \$15.8 million left, we scooped up the two bargains from the first go-round: Ennis in '11-12 (15 goals and 34 points in 48 games, \$875,000) and Rodrigues this year (nine goals, 27 points, \$650,000).

There were still big holes to fill.

Left wing	Center	Right wing
Skinner	Eichel	Pominville
Vanek	O'Reilly	
Ennis		
Rodrigues		

Needing right wingers, this year's Reinhart (18 goals, 59 points, \$3.65 million) and Stafford from '11-12 (20 goals, plus-8 goal differential, \$4 million) left us with just \$6.7 million and five roster spots. That eliminated Gionta (\$4.25 million).

Hodgson from '12-13 (15 goals, 34 points in 48 games, \$816,667/\$1.67 million with bonuses) and Foligno from '15-16 (10 goals, even differential, \$1.875 million) moved from extra forwards on the initial team to regular roles on the final team. With only \$3.12 million remaining, Ott and his \$2.95 million salary were out.

Needing a fourth-line right winger and two extra forwards, the list of candidates included Zack Kassian, Patrick Kaleta, Corey Tropp, Matt Ellis, Zemgus Girgensons, William Carrier, Nicolas Deslauriers, Johan Larsson, Brian Flynn, Benoit Pouliot, Luke Adam and Casey Mittelstadt. While Mittelstadt obviously has the most talent and a

workable contract (\$925,000 base, \$1.49 million with bonuses), his stats don't yet compare to the guys who beat him out.

Girgensons from his All-Star season of '14-15 (15 goals, 30 points, \$894,167/\$1.37 million) picked up the final right-wing spot. Evolving-Hockey's goals-above-replacement metrics helped tilt the final jobs to Larsson from '14-15 (7.1 GAR, \$870,000) and Flynn from '14-15 (7.6 GAR, \$637,500).

So with a bonus-inflated cap of \$75.25 million, we spent \$75,005,358 – just \$244,642 under the limit. The base salaries totaled \$69,180,358 – only \$819,642 under the \$70 million cap.

Here's the final depth chart:

Left wing	Center	Right wing
Skinner	Eichel	Pominville
Vanek	O'Reilly	Reinhart
Ennis	Hodgson	Stafford
Foligno	Rodrigues	Girgensons
Larsson	Flynn	

Left defense	Right defense
Leopold	Dahlin
Ehrhoff	Myers
Zadorov	Ristolainen
Fedun	

Goalies
Miller
Johnson

Now the big question: Would these Sabres make the playoffs?

The good news is they can score. The players combined for 320 goals, which would be the most during the past eight seasons (though Tampa Bay had 292 with seven games remaining).

But Miller would be busy, too. The combined five-on-five goal differential for the squad is plus-19. The Lightning are at plus-57 this season. The young group of Girgensons (minus-17), Ristolainen (minus-16), Hodgson (prorated minus-9) and Zadorov (minus-2) would have rough moments, and they wouldn't be alone on a team that thinks offense first.

The power play would be good because the squad's 81 goals lead everyone since 2011 (though Tampa Bay was in striking distance at 72). There's a core penalty-killing group of Foligno, O'Reilly, Pominville, Girgensons, Myers and Ristolainen, but there's not much short-handed depth.

Having the highest-scoring team all but cements a postseason spot. It's not likely they'd knock off this year's Lightning, last year's Capitals or the Cup-winning Penguins teams, but they could advance past the first round.

That's way better than reality since 2011.

As the Sabres' regular season dims, goaltending prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen could be a light on the horizon

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

March 22, 2019

The evolution of a goaltender can be a mysterious process. A goalie generally takes a lot of time to round into form if they're going to become a NHL-caliber player, making the prediction of who will become an elite-level goalie a potentially Sisyphean task. That's part of what makes watching the progress of 20-year-old Buffalo Sabres prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen so interesting.

Luukkonen was drafted in the second round of the 2017 NHL Draft out of Finland, where he played for HPK in Liiga. Last year he played for LeKi in Mestis, Finland's second league. As a teenager he was playing in men's hockey leagues. Sure, forwards and defensemen do that often in Europe, but a goalie? That's difficult to pull off unless the player has great talent.

