



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 31, 2019

Sabres take on the Blue Jackets on 6-game skid

Associated Press

March 31, 2019

Columbus Blue Jackets (44-30-4, fifth in the Metropolitan Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (31-37-10, sixth in the Atlantic Division)

Buffalo, New York; Sunday, 6 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: Buffalo comes into the matchup with Columbus after losing six games in a row.

The Sabres are 17-24-8 in conference games. Buffalo scores 2.6 goals per game, the least in the Eastern Conference. Jeff Skinner leads them with 37 total goals.

The Blue Jackets are 22-14-2 on the road. Columbus has given up 30 power-play goals, killing 84.8 percent of opponent chances. In their last meeting on Jan. 29, Buffalo won 5-4. Evan Rodrigues recorded a team-high 2 points for the Sabres in the victory.

TOP PERFORMERS: Jack Eichel leads the Sabres with 77 total points, scoring 27 goals and adding 50 assists. Casey Mittelstadt has recorded 4 points over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

LAST 10 GAMES: Blue Jackets: 6-3-1, averaging 3.4 goals, 5.1 assists, 2.3 penalties and 5.2 penalty minutes while giving up 1.8 goals per game with a .936 save percentage.

Sabres: 1-8-1, averaging 1.7 goals, 2.9 assists, 2.9 penalties and 6.1 penalty minutes while giving up 3.9 goals per game with a .881 save percentage.

Sabres Injuries: Marco Scandella: day to day (foot), Zach Bogosian: day to day (undisclosed), Rasmus Ristolainen: day to day (illness).

Blue Jackets Injuries: Adam McQuaid: day to day (head).

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Islanders clinch playoff spot with 5-1 victory over Sabres

By Allan Kreda
Associated Press
March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE, N.Y. (AP) — Clinching a playoff spot brought roars from the home crowd and broad smiles from the New York Islanders, who acknowledged their accomplishment is a satisfying first step.

Jordan Eberle continued his scoring surge with another goal, Anthony Beauvillier added two of his own and the Islanders secured a postseason berth for the first time since 2016 with a 5-1 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night.

Michael Dal Colle and Ryan Pullock also scored for the Islanders, who have 99 points in their first season under coach Barry Trotz and secured a postseason spot in March for the first time since 1990. If the Islanders finish first or second in the Metropolitan Division, it would mark the first time since 1988 they would open a playoff series at home.

"The strength of this team is its backbone," Trotz said. "It's good to know we have an invite to the party."

The Islanders, who have won four of their last five games, trail Washington by three points for the division lead and are four points ahead of third-place Pittsburgh. New York and Washington each have three games remaining, while Pittsburgh has four.

Buffalo's Victor Olofsson spoiled Robin Lehner's shutout bid with his first NHL goal on the power play at 13:28 of the third period.

Eberle opened the scoring at 7:41 of the first at Nassau Coliseum, tapping in a rebound after Buffalo's Carter Hutton initially stopped a shot by Mathew Barzal. Anders Lee also assisted.

The goal was the third in the last two games for Eberle, who has 18 overall this season. He had a three-point game — including the winning goal — against Winnipeg on Thursday, when the Islanders scored two late goals for a 5-4 win over the Jets.

Beauvillier made it 2-0 at 8:20 of the second, finishing off a sequence in which the Islanders kept the puck in the Sabres zone for an extended time. Beauvillier, who was denied on a penalty shot midway through the first, shot the puck from just inside the blue line to elude Hutton.

Dal Colle added his third goal of the season at 19:26 of the second before Pullock scored his ninth goal 30 seconds into the third to make it 4-0.

Beauvillier scored his second of the game and 18th of the season at 6:07 of the third to make it a 5-0 advantage for the Islanders.

Veteran Islanders forward Cal Clutterbuck said the victory before their appreciative and very vocal fans - the first time the Islanders clinched at home since 2002 - was important.

"It's nice to get in there and do it front of these people in this building," said the 31-year-old Clutterbuck, an Islander since 2013. "They have been there for us all year."

Lehner, the former Sabre, made 31 saves to improve to 24-12-5 as he heard the crowd repeatedly chant his name.

Lehner has been a revelation for the Islanders after they signed him to a one-year free agent contract last summer during which the Swedish netminder went through well-documented substance abuse and mental illness rehab.

"The strength of our team this year has been working as a group, everyone buying into the system learning how to play close games and play good defense," Lehner said. "It's incredibly rewarding to clinch today."

The Islanders came out flying against the dreadful Sabres, outshooting Buffalo 16-8 in the first period. Hutton managed to stop Beauvillier on a penalty shot at 12:23 after defenseman Brandon Montour tripped the Islanders forward.

Buffalo, which will miss the playoffs for the eighth straight season, is 0-5-1 in its past six games and 1-11-2 in its last 14 overall. The Sabres are also 0-12-2 in their past 14 road games, the longest road skid in the NHL since Toronto went 0-14-2 from Jan. 2 to March 1, 2015.

"This game was about battles. They are a bigger team. That's why they are in the playoffs," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We spent way too much time in the defensive zone and we didn't execute very well. They won way more puck battles than we did."

With the loss, the Sabres matched the second-longest road skid in franchise history. They went also 0-13-1 from Dec. 4, 2014 to Jan. 30, 2015. Buffalo's longest road winless streak is 23 contests. The Sabres were 0-15-8, including eight ties, from Oct. 30, 1971 to Feb. 19, 1972.

NOTES: The Islanders are 12-6-2 at Nassau Coliseum this season and were also 12-6-2 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn. ... The Islanders are 32-14-3 in their last 48 games and 7-2-2 in their past 11 games overall against the Sabres. ... The Islanders scratched defensemen Thomas Hickey and Luca Sbisa, plus forwards Tanner Fritz and Ross Johnston. ... Buffalo scratched defensemen Zach Bogosian, Matt Tennyson, Jake McCabe, Matt Hunwick and Rasmus Ristolainen, plus forwards Evan Rodrigues and Vladimir Sobotka.

UP NEXT:

Islanders: Host Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday night.

Sabres: Host Columbus Blue Jackets on Sunday night.

Buffalo takes on New York on 5-game losing streak

Associated Press

March 30, 2019

Buffalo Sabres (31-36-10, sixth in the Atlantic Division) vs. New York Islanders (45-26-7, second in the Metropolitan Division)

Uniondale, New York; Saturday, 7 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: Buffalo looks to break its five-game losing streak with a win over New York.

The Islanders are 27-16-5 in conference matchups. New York is last in the Eastern Conference shooting 28.6 shots per game.

The Sabres have gone 11-23-5 away from home. Buffalo has given up 40 power-play goals, killing 80.4 percent of opponent chances. In their last matchup on Feb. 12, Buffalo won 3-1. Jack Eichel recorded a team-high 2 points for the Sabres.

TOP PERFORMERS: Mathew Barzal leads the Islanders with 43 assists and has collected 61 points this season. Anders Lee has recorded 6 points over the last 10 games for New York.

LAST 10 GAMES: Sabres: 1-8-1, averaging 1.6 goals, 2.8 assists, 3.3 penalties and 6.9 penalty minutes while giving up 3.6 goals per game with a .892 save percentage.

Islanders: 6-4-0, averaging 1.9 goals, 3.2 assists, 2.9 penalties and 7.2 penalty minutes while giving up 2.3 goals per game with a .928 save percentage.

Islanders Injuries: Andrew Ladd: out for season (torn acl), Valtteri Filppula: out (upper body).

Sabres Injuries: Zach Bogosian: day to day (undisclosed), Rasmus Ristolainen: day to day (illness).

Mike Harrington: Evidence aside, Sabres insist they haven't quit on Housley

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE – The message was sent during pregame warmups. A solitary Buffalo Sabres fan in a white jersey pressed a placard with black letters against the glass behind the Buffalo bench.

It said simply, "Fire Housley."

The fan stood there for about 10 minutes, then quietly climbed the stairs with his card when the warmups were over. He might get his wish in four more games.

Because if this team has not quit on coach Phil Housley, it sure has a funny way of showing it.

The Sabres were complete no-shows from the first shift Saturday night, with only goaltender Carter Hutton offering any resistance. The New York Islanders clinched a playoff berth by toying with Buffalo, 5-1, at a raucous NYCB Live Nassau Coliseum.

Former Sabre Robin Lehner made 31 saves and Anthony Beauvillier had two goals to lead the Islanders in a game that saw Buffalo only break Lehner's shutout with 6:32 left on Victor Olofsson's first NHL goal.

Of the Sabres' 32 shots on goal, 15 were spread between rookies Olofsson, Lawrence Pilut, Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Dahlin. Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart had just one apiece while combining for a minus-6 rating.

The shots on goal were 12-1 over the first 15 minutes of the first period, and Buffalo didn't get one for nearly 6 1/2 minutes in the second period.

"It's embarrassing. Embarrassing," Eichel said. "That's the best way to put it. It's embarrassing. ... That's a really bad effort there."

The players essentially ran out coach Dan Bylsma two years ago after seasons of 81 and 78 points, respectively. Housley had 62 last year and is at 72 with four games left this time.

"This isn't on Phil. This is on us," Eichel said pointedly. "It's on us. Not Phil right now. He's not out there playing the games, is he? He's not out there competing. It's not his job. It's our job."

"They beat us tonight in all facets of the game," Skinner added. "That's what it looks like when a good team plays a team that doesn't perform and doesn't play up to their standard. We're all professional athletes. We all play in the NHL. No one's quitting."

Housley continues to play good soldier in all this, even though his team has gone 1-11-2 in the last 14 games to slip to 27th place in the NHL's overall standing. The coach refuses to throw anybody under the bus.

"This game really wasn't about Xs and Os. It was just about battles," Housley said. "We didn't win many of them and they won the majority of them."

It's a constant theme with a club that has won just 14 of its last 53 games. Housley tried to talk about the way his team played in Thursday's overtime loss to 28th-place Detroit as a way to show it hasn't quit. But he had no answer when asked about its abysmal road play: No wins in the last 14 games and just two goals in the last three.

"I don't think this team doesn't have heart. This team is fighting," Housley insisted.

Hutton, who had a strong night with 33 saves and couldn't do much on any of the goals, said there needs to be more pride in the dressing room.

"There has to be," Hutton said. "I know I try to compete the best I can. I don't know right now. Personally it's embarrassing and frustrating. I don't want to lose. I want to compete and give us a chance to win. They pounded us off the drop of the puck and I don't think we had an answer."

Although the evidence keeps pointing the other way, Eichel wasn't having anything to do with the quit narrative. He said to give the Sabres another look Sunday in KeyBank Center against Columbus.

"We're not quitting on Phil. We're not quitting on each other," the captain insisted. "We're just not bringing anything. That's a hockey team right there playing to get in the playoffs. From the first shift, we didn't execute. We weren't hard on the puck. Easy to play against."

"I don't think we've quit. At this point, it's definitely tough. It's a struggle. It's been a long year. You can say that. Quit? No. We're going to play tomorrow. We should be mad about this and bring our best effort. That's all I got."

The Wraparound: Islanders 5, Sabres 1

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE — The New York Islanders are going to the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time in three years. The Buffalo Sabres continue to count down to spring tee times for the eighth straight season.

The Isles' 5-1 domination of Buffalo Saturday night in NYCB Live Nassau Coliseum clinched at least an Eastern Conference wild-card and kept them in the hunt for the Metropolitan Division title. New York is three points behind division-leading Washington but four ahead of Pittsburgh in the battle for second place and home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

It's heady stuff for a franchise picked to go nowhere this season by virtually every expert in the wake of the free agent defection of captain John Tavares to Toronto. But under the tutelage of coach Barry Trotz, the Islanders have improved to 99 points.

A roaring, chanting sellout crowd of 13,917 created an intense atmosphere in support of its team in Buffalo's first game in the building in nearly four years. Anthony Beauvillier scored two goals and former Sabres goalie Robin Lehner notched his 24th win while coming within 6 1/2 minutes of a shutout to lead the way for the Islanders. The crowd stood and roared for the entire final minute to celebrate the playoff berth.

The Sabres, meanwhile, continue to go nowhere. They're 0-5-1 in their last six games, 1-11-2 in their last 14 and 3-16-3 in their last 22.

Buffalo's lone bright spot: Winger Victor Olofsson got the Sabres on the scoreboard with his first NHL goal with 6:32 to play. It was a snapshot from the right circle after a cross-ice pass from Jack Eichel.

Sorry start: The Sabres gave up 12 of the game's first 13 shots on goal and fell behind, 1-0, on Jordan Eberle's goal at 7:41 of the first period. Eberle took a Mathew Barzal rebound and slid the puck under Carter Hutton.

Struggling second: Beauvillier, who was stopped on a first-period penalty shot by Hutton, got some revenge in the second period with a goal at 8:20 on a Devon Toews feed. Michael Dal Colle outfought Zemgus Girgensons for a puck at the crease and poked it through Hutton to make it 3-0 with 33.5 seconds left in the period.

Wrapping it up: The Islanders got a goal from defenseman Ryan Pullock 30 seconds into the third and Beauvillier's second of the night on a tap-in at 6:07 of the third.

Road not taken: Benny Ercolani, the NHL's longtime chief statistician, has provided clarity on the Sabres' current road streaks to point out the club record for the longest road losing streak is 12 games, set in 2011-12.

Since the advent of overtime in 1983 and the shootout in 2005, the league differentiates between losing streaks and winless streaks, just like it did when ties were played. Games decided in OT or shootouts are not listed under losing streaks because the losing team gets a point. Instead, they are part of winless streaks.

The bottom line is this: Saturday's loss gives the Sabres a six-game road losing streak, dating to their shootout loss March 7 in Chicago. But they're on a 14-game road winless streak (0-12-2) and have not won since Jan. 29 in Columbus. The franchise record in that category is 23 games (0-15-8), set from Oct. 30, 1971-Feb. 19, 1972.

Another injury on defense: Marco Scandella took a slapshot to the right foot in the second period and did not return. The Sabres were already playing without Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe and Matt Hunwick. McCabe took the morning skate and thus might play Sunday against Columbus.

Up next: Mercifully, there are only four games left in the season. The Sabres flew home immediately after Saturday's contest and will host the Blue Jackets Sunday night at 6 in KeyBank Center.

Sabres Notebook: Borgen stunned by St. Cloud State's second straight NCAA shocker

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE — It happened again to St. Cloud State on Friday. Sabres defenseman Will Borgen lived the nightmare in person last year. It seemed all too familiar watching on TV this time.

There will be no Frozen Four trip to Buffalo for the No. 1 seed in the NCAA hockey tournament after St. Cloud State was upset by American International, 2-1, in the NCAA West Region semifinals in Fargo, N.D.

It's the second straight year the Huskies were knocked out by a colossal 1-16 upset to the champion of Atlantic Hockey, the league that Canisius and Niagara play in. Air Force dumped St. Cloud last season and American International — which needed overtime to beat Niagara in HarborCenter last weekend in the Atlantic final — took a 2-0 lead and held on for the upset this time.