This season he came to North America, joining the Sudbury Wolves of the OHL to get acclimated to the smaller ice and faster game here and to keep him within reach of the watchful eyes of the Sabres organization. Next season he'll be a pro once again, this time with the Rochester Americans in the AHL.

"I think he just wanted to come over and prove that he is the best and to me, right now, he is the best 19-year-old goalie in the world (Luukkonen just turned 20 on March 9th) and now it's for him to continue to hold that reign," Sudbury coach Cory Stillman said. "He did it at the World Junior Championships in Vancouver (in 2018) and now we're hoping for him to do it here in the OHL. We believe when he's in net we can beat every hockey team in our league."

This season has been an awakening for Luukkonen. He led the Wolves to home ice in the first round of the OHL Playoffs by leading the league with a .920 save percentage. He set the Sudbury record for shutouts in a season with six and tied the franchise record for shutouts in a career. He had 38 out of Sudbury's 43 wins and went 38-11-2 while playing in 53 games, tied for fourth-most in the OHL.

"His dedication on and off the ice and his desire to get better each and every day made that adjustment easier for himself. Not that it was easy, but he put in that work so he could do it in a timely fashion," Sudbury Wolves goalie coach Alain Valiquette said. "As soon as he came in after training camp, he was a huge difference maker for our team immediately. So that adjustment period for him was really small if there was any."

Preseason was an instant turning point for Luukkonen. In September, he took part in Sabres camp before he was sent to join Sudbury. There, it was during an exhibition game that Luukkonen found out how different things were going to be in North America.

"The first game we had him play, it was an exhibition game, and he looked really shaky and I think it was with angles and how quickly pucks got to him," Stillman said. "Now, the goalie he is and the level he has, within a week he was back to normal and I think his routine often now is when we go into rinks he tries to pick up on the new angles. The Olympic-sized ice is much bigger, but he has no problem playing in the NHL-sized rink and I think that's why Buffalo wanted him over here is to make the step quicker."

"To me, next year I see him playing in the American Hockey League and getting a chance to play in the NHL. I think this year was the biggest learning curve he could have."

Luukkonen went from being a prospect with a lot of tools and talent to being an absolute No. 1 stud goaltender in junior hockey. Part of his drive isn't just to improve himself and get better each day but to also show teams that passed on him that they made a mistake.

"Of course you want to prove everybody, how do you say, right or wrong, but you want to prove to yourself it was the right decision to draft you and I think every kid thinks like that when they get drafted," Luukkonen said.

"I think when you get drafted it shows they see something special in you and it gives you that extra motivation and gives you, as I said about going to the pros, it's the same thing when you get drafted. It just gives you that motivation to be that much closer to playing in the NHL."

For goalies, it's never a sure thing they'll get to the NHL. The Sabres have drafted 45 goalies since 1970. Out of those 45, 20 went on to play at least one game in the NHL. Out of those 20, 14 played more than 20 NHL games. Goalies are unpredictable, but Luukkonen has already shown plenty of signs he could be the real deal.

"When he's gone in after a different goalie and started the second period or earlier, you can see the shoulders, the heads of all our team rise and right then it's like, 'They're not going to score any more goals — we're coming back,'" Stillman said. "And he's giving the confidence and the belief in the 18 skaters that we skate every night that we're going to win hockey games ... You can afford to make a mistake. We can afford to take the odd chance here early in the game or late in a period because you know he's going to make the big save at the right time."

It was at the 2019 World Junior Championships in Vancouver in January that Luukkonen seized everyone's attention when he helped lead Finland to the gold medal. Although many in his position might've sagged after such an emotional high, Luukkonen powered ahead upon his return to Sudbury after the tournament.

"I think he had the ability to take it game-by-game and day-by-day and once he went to the tournament his main focus was the World Juniors and as soon as he came back from World Juniors he was ready to come back and that was in the past," Valiquette said. "He turned that switch off and he was back in the dressing room with the guys and our team, doing what he could to give our team the best chance to win. He did that since the beginning of the year. He's obviously a huge part of our team and he gives us the best chance to win night in and night out."