"We expect to win those games when you're the No. 1 team but it's an NCAA game and you know the other team will play hard," Borgen, a three-year player at St. Cloud, said Saturday in Nassau Coliseum prior to the Sabres' game against the New York Islanders. "Their goalie played a super game and we just couldn't find a way to get the puck in the net. It stinks because it's just one game but that's how it goes."

St. Cloud State had a 34-13 advantage in shots on goal, and it was an eerie parallel to last year's 4-1 loss to Air Force as St. Cloud had a 40-26 edge in that game. With his season over prematurely after that defeat, Borgen signed his three-year entry-level contract with the Sabres and headed to Rochester.

"Outshot them, outplayed them, goalie played well, just couldn't find a way to put the puck in the net," Borgen said of the similarity of the two games. "Time is just going way too fast in that game. pressure is building because you expect to score."

"Guys try to make individual plays. everyone wants to get it done. They played hard. They played right. It's just how it goes sometimes."

Saturday was Borgen's third NHL appearance and he's played a steady game in the first two, averaging 14:43 per contest.

"You get a lot more comfortable even in two games, especially with guys talking to you on the ice," Borgen said. "The first game, Marco Scandella talked to me a ton, which helped out a lot. I've found comfort. The pace is fine. It's more just the skill level of players being the biggest difference."

Borgen had two goals, 10 assists and a plus-7 rating in 66 games for Rochester this season. He's likely to return there to wrap up the regular season and prepare for the Calder Cup playoffs as soon as the Sabres get a little healthier on the blue line.

Rasmus Ristolainen (flu) and the injured trio of Jake McCabe, Zach Bogosian and Matt Hunwick all missed Saturday's game. McCabe skated again and could return to the lineup any day.

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As the Sabres wrapped up their morning skate, former Islander Kyle Okposo entered the center ice circle to lead the stretch. There was some chatter and Okposo was suddenly pointing with his stick to the Islanders' four Stanley Cup banners in the rafters.

What was the conversation about?

"Somebody made a joke about my number being up there in the rafters and I just said, 'Those guys got those four things up there,'" Okposo said. "So we were just giving each other a hard time."

[View image on Twitter](#)

Okposo said he hoped the Sabres' younger players understood the legacy of great games that had taken place in the building during its first run from 1972-2015 that included four straight Cups from 1980-83.

"These guys won 19 playoff series in a row. That's never going to happen again. It's just not," Okposo said. "That's something that's obviously special to the organization here. It's something the young kids probably don't know a ton about but I'm here to talk about it if they want."

Okposo said he was thrilled to get another chance in the building where he made his NHL debut and played eight seasons.

"It's a little different. I never thought I'd play here again and here I am. Pretty cool," Okposo said. "A lot of good memories here. ... The bones of the place you can tell are still here but everything visually is completely different."

The capacity of the building is down to just over 13,000 and all the seats were replaced. There were lots of technological advances as well, and the team dressing rooms have been upgraded and reversed, with the visitors now dressing in the Islanders room where the franchise legends prepared during the 70s and 80s.

"I feel like I grew up here," Okposo said. The most vivid memory I have here was Game 3 the first time we went to the playoffs against Pittsburgh (in 2013). We were in the locker room before the game and literally the locker room was shaking. I'll never forget that as long as I live. It. Was. Loud."

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The Sabres' game Sunday night against Columbus will mark the third time this year a team has played in KeyBank Center coming off a back-to-back the previous night in Nashville.

The Sabres did the Nashville-to-Buffalo jaunt Dec. 3-4, losing to Toronto in overtime, 5-4. The Leafs then did it earlier this month prior to their 5-2 victory over the Sabres.

The Blue Jackets met the Predators in Bridgestone Arena Saturday night, with both teams in a desperate playoff push. Columbus is trying to hang on in the East wild-card race while Nashville entered Saturday tied with Winnipeg for first in the Central Division.

Sabres at Islanders: Five Things to Know

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE – It's a throwback night for the Buffalo Sabres and a big look to the future for the New York Islanders when the teams meet tonight at 7 in NYCB Live Nassau Coliseum, the name of the renovated home of the Islanders from 1972-2015.

The Sabres are here for the first time in nearly four years, since a 3-0 loss on April 4, 2015. The Islanders, meanwhile, are trying to clinch an unlikely playoff berth here in a season where everyone wrote them off because captain John Tavares left for Toronto in free agency.

The Islanders are 11-6-2 at the Coliseum and 12-6-2 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn. They will play their first-round playoff games on Long Island before transferring the rest of their postseason to Brooklyn.

The Islanders have won three of their last four games, including Thursday's 5-4 comeback win in Winnipeg, and are 8-5 in their last 13.

The Sabres, meanwhile, enter tonight's game 0-4-1 in their last five, 1-8-1 in their last 10, 1-10-2 in their last 13 and 3-15-3 in their last 21. Their record since their 10-game winning streak ended on Nov. 29 is an NHL-worst 14-30-8.

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

1. The lineup: Carter Hutton (17-23-5, 2.98/.909) will start in goal for the Sabres and the Islanders, who generally don't make it clear who is starting, are expected to go with former Buffalo goalie Robin Lehner (23-12-5, 2.22/.926), who has split two meetings against his old team this season. Jake McCabe skated today but Evan Rodrigues did not and both remain day to day. Vladimir Sobotka has tweaked an upper-body injury and did not skate so Zemgus Girgensons will switch to center tonight.

2. What's at stake: The Islanders come into the game with 97 points. They're three behind Washington for the Metro Division lead and two ahead of Pittsburgh in the battle to stay in second place and keep home ice advantage in the playoffs. They will clinch a playoff berth if they win in any fashion, or if they get one point and Montreal loses at Winnipeg in any fashion, or if the Canadiens lose in regulation regardless of the result here tonight.

"Pittsburgh is breathing down the Islanders' neck so they've got a lot to play for and we've got a lot to prove as a group," coach Phil Housley said today. "Especially with our young players. It's going to be a great atmosphere, it's going to be a great test for our guys tonight."

3. Welcome back: Longtimer former Islander Kyle Okposo spoke to reporters in an arena hallway after the morning skate and pointed out how the renovations now have the visitors dressing where the Islanders used to.

"I played a lot of soccer in this hallway," a smiling Okposo said as he greeted the media. "It's a little different. I never thought I'd play here again and here I am. Pretty cool. A lot of good memories here. It will be a fun game tonight. The bones of the place you can tell are still here but everything visually is completely different."

Housley played a 20-year NHL career coming through this building and said the walk from the adjacent Marriott hotel to the morning skate was eerie and brought him back to his playing days.

"It's the same nostalgic building," Housley said. "There was a lot of success here early in the 80s. It was always a great experience coming in this building especially when it was rocking."

"Talking to a few guys that have already played here, they said it's just been rockin at the 'Coli' every night," Okposo said. "So a Saturday night here with a chance to clinch, that's going to be loud so we're going to have to be ready."

4. The road not taken: I checked in with Benny Ercolani, the NHL's longtime chief statistician, to get some clarity on the Sabres' road losing streaks, and he pointed out the club record for the longest road drought is 12 games, set in 2011-12.

Since the advent of overtime in 1983 and the shootout in 2005, the league differentiates between losing streaks and winless streaks, just like it did when ties were played. Games decided in OT or shootouts are not listed under losing streaks because the losing team gets a point. Instead, they are part of winless streaks.

The bottom line is this: The Sabres are currently on a five-game road losing streak, dating to their shootout loss March 7 in Chicago. But they're on a 13-game road winless streak (0-11-2) and have not won since Jan. 29 in Columbus. The franchise record in that category is 23 games (0-15-8), set from Oct. 30, 1971-Feb. 19, 1972.