The effect Luukkonen has had on Sudbury is profound. Their 43 wins this season, 38 of which belonged to Luukkonen, were the most they've had since 1994-1995. Although a future in Rochester and Buffalo awaits if his play continues to improve, the task at hand keeps him going. Of course, mentioning a future in the pros brought a big smile to the big Finn's face.

"Every kid who starts to play hockey and any kid who gets drafted, their dream is to play in the NHL and making pros next year will be one step closer to that," Luukkonen said.

Although Sudbury is having their best season in years with Luukkonen saving the day, he's done it under duress. He's faced the seventh-most shots among OHL goalies and sees an average of 30.1 shots per game. He's had 17 games in which he's faced 35 or more shots on goal and has had five games with 40 or more saves, including a 47-save effort in a 5-4 win on the road against Niagara in mid-February and a 41-save shutout on his 20th birthday in Hamilton.

Even with highlights like those, it was the third game of the season — a 3-2 win on the road against Niagara in which Luukkonen made 46 saves — when Stillman knew he had a goalie destined for bigger things.

"He stole us a game and I think the next night he was the first star again," Stillman said. "As a coaching staff you know you have a special goalie and you have an NHL goalie and you know you have a guy that's going to win."

"We've gone from a team that was in last place and now we're in a playoff spot, we have home ice. Him coming in sets the standard for what we want for goaltending. You're not always going to get his level, but now we realize as an organization what a goalie can do throughout a 68-game schedule."

Sabres recall Lawrence Pilut from Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 23, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres recalled rookie defenseman Lawrence Pilut, who played 25 NHL games earlier this season, from the Rochester Americans this afternoon.

Pilut, 23, compiled one goal, six points and a minus-3 rating in nearly three months with the Sabres.

Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian is missing from today's practice, according to reports from Newark. Defenseman Matt Hunwick (upper body) is also injured.

Pilut has been dynamic at times in his first American Hockey League season, registering four goals, 26 points and a plus-21 rating in 28 outings.

The Swede, however, hasn't been the same offensive force over the last month. After returning to the Amerks in late February, he scored one goal and four points in 12 contests.

The Sabres play a road game against the New Jersey Devils on Monday. The Amerks, meanwhile, play a road contest versus the Toronto Marlies this afternoon.

Stay tuned for more updates.

Update: Coach Phil Housley told reporters in Newark the Sabres recalled Pilut as a precaution because Bogosian is day-to-day for lower-body maintenance and Hunwick is hurt. Housley plans on Bogosian playing Monday.

Newcomer Brandon Montour utilizing skills with Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 22, 2019

BUFFALO – In Anaheim, Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour couldn't play the aggressive, exciting style he has consistently showcased in his first weeks here.

The Ducks' conservative game constrained the speedy Montour, limiting his effectiveness.

"I got kind of caught with how they want me to play, specific areas where I was just a player on the team," Montour said Thursday inside KeyBank Center.

Montour, of course, loves having the green light to freewheel with the Sabres. The UMass product regularly joins the rush, adding another wave to the offensive attack.

"I think he's enjoying the opportunity," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He's just really still trying to get acclimated to his teammates and just trying to be part of the solution. I just like the way he plays. He plays an aggressive style, he likes to join the rush, he wants to get on the attack and he's got a little edge to his game."

The Sabres want Montour, 24, to be one of their top guns. That's why they paid such a hefty price – defense prospect Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick – to pry him from the Ducks on Feb. 24.

"Here, I have that freeness to use my strengths," said Montour, who will likely play beside rookie Rasmus Dahlin again Saturday versus the Montreal Canadiens, the start of a three-game road trip.

Through 11 outings with the Sabres, Montour has scored two goals and six points. While it's a small sample size, that's a 15-goal, 45-point pace over a full season.

Those numbers are huge benchmarks for defensemen. Overall, Montour has scored seven goals, 31 points and a minus-17 rating in 73 games this season.