5. By the numbers: Tonight's game opens the Sabres' final back-to-back of the season as they host Columbus Sunday in KeyBank Center. Buffalo is 7-7-1 in the first game of a back-to-back and 6-7-2 in the second game. ... The Sabres are one of four teams to have played an NHL-high 22 games that have extended past regulation and their 12 wins are one behind Tampa Bay for the league league. Buffalo is 7-7 in overtime after Thursday's loss to Detroit and 5-3 in shootouts. ... Captain Anders Lee leads the Islanders with 28 goals while reigning Calder Trophy winner Mathew Barzal is the leader in assists (43) and points (61).

Tage Thompson settles in during Amerks' debut

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2019

ROCHESTER – Early in Tage Thompson's first American Hockey League appearance in more than a year, the newcomer looked determined to make an immediate impact.

Instead of simply clearing the puck during a kill, the Americans newcomer sent it sailing 130 feet down the ice and over the glass, earning a delay of game penalty.

The Laval Rocket tied the game during the ensuing two-man advantage.

"I've tried after practice to shoot it the whole way," Thompson said after recording two goals and an assist in Friday's 4-2 win before a crowd 6,096 at Blue Cross Arena. "I've never done that, so it was kind of different. I didn't think that was going to happen."

At other times, Thompson, 21, seemed snakebitten or a little out of place.

In the second period, Thompson blew a prime opportunity from the slot by shooting into goalie Michael McNiven's midsection. He also broke his stick attempting to one-time the puck from the left circle during a power play.

On the Rocket's tying power-play goal 29 seconds into the third period, Amerks coach Chris Taylor acknowledged Thompson could've collapsed more.

But Thompson, who spent the entire season in Buffalo before getting sent down Thursday, eventually settled down and started looking comfortable.

"I think I had a great response after the first," Thompson said. "I was a little slow there."

Thompson assisted on Danny O'Regan's power-play goal. Then 8:37 into the third period, he scored the winner, tipping Arvin Atwal's point shot in from the right circle.

Thompson's empty-net goal then sealed the game.

No matter what Thompson did, Taylor kept sending the 6-foot-5, 200-pound prospect out on the ice.

"If you make a mistake, we want to put you right back out there," Taylor said.

He added: "What he's got to do is the little things."

The Sabres want Thompson, a key piece of the Ryan O'Reilly trade with the St. Louis Blues, to play in all situations with the Amerks.

In Buffalo, Thompson was often sitting out games as a healthy scratch or skating short minutes when he played.

"It feels good getting back out there on the ice," said Thompson, who skated at right wing beside center Kevin Porter and C.J. Smith. "I feel like any player, if you make a mistake, you want to be able to correct it right away. I was fortunate to be able to do that tonight."

Thompson hadn't played an AHL game since Feb. 23, 2018, with the San Antonio Rampage. Counting the playoffs, Friday was the former first-round pick's 57th minor league appearance.

The Sabres planned to send Thompson down for the postseason, but they figured they would let him play regular-season games to help him get acclimated.

"I didn't know if I would come down a few games before," Thompson said. "It makes sense."

So far, Thompson said his transition to the Amerks has been "pretty easy."

"They've had great success all season long," he said. "It's easy to step into an atmosphere and an environment where it's positive every day."

The Sabres quit on another game

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 30, 2019

Uniondale, LI (WGR 550) - Saturday was just another game in a string of many where the Sabres weren't the least bit interested and got run over in the process. The Islanders came out flying and hit every Sabres at every turn. The Sabres had no fight at all and spent the better part of the first 40 minutes in their own zone.

The Sabres were looking over their shoulder to see which Islander was going to hit them and they usually did get hit.

On New York's first goal. Lawrence Pilut turned the puck over and then lost track of Jordan Eberle who scored on a rebound. Nothing at all Carter Hutton could do about it.

You know what? I'm going to stop there. There's no point going over every goal and telling this team has quit. You watch the games, you can decide for yourself.

As far as after the game? Jack Eichel was emphatic in defending Phil Housley, "This isn't on Phil. It's on us, not Phil. It's not his job, it's our job. He's not out there playing the game, is he?"

Housley was asked if his team has quit. He said, "No. Again, it came down to 1-on-1 battles."

Hutton was hung out to dry again and he doesn't know what to say about these non-efforts, "Personally I'm embarrassed, they pounded us right from the opening faceoff.

"I don't know how it explain it anymore, teams just bury us and then just sit back."

Before one of the Islander goals, the Sabres got hemmed into their zone. They finally got the puck out and only Casey Mittelstadt went for a change. He had been on the ice for 1:42. Jeff Skinner was the left winger and was the closest to the bench, but he went cross-ice to the right wing side because he saw a possible offensive opportunity. There is no way the left wing and the left defenseman Lawrence Pilut shouldn't get off the ice, yet Skinner wasn't happy when I questioned him about it. Jason Pominville was on the right wing and he's the furthest away from the bench along with Brandon Montour.

Skinner tried to make the case that it was a long change for him. Skinner and Pominville were on the ice 1:47 while Pilut was on for 2:05 and Montour for 2:20.

The one positive from this game is Victor Olofsson scored his first NHL goal from the right wing circle on a late power play. I can't honestly sit here and tell you Olofsson, Alex Nylander or Will Borgen played well. Everybody struggled.

Sabres get dominated by Lehner and the Islanders, 5-1

By Derek Kramer

WGR 550

March 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have struggled on the road all season and have not won a game away from Key Bank Center since January 29th. Their struggles continued on Saturday night against the New York Islanders at Nassau Coliseum, as the Islanders had their way with Buffalo, 5-1.

Buffalo was dominated in possession right from the start, starting in the opening period, as New York led in the shot totals, 16-8. Jordan Eberle started off the scoring with his 18th goal of the season after putting in a rebound off of Carter Hutton to make it 1-0 for New York. Hutton was busy, even dealing with several breakaways and made a save on a penalty shot against Anthony Beauvillier.

The second period did not fare much better for the Sabres either, as a shot from Beauvillier deflected off of the stick of Lawrence Pilut past Hutton to make it 2-0. New York wasn't done there, as Michael Dal Colle added another Islander goal with less than a minute left in the second period to add to New York's lead, 3-0.

The Islanders didn't stop there, scoring again just 30 seconds into the third period, courtesy of Ryan Pullock. The Islanders made it 5-0 thanks to another goal for Beauvillier to cap off their scoring. The lone bright spot was for Buffalo was winger Victor Olofsson, who notched his first career NHL goal on a late power play to ruin the shutout bid for former Sabre Robin Lehner. Eichel was the only other Sabre to register a point, making the pass for Olofsson's goal. As for Lehner, the Islanders netminder made 31 saves in the win, while Carter Hutton made 33 saves for Buffalo in the loss.

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

NYI: 7:41 - Jordan Eberle (18) (Mathew Barzal, Anders Lee)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

NYI: 8:20 - Anthony Beauvillier (17) (Devon Toews), 19:26 - Michael Dal Colle (3) (Adam Pelech, Brock Nelson)

Third Period:

BUF: 13:28 - Victor Olofsson (PPG) (1) (Jack Eichel)

NYI: 0:30 - Ryan Pullock (9) (Cal Clutterbuck, Casey Cizikas), 6:07 - Anthony Beauvillier (18) (Josh Bailey, Leo Komarov)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 12:23 - Brandon Montour (penalty shot) (tripping)

NYI: 17:38 - Casey Cizikas (tripping, 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

NYI: NONE

Third Period:

BUF: 2:29 - Rasmus Dahlin (cross-checking) (2 min.)