"He adds a dynamic to our offense that's new to us," Sabres center Evan Rodrigues said. "He's always jumping up in the play, he's always adding a fourth wave. He's sometimes the first guy in on a forecheck, and that's just a testament to his speed."

Rodrigues said in Wednesday's 4-2 loss to Toronto, one of the Maple Leafs chipped the puck by Montour to create a two-on-one before he raced back to stymie it.

"With his skating ability, he gets back, turns it into a two-on-two," Rodrigues said.

Montour and Dahlin, perhaps the league's best young defenseman, have a chance to become a "dynamic" tandem, Housley said

"They control the game back there," Housley said.

So far, Montour feels comfortable with the Sabres and good about what he has accomplished.

Well, other than not winning enough games.

The Sabres are 2-7-2 with Montour. They haven't won a game in regulation with him yet.

"That's obviously a tough issue," he said of the losing.

Having spent most of the season in Anaheim, one of the NHL's bottom-feeders, Montour has endured a lot of losing over the past six months.

Not surprisingly, Montour said this has been the toughest season of his career. He made the playoffs his first two years, playing 17 games as the Ducks reached the Western Conference final in 2017.

The Ducks were 24-29-9 when they traded him, meaning his teams have lost 64 percent of their games this season (26-36-11).

"In Anaheim, we went on a bunch of skids," Montour said. "We went on a seven-game losing streak. We won seven in a row. We lost 12 in a row. We lost eight in a row and then came here and same thing. I think every guy is going to experience those. ...

"My years past, I've had success. I've been on some good teams where we made some runs in the playoffs. I think it's one of those things where it's going to be an adjustment. It's something that I can experience and learn from, those highs and lows in a year. I've definitely had a lot of highs and lows this year."

Those lows can be rough. Montour said managing emotions as a team has been the most difficult part of the season.

"You just have to gain your confidence as fast as you can and kind of regroup and wash that game or wash that shift," he said, "wash whatever negative things you have and focus on the next day or the present."

Sabres' Matt Hunwick day-to-day; Zach Bogosian practices

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 22, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Matt Hunwick is day-to-day with an upper-body injury, coach Phil Housley said this afternoon.

Hunwick missed his second straight practice this morning inside HarborCenter.

Meanwhile, defenseman Zach Bogosian, who missed Thursday's session, practiced today and will play Saturday against the Montreal Canadiens, the start of a three-game road trip.

Based on line combinations, wingers Tage Thompson and Scott Wilson could be scratched Saturday.

Buffalo Sabres miss playoffs for eighth consecutive season

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — There's always next year.

On Saturday the Buffalo Sabres were officially eliminated from playoff contention with a 7-4 loss to the Montreal Canadiens.

It's funny how quickly things can change. In late November the Sabres sat atop the standings after rattling off 10 consecutive wins. As of Saturday evening, the Sabres have an underwhelming 31-34-9 record [71 points]. Only four teams in the Eastern Conference have fewer points than the Sabres.

Since their win streak ended the Sabres have one of the worst records in the NHL with just 13 wins and 36 losses [13-28-8].

2018-2019 becomes the eighth consecutive season the Sabres have missed the playoffs, with their last postseason appearance coming in 2010-2011 [lost in ECQ to Flyers].

The Sabres eight year playoff drought is the second longest in the NHL behind only the Carolina Hurricanes.

For those keeping track at home, the NHL Draft lottery takes place on April 9 in Toronto.

Sabres eliminated from postseason contention with 7-4 loss to Habs

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

March 23, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Alex Nylander scored for the second straight game, and Jack Eichel tallied a new career high by burying his 26th goal of the year, but it wasn't enough to delay the inevitable as the Sabres were eliminated from postseason contention with a 7-4 to Montreal.

The Sabres will miss the playoffs for an eighth straight year which is currently the second longest drought in the NHL.

The Carolina Hurricanes own the longest postseason drought at nine years, but that could come to an end as they currently have 89 points and hold the first Wild Card spot.

Buffalo jumped out a 1-0 lead courtesy of Sam Reinhart in the first period, but wouldn't find the back of the net again until the end of the second period.

Nylander blasted home a one-timer from Rasmus Dahlin and Marco Scandella ripped home another goal two minutes later to tie the game up at three.

But, as it's happened all too often this season, the Canadiens regained the lead two minutes later and never gave it back.

Pilut joins Sabres in New Jersey, adding insurance on back end

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 24, 2019

NEWARK, N.J. - With Matt Hunwick nursing an upper-body injury and Zach Bogosian taking a maintenance day off from practice, the Sabres recalled defenseman Lawrence Pilut from Rochester on Sunday afternoon.

Phil Housley said he expects Bogosian to be ready to play against the New Jersey Devils on Monday, but the addition of Pilut gives the Sabres insurance on the back end with another game awaiting them in Ottawa on Tuesday.

Even if Bogosian does play, Pilut's presence give the Sabres the option to restore left-right balance on defense. The Sabres have been playing with four right shots, using Bogosian on his off side on a pair with Rasmus Ristolainen.

"We're sort of depleted with Matt Hunwick's situation," Housley said. "We felt we needed some insurance. Those decisions will be made at game time tomorrow."

Pilut tallied six points (1+5) during a 25-game stint with the Sabres that began in late November and ended with his reassignment to Rochester on Feb. 22. The 23-year-old defenseman ranked third among AHL skaters with 22 points (3+29) at the time of his recall on Nov. 27.

He made a similar impact upon making his NHL debut, skating 19-plus minutes in three of his first four contests with Buffalo. As time went on, however, Housley saw the young defenseman's game slip.

"I think his overall game was really good when he got here," the coach said. "He played some really good minutes for us in a lot of different situations. Sometimes, in a young man's development, you take a step back and you're not up to speed. I didn't think he was moving his feet as well. His defensive reads weren't as sharp as they needed to be, so we brought him back down to Rochester to find his game."

Pilut admitted his play in Rochester since his reassignment had been less consistent than his early-season surge. He registered four points (1+3) in 12 games, but did tally four shots in the Amerks' win over Toronto on Saturday.

"I think I had great consistency at the beginning of the season," he said. "When I came back now, I thought I struggled a little bit but I'm finding my way back slowly. I thought yesterday was a good game for me. ... I felt a little push from that game."

At his best, Pilut is a dynamic puck-moving defenseman who can jump into the play and get shots through from the point on offense and plays with a competitive edge in his own zone.

"He's an excellent first pass, best pass option and he can see the whole ice coming out of his own end," Housley said. "He's got to get back to moving his feet. Things will happen when he starts to move his feet and skate to the next option, but it's good to have him back."

Sunday's practice

Casey Mittelstadt filled in on a defense pair alongside Ristolainen, a sign that he could be scratched against the Devils on Monday. Housley said that decision would be made prior to the game, but added that the new perspective could be beneficial for the rookie.

"I think Casey's given us some really good games," Housley said. "Sometimes, in a player's development, it's not a bad thing to take a step back. You look at our games, we're giving up way too much right now. And it's not what you make, it's what you leave on the table and we're leaving way too much."

"In Casey's defense, it might be a good thing just to take a deep breath. He's played a lot of hockey to this point. We'll make that decision tomorrow."

Here's how the Sabres lined up, with Scott Wilson also working in on defense:

43 Conor Sheary - 9 Jack Eichel - 92 Alexander Nylander
53 Jeff Skinner - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 23 Sam Reinhart
72 Tage Thompson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 29 Jason Pominville
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

20 Scott Wilson / 37 Casey Mittelstadt* - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 62 Brandon Montour
6 Marco Scandella - 8 Casey Nelson

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

*Extra forwards skating on defense

Costly mistakes mount in loss to Canadiens

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 24, 2019

MONTREAL - Facing a raucous road atmosphere and an opponent fighting for a spot in the playoffs, the Sabres emphasized the importance of starting strong against the Montreal Canadiens at Bell Centre on Saturday night. They led 1-0 after the first period on the strength of a Sam Reinhart goal.