NYI: 13:06 - Mathew Barzal (high-sticking) (2 min.)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 32 (8, 12, 12)

NYI: 38 (16, 12, 10)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 33 saves

NYI: Robin Lehner - 31 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 for 2 (50%)

NYI: 0 for 1 (0%)

Sabres' Okposo enjoyed coming back into his old arena

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 30, 2019

Uniondale, LI (WGR 550) - On Saturday morning, Kyle Okposo got his first look at the refurbished Nassau Coliseum. Okposo is in his third season with the Sabres after spending parts of nine years with the Islanders. Okposo was impressed with the place, "It was a little different. I never thought I'd play here again and here I am, so it's pretty cool, a lot of good memories here and it'll be fun.

"It was special, I feel like I grew up here. I played my first NHL game here and the most vivid memory I have here is Game 3 the first time we went to the playoffs against Pittsburgh and we were in the locker-room before the game and literally the locker-room was shaking and I'll never forget that as long as I live."

The Sabres had a full morning skate so Okposo had the chance to soak in all the changes in the arena. He said, "Everything, the bones of the place you can tell are still here, but everything visually is completely different, so it's tough to have to get used to, but we're on the same bench that I'm used to."

Having played here, Okposo appreciates the history of this franchise. He said, "These guys won 19 playoff series in a row, that's never going to happen again, it's just not, so that's something that's special to their organization."

The fans have come out in droves for the games in the Coliseum and considering the Islanders can clinch a playoff spot, I would expect nothing different for this game. Okposo knows what his team will be up against, "I've tried to prepare them. In talking with a few guys that play here they've said it's just been rockin' every night at the Collie, so Saturday night here and they have a chance to clinch, it's going to be loud, so we're going to have to be ready."

Phil Housley played here many times during his long career. He said, "I just reminisced walking out of the old Marriott coming across that big parking area and you're getting ready for the game because back in the day in the early 80's, it was always a tough matchup."

Housley noticed some changes too, "It's weird because we're in the locker-room of the Islanders now and it used to be down at the end of the hall.

"I noticed the new seats and they added some suites, but this is a nostalgic building. They had a lot of success here early in the 80's and it was always a great experience especially when it was rockin'".

Vladimir Sobotka won't play Saturday due to an upper-body injury. Jake McCabe and Evan Rodrigues aren't quite ready and Rasmus Ristolainen is sick. Others out injured are Matt Hunwick and Zach Bogosian. Matt Tennyson is a healthy scratch.

Carter Hutton gets the start in goal. He's lost seven of his last eight starts. The Islanders won the first game in Buffalo 3-1 while the Sabres took the second 3-1.

Saturday's lines:

Olofsson Eichel Reinhart

Sheary Larsson Nylander

Skinner Mittelstadt Pominville

Wilson Girgensons Okposo

Scandella Nelson

Dahlin Borgen

Pilut Montour

McCabe Tennyson

Join Brian Koziol for the pregame starting at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Kyle Okposo and Brandon Montour

Sabres' Montour is eating up a lot of minutes

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 29, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - With Rasmus Ristolainen and Zach Bogosian out of the lineup, Brandon Montour played 29:14 against Detroit. While with Anaheim, he did play 29:36 in a game, so Thursday wasn't a season high. Montour said he felt fine during the game, "I was out there a lot, but as the game went on I didn't have too much time to think about the last shift so you just move on and my legs felt pretty good."

Phil Housley doesn't change the defense as that is Steve Smith's job. He said, "I looked after the second period and I saw he had 19 minutes, but he's very physically fit. I didn't see any slow in his play, he really attacked the game, you could see every opportunity he's charging up ice and he wants to be a part of it, so he played a very sound game."

Montour averages 21:47 per-game with Buffalo and Anaheim.

Buffalo has only won two of the 15 games he's played in. They didn't do a lot of winning in Anaheim when he was there either and Montour said, "It hasn't happened all year, I think if you look at my season with Anaheim we didn't have the best results there too, so I think every player goes through these seasons and unfortunately mine was this year.

"For me coming into Buffalo, I'd like to have more wins, but we're in a tough time of the year and we've got to find a way to collect wins."

I would think the losing would've made it harder for him to get used to a new city and a new team, but he said that hasn't happened, "No I don't think so, I think the room, the players, the staff are very positive and my mindset coming in was to get used to everybody around the arena, so yes I'd like to win more hockey games, but in the end for me coming in and being ready for next year has me more comfortable for sure."

Friday was an optional skate before the team left for Long Island. Evan Rodrigues and Jake McCabe both took part and both could play Saturday against the Islanders.

Housley said Rasmus Ristolainen has been very sick and has lost a lot of weight, so he will not go on the trip. Zach Bogosian and Matt Hunwick will both stay back too.

Don't forget Saturday's game is in the old Nassau Coliseum, which is now called NYCB Live. The place is fully renovated, but doesn't have as many seats.

Olofsson: NHL debut was 'a dream come true'

WGR 550

March 29, 2019

Victor Olofsson has had a pretty remarkable first full season playing in North America.

The 23-year-old winger came to the Buffalo Sabres organization this summer after spending four years playing professionally in the Swedish Hockey League with MODO and Frölunda. Olofsson scored 27 goals last season while playing with Frölunda in Gothenburg, Sweden, which led all skaters in the SHL. In his career in the SHL, Olofsson was able to score 60 goals and register 117 points in 200 games played.

In his first season with the Rochester Americans, he has already scored 27 goals and picked up 33 assists in 64 games played in the American Hockey League. His 60 points is good enough to place him in a six-way tie for fifth in league scoring this season.

On Wednesday, Olofsson earned his first call up to the National Hockey League as the Sabres wanted to get a look at him with six games left in the regular season. The next night against the Detroit Red Wings, he made his NHL debut, finishing the night with an assist and five shots on goal in 16:25 of ice time.

Olofsson took the time Friday morning to join Howard Simon and Jeremy White on WGR, and said he took in everything he could from his NHL debut and relished the moment.

"I was super excited," Olofsson said. "It was a lot of fun, a dream come true for me. It has been what I've been working for all of my life. It was really cool, and it was a fun night for sure."

The young Swede got off to a fast start in the 5-4 overtime loss, throwing a number of pucks toward the net in hopes of scoring his first NHL goal. Once the night was through, he ended the night with five shots to the net, and four more shot attempts that hit the net. While his thought was to just play his game in his first NHL game, Olofsson couldn't stop thinking about the possibility of scoring his first goal, of hopefully many, in the league.

"It would've been amazing to get that first goal, and that's another dream I've always had - to score a goal in the National Hockey League," Olofsson said. "I was thinking about that last night, but I was trying to be as calm as I can be and I just went out there and played my game."

Olofsson was put in prime opportunity to get that first goal in the NHL as he was placed on a line with Sabres captain Jack Eichel and forward Sam Reinhart. He did end up picking up his first NHL point on Thursday, assisting on Eichel's third period goal to tie the hockey game at 4-4. It was an exciting start to his NHL career in Buffalo to get a chance to play with two players he has a lot of respect for.

"Obviously both of them are amazing players. Just so skilled and calm with the puck," Olofsson said. "They talked to me throughout the game and helped me a lot. I really appreciated the help and effort they gave me."

Coming over from Sweden to North America this season, Olofsson has had to go through some transitions with his play due to the smaller ice surfaces compared to those in his home nation. However, Olofsson has made that transition look pretty easy, and has continued to play at a very good pace since the first game of the year in the AHL. As for the transition from to the AHL to the NHL, he could see the difference in play right from the get go.

"There's more skilled players, smarter players, and [players who are] a little bit stronger even. It's another level in every aspect of the game," Olofsson said.

A big reason for his success this season with the Amerks has been, in huge part, to the chemistry he has developed with his teammates in Rochester. He has played a good portion of the season with a number of other young Swedish players on the roster, getting comfortable with his fellow countrymen in the Flower City.

One of those Swedish teammates he has really gotten close with is Rasmus Asplund, who he plays on a line with along with Danny O'Regan. The three of them were formed at the start of the season by Amerks head coach Chris Taylor, and have rarely ever seen themselves apart from one another for more than a handful of games.

Olofsson feels like their success this season will have an even bigger impact for the team as the playoffs approach for the Amerks in mid-April.

"I feel like we have a great line there," Olofsson said. "We've really been getting to know each other on and off the ice, which helps a lot. You just know where you have the other guys all the time on the ice. We have the same mindset and we want to play the game the same way, so that's helped a lot. I'm really excited to play with them."

Once his time with the Sabres has come to an end, Olofsson will likely re-join the Amerks in their push for the Calder Cup. Rochester has the chance to clinch a playoff berth on Friday with a win over the Laval Rocket, as well as a regulation loss for the Cleveland Monsters against the Lehigh Valley Phantoms.

'Everyone's playing for something right now': What Thursday night tells us about the Sabres' youthful future

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

March 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Most of the present results for the Buffalo Sabres are dark and full of errors. Yet, there's a light that's appeared in the form of young players getting their chance to show that the NHL is, indeed, where they belong.

Over the past week, the Sabres have brought up Alexander Nylander, Lawrence Pilut, Will Borgen and, now, Victor Olofsson. While Pilut got a taste of NHL life earlier this season, Olofsson joining the party with six games remaining and getting a chance to line up with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart signals we could be getting a preview of what the Sabres might look like next season.

Sound crazy? Well, here are the lines Buffalo rolled with against Detroit on Thursday night, with their ages in parentheses:

Olofsson (23) — Eichel (22) — Reinhart (23)

Jeff Skinner (26) — Casey Mittelstadt (20) — Jason Pominville (36)

Conor Sheary (26) — Vladimir Sobotka (31) — Nylander (21)

Zemgus Girgensons (25) — Johan Larsson (26) — Kyle Okposo (30)

Olofsson made his debut with the Sabres on Thursday after putting up 60 points (27 goals, 33 assists) with Rochester this season. When we saw him last summer during development camp, and again during training camp, he showed off an elite shot. It was a skill he'd put to good use in Sweden with Frolunda the season prior, scoring 27 goals there, as well.

Pilut raved about how good Olofsson's shot was in October, and he's not the only Swedish Sabre to notice.

"He's probably got the best shot I've ever seen in my whole life," said Sabres Rasmus Dahlin, Olofsson's former Frolunda teammate. "It's so quick and so hard; it's probably so tough for the goalies. It's unbelievable."

The questions that needed answering about Olofsson's move to North America were how he would adjust to the faster game and smaller surface, and whether he'd be able to unleash that shot regularly and with success. He'd expectedly have any easy enough time on the power play; it was at even strength where he'd be tested. Of the 27 goals he scored in Rochester, however, only nine came on special teams — eight power-play goals and one shorthanded.

"I feel like I've developed throughout the season, just to adjust a little bit to the North American style," Olofsson said before the Sabres dropped another at home, 5-4 to the Red Wings. "I feel a lot more confident out there."

"My defensive play has been better," he continued. "I feel that it gives me confidence on offense, too. I'm really confident with the puck, which has helped me a lot."

On Thursday night, Olofsson shook off early nerves to become an offensive factor in the third period and help the Sabres erase a 4-2 deficit. He teamed up with Reinhart to set up Eichel for his 27th goal of the season, which tied the game just 41 seconds after Mittelstadt had made it 4-3.

"He played his own game. He was shooting the puck, he was creative offensively, his wall play is very good, he's very poised, and it was great to see him have his first NHL game, get a point, and contribute," coach Phil Housley said of Olofsson.

Olofsson's best chance of the game came in the third period on a 3-on-1 with Dahlin and Eichel, when he took a pass on the left side and put his shot off the crossbar. Still, when he had the opportunity to shoot, he did.

Olofsson piled up five shots on goal and nine shot attempts in all, and showed just how dangerous he can be in front of net.

"I thought he brought a really good spark to our team," Eichel said. "The combination of his skill, I think he competes hard on pucks, he's a smart player, and obviously an elite shot. It was really good getting to play with him."

On the second line, Mittelstadt continued his offensive surge with two points against Detroit. He now has four points in his last four games. After he was a healthy scratch against New Jersey on Monday, posting a goal and an assist and having an overall strong game Thursday is encouraging, despite the loss.

With Sabres' youth producing across the attacking lines, it's easy to forget how the defense plays into the equation. Here's how Buffalo's defensive pairs lined up on Thursday, again with ages in parentheses:

Dahlin (18) — Will Borgen (22)

Pilut (23) — Brandon Montour (24)

Marco Scandella (29) — Casey Nelson (26)

The Sabres leaned hard on Montour (over 29 minutes TOI) and Dahlin had a bit of an off-night (17:36 TOI, minus-3), but it's hard to disparage the defense for how they rallied. Scandella even chipped in with a goal.

"Olly (Olofsson) had a real good, strong game, he made some plays, had some opportunities; hit the crossbar in the third," Housley said of his young squad. "Will Borgen continued to be steady back there. Casey Mittelstadt, it was good to see he had some jump in his step. Lawrence (Pilut) had a very solid game. I liked Dahlin for the most part — I think he'd probably want that one back in the third. But those are things that they have to continue to fight through and learn."

In trying to figure out before the season what this Sabres team would amount to, the popular refrain was that they'll go as far as their youth carries them. Thursday turned out to be a microcosm for what we've seen all season long: defensive breakdowns, spotty offense and questionable goaltending.

But the resilience they exhibited, granted against one of the few teams lower than they are in the standings, provided a reason to be hopeful about where this team is headed.

"Everyone's playing for something right now," Eichel said. "I thought a lot of our young guys brought a lot of good energy and they fit right in. It was good to see that on the back end all the way through up front. It's good that we didn't quit there. We were down two goals twice. We had some good resiliency, but it's unfortunate. We want to get on the right side of these ones and start feeling good about ourselves here."

Visit to Nassau Coliseum will be special for Sabres' Kyle Okposo

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 30, 2019

BUFFALO – When Sabres winger Kyle Okposo played on Long Island, the New York Islanders had a saying about their antiquated home rink in Uniondale, Nassau Coliseum.

"It's an old barn," a smiling Okposo said. "We'd always say, 'It was a dump, but it was our dump and we loved it.' It was home."

Well, it was the Islanders' regular home until 2015, when they left for the sparkling, ultra-modern Barclays Center 24 miles away in Brooklyn.

Barclays, of course, isn't a hockey facility. It was built for basketball and concerts. Some seats have an obstructed view of the ice. The scoreboard hangs over a blue line.

Fans have stayed away from Barclays in droves. That's why the Islanders returned to Long Island and the renovated Coliseum – the official name is now NYCB Live: Home of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum – for 20 home games this season, including their last 10.

One of them happens to be tonight's contest against the Sabres.

During a five-minute chat Friday inside KeyBank Center, Okposo, who spent nine years with the Islanders, couldn't hide his excitement about returning to Long Island. He has been looking forward to this Nassau game for a long time.

"It's a place where I played my first NHL game, grew up there," he said. "I have a lot of really good memories there. It's going to be pretty special."