In the second period, they got away from what made them successful. Costly mistakes mounted into a 7-4 loss, officially eliminating the team from playoff contention.

"I thought we had a good first period," captain Jack Eichel said. "Second period, I thought maybe we got a little bit away from our game and I thought they were able to extend shifts in our end and we probably turned over too many pucks and that led to some of their goals.

"It's been a long process here, it's been a long year. These same issues seem to continue to haunt us, so we've got to be better here for these next couple games. There's a lot of pride on the line, there's a lot to play for. We represent our city, we represent each other, this organization. That should be enough right there. We've got to play for each other more."

In addition to Reinhart, Alexander Nylander, Marco Scandella and Eichel all scored goals for the Sabres. Carter Hutton made 37 saves on 43 shots, his second straight workload of 40-plus shots.

The Sabres were outshot 20-7 during a second period in which the two teams combined for six goals. The Canadiens scored three in a row - from Artturi Lehkonen, Brendan Gallagher and Andrew Shaw - to take a 3-1 lead.

The Sabres tied the game with goals from Nylander and Scandella that were scored 1:15 apart, but Paul Byron capitalized on a turnover by Reinhart at the offensive blue line to put the Canadiens back ahead with 1:57 remaining. Gallagher scored his second goal to add to the lead with 11:25 left in the third.

"In the second period we're trying to do too much ourselves, too much one-on-one hockey," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "... We come and tie it up, we show some jam, we have the puck on our stick and we just can't make these critical mistakes."

Lehkonen put the Canadiens on the board after Jordie Benn kept prevented a clearing attempt by Casey Nelson from leaving the Sabres' zone. Max Domi collected the puck up high, spun as he approached the net and dished a backhand pass down low to Shaw, who passed across the net to set up Lehkonen.

Their next three goals came in similar fashion. Phillip Danault stole the puck down low and sent a diving pass to the front of the net to set up Gallagher's first goal. Shaw scored on an odd-man rush.

"This is the thing we continue to talk to our players about, is our checking detail," Housley said. "We're going to continue to talk about it because it's so important. When we don't have the puck, you can see, we have to have a bigger commitment without it.

"You're playing against good teams that are fighting for their playoff lives, they have a good transitional game and it ends up in our net, so we've got to continue that message."

Eichel brought the Sabres back within one when he cleaned up a loose puck for his career-high 26th goal of the season. The goal came seconds after the expiration of a four-minute power play, making it 5-4 with 6:47 remaining.

Once again, the Canadiens responded. Max Domi buried a wrist shot on the power play 3:17 later and Tomas Tatar capped the scoring with an empty-net goal.

Reinhart admitted to feeling the frustration of another season without playoffs, but echoed Eichel in saying that pride will be on the line over the final eight games.

"It's not an easy situation to be in," Reinhart said. "When you go through a couple years of it and they start adding up, it just adds to the frustration. When we do have a little bit of success at the start of the year, it makes it that much more difficult to lose, really. We've got to find a way to stick together and start playing for one another down the stretch here."

Streaking

Nylander's power-play goal extended his career-best point streak to three games, with two goals and two assists in that span. Once again, it was the sort of goal one would expect from a guy with "snipe show" in his Twitter handle:

Nylander spent the game skating on a line with Eichel and Conor Sheary, which meant recurring matchups with Montreal's top line of Danault, Gallagher and Tatar as well as its top defense pair in Victor Mete and Shea Weber. He skated 14:32 and tallied three shot attempts.

"I thought Alex played a heck of a game tonight," Housley said. "Not because he scored, I thought he was skating well, he was getting down in deep in the corners, controlling the puck, hanging onto pucks. He got a couple looks. It was a heck of a shot on the power play."

Reinhart's 200th

Reinhart's first-period goal was his 200th NHL point, as well as his fourth in four games against the Canadiens this season.

The goal was the product of a give-and-go between Reinhart and Casey Mittelstadt that began with the former along the right half wall, where he found Mittelstadt in the corner and proceeded to drive to the net. Mittelstadt delivered a return pass to Reinhart in the slot, where he went five-hole on Carey Price.

The goal was Reinhart's 60th point of the season, his first time reaching that mark.

"I think that was our first period," Reinhart said. "We kept things simple through the neutral zone, we were able to get on pucks in deep and get our forecheck going and then get our cycle play going. That summed up our first, as well as Hutts making a couple big saves. We got away from that."

Brandon Montour earned a secondary assist on the goal, his seventh point in 12 games with the Sabres. He gained the offensive zone with a dynamic end-to-end drive, weaving his way through defenders as he drove low toward the net.

Up next

The road trip continues in New Jersey on Monday. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.

Pominville set to return in Montreal

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 23, 2019

MONTREAL - Jason Pominville has maintained a positive attitude while sitting as a healthy scratch for the past two games, earning praise from coach Phil Housley in the process.

That said, the veteran forward admitted to smiling when he saw his name in the lineup for the Sabres' game tonight in his hometown Montreal.

"A lot of family and friends will be here so it's always a fun place to play in," Pominville said. "As far as not playing, I don't really see it as punishment. At this point of the year, I've been in the league long enough to understand the situation we're in and know that we've got a lot of young guys they want to see play. I get that part.

"I'm not going around being happy that I'm not playing, but at the same time I'm being a good teammate and showing up to work every day and haven't changed my attitude at all. But yeah, it's obviously nice to be back in and in a building where I've always enjoyed playing, for sure."

Pominville will skate on a line with Jeff Skinner and Evan Rodrigues when the Sabres visit the Montreal Canadiens for the final time this season at Bell Centre. Scott Wilson and Tage Thompson will be scratched at forward, while Carter Hutton will make his third straight start in net.

The Sabres will likely be in for a raucous atmosphere, thanks to a perfect storm of circumstances that could have the Bell Centre even more electric than usual. Not only is it Saturday night, but the Canadiens are clinging to their grip on the second wild card in the Eastern Conference.

It might be business as usual for a veteran like Pominville, but it will be a valuable test for the young players in Buffalo's lineup.

"It doesn't get any better than this, Saturday night in Montreal," he said. "They're desperate for points, so we know they're going to be ready to play. This is definitely a good measuring stick for us, for the young guys to see what type of atmosphere it's going to be in here."

Alexander Nylander will play on a line with Conor Sheary and Jack Eichel after tallying three points (1+2) in his last two games. With that opportunity comes the test of seeing ice time against Montreal's top players, especially with home ice giving the Canadiens their choice of matchups.

Housley said he'd like to see Nylander build on his third period against Toronto on Wednesday, when he scored his first NHL goal of the season on a one-time shot from the high slot.

"Every game he's gotten better," Housley said. "Not because he scored. I think he's just attacking the game the right way, he's holding onto pucks down low and he's using his shot a lot more. He's had a shot mentality. You'd like to see that continue.

"He's going to have a great opportunity tonight, probably playing against some great competition as far as the line matchup, defensive pairings. It's going to be a great opportunity for him."

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 Habs

The Canadiens have won their last two games, including a 4-0 shutout of the New York Islanders on Thursday in which Carey Price made 28 saves. Price is expected to get the start in net tonight.

The Sabres won their first three matchups this season with the Canadiens, all of which were one-goal games. They most recently met on Nov. 23 in Buffalo, a 3-2 overtime victory for the Sabres.

"I liked our game in those games that we played," Housley said. "We were a smart team, we managed the puck well, we tried to take away their speed because they have an excellent transition game so that's going to be important tonight."

Montreal boasts a balanced lineup that features six players over the 40-point mark. Max Domi has tallied a team-high 64 points (25+39) in his first season as a Canadien, while Brendan Gallagher leads the team with 31 goals.

Projected lineup

43 Conor Sheary - 9 Jack Eichel - 92 Alexander Nylander
53 Jeff Skinner - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville
17 Vladimir Sobotka - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 23 Sam Reinhart
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