To Okposo, the Coliseum, which opened in 1972, is hallowed ground.

The Islanders won four straight Stanley Cups from 1980-83. Their stacked rosters loaded with Hall of Famers – Mike Bossy, Denis Potvin and Bryan Trottier are just a few of the legendary names – rank among hockey's all-time greatest.

"They won four Cups in a row and they really didn't do anything to the arena after that," Okposo said. "So it's like you still have that ... rarefied air and rarefied space. You still have that aura, that presence of those Cup-winning teams, because you watch the highlights (from) 1983 and it's still the exact same barn."

Thanks to \$165 million worth of renovations that took place over 20 months, that barn looks a little different today. The outside, for example, features 4,700 brushed aluminum fins, according to Newsday.

Still, at its core, it's the same rink – the NHL's oldest and smallest (just 13,900 seats).

"The seats are right on top of you, (the fans) could blow the roof right off the building," Okposo said. "Like, it was just loud. Fans were crazy and it was a lot of fun to play."

When former Islander star John Tavares returned to the Coliseum with the Toronto Maple Leafs on Feb. 28, the building was raucous all night.

Perhaps Okposo will walk to the Coliseum's Exhibition Hall. When he broke into the league 11 years ago, he often used what he called a "massive space" to warm up.

"Usually there was no lights and there's like an old staircase there and sometimes it would creak," Okposo said. "I'd like freak out a little bit. It was just like old. It had those little quirks in the arena like that."

Okposo said he's "shocked" the Islanders returned to the Coliseum. When the Capitals won a seven-game first-round series four years ago in Washington, he figured the Islanders' last game at Nassau would've been their Game 6 win on April 25, 2015.

Counting preseason contests, the Islanders will play 68 games at the Coliseum through 2020-21. After that, their new rink in Belmont might be open.

"When we left, we thought it was done and over with," Okposo said. "We were all sad and we were all like, 'This is tough,' because the last game that I played there was Game 6 against the Caps, and if we won Game 7, we were going to play the Rangers. That would've been crazy."

Not surprisingly, Okposo said the move to Brooklyn wasn't met with excitement.

"It was the old barn, it had that nostalgia, it had that mystique, and you were going to go to this new arena that was built to entertain and wasn't built for hockey," he said. "So I think that we were all hoping that something could've got done on Long Island. And the fan base is so loyal and so passionate."

"To move to Brooklyn, a lot of the people in Suffolk County, they weren't going to be able to go to the game in Brooklyn, because it was just too far. It was tough."

—

Sabres coach Phil Housley wouldn't rule defenseman Jake McCabe (upper body, 12 games) or center Evan Rodrigues (upper body, one game) out for tonight's contest.

Housley said defensemen Zach Bogosian (upper body), Matt Hunwick (upper body) and Rasmus Ristolainen (flu) are all out against the Islanders. None of them traveled.

Ristolainen has "been really ill," Housley said.

"He's dropped some weight," he said.

Olofsson scores first NHL goal as Sabres fall to Islanders 5-1

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

March 30, 2019

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) — The bright spot in Saturday's game against the New York Islanders? Victor Olofsson scored his first NHL goal.

The rest of the game? Not pretty.

The Sabres fell to the the Islanders 5-1 for their seventh straight loss. That brings their March record to 2-11-2 and are now sitting at 31-37-10 overall on the season.

Jack Eichel picked up an assist on Olofsson's goal while goaltender Carter Hutton stopped 33 of 38 shots.

The Sabres are back on the road Sunday when they play Columbus at 6 p.m. They then return to KeyBank Center on Tuesday and Thursday for their final home games of the season.

Sabres Lose 6th Straight

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

March 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres lost their 6th straight game Saturday night, falling to the Islanders 5-1.

New York turned on the jets from the opening minutes of the game. Jordan Eberle put the Islanders on the board just over seven minutes into the match-up.

The Islanders would add to their lead just before the midway point of the second period when Anthony Beauvillier beat Carter Hutton. With just over :30 to play in the period, Michael Dal Colle would give New York a three goal lead.

It didn't take long for the Islanders to get on the board in the third period. Ryan Pullock scored 30 seconds in to give NY a 4-0 lead. Beauvillier would tally his second of the game to put the Isles up 5-0 late.

Victor Olofsson would score his first career NHL goal for the Sabres on the power play.

However, it would be too little too late. The Sabres host Columbus Sunday.

Islanders clinch playoff berth with win against Sabres

By Brian Compton

NHL.com

March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE, N.Y. -- The New York Islanders clinched a berth in the Stanley Cup Playoffs with a 5-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Nassau Coliseum on Saturday.

New York (46-26-7), which has won four of its past five games, leads the Pittsburgh Penguins by four points for second place in the Metropolitan Division, three points behind the Washington Capitals. Anthony Beauvillier scored twice, and Robin Lehner made 31 saves.

It will be the Islanders' first playoff appearance since 2016.

"It is special," New York captain Anders Lee said. "We have a wonderful group of guys in here. There's a lot of leaders, character guys, guys that have battled through a lot of adversity at various points in their career, whether it's this year or years prior. We've all come together here in this room to have a common goal and to stick together, and I think you've seen that throughout the season when things are going well or things aren't. We've really stuck together."

Victor Olofsson scored his first NHL goal, and Carter Hutton made 33 saves for Buffalo (31-37-10), which has lost six in a row (0-5-1) and 13 of its past 14 games (1-11-2). The Sabres have been eliminated from playoff contention.

"This game wasn't really about X's and O's," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "It was just about battles. The 1-on-1 battles, they were heavier, they were a bigger team. That's why they're in the playoffs in the position they're in."

Jordan Eberle gave the Islanders a 1-0 lead at 7:41 of the first period when he put Mathew Barzal's rebound past Hutton for his fourth goal in the past four games.

Hutton kept it a one-goal game by saving Beauvillier's penalty shot at 12:23 of the first period after he was taken down on a breakaway by Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour.

But Beauvillier made it 2-0 at 8:20 of the second period. Devon Toews carried the puck into the Sabres zone from center ice and fed Beauvillier, who scored on a wrist shot from the high slot for his first goal since March 7 (12 games).

"It's so nice, we've been battling all year [to clinch a playoff berth]," Beauvillier said. "It's just fun, it's an exciting time of the year. To be able to be in the playoffs, we feel lucky but we also deserve it. We worked hard for it."

"Nothing's done yet. It's just the beginning of something."

Michael Dal Colle extended the lead to 3-0 with 34 seconds left in the second period when he stuffed a rebound between Hutton's pads after he made the initial save on Adam Pelech's shot from the left point.

Ryan Pulock scored from the right circle 30 seconds into the third period to make it 4-0, and Beauvillier finished off a passing play with Josh Bailey and Leo Komarov at 6:07 to give New York a 5-0 lead.

"I thought Ryan was the best player on the ice tonight," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "He was dominant, he defended well."

Olofsson ended Lehner's shutout bid on a power play at 13:28 for the 5-1 final.

"Really early, I just knew it was a really good group of guys and good people," Lehner said. "I think in camp, you saw that everyone was working hard. The big thing for me was everyone was working really hard in practice and everyone paying attention."

"We just kept building from there. It's incredibly rewarding to be a part of this group this year."

They said it

"I don't know how to explain this anymore. It's frustrating. I guess we had a good last 10 [minutes], but teams just bury us, they just sit back. I don't know, it's frustrating. I try to compete as best I can. I don't know what to say right now. It's obviously frustrating." -- Sabres goalie Carter Hutton

"We've been up there in the standings for quite a while, so this doesn't feel like a surprise or doesn't feel like we should be jumping with joy. We're excited, we're happy, we've accomplished a lot without a lot of people believing in us. From the fans to us, it's a great first step here." -- Islanders captain Anders Lee

Need to know

The Sabres were without center Vladimir Sobotka because of an upper-body injury. ... It was the first time the Islanders clinched a playoff berth in March since 1990. ... Lehner set an NHL career high with his 24th win of the season. ... Lee had an assist and reached 50 points for a third straight season. ... New York is 37-2-2 when it scores at least three goals.

What's next

Sabres: Host the Columbus Blue Jackets on Sunday (6 p.m. ET; TVAS, MSG-B, FS-O, NHL.TV)

Islanders: Host the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday (Nassau Coliseum; 7 p.m. ET; MSG+ 2, SNO, NHL.TV)

Olofsson scores 1st NHL goal in loss to Islanders

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 30, 2019

UNIONDALE, N.Y. - Facing a New York Islanders team looking to clinch a playoff berth in front of a raucous home crowd, the Sabres struggled right from the start in a 5-1 loss at NYCB Live on Saturday night.

The loss extended their winless streak to six games.

"It started on the opening faceoff," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We don't make a D-to-D pass on the tape and it comes right back after us. This game wasn't really about X's and O's. It was just about battles. The one-on-one battles, they were heavier.

"They're a bigger team, that's why they're in the playoffs and in the position we're in. We couldn't get pins in the defensive zone, we spent way too much time in the defensive zone and when we had an opportunity to make a play, we didn't make a play."

The Sabres were outshot 16-8 in the first period and 38-32 overall. They broke Robin Lehner's shutout when Victor Olofsson scored his first NHL goal on a power play with 6:32 remaining in the contest.

Anthony Beauvillier scored twice for the Islanders. Jordan Eberle, Michael Dal Colle and Ryan Pulock also added goals.

Carter Hutton made 33 saves for the Sabres, including one on a penalty shot for Beauvillier to keep the score 1-0 in the first period.

"I don't know what to explain to you right now," Hutton said. "For me, honestly, I try to compete the best I can. Personally, I'm embarrassed. It's frustrating. I don't want to lose. I want to compete, I want to give this team a chance to win and it's just been frustrating lately.

"That's a good hockey team over there. It's like they came out and we were surprised that they were going to come out hard at home. They pounded us right off the opening puck."

Sabres captain Jack Eichel echoed his goaltender, referring to the team's recent stretch as "embarrassing" and admitting that they were unable to match the Islanders' desperation. He defended his coach, however, refuting the notion that the team has quit.

"We're not quitting on Phil," Eichel said. "We're not quitting on each other. We're just not bringing it. I mean, that's a hockey team right there that's playing to get into the playoffs. From the first shift, we didn't execute. We weren't hard on the puck. Easy to play against. So, this isn't on Phil. This isn't on Phil. This is on us."

The Islanders entered the night allowing 2.4 goals per game, the best mark in the NHL. They showed why on both ends of the ice, establishing their forecheck early to sustain time in the offensive zone and allowing little room for the Sabres to operate on defense.

Between the level of New York's play and the playoff-like atmosphere inside the renovated Nassau Coliseum, it was likely an eye-opening experience for the six rookies in the Buffalo lineup.

"It's a great learning experience, the level you have to get to," Housley said. "Especially on the road in this building, that's a big, heavy team. We've got to reach another level. We've got to keep changing lines, we've got to try and do different things to give our guys a spark."

On the board

Housley placed Olofsson on the right flank of the top power-play unit as an opportunity for the rookie to showcase his dangerous shot, and he delivered when given the chance on a feed from Eichel. He buried a shot from the right circle with Sam Reinhart setting a screen in front of Lehner.

"First of all, I got a great pass from Jack there," Olofsson said. "I saw Reinhart coming around the goalie, screening him. I was trying to hit that far side, and it went in."

Olofsson finished the night with three shots in 11:08. He tallied an assist for his first point in his NHL debut against Detroit on Thursday.

Injury report

Marco Scandella sustained an injury while blocking a shot in the second period and did not return for the third.

The Sabres entered the game without Zach Bogosian (lower body), Matt Hunwick (upper), Jake McCabe (lower) and Rasmus Ristolainen (illness) on defense, all of whom are considered day-to-day.

Up next

The Sabres return to KeyBank Center to open a three-game homestand against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Sunday. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 5:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 6.

Okposo bracing teammates for raucous return to Coliseum

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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UNIONDALE - Kyle Okposo's most vivid memory of Nassau Coliseum occurred on May 5, 2013, prior to Game 3 of the New York Islanders' quarterfinal series with the Pittsburgh Penguins. It was the Islanders' first playoff game at home in six years and the first series of Okposo's career, and the atmosphere reflected it.

"We were in the locker room before the game and literally, the locker room was shaking," Okposo said. "I'll never forget that as long as I live."

It's not quite the playoffs, but the Sabres should be in for a similar atmosphere when they visit the Islanders tonight at The Coliseum, which has been renovated and rebranded as NYCB Live. The Islanders are looking to fend off the Penguins for the second seed in the Metropolitan Division and can clinch a playoff berth with a win.

Okposo spent the first eight seasons of his career playing on Long Island, but never envisioned himself coming back after a Game 7 loss to the Capitals in 2015. The Islanders moved to the Barclays Center in Brooklyn the following season.

Things changed prior to this season, when the Islanders announced they would split their home games between Brooklyn and Long Island. Okposo found himself leading the stretch at center ice this morning and even dressing in his old locker room, with the home and road rooms having switched during renovations.

The Sabres' alternate captain said he spoke with his younger teammates about the atmosphere they should expect tonight.

"I tried to kind of prepare them," he said. "Talking to a few guys that play here, they've said it's just been rocking every night at the Coli. Saturday night and I think they have a chance to clinch, it's going to be loud. We're going to have to be ready."

Sabres coach Phil Housley is also well-versed in the Coliseum's history, having begun his career during the final season of the Islanders' dynasty that won four straight Stanley Cups from 1980 to 1983.

Housley reminisced about those early days this morning during the short walk from the team Marriot, which shares a parking lot with The Coliseum. It's the same walk he made as a player, mentally prepping to face Mike Bossy and Bryan Trottier.

With six rookies set to dress for the Sabres tonight, Housley said the game should be a memorable experience and a welcomed test.

"Pittsburgh's breathing down the Islanders' neck, just got get home ice, so they've got a lot to play for and we've got a lot to prove as a group, especially with our young players here," he said. "It's going to be a great atmosphere. It's going to be a great test for our guys tonight."

Projected lineup

Jake McCabe and Evan Rodrigues both skated with the team this morning and are close to returning from their respective upper-body injuries, but neither player will dress tonight. Vladimir Sobotka was absent from the morning skate due to an upper-body injury and will not play.

Zemgus Girgensons will move to center in Sobotka's absence, marking a return to the position he played at the outset of his career.

"I think he's a natural," Housley said. "He's a very versatile player and he's really good on the draws, which is going to be important tonight against their team."

Scott Wilson will return to the lineup after sitting out the past seven games as a healthy scratch. Carter Hutton will get the nod in net, opposite former Sabres goalie Robin Lehner.

Here's how the Sabres are expected to line up, based on their morning skate:

41 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 29 Jason Pominville
43 Conor Sheary - 22 Johan Larsson - 92 Alexander Nylander
20 Scott Wilson - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 21 Kyle Okposo

24 Lawrence Pilut - 62 Brandon Montour
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 33 William Borgen
6 Marco Scandella - 8 Casey Nelson

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark