



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 4, 2019

Conor Sheary scores 2 in Sabres' 4-3 OT win over Penguins

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

March 1, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Conor Sheary and the Buffalo Sabres aren't ready to be counted out of the Eastern Conference playoff race just yet.

With Buffalo in jeopardy of fading further down the standings, Sheary assisted on Brandon Montour's tying goal with 2:32 left in regulation and scored his second of the game with 49 seconds left in overtime in a 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday night.

"We know at this point of the year we've got to press for every point we can get," Sheary said. "So these two points were really important. I get the opportunity to be in some really good positions being out there in overtime, and I was able to take advantage."

After both teams traded scoring chances, Sheary scored on a giveaway in the Penguins end. Marcus Pettersson's pass up the left boards skipped off the stick of teammate Evgeni Malkin and directly to Sheary. He then cut into the middle and, using Phil Kessel as a screen, snapped a shot that beat goalie Matt Murray over his right shoulder.

The goal was allowed to stand after the NHL reviewed whether the Sabres were offside upon first entering the zone. Though a replay showed Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Dahlin crossing the blue line with the puck behind him, the league ruled Dahlin had possession.

"It was big. We've been in a rut late," said Sabres captain Jack Eichel, who also scored. "It was awesome to see 'Shears' get rewarded against his old team."

Scoring clutch goals was a key reason the Sabres acquired Sheary in trade with the Penguins last June. And though he's only scored 11 times in 60 games for Buffalo, Sheary on Friday provided Buffalo a tremendous boost at time it was slipping out of the playoff race.

By improving to 2-5-1 in their past seven, the Sabres jumped into 11th place in the East, and now sit seven points back of eighth-place Columbus and Pittsburgh, which remained in ninth.

Linus Ullmark stopped 41 shots for Buffalo.

Sidney Crosby and Patric Hornqvist scored power-play goals 63 seconds apart late in the second period, and Nick Bjugstad also had a goal for the Penguins. Crosby's goal was the 439th of his career to move into a tie with Jaromir Jagr for second on the franchise list.

Murray stopped 26 shots as the Penguins dropped to 5-2-2 in their past nine.

With five weeks left in the season, the aging and injury-depleted Penguins are suddenly facing questions of potentially missing the playoffs for the first time in 13 seasons.

"We need to fight. It's not easy games anymore. We understand that it's not easy and it's a good challenge before the playoffs," Malkin said.

Defenseman Erik Gudbranson made his Penguins debut since being acquired in a trade with Vancouver on Monday. In the meantime, defensemen Brian Dumoulin (concussion) and Kris Letang (upper body) missed their second straight game and have already been ruled out from playing at Montreal on Saturday.

"It's frustrating for sure that we let a point get away because it was there to be had," coach Mike Sullivan said. "But I thought for the most of the night we were the better team."

The Penguins outshot Buffalo 44-30 overall, and went ahead 3-2 with 1:39 left in the second period when Hornqvist and Crosby scored with Sabres forward Scott Wilson serving a double-minor penalty for high sticking Pettersson.

The Sabres responded when Montour, playing in his first game in Buffalo since being acquired in a trade with Anaheim on Sunday, tied it by knuckling in a shot from the blue line that beat Murray on the right, glove side.

It marked Buffalo's second consecutive overtime win over the Penguins. The Sabres rallied from a 4-1 deficit to beat the Penguins 5-4 in overtime at Pittsburgh in November.

Despite the loss, the Penguins and Crosby continued their lengthy string of dominance over Buffalo.

Pittsburgh improved to 14-0-3 in its past 17 meetings, and hasn't lost to the Sabres in regulation since Buffalo's 4-2 win on April 23, 2013. And the Penguins improved to 8-0-2 in their past 10 visits to Buffalo since a 6-2 loss on Feb. 19, 2012.

Crosby has a point in 34 of 38 games against the Sabres — a stretch in which he has 20 goals and 39 assists.

NOTES: Sabres C Vladimir Sobotka is listed as day to day after sustaining an upper-body injury in 5-2 loss at Philadelphia on Tuesday. ... Sabres D Marco Scandella was out with a lower-body injury. Hornqvist became just the second player selected last in the draft to appear in his 700th career game. He joined Kim Johnsson (selected 286th by Rangers in 1994), who played 739 games. Hornqvist was selected 230th overall by Nashville in 2005. ... Linesman Brad Kovachik worked his 1,500th career game.

UP NEXT

Penguins: Conclude four-game road trip at Canadiens on Saturday.

Sabres: At Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday.

Tavares has goal, 2 assists as Maple Leafs beat Sabres 5-2

Associated Press

March 2, 2019

TORONTO (AP) — When John Tavares skated onto the ice during the introductions of starters Saturday night, his Toronto Maple Leafs teammates peeled off to allow him to stand alone in the Scotiabank Arena spotlight.

Two nights after the ugly reception the former Islanders captain received in his return to New York, Tavares was serenaded with wild applause and a standing ovation.

And then he gave the home fans reason to cheer again.

Tavares had a goal and two assists on a night Toronto fans dubbed "TavaresDayTO," and the Maple Leafs beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-2 Saturday.

"It was a pretty special moment, certainly to be recognized like that and get the support of the city and the fans," Tavares said. "Shows you why it's special to be a Maple Leaf. Definitely got some goosebumps, and a nice little boost there.

"Nice to do it in a win, and come home on a Saturday and play the way we did."

Mitch Marner also had a goal and two assists, and Morgan Rielly, Nic Petan and Nikita Zaitsev each scored as the Maple Leafs won for the fourth time in five games. Frederik Andersen made 35 saves.

Jason Pominville and Conor Sheary scored for Buffalo, and Linus Ullmark stopped 27 shots.

The Leafs were back at Scotiabank Arena after losing 6-1 to the Islanders on Thursday night that both snapped their three-game winning streak, and spoiled what was already a tough return to Long Island for Tavares. The Islanders' former captain was vigorously booed and serenaded with chants of "We Don't Need You."

The nasty reception prompted Leafs fans to declare Saturday #TavaresDayTO on social media. They arrived at Scotiabank Arena carrying signs that read: "Dear John, We Do Need You, We Do Care! Love, Toronto" and "Toronto Loves You Tavares."

Even Toronto Mayor John Tory and former New York Rangers bad boy Sean Avery joined the conversation. Mayor Tory tweeted: "Don't let the haters get you down @91Tavares, you're home now and we're proud you're here in Toronto! #TavaresDayTO." Avery posted an expletive-filled video condemning the New York crowd's reaction.

The Leafs changed their starting lineup introductions to announce Tavares last, prompting a huge roar and standing ovation from the crowd.

"I thought it was great, but I also thought the people in New York showed the passion they have for John the other night," Toronto coach Mike Babcock said. "To me, when you get booed on the road, you must be something special."

Tavares jammed in a loose puck for his 37th goal of the season, giving the Leafs an early lead just 4:20 into the game.

Pominville tied it up at the 6-minute mark scoring off a loose puck in the crease that trickled through Andersen's pads. Sheary, who scored Buffalo's OT winner a night earlier, then put the Sabres ahead with a wrist shot off a bouncing puck.

It was all Maple Leafs after that.

Rielly notched his 16th with 20 seconds left in the first with a wrist shot that bounced around before slipping through Ullmark's legs.

Petan, who was acquired by the Leafs at Monday's NHL trade deadline, scored his first goal for Toronto, a one-timer in front of the net with 4:58 left in the second.

"Unreal pass, I was yelling super loud, when we got to the bench he said 'good yell,'" Petan said. "It was a phenomenal pass. Didn't really think about it too much, just smacked it and it went in."

Petan had only played 13 games for Winnipeg this season, sitting for long stretches. His goal was his first in more than a year.

"Felt good to be out there again, and the goal was the cherry on top," Petan said.

Zaitsev padded the Leafs' lead 55 seconds before the second intermission when he fired a hard pass that deflected off Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour and into the net.

Marner's empty-net goal came with just under two minutes to play.

Marner was pleased with how his team bounced back after Thursday's emotional loss, and praised the Leafs fans for their support of Tavares.

"It was great seeing the fans interact with him like that and give him that ovation after that night in New York," Marner said. "Obviously, it wasn't the way we wanted to play."

"It wasn't the game we wanted and it was pretty harsh on him . . . All the (negative) stuff that you can hear, it doesn't matter how strong-willed you are in your head, it's going to affect you one way or another. That's why I think it's so special to come home and give him that love he deserves."

NOTES: The Leafs, third in the Atlantic Division, were missing defensemen Travis Dermott and Jake Gardiner. Gardiner was already out with a sore back before Dermott injured his shoulder when he was checked into the boards in Wednesday's 6-2 win over Edmonton. Dermott is expected to miss four weeks. ... The Sabres lost to Toronto for the third time this season, including last week's 5-3 loss Monday in Toronto on trade deadline day.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Host Edmonton on Sunday night.

Maple Leafs: At Calgary on Monday night to open a three-game trip to Western Canada.

Mike Harrington: In rising cities, Sabres and Oilers suffer falls from grace

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 3, 2019

Most of you have probably never found reason to go to Edmonton. Because of this gig, I have several times. Yes, it's cold. Really cold. But folks in Alberta are more than hospitable to visitors. It's always an interesting excursion.

The West Edmonton Mall — with its water rides, amusement park and ice rink — is the largest and one of the wildest shopping experiences in North America. Seeing Edmonton Oilers hockey games at Rexall Place brought back memories of its days in the 1980s as Northlands Coliseum, the home of Wayne Gretzky and one of the greatest shows in sports as the franchise won five Stanley Cups in seven years from 1984-1990.

The new arena, Rogers Place, looks like a giant spaceship on the outside and is a modern marvel on the inside.

As a city, Edmonton is rebuilding itself like Buffalo. We were once about the steel and auto industries. We're much more now about things like the incredible new medical campus and the business world. Edmonton, like Calgary, relies on the oil industry. But it's booming now in construction.

And both cities love hockey. But their teams are mired in tough times they thought should have long been over by now.

The Sabres and Oilers have their annual meeting Monday night in KeyBank Center, with key questions staring at both franchises as they head into another offseason of pain. We've moved well past the mere talk of Connor McDavid facing Jack Eichel in the matchup of the players taken first and second in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft that came on the heels of the greatest tanking controversy in the NHL in more than 30 years.

The major inquiry is this one: Will either of these teams ever win again?

The Sabres haven't made the Stanley Cup playoffs since 2011 and haven't won a postseason series since 2007, the year Daniel Briere and Chris Drury walked out the door in free agency. If the Carolina Hurricanes make the postseason this year — which is looking like a good bet — Buffalo's eight-year run of playoff-less springs will become the longest in the NHL.

Didn't we just get done using the word "drought" around here?

If you went on Sportsclubstats.com, the Sabres' chances of making the playoffs had slipped to just 1.7 percent Sunday morning. In mid-December, they were about a 93 percent lock to qualify.

So there's a good reason you are hearing snickers in hockey circles referring to the Sabres as "Edmonton East." Even though they had the No. 1 pick in the draft four times from 2010-2015, the Oilers are in danger of missing the playoffs for the 13th time in 14 years. They qualified in 2017, McDavid's second season, and beat San Jose in six games in the first round before losing Game Seven of the second round in Anaheim.

It was a one-year blip as reality hit hard last season with a 25-point drop to 78 and a sixth-place finish in the Pacific Division. This year, coach Todd McLellan was fired in November and General Manager Peter Chiarelli got jettisoned in January.

The Sabres went through that on April 20, 2017, when owners Terry and Kim Pegula fired coach Dan Bylsma and GM Tim Murray. And surely the progress they saw in places such as Edmonton and Toronto impacted their decision.

Things reached a new low for the Sabres Saturday night in Toronto, where a 5-2 loss marked their fourth straight to the Maple Leafs — a fate that had not befallen the Sabres since 1972.

The Sabres are about to join the 2017 Philadelphia Flyers as the only teams in NHL history to not make the playoffs in a season in which they had a 10-game winning streak.

There are massive falls from grace and then there are the 2018-19 Sabres.

They haven't won two games in a row since December, a stretch of 33 games. If you think back to 2014-15 — when ownership and management set up the Sabres to lose so they could get the best chance to draft McDavid — the team never went more than 31 games without a winning streak.

Coach Phil Housley was stammering pretty hard after Saturday's game when asked about the lack of any consecutive wins in nearly three months.

"It's hard to win any game in this league," Housley said. "I'm just saying this is a tough league to play. There's a lot of parity. Obviously on a back-to-back night, where we've done a pretty good job on back-to-backs, I liked the way we pushed all night. Obviously, we would have liked to have gotten this game because of where we are at this point in the year."

The players are out of answers. Housley seems out of answers, too. General Manager Jason Botterill said a couple weeks ago in Tampa that Housley was going nowhere but Terry Pegula famously said the same thing about Lindy Ruff and Darcy Regier and we know how that one ended.

The Oilers have Ken Hitchcock behind the bench now and Keith Gretzky, Wayne's brother, serving as GM for now. Good chance both won't be there by next season.

This kind of instability was supposed to be over when McDavid and Eichel showed up. Both managements failed to build teams around their young stars and the franchises, as well as the fan bases, keep suffering.

On an individual level, at least, both McDavid and Eichel are having productive seasons.

Eichel has already established career highs with 47 assists and 70 points in 62 games. His goal total of 23 leaves him in range of connecting for his first 30-goal season.

McDavid, of course, is perhaps the game's most prolific scorer. He comes into Monday's visit with 33 goals, 57 assists and 90 points in 61 games — and that comes on the heels of back-to-back seasons of 100 and 108 points.

McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, taken one pick after Sam Reinhart in 2014, both had three points in Edmonton's 4-0 win Saturday afternoon in Columbus and Draisaitl scored his 40th goal. Eichel had a seven-game point streak, tied for his season high, snapped in Buffalo's loss in Toronto.

Their fans may not want to hear it anymore, but both teams have a lot of hopes riding in their prospect pools.

The Rochester Amerks, Buffalo's top farm team, entered Sunday second overall in the American Hockey League in points (75) and third in points percentage (.658). They're leading their division and hopeful of winning a postseason series for the first time since 2005, when names such as Ryan Miller, Thomas Vanek, Jason Pominville, Derek Roy and Paul Gaustad dotted the roster.

The Sabres also feel they have a mega-goaltending prospect in 19-year-old Finn Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, who led his country to a gold medal in the World Junior Championships in Vancouver in January and set a franchise record with his 34th win of the season Saturday night for the Ontario Hockey League's Sudbury Wolves.

Meanwhile, Edmonton's team in Bakersfield, Calif., hit Sunday second in percentage (.670) while playing several fewer games. The Bakersfield Condors put together a 17-game winning streak — second-longest in AHL history — before it ended Friday night with a 1-0 loss to Iowa.

That's what Buffalo and Edmonton have right now. The future. It seems bright when it comes to the fortunes of their cities. When it comes to hockey, there's a lot more doubt.

Sam Reinhart and Leon Draisaitl also bear watching in Sabres-Oilers matchup

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 3, 2019

It isn't always about the 2015 NHL Draft when the Buffalo Sabres meet the Edmonton Oilers.

Sure, Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel are putting up numbers for their teams as the top two picks from that year. But the Buffalo-Edmonton connection from 2014 is also proving to be prolific as well.

Sam Reinhart went No. 2 in 2014 and Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl went No. 3 that year in Philadelphia. Both of them are enjoying their best NHL seasons as the Sabres and Oilers meet Monday night in KeyBank Center.

Draisaitl, and not McDavid, actually leads the Oilers in goals with 40. That's seven more than McDavid, who had 41 last year, and gives Edmonton a 40-goal man in two straight years for the first time since Mark Messier had 45 in 1989-90 and Petr Klima had 40 in 1990-91.

Reinhart, meanwhile, has already set career highs in assists (40) and points (58). He has 18 goals and could pass his career high of 25 set last year.

But even with Draisaitl and McDavid piling up goals and points, Edmonton still has just 183 goals on the season and is 24th in the league — four goals behind Buffalo.

Still, the Oilers are 4-1-1 in their last six games and coming off perhaps their best game of the season in Saturday's 4-0 win at Columbus. But that came on the heels of a 1-8-3 slide that essentially ruined their season.

Coach Ken Hitchcock has been pleased with the way his team has regained its equilibrium.

"People complain about what we don't have. Well, all we have is a team. You've got to give us that," Hitchcock told reporters after Saturday's game. "You can complain that we've got American League [players], or whatever. What we have is a damned team. And a good one. We're not going to be easy to play against for the rest of the year."

A big recent factor for Edmonton has been in goal, where Mikko Koskinen has stopped 65 of 67 shots the last two games after getting pulled from Wednesday's 6-2 loss in Toronto.

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The Sabres made no roster moves Sunday and no injury updates were issued on any players. Defenseman Jake McCabe left Saturday's game in Toronto after a series of bodychecks between players in the final minute of the second period. He did not return for a third and coach Phil Housley had no update on his status after the game.

The Sabres will have their normal gameday morning skate Monday at 10:30 in the arena and more will be gleaned about McCabe's status then. The same goes for goaltender Carter Hutton, who tweaked a lower-body injury in practice on Thursday and thus gave way for Linus Ullmark to start Friday against Pittsburgh and again Saturday in Toronto.

Hutton was pulled after giving up five goals in 25 minutes during the Sabres 7-2 loss in Edmonton on Jan. 14.

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- The Sabres are 10-4-1 against the Pacific Division this season, including 6-0-1 at home.
- With his three-point night Saturday against the Sabres, Toronto center John Tavares became the fourth player to reach 70 points in his first season with the Maple Leafs and the first since Nikolai Borschevsky had 74 points in 1992-93.

- Monday's game will be televised as normal on MSG and WGR Radio. Fans out of the Buffalo market can watch the game on NHL Network. Dan Dunleavy will be on the play by play again as Rick Jeanneret wraps up his annual vacation. Jeanneret is scheduled to return to the mic for both games of the upcoming road trip, Thursday night in Chicago and Saturday afternoon in Colorado.

Mike Harrington: They kept teasing us, but this loss is the end for the Sabres

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 2, 2019

TORONTO — Never mind.

That peek you took at the Buffalo Sabres on Friday night? Left you wondering what if, didn't it?

There was a lot of euphoria in KeyBank Center after that overtime win over the Pittsburgh Penguins. It kept the Sabres on the outskirts of the playoff race. Of course, they needed a winning streak and that required success here Saturday in Scotiabank Arena.

Get a win here and maybe, just maybe, the Sabres find some glimmer of hope, get a streak going and stay in this thing. Especially with the schedule's degree of difficulty about to lighten up.

Nope.

Their 5-2 loss to the Maple Leafs was a horrible downer. Just too many things went wrong when chances were there to create a different outcome.

The Sabres can excuse-monger all they want. But the fact remains this season has been an embarrassment for more than three months. They're nine points out of the playoffs.

With no apologies to the point I made to Sam Reinhart a couple weeks ago in New Jersey, they're toast.

The Sabres are now 0-10-1 in their last 11 attempts to have a simple two-game winning streak. They're now 3-14-3 in their last 20 road games. Coach Phil Housley clearly dialed back on public criticism of his team after calling them "soft" following that ghastly loss to the New York Rangers a couple weeks ago, but he wasn't wrong.

That was clearly said in anger after the defeat. You know what the old adage is: The immediate aftermath is often the truth serum.

The Sabres have lost four in a row to the Leafs. To their No. 1 rival. For the first time since 1971-72. That humiliation clearly doesn't register enough with too many of these players.

"I've been fortunate to be on the good side of things for a while [against Toronto] but we've got to find a way to get that hate a little bit more, especially at home," said Jason Pominville, who has played more than 700 games with this organization. "We had a chance tonight but just weren't able to do it. We have to find a way to win a game against this team. I think everyone is well aware they're not a favorite."

It's yet another example of how the Leafs have flown light years ahead of Buffalo. Think of the Atlantic Division right now. How in the world are the Sabres ever going to catch up with Tampa Bay or Toronto? Boston seems ready to take a step back every year and never does. Now Montreal is vastly improved.

The Sabres basically go nose-to-nose with Florida and don't look likely to finish in front of a team that plays in a largely empty arena.

Think how maddening this team is. The last three home wins are over the New York Islanders, Washington and Pittsburgh. They can play every once in a while. But that's not remotely good enough in this league.

It's not only ridiculous to go nearly three months without winning two games in a row, it's downright laughable. It feels like the next time the Sabres might do it will be in October. As in next season.

"No, it doesn't feel like that at all," said captain Jack Eichel, laughing to mask his clear disgust at the topic being broached. "I don't know. I don't have an answer for you right now."

Fair enough. There isn't one answer. There's a host of them.

Here's a point fans should know about Eichel. He takes losing as seriously as you can. He sits at his stall after games. If the media wants him, he's available. Just about any night of the season.

A guy like Rasmus Ristolainen should volunteer to take the heat once in his career. Eichel does it three times a week.

The Sabres finally crumbled in the final five minutes of the second period as Ristolainen, an alleged top-pair defenseman, was outworked for the puck by Trevor Moore and it was fed to newcomer Nic Petan for his first NHL goal of the season with either the Leafs or Winnipeg.

Ristolainen piled up another minus-2 night. That's minus-31 and counting, the worst figure of any player in the entire league. And yes, I realize plus-minus is considered a dopey stat these days. But worst in the league remains worst in the league.

There are moments in a career that can change a narrative. That goal feels like a coffin-nailer on Ristolainen's Buffalo career. Your top D man can't get toasted on the wall with the puck like that by a rookie fourth-line kid who's been with the Marlies most of the season.

For his part, Housley continues to not distinguish himself either and the continued collapse is going to squarely put more focus on his status. It seems crazy to fire yet another coach after two years but by the season finale April 6, Terry and Kim Pegula might have actually gone a few weeks without firing somebody and might have itchy trigger fingers again.

Housley blew it when he didn't issue a goalie interference challenge on Morgan Rielly's goal with 18.4 seconds left in the first period. Patrick Marleau was battling in front with Evan Rodrigues and might have been bumped toward the goalie but it seemed like his body contacted Linus Ullmark's glove.

That could have been a huge challenge. The way those calls go, goals are often wiped out. Instead, Housley took his timeout home on the bus with him. He said he didn't think it would be successful and he might want that timeout late in the game.

That's soft coaching, too.

What's left the rest of the season? Eichel is going for 30 goals and Skinner for 40. Rasmus Dahlin can pass Bobby Orr for points by an 18-year-old defenseman. Those three are worth watching for sure.

Starting Monday against Edmonton, Housley should be cutting Ristolainen's minutes down by 4-5 a night, giving some more to Dahlin and promising newcomer Brandon Montour.

The Sabres should send Tage Thompson to Rochester immediately. He's barely been an NHL player much of the season and isn't suited for any sort of serious game now. One problem is Vladimir Sobotka is still hurt and they may not want to call up any forwards from Rochester while the Amerks are in the playoff hunt.

So I'd call up Alex Nylander and see if he has any desire to have an NHL career with this organization. It's time. If he can't play or doesn't want to play, cut bait. Get Thompson ready for his playoff work in the AHL.

Shortly after the Leafs' first goal, Thompson flat-out waved at Toronto defenseman Martin Marincin in the Buffalo zone and only an Ullmark save prevented an early 2-0 deficit and an awfully short night for the Blue and Gold. It was a grievous play, the kind that cannot be rewarded with any more NHL ice time this season.

And if the Sabres don't want to call up a forward, then play with 11 forwards and seven defensemen. There is no good reason why Casey Nelson has sat for seven games after his conditioning assignment in Rochester while Matt Hunwick and Marco Scandella continue to play.

None of this makes sense. November seems like years ago.

'Simple' mistakes slow Sabres in another loss to the Maple Leafs

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 2, 2019

TORONTO -- All Casey Mittelstadt and Marco Scandella could do was watch as Rasmus Ristolainen lost the puck behind the Buffalo Sabres' net, and no one alerted them that Nic Petan was skating alone toward Linus Ullmark.

Trevor Moore fired a quick pass to the slot, where Petan dropped to one knee and shot over Ullmark's glove to give the Toronto Maple Leafs a one-goal lead in the second period and provoke a roaring standing ovation in Scotiabank Arena.

The Sabres never recovered. Though Buffalo pelted 20 shots on goal in the third period, the Maple Leafs scored with the net empty to secure a 5-2 win Saturday night. The final 20 minutes were no consolation to coach Phil Housley or his players.

After all, the Sabres (30-27-8) are desperate for points -- they are nine back of the second wild-card playoff spot with 17 games remaining -- and have not won back-to-back games since Dec. 13.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush: it's disappointing that we didn't get the result," Housley lamented. "We didn't meet our standard tonight. ... These guys have fought and battled together, and fought for each other in the third period. We get one goal it changes the complexion of the game, but the bottom line is we didn't get the result at this time of the year."

Buffalo managed to complete a come-from-behind overtime victory over Pittsburgh Friday night, despite allowing 20 shots on goal in the first period and the Penguins having lost only two games when leading after two periods.

The Sabres were unable to get away with such poor defensive play against the Maple Leafs (40-21-4), who improved to 31-0 when leading after two periods despite having only 16 shots on goal over the final 40 minutes.

Following Petan's one-timer goal, Nikita Zaitsev pushed Toronto's lead to two when his shot from the blue line ricocheted off Brandon Montour's skate and past Ullmark with 55 seconds left in the second period.

"Tonight they were better than us," Jack Eichel said bluntly.

John Tavares poked a rebound over the goalline to open scoring 4:20 into the first period because Ullmark was unaware he did not have the puck covered following a spectacular save on Mitch Marner.

The Sabres silenced the crowd when Jason Pominville and Conor Sheary scored 94 seconds apart in the first period to take a 2-1 lead, and they had the opportunity to add an insurance goal when Marner was penalized for slashing with 14:08 remaining.

Buffalo failed to score on the power play and momentum quickly swung in Toronto's favor. Evan Rodrigues mistakenly pushed Patrick Marleau into Ullmark, preventing the Sabres goalie from attempting a glove save on Morgan Rielly's shot from the blue line and the puck ended up in the back of the net with only 20 seconds remaining in the first period to tie the score, 2-2.

"We did some good things," Pominville said. "We were able to get the lead, play with it for a little bit. But tough to give one up at the end of the period. ... I just feel like the breaks right now aren't going our way. We have to find a way and dig a little deeper. Obviously it hasn't been a fun stretch for anyone, but we have to look at the positives."

The Sabres didn't play poorly in the second period, either. Jeff Skinner nearly gave Buffalo the lead with a breakaway, only for his shot to be stopped by Maple Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen, who finished with 35 saves.

For the second time in one week, Housley noted that his players failed to communicate in the defensive zone, leading to Petan's go-ahead goal. Additionally, the Maple Leafs pushed the lead to two goals when Montour was unable to move Zach Hyman from in front of the net.

Shots on goal were 16-2 in favor of Buffalo during the first 14 minutes of the third period, and Rodrigues nearly cut the deficit to one when his wrist shot went through Andersen's leg pads.

"We're not going to quit, Pominville continued. "We know that we have to get every point that we can. I thought we threw everything at them. Unfortunately, we weren't able to put one in. Definitely had some looks. Again, not a lot of puck luck in the third. I don't think it was for a lack of effort or execution."

Marner scored an empty-net goal with 1:57 remaining in regulation to secure the Leafs' first four-game winning streak over the Sabres since 1972. More important, the Sabres have lost nine of their last 13 games and have only 13 wins in 40 games since their winning streak ended.

The same problems that have followed the Sabres all season are preventing them from gaining any sort of traction, and they are in jeopardy of becoming only the second team in NHL history to miss the playoffs after a 10-game winning streak.

"It's just simple stuff that kills us," said Eichel.

The Wraparound: Maple Leafs 5, Sabres 2

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 2, 2019

TORONTO — Phil Housley is sick of losing, no matter the opponent. He made that abundantly clear Saturday afternoon when asked about the Buffalo Sabres potentially losing four straight games to the rival Toronto Maple Leafs for the first time since 1972.

Housley responded to the question with the cliché of wanting to focus on the next game, not the Sabres' previous three losses to their bitter rival. However, the problems that have plagued his team against the Maple Leafs reared their ugly head hours later in Scotiabank Arena.

Two defensive breakdowns cost the Sabres two goals against in the second period, and the Maple Leafs held on for a 5-2 win. More important than a four-game skid against Toronto, the Sabres (30-27-8) failed to generate any momentum after beating the Pittsburgh Penguins Friday night and have not won back-to-back games since Dec. 13.

John Tavares, Morgan Rielly, Nic Petan, Nikita Zaitsev and Mitch Marner scored for Toronto (40-21-4), which suffered its most lopsided loss of the season, a 6-1 defeat, Thursday against the New York Islanders. Petan broke a 2-2 tie with his goal at 15:02 into the second period, and Zaitsev's shot went off Brandon Montour's skate and in for a 4-3 lead a little over four minutes later.

Jason Pominville and Conor Sheary scored one minute, 34 seconds apart to give the Sabres a 2-1 lead in the first period. Linus Ullmark made 27 saves while starting games on back-to-back days for the first time this season.

Opening salvo: Ullmark made an outstanding save on Marner's tip near the slot, only for Tavares to jam the rebound over the goal line for a 1-0 lead at 4:20 into the first period.

94 seconds: Pominville capitalizes on a loose puck in the crease for his 15th goal of the season with 14 minutes left in the first period.

Kyle Okposo then broke the puck out of the Sabres' zone by shooting it high into the air. The puck bounced into the Leafs' zone, where Sheary gained possession and beat Frederik Andersen with a quick shot from the slot. Sheary has six points in his last five games, including three goals in the past two games.

Late response: Toronto tied the score with 20 seconds remaining in the first period when Rielly's shot from the point snuck through Patrick Marleau's screen to beat Ullmark. Marleau bumped into Ullmark while Rielly wound up at the blue line, however, the Sabres chose to not challenge for goaltender interference.

Delay: In addition to a late start for the Sportsnet "Hockey night in Canada" broadcast, opening faceoff did not occur until 7:23 p.m., because an arena employee noticed a cracked pane of glass behind the Sabres' net following both anthems. A crew rushed to change the glass and tested several neighboring pieces to ensure playing conditions were safe.

Warm welcome: Tavares, the subject of disdain for Islanders fans during his return to Long Island this week, received a roaring standing ovation from the crowd during pregame introductions, which were recited in reverse order to allow the crowd to embrace Tavares, who signed with the Maple Leafs last summer.

Injury: Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe left the game with an injury in the second period and did not return.

Next: The Sabres are not scheduled to practice Sunday and will hold a morning skate Monday ahead of their game against the Edmonton Oilers, who defeated the Columbus Blue Jackets, 4-0, Saturday.

Sabres at Leafs: Five Things to Know

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 2, 2019

TORONTO – For the second time this week, the Sabres are in Scotiabank Arena to meet the Toronto Maple Leafs. Buffalo is playing on a back-to-back after Friday's overtime win over Pittsburgh and did not have a morning skate today.

Toronto has won both meetings this season, a 5-4 overtime thriller in December in KeyBank Center and Monday's 5-3 victory here. Faceoff tonight is at 7:15 on MSG and WGR Radio. Thanks to Canadian television for that extra delay.

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

1. What's at stake: The Sabres are seven points out in the wild-card race while the Leafs are three points behind Boston in the race for second in the Atlantic Division. Other key games among wild-card teams today are Edmonton at Columbus, Pittsburgh at Montreal and Carolina at Florida.
2. Some ugly Sabres numbers: There's a lot of it heading into this one. Buffalo has dropped three straight overall to the Leafs – and has not lost four in a row to its archrival since the 1971-72 season. It lost here Monday after playing a strong first period and then getting burned for three quick goals early in the second.

"It's a big rivalry, a divisional game, divisional opponent," coach Phil Housley said when he met reporters late this afternoon because the Sabres did not skate today. " ... We've got to focus on tonight. It will be a tough task. They're a very good hockey team. At the same time, if we can shut things down and play a boring game so to speak, we'll get opportunities to score. That's the way we look at it."

Asked if he's fed up losing to the Leafs, Housley dropped some of the coachspeak.

"I'm fed up losing to anybody for that matter," Housley said, smiling. "I like the way we started our game here the last time."

There's more numbers trouble for the Sabres: They're 0-9-1 when trying to forge a two-game winning streak since their last one, Dec. 11-13. The Sabres are just 3-13-3 in their last 19 road games and 0-5-1 in their last six.

3. Leafs on the bounceback: Toronto took Friday off to recoup from Thursday's 6-1 decimation on Long Island in John Tavares' return game. That loss snapped a three-game winning streak – the seventh time this year Toronto has won three or more.

"I really liked our game. Actually I thought it was spectacular for us for about 24 minutes," coach Mike Babcock said after his team's morning skate today. "It just goes to show you if you don't keep doing it right, you can't win in the National Hockey League against good teams. I thought it was as good a lesson as we could get."

Tavares, the subject of the fan unrest in Nassau Coliseum after his free-agent jump over the summer, took the high road today and said he was on to the next game. Fans here had his back Friday in the wake of Thursday's display in the crowd, and even Mayor John Tory tweeted his support of the Leafs' hometown star.

"I'm focusing now on tonight and getting ready to play against Buffalo," Tavares said. "I just want to bounce back. That's what's most important, moving forward and getting back to some of the things we were doing forward."

"Ever since I've been here the support has been tremendous. Playing here and being a part of it, especially from the support you get from the fans around the city, it's a special place to play."

4. Jack vs. Auston: Jack Eichel and Auston Matthews are good friends who seem to be relishing their personal rivalry. Eichel (23-47-70 in 61 games) has 10 goals and 15 points in 11 career games against the Leafs while

Matthews (30-29-59 in 50 games) has eight goals and 11 points in nine career games against Buffalo – including the sizzling overtime winner in the final seconds Dec. 4 in Buffalo.

Eichel had the third two-goal game of his career against the Leafs here in Monday's matchup. He's 5-3-8 in six career games in this building. He's also on a seven-game point streak overall, tied for his longest of the season. He's at 5-4-9 in those games.

"Elite speed. He's an interesting type skater," Babcock said. "... Against us last time he was dangerous. I thought he was the best player on the ice for both teams. It's like playing against McDavid, Draisaitl, Barzal or any of the guys that are really good. You give them space and room and they really hurt you."

5. By the numbers: Frederik Anderson (30-13-3, 2.59/.923) starts in goal for Toronto and Linus Ullmark, who made 41 saves against the Penguins, will go on back-to-back days for the first time this season. He's 14-8-4, 3.03/.910. Housley said Carter Hutton is healthy enough to play but Ullmark is being rewarded for his play Friday night and in relief here Monday. ... Marco Scandella is back on on defense for Matt Hunwick. ... Jeff Skinner's season-high goal drought is at seven games and he's stuck at 36 goals ... The Sabres have a power-play goal in four straight games and are 5 for 14 in that span. ... Former Sabre Tyler Ennis, who has nine goals and played well as a fourth-liner, will be a healthy scratch for the Leafs tonight so trade deadline acquisition Nic Petan can make his Toronto debut.

Mike Harrington: After a big win, Sabres have to show it meant something by beating Leafs

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2019

Great win, Sabres. Highlight reel stuff. A 2-0 mark this year against the suddenly vulnerable Pittsburgh Penguins, both wins in comeback fashion in overtime.

Now do it again Saturday night. You have no other choice.

If you want real meaningful March hockey in these parts for the first time since 2012, the Sabres have to show they have some mettle and moxie to survive in one of hockey's biggest fishbowls.

Saturday night in Toronto. Hockey Night in Canada. Against the Maple Leafs. Who are coming off sheer embarrassment.

Good luck to the Blue and Gold. They might need it.

The Sabres are 0-9-1 in their last 10 games after a victory. They haven't won two in a row since beating Los Angeles and Arizona, hardly two of the NHL's heavyweights, on Dec. 11 and 13.

It's an almost unfathomable lack of success. And it's certainly unforgivable.

Even the tank team of 2015 had a pair of two-game winning streaks after the turn of the new year.

Back in the good old days of October and November, the Sabres put up monthly records of 6-4-2 and 11-3-0, respectively. Then things hit the skids: 4-6-3 in December, 4-6-0 in January and 4-7-2 in February.

That's what happens when you can't string victories. The Sabres' only hope is a long run of success. It's almost pointless to scoreboard watch.

Win your own games, especially in regulation against teams in the race, and see what happens. They're seven points out now and it's going to be hard some nights to pick up two. Friday's dramatic win gave them just one extra with all the flip-flopping being done between Carolina, Columbus and Pittsburgh.

Conor Sheary, who scored an overtime goal for Pittsburgh in Game 2 of the 2016 Stanley Cup final against San Jose, burned his old team with the OT winner on this night.

Sheary has 11 goals on the season and this was his first multi-goal game since Oct. 6. It's a tad harder to score when you're not on Sidney Crosby's wing. But Sheary knows what it takes to get to the playoffs and win there. You would hope he's had a few words in the dressing room this season.

"The most important thing is that playoff teams play their best hockey at this time of the year," Sheary said afterward. "No one limps into playoffs because they had enough points before. I think the top eight teams get in for a reason. If we can find our game and get on a little streak here, I think we'll be in a good position."

The Sabres, of course, are not in a good position. One reason is a lack of streaks. The other is their 11-17-4 road record.

A couple nights after Thanksgiving, the Sabres won a shootout in Detroit to go 8-4-1 on foreign ice. That means they're 3-13-3 in their last 19. They're 0-5-1 in the last six. They don't show up against bad teams (see Edmonton, Vancouver and New Jersey) and haven't been good enough on the road against good teams.

Sheary had said earlier in the day the Sabres were trying to break the game down as Pittsburgh simply being one of the teams ahead of them. You can't make up an eight-point deficit in one night. Penguins coach Mike Sullivan confirmed Sheary's thinking.

"It's just the reality of how close the race is right now," Sullivan said. "You have a good night or a good week and you're in the playoffs. If you don't, you're not. So we're just going to have make sure we control what we can.

"The way to do that is just stay in the moment. We have to stay focused. We can't get overwhelmed by all the distractions and the noise that's going on around us. That for your guys to talk about and write about. We're just going to focus on the game."

The Penguins have to be in disbelief they lost this one. They had 44 shots on goal and 71 attempts. Linus Ullmark was brilliant in the Buffalo goal but Pittsburgh didn't close when it had multiple chances, both in the third period and overtime.

That allowed newcomer Brandon Montour to score the tying goal with 2:32 left and Sheary to cap the madcap sequence with the overtime winner, that was officially listed as unassisted even though Rasmus Dahlin did the bulk of the work on the wild shift in the Pittsburgh zone.

So it's on to Toronto and the bright lights of the big city and the hockey world. The stats and the recent past, including Monday's 5-3 loss in Scotiabank Arena, indicate the Sabres aren't up to the task.

History says the Sabres should be. They've lost three straight to their archrivals. The last time Buffalo has dropped four in a row to Toronto? Way back in the 1971-72 season. This is no time for that kind of negative history.

"Just another game in Toronto," said a smiling Montour, an Ontario native clearly looking forward to his first Buffalo-Toronto game. "They're obviously a great team with a ton of talent. It's going to be a big test to see what we're all about."

Sure is. The Sabres entered Friday's game having fallen into 12th in the East for a night after Florida's shootout point Thursday in Vegas. It seems silly to be thinking playoffs but there's still 18 games left and 36 points to be had.

The Leafs laid a colossal egg Thursday on Long Island, cracking under the lynch mob that was the Nassau Coliseum in a 6-1 loss to the New York Islanders in John Tavares' return to his former home. They took Friday off. The Sabres will be on a back-to-back.

No excuses. Beat Toronto. Show you can stand up to your biggest rival. Otherwise, Friday night was just another meaningless blip on the schedule.

Conor Sheary shows Sabres they can come back again, scores OT winner to beat Penguins

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
March 1, 2019

The belief that fueled the Buffalo Sabres' unprecedented 10-game winning streak and their ascent to the top of the NHL has wavered over the past three months. That seemingly unflappable confidence was replaced with an emotional rollercoaster, as a young roster tried to cope with the constant challenges of a playoff push.

With their season on the brink Friday night in KeyBank Center, the Sabres finally reminded themselves that they can roar back from any deficit, no matter the odds.

Defenseman Brandon Montour scored with 2:32 left in regulation to send the game into overtime, and Conor Sheary's game-winning goal completed a come-from-behind 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Sabres (30-26-8), 12th in the Eastern Conference entering the game, snapped a two-game losing streak and closed within seven points of the second wild-card spot, despite being outshot, 44-30, against the desperate Penguins (33-22-9)

It was fitting that Sheary, the 26-year-old winger who won two Stanley Cups with Pittsburgh, helped pen this latest comeback.

"I think early on in the season we had that [belief] a little bit more often," Sheary, who was awarded the game's first star after scoring two goals with an assist, said. "I hope tonight is a reminder of how good of a team we are and how good of a team we can be."

Patric Hornqvist and Sidney Crosby scored power-play goals 63 seconds apart late in the second period to give Pittsburgh a one-goal lead, a seemingly insurmountable deficit considering the Penguins were 27-0-2 this season when leading after two periods.

Yet, one of those two losses came against Buffalo, when Jack Eichel extended the Sabres' winning streak to six with his goal 45 seconds into overtime in Pittsburgh. Entering Friday, the Sabres had won only 12 of 38 games since the winning streak.

The Penguins pelted 20 shots on goal in the first 20 minutes Friday night, and the Sabres went 12 minutes without forcing goalie Matt Murray to make a save. Buffalo struggled to forecheck or break the puck out of its zone.

Additionally, the Sabres gave Pittsburgh six minutes of power-play time in the second period because of Scott Wilson's four-minute high-sticking double minor.

"Obviously whenever you put a team like that on the power play for as much as we did in the second I think, for one, it ruins the flow of the game and two you're giving their best players a lot of touches and they're getting into the game," Eichel explained. "They're starting to feel themselves, so it's never easy. ... I thought we did a good job coming out in the third and finding a way."

Though the Penguins had 33 shots on goal through two periods, Buffalo was within striking distance thanks to first-period goals from Eichel and Sheary. Eichel scored his 23rd of the season 3:09 into the game after Penguins defenseman Marcus Pettersson committed an ugly turnover, and Sheary added a power-play goal to regain the lead almost 10 minutes later on a centering pass from Kyle Okposo.

The Sabres were giving up too many quality scoring chances but were buoyed by the play of Linus Ullmark, who made 41 saves after allowing 11 goals over his previous three starts. Buffalo's blitz began with Ramus Dahlin's shot off Murray's blocker early in the third, and Eichel followed by missing the net on a near breakaway.

Murray then stopped Wilson's one-timer, and Jeff Skinner was robbed at the doorstep when Pettersson covered up a puck on the goal line. Finally, moments after Evan Rodrigues hit the post, Montour's first goal as a Sabre tied the score.

The Penguins' Evgeni Malkin nearly scored the winning goal in overtime after Ullmark misplayed the puck. However, Dahlin regained possession and entered the offensive zone before another Pettersson turnover gave Sheary the puck.

Sheary, who had scored only three goals in his previous 43 games entering the night and was brought to Buffalo partly because of his success in meaningful games, skated toward the slot and his left-handed shot went off the post and in with 49 seconds left in overtime to give the Sabres' their seventh win this season when trailing after two periods. The league's situation room challenged the goal for offsides but ruled that Dahlin had possession when entering the zone.

Yet, the performance won't mean much if the Sabres fail to win Saturday in Toronto. They have not won back-to-back games since Dec. 13, and only 18 regular-season games remain over the next five weeks. And Housley hopes their heroics Friday night illustrate what they are capable of when playing their best.

"It shows them they can still come back again, if they stay the course and stick with it," coach Phil Housley said. "These guys fought right through to the end."

Sabres Notebook: Rasmus Dahlin maintained possession before OT goal vs. Penguins

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
March 2, 2019

TORONTO — The Buffalo Sabres' celebration was underway in KeyBank Center Friday night when referee Tim Peel announced that Conor Sheary's game-winning overtime goal was under review.

The NHL's situation room in Toronto initiated the challenge to determine if Rasmus Dahlin was offside earlier in the Sabres' final possession, which ended with Sheary's wrist shot sealing a come-from-behind 4-3 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Penguins players climbed over the boards to prepare for the next shift following Peel's announcement, only to discover less than one minute later the call on the ice stood because Dahlin was ruled onside. A similar play negated Jack Eichel's goal at Florida on Feb. 19, and coach Phil Housley admitted the rule's interpretation can be unpredictable.

"It always changes game to game," Housley said Saturday in Scotiabank Arena when asked of the difference between the two challenges. "I just thought Rasmus had possession coming into the zone. He was making a hockey move and it was right on to his tape, so that to me is possession at that point in the overtime."

That was the league's interpretation upon further review. The sequence in question began when Dahlin collected the puck in the neutral zone and maintained possession until he met Penguins defenseman Marcus Pettersson at the opposing blue line.

The league's initial concern stemmed from the puck lagging behind Dahlin's body while he tried to stick handle to his left around Pettersson. While still images show Dahlin in the offensive zone with the puck behind the blue line, the official ruling determined the 18-year-old defenseman never lost possession of the puck, therefore making him onside.

Eichel's third-period goal in Florida was nullified because he lost possession while attempting to enter the offensive zone, and he skated backward to try to regain the puck on the blade of his stick. Initially ruled onside, Eichel would one-time a pass from Zach Bogosian for a goal, only to have the play ruled offside after a challenge.

However, Housley said he and his coaching staff had no such concerns Friday night when Sheary scored with 49 seconds left in overtime. According to the NHL's Rule 83.1, "a player actually controlling the puck who shall cross the line ahead of the puck shall not be considered 'offside,' provided he had possession and control of the puck prior to his skates crossing the blue line."

"We looked at it in the coach's room, and I felt they made the right call," Housley said.

Ullmark starts again

Housley chose to use the same starting goalie in back-to-back days for the second time in one week, opting to use Linus Ullmark in net Saturday night in Toronto after the 25-year-old stopped 41 of 44 shots against the Penguins.

It was the first time this season Ullmark started games in back-to-back days. Carter Hutton, who left practice early Thursday because of a lower-body injury, was available to start if needed, but Housley chose to use Ullmark because of his performance against the Penguins.

Scandella returns

Defenseman Marco Scandella returned to the Sabres' lineup Saturday after a lower-body injury prevented the 28-year-old from playing against the Penguins. Defensemen Matt Hunwick and Casey Nelson were healthy scratches, while forward Vladimir Sobotka remains day to day with an upper-body injury.

The Wraparound: Sabres 4, Penguins 3, OT

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2019

The puck left the blade of Brandon Montour's stick and hit the back of the net, salvaging what was one of the Buffalo Sabres ugliest performances since their 10-game winning streak ended in November.

Montour, the defenseman acquired on the eve of the trade deadline, helped send the game to overtime with his first goal as a Sabre, and Conor Sheary scored the game-winning goal with 48.2 seconds remaining to beat the Pittsburgh Penguins, 4-3, Friday night in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres (30-26-8) rallied from a one-goal deficit after the Penguins (33-22-9) scored two power-play goals in 63 seconds late in the second period.

Following Scott Wilson's four-minute high-sticking penalty, Sidney Crosby and Patric Hornqvist scored for Pittsburgh. Nick Bjugstad also had a goal for the Penguins, who outshot Buffalo, 43-30, and had 20 shots on Linus Ullmark in the game's first 20 minutes.

Sheary scored twice and Jack Eichel added a goal for the Sabres, who went 12 minutes without a shot on goal and are 13-20-6 since their 10-game winning streak ended Nov. 29.

Opening salvo: Penguins defenseman Marcus Pettersson failed to break the puck up along the boards, hitting Sam Reinhart before going right to Eichel, who beat Murray for a 1-0 lead at 3:09 into the first period. Eichel's 23rd goal of the season extended his point streak to seven games, and he is on pace to become the first Sabres player to record at least 90 points since Daniel Briere had 95 in 2006-07.

Eichel is the first Sabres player with at least 70 points since Jason Pominville had 73 in 2011-12.

56 seconds: That is all the Penguins would need to answer, as Bjugstad's shot from the left-wing circle went over Ullmark's shoulder to tie the score, 1-1, at 4:05 into the first period.

Sweet revenge: Following Garrett Wilson's roughing minor, the Sabres capitalized on the power play with Sheary's goal at 8:30 in the first period for a 2-1 lead. Montour was credited with a secondary assist, his first point since joining the Sabres last Sunday.

Sheary, who has four goals in his last 44 games, twice won the Stanley Cup with the Penguins.

Odd first: The Sabres were thoroughly outplayed in the first period, despite leading 2-1 after 20 minutes. They were outshot 20-7 and needed Ullmark to make two highlight-reel saves.

Breakthrough: Hornqvist capitalized on Wilson's penalty by tipping Justin Schultz's shot past Murray to tie the score, 2-2. Crosby then one-timed a pass from Evgeni Malkin to give Pittsburgh its first lead with 1:39 remaining in the second period.

Crosby's goal, his 28th of the season, was the 438th of his career, tying Jaromir Jagr for the second-most in Penguins franchise history.

Injury updates: Forward Vladimir Sobotka (upper body) and defenseman Marco Scandella (lower body) were not available to play and remain day to day. Defenseman Casey Nelson was the Sabres' lone healthy scratch. Defensemen Kris Letang, Olli Maatta, Chad Ruhwedel, and winger Bryan Rust were out for the Penguins.

1,500: Linesman Brad Kovachik, a native of Woodstock, Ontario, officiated his 1,500th NHL game, which was commemorated with a brief ceremony before opening faceoff.

Next: The Sabres will not hold a morning skate Saturday ahead of their 7 p.m. game against the Maple Leafs in Toronto.

Sabres' Tague Thompson not ready to think about joining Amerks for playoffs

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2019

No matter the outcome of the regular season's final five weeks, Tague Thompson knows he will likely be playing playoff hockey next month. The only question is whether he will be in Buffalo or Rochester.

The Sabres' 21-year-old winger was told by General Manager Jason Botterill this week that he will likely join the Amerks for the AHL Calder Cup playoffs if the Sabres are unable to make a playoff run over the season's final month.

Thompson is not interested in thinking about playing in the AHL again. His focus is on improving his game enough now to earn the trust of coach Phil Housley and help the Sabres snap their playoff drought.

"I spoke to Botts about it, but our mindset is here, right now, and helping Buffalo," Thompson told The News following Friday's optional morning skate in KeyBank Center. "I want to do everything in my power to help our team here make the playoffs. We'll cross that bridge if or when it comes."

Thompson, who was acquired along with Patrik Berglund, Vladimir Sobotka and draft picks from St. Louis in the Ryan O'Reilly trade, had seven goals among 11 points with a minus-14 rating in 54 games entering Friday.

He had not scored in 12 consecutive games and had one goal in 16 games. That is not the sole reason why he was a healthy scratch Tuesday night in Philadelphia, though. Thompson is at his best when using his speed to get to the net and unleashing his heavy right-handed shot to get the puck on net.

He also needs to use his 6-foot-6, 205-pound frame to finish checks and gain leverage on opponents. Too often Thompson has tried to stick-handle around defenders, which has rendered him ineffective.

"I think it's important for him to get his feet moving," Housley said. "That's when he's a much better player. When he's standing still and trying to stick-handle through people it doesn't bode well for him, but when he's moving his feet and using his speed, because he is a fast player, he attacks the game the right way and he uses that deadly release. ... He just has to get back to his foundation of moving his feet."

Entering Friday, Thompson, who was officially assigned to Rochester on Monday to make him eligible for the Calder Cup playoffs and recalled hours later, was averaging just 12 minutes, 23 seconds per game — including eight minutes, 40 seconds Monday in Toronto — and ranked second-to-last among qualifying Sabres with a 46.46 percent Corsi, a measurement of 5-on-5 shot differential.

He was acquired for his offensive upside with the hope that his defensive play would improve with more NHL service time. Thompson split last season between St. Louis and its AHL affiliate, scoring three goals among nine points in 41 games with the Blues.

The Sabres opted to keep Thompson in the NHL this season, even when he was a healthy scratch in seven of nine games earlier this season. He earned a spot on the team's top line for a 4-3 loss in Carolina last month, only to tumble down the depth chart because of his defensive lapses and offensive tendencies. Now he's not generating enough chances and admitted he is pressing at times.

Thomson drew back into the lineup Friday against Pittsburgh, but he could be scratched again when Sobotka returns from an upper-body injury. The son of a former NHL player and current AHL coach, Thompson said his focus is on what he can control — performing well enough to remain in the Sabres' lineup the rest of the season.

"It's a marathon, not a sprint," Thompson said. "I want to be here for a long time. I want to help the Sabres win Stanley Cups for years to come. I'm a young guy. It's part of the development. You're going to go through ups and downs throughout your season, throughout your career. For me, it's keeping that mindset that when I'm not getting minutes just work hard and be strong in one-on-one puck battles. Do everything to help the team when I'm not contributing offensively."

Sabres vs. Penguins: Five Things to Know

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres are desperate for points. For them, there may no worse team in the NHL to be playing tonight in KeyBank Center than the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Sabres are 2-12-2 in their last 16 games against the Penguins, although they posted a 5-4 overtime win in November over the Pens in the midst of their 10-game winning streak. But they have gone just 1-8 in their last nine home games against them and haven't beaten them in regulation anywhere since April 23, 2013.

Another month has flipped off the calendar and the Sabres continue to suffer. They went 6-4-2 in October and 11-3-1 in November. They've been consistently bad since, going 4-6-3 in December, 4-6-0 in January and 4-7-2 in February.

They have a tightly packed March with 16 games. Faceoff for the first one is shortly after 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR Radio.

Here are five things to know about tonight's game:

1. Where they stand: The Sabres fell another rung in the standings late Thursday night when the Florida Panthers got a point in a 6-5 shootout loss in Vegas. The Sabres are now eight points out of the final playoff spot with three teams to pass. The Penguins, meanwhile, fell out of a wild-card as well with Columbus' overtime win over Philadelphia. Pittsburgh is tied with Carolina at 74 points, but behind on tiebreakers.

"I'm sure there's no panic in their game. They're just worried about this game tonight and getting two points out of it," said Sabres winger Conor Sheary, who won Stanley Cups with the Penguins in 2016 and 2017. "We're looking at it as they're one of the teams standing in front of us, in our way as well. We need those two points."

Penguins coach Mike Sullivan confirmed Sheary's thinking after his team's morning skate.

"It's just the reality of how close the race is right now," Sullivan said. "You have a good night or a good week and you're in the playoffs. If you don't, you're not. So we're just going to have make sure we control what we can."

"The way to do that is just stay in the moment. We have to stay focused. We can't get overwhelmed by all the distractions and the noise that's going on around us. That for your guys to talk about and write about. We're just going to focus on the game."

2. Lineup notes: The goalie matchup tonight is Linus Ullmark (13-8-4, 3.03/.909) vs. Matt Murray (19-10-2, 2.94/.912). Carter Hutton — who is 3-0, 1.36/.956 with two shutouts in five career games against the Penguins — is healthy enough to back up for the Sabres after leaving practice early yesterday with a lower-body problem. Marco Scandella (lower body) and Vladimir Sobotka (upper body) both remain out and day to day. Matt Hunwick will remain in the lineup.

The Penguins will be without their top two defensemen for the weekend, both tonight and Saturday in Montreal. Brian Dumoulin (concussion) and Kris Letang (upper body) were both injured in the Stadium Series loss Saturday in Philadelphia. Burly veteran Erik Gudbranson, acquired at the trade deadline from Vancouver, will make his Penguins debut tonight.

3. The Crosby Chronicles: Penguins captain Sidney Crosby continues to put up huge numbers with 27 goals, 50 assists, 77 points and a plus-19 rating in 60 games. He is tied for ninth in the NHL in scoring with Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos. In his last nine games, Crosby is averaging nearly two points per game at 4-12-16. In 37 career games against the Sabres, he has 57 points (19-38-57) and a plus-22 rating. Crosby's 12th season of 20 goals or more tied Mario Lemieux for the most in team history.

What's No. 87's take on the playoff race?

"You look at the standings and how tight the teams are, what's separating second in your division to out of the playoffs isn't much (five points)," he said today. "You can't really dwell on that. You find a way to get points every night and find a way to get yourselves in there."

4. Skinner not scoring: Sabres winger Jeff Skinner is in a season-long goal drought of six games and has slipped into a four-way tie for fourth in the NHL goal race at 36. He's now behind Alex Ovechkin (44), Patrick Kane (40) and Leon Draisaitl (39). Skinner has 19 shots on goal in the six games and has notched four assists.

"You want to contribute and you want to contribute to a win," Skinner said today. "It sort of is what it is. You have to fight through it."

5. By the numbers: The Penguins are sixth in the NHL on the power play (24.3 percent) while the Sabres are fifth on the penalty kill (83.0), allowing just two power-play goals in the last nine games (13-15). The Sabres are third in home penalty killing (85.5) while Pittsburgh is second in road power plays at an eye-popping 31.2. ... Jake Guentzel leads the Penguins in goals (29), while Evgeni Malkin (20-44) and Phil Kessel (21-43) are second on the club to Crosby with 64 points. ... The Penguins are 16-10-6 on the road this year but are in playoff peril because they've been unusually poor at home (17-12-2). ... Pittsburgh veteran Patric Hörnqvist, who scored the Stanley Cup-winning goal at Nashville in 2017, is playing in his 700th career game tonight. That's the most in NHL history for a player taken with the last pick in the draft. Hörnqvist was taken by the Predators with the final choice of the seventh round in 2005.

What happened in Vegas won't stay in Vegas

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

February 3, 2019

Jeff Skinner should send a thank you note to the Vegas Golden Knights. When the Golden Knights gave newly acquired winger Mark Stone a contract extension worth an average of \$9.5 million a year, Skinner had to be the second happiest man in the NHL.

It was only last summer I was thinking the floor for Skinner's next contract would be at least \$7 million a year. After all, that's what former Buffalo Sabres forward Evander Kane got when he passed on free agency to stay with the San Jose Sharks. James Van Riemsdyk received the same average salary when he used free agency to return to the Philadelphia Flyers. Skinner's price certainly started to rise as he continued to put the puck in the net during his first season as a Sabre, but the Stone contract officially established a market price.

There are a number of similarities between the two players. Both are 26 years old (they were born three days apart in May of 1992), both are/were in the final year of their contract and headed to unrestricted free agency for the first time. Both are wingers who are having their best season, in terms of goal scoring. Stone has a career-high 28 goals, while Skinner's total of 36 is one away from his single season best. Stone has five straight seasons of 20 goals or more, while Skinner has four in a row. Skinner does have one notable edge with four 30-goal campaigns on his resume, while Stone has none. However, Stone has produced more total points, an average of .84 per-game over his nearly seven seasons in the NHL, while Skinner is at .67 in this his ninth NHL season.

Since the Sabres' playoff chances are pretty much shot, whether or not Skinner re-signs with Buffalo is now one of the top storylines for this team. He's the best goal scorer around here since Thomas Vanek, and if the Sabres aren't able to reach an agreement with the Toronto area native, it will open up a huge hole on the roster. Skinner has been a great fit with Jack Eichel, who is having his best season in terms of points. Each player is responsible for the other having a career best year.

So how much should the Sabres pay Skinner and how long should the contract be? Now that we are past the trade deadline, the Sabres can do what no other team can do by offering Skinner an eight-year contract. In terms of average value, the easy answer is less than the \$10 million a year that Eichel is making. Eichel should be the highest paid player on the team at this point, and while an agent wants to get everything he can for his client, I wouldn't think Skinner's agent would be looking to make him the highest paid Sabre.

Word on the streets has the Sabres not wanting to go beyond \$9 million dollars a year, but Stone's new deal in Vegas might force them to go beyond that. I know. It's a lot of money, but this is what the market is now going to yield for a goal scorer like Skinner. He'd also be giving up a chance to go out into the free agency and he'll want to be compensated for that as well. If the Sabres are willing to go to \$9 million a year and Skinner's side is looking for Stone money, just pay the man. Would it be worth half a million dollars a year to let your best goal scorer walk away? Of course not.

When it comes to the salary cap, the Sabres are in good shape. There aren't many long-term commitments on the books. In fact, the only players under contract beyond next season are: Eichel, Kyle Okposo, Rasmus Ristolainen, Carter Hutton and Rasmus Dahlin (and he is on a very affordable entry-level contract). If you're wondering about making a big Skinner contract fit, it should not be a problem. As opposed to teams loaded with talent like the Tampa Bay Lightning and Toronto Maple Leafs there are no discussions here about how to keep all the players who will be getting big money. At this point, Dahlin and Sam Reinhart look like the only players in line for a big contract down the road. Jason Pominville (\$5.6 million) and Matt Moulson (\$3.9 million) will both come off the books after this season, so there's your \$9.5 million in cap space.

See, wasn't that easy?

The Sabres had a chance to win in Toronto, but couldn't shine in key spots

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 2, 2019

Toronto, ON (WGR 550) - The Sabres got behind to the Leafs but then came at Freddie Andersen and netted two goals in 1:34 to take the lead.

Jason Pominville is one of the Sabres forwards that is willing to be around the crease and it paid off for him when a puck slid through Andersen.

Connor Sheary then setup Nikita Zaitsev as a screen and whipped home his third goal in two games.

That's where a good team has to push and get that third goal. You're playing the high flying Toronto Maple Leafs at home. Jeff Skinner gets stopped in front, Sam Reinhart goes in alone and hits the post and a late power play produced absolutely nothing. They hardly even got the puck in.

You have to get that third goal and make the home team uncomfortable. Instead, the well covered Morgan Reilly breaks free from coverage on the blue line and fired one at Ullmark. Patrick Marleau gets position pretty much in Ullmark's lap and stops his glove from moving forward. I think it was a huge mistake by Phil Housley not to challenge that goal. Who cares if you lose your time out. That is a huge goal in the game and he needs to try to get it off the board.

Rasmus Ristolainen lost a battle to little Trevor Moore in the corner and Casey Mittelstadt fails to cover Nic Petan in front and now you're behind. Ristolainen is supposed to be your best defenseman, but yet there he was once again making a play that his team can't have him making in a 2-2 game. He doesn't sense danger around him and it kills this team.

It doesn't end there as bad luck strikes. Brandon Montour has his man tied up pretty well in front, but the puck goes in off his skate, so now you have 20 minutes to try to win a game that had been there for the taking.

Buffalo had 20 shots on Andersen in the third period, but couldn't beat him, He had two or three more pucks scoot by him, but there was never a Sabre there around the crease to take advantage.

So this team failed again to win two straight games. They haven't done it since mid-December That's why we're in March and this team isn't playing meaningful games.

Sabres road woes continue, fall to Maple Leafs 5-2

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

March 2, 2019

Despite a promising first period, the Buffalo Sabres' road losing streak hit an unlucky number seven. The blue and gold were dropped in unceremonious fashion, 5-2, at the sticks of the Toronto Maple Leafs inside Scotiabank Arena. It was the second road loss for Buffalo against Toronto in just this calendar week; as the Leafs throttled the Sabres 5-3 on Monday night.

As mentioned, it was a wild start to the game between these divisional opponents. Following a delay to the start of the game courtesy of a broken pane of glass, the teams combined for four goals throughout the opening period of play. Toronto scored the first and last of the stanza, while Buffalo's tallies came in between. John Tavares potted a goal just 4:20 into the contest for the home side, but the Sabres responded with a pair of goals courtesy of Jason Pominville (6:00) and Conor Sheary (7:34). Sheary is fresh off a two-goal performance just last night against his former team, the Pittsburgh Penguins.

With around two-and-a-half minutes left in the opening period, Buffalo had a golden opportunity to extend their lead to 3-1. Sam Reinhart accepted a pass and crossed the blue line as a pair of Toronto defenders got tied up with one another, but Reinhart ripped the far post as he had Andersen beat, but was unable to seal the deal. Two minutes later, the Maple Leafs instead knotted things up courtesy of defenseman Morgan Rielly. His point shot snuck ever-so-softly through Linus Ullmark and with 19.6 seconds left on the docket it was a brand new hockey game heading into the first intermission at 2-2.

The second period was less eventful, at least early on for both sides. Buffalo's first "best chance" of the period came with 7:38 gone in the middle stanza. With the Leafs' committed deep in the Sabres' zone, the blue and gold found a turnover and were able to spring Jeff Skinner for a chance at a breakaway. Skinner was caught by Rielly, but not before the Buffalo winger was able to get a shot off that was swallowed by Andersen for a stoppage.

With 8:20 left in the second, a couple of fighters from the lightweight division dropped their gloves for a brief scrap. Words were exchanged between Evan Rodrigues and Toronto's Kasper Kapanen following an offside stoppage, and the two opted to settle things with fists. It was brief, but showcased the internal rivalry between these Atlantic Division foes.

Just 20-seconds after the fight, Brandon Montour took his first penalty as a Buffalo Sabre; a cross-check in front of his own net. Buffalo was able to kill the penalty and then some, despite Toronto cycling the puck well around Ullmark. Jack Eichel and Scott Wilson were able to team up for a short-handed attempt during the penalty kill, but Wilson fanned on Eichel's one-timer feed in front of Andersen.

The Leafs grabbed their first lead since the opening minutes of the first period, just 1:02 after the Sabres killed off their powerplay. Nic Petan netted his first goal as a Toronto Maple Leafs with 4:58 left in the middle stanza, off a feed from Trevor Moore. Petan was acquired by Toronto from the Winnipeg Jets ahead of Monday's NHL Trade Deadline.

Oh, but the Maple Leafs were not done there. Much like the first period, the Sabres were unable to get to the buzzer unscathed as Toronto netted another goal in the final minute of play. This one was a wacky one, but it counted just the same. Buffalo was 55-seconds from heading to the locker room down just a goal, but a fluky bounce off the skate of Montour eluded Ullmark and suddenly the deficit was doubled, 4-2, for the Sabres as the third period loomed.

Aside from a Tavares hooking minor and a Mitch Marner empty-net goal, the third period saw little to no high-danger action. Buffalo peppered Andersen throughout the period with a period-high 20 shots, but not one got past the Toronto netminder. Marner's goal on the vacated net all but sealed things in Scotiabank Arena, as the Sabres were sent to their seventh straight loss away from KeyBank Center. Their last victory, you ask? January 29th in Columbus; a 5-4 win over the Blue Jackets coming out of the All-Star Break.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 6:00 - Jason Pominville (15) (Zemgus Girgensons, Marco Scandella); 7:34 - Conor Sheary (12) (Kyle Okposo)

TOR: 4:20 - John Tavares (37) (Mitch Marner, Martin Marincin); 19:40 - Morgan Rielly (16) (Auston Matthews, Ron Hainsey)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 15:02 - Nic Petan (1) (Trevor Moore); 19:05 - Nikita Zaitsev (3) (Mitch Marner, John Tavares)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 18:03 - Mitch Marner (23) ENG (John Tavares, Jake Muzzin)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 11:21 - Kyle Okposo (Hooking - 2 min.)

TOR: 14:08 - Mitch Marner (Slashing - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 11:40 - Evan Rodrigues (Fighting - 5 min. major); 12:00 - Brandon Montour (Cross-checking - 2 min.)

TOR: 11:40 - Kasperii Kapanen (Fighting - 5 min. major)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 2:22 - John Tavares (Hooking - 2 min.)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 37 (10, 7, 20)

TOR: 31 (16, 7, 8)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 27 saves

TOR: Frederik Andersen - 35 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 2

TOR: 0 for 2

Three Stars:

1. John Tavares - TOR

2. Mitch Marner - TOR

3. Nic Petan - TOR

What's Next:

It's back to KeyBank Center for a Monday night bout with the Edmonton Oilers. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m., with pre-game coverage on WGR Sports Radio 550 starting at 6 p.m. with Mike Schopp & the Bulldog from (716) Food and Sport.

The Sabres play the Leafs for the second time this week

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 2, 2019

Toronto, ON (WGR 550) - After beating Pittsburgh in overtime on Friday, the Sabres have once again put themselves in position to win two games in a row. They haven't done it since mid-December and that's why they're in 11th place in the Eastern Conference, two points in back of Philadelphia, seven behind Pittsburgh and Columbus and eight points in back of Carolina.

Buffalo is back in Toronto, a place where they lost to the Leafs last Monday 5-3. Buffalo also has a 4-3 overtime loss to the Maple Leafs back in December.

In Monday's game, the Sabres had a 1-0 second period lead and in less than four minutes, it was 3-1 Leafs.

The Sabres have points in three of their last five games, but have lost five straight on the road.

Jack Eichel opened the scoring against the Pens giving him points in seven straight games. He has five goals and four assists in the time. With 23 goals and 47 assists for 70 points in 61 games, Eichel is 20th in league scoring.

Eichel has put 244 shots on net this season. That ranks him sixth in the NHL.

Coming into Friday's game Conor Sheary had no goals and two assists in nine games. He picked up two goals and an assist against his old team including the overtime winner.

Sam Reinhart assisted on Eichel's goal and has four goals and two assists for six points in four games.

The Sabres didn't have a morning skate so I don't know if Carter Hutton will play. Hutton wasn't well enough to get through a full practice on Thursday, but he did backup Linus Ullmark on Friday. Ullmark hasn't started on back-to-back nights all season. Hutton started his first back-to-back this past week in Toronto and Philadelphia

Freddie Andersen will be in goal at the other end for Toronto. Andersen is 30-13-3 with a 2.59 goals against average. He has a very good .923 save percentage. Andersen didn't play in the 6-1 loss on Long Island, but he has played in eight-of-nine games and 11 out of 13. Andersen has won his last three starts.

Despite scoring against his old team on Monday, Tyler Ennis will be scratched to allow Nic Petan to play his first game as a Leaf. He was acquired from Winnipeg.

Toronto has won three of its last seven games.

The Leafs already have two 30 goal scorers. John Tavares has 36 and Austin Matthews has 30 in 50 games. That's a 49-goal pace.

Matthews and Eichel enjoying facing each other. Matthews has eight goals and 11 points in nine games against Buffalo while Eichel has 10 goals and 15 points in 11 games vs Toronto.

Mitch Marner is 12th in league scoring with 75 points in 64 games. Tavares is two points behind Eichel in the scoring race.

In 28 games against the Sabres, Tavares has 16 goals and 15 assists for 31 points.

Join Brian Koziol for the pre-game starting at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Zemgus Girgensons and Tage Thompson.

Sheary has a huge game to beat his old team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres kept tempting fate by taking penalties and a 2-1 lead turned into a 3-2 deficit against Pittsburgh. They got over it in the third period and Conor Sheary beat his former team with the overtime winner.

Sheary had two goals and an assist in the must win game. That gives Buffalo two overtime victories over the Penguins.

Buffalo had done a terrific job of killing the calls, until Scott Wilson took a double-minor for high sticking. Linus Ullmark had been spectacular the whole second period, but Patric Hornqvist tipped in a Justin Schultz shot and 1:03 later, Evgeni Malkin found Sidney Crosby for an open one-timer. The goal and an assist gives Crosby 59 points in 38 games against the Sabres.

Buffalo gave up 20 shots in the first period, but many were from distance and I didn't think the Sabres got dominated. Ullmark had one huge save after Jeff Skinner gave the puck away. Crosby found Jack Johnson breaking in, but Ullmark robbed him.

The Sabres got the lead when Marcus Pettersson turned the puck over. Sam Reinhart set up Jack Eichel alone in the slot and he extended his points streak to seven games.

Brandon Montour paid dividends in his first home game finding Kyle Okposo on the power play. Okposo made a nice pass in front to Sheary and he scored his first goal in 10 games. The assist was Montour's first point as a Sabre.

Skinner has been snake bitten lately. Matt Murray made a huge save on him from the slot not once, but twice.

The Pens were all over Ullmark in the second and once again, there was no sense of urgency from the blue and gold.

The first close call came when the puck popped straight up in the air. Montour reached behind Ullmark and shoveled the puck out.

Later, Erik Gudbranson was a late coming defenseman down the slot. No Sabre picked him up, but Ullmark made a huge save.

Malkin got everything he had on a shot down the slot, but Ullmark got his mask in the way.

The only chance Buffalo had in the second period was Scott Wilson being stopped on consecutive shots in close by Murray.

Dahlin had a chance to tie the game early in the third period, but Murray got an arm on it. A few minutes later, Buffalo had an even better chance when Skinner stole the puck and sent in a streaking Eichel, but he missed the net.

Buffalo had another great chance when Casey Mittelstadt found Wilson in front, but Murray robbed him again.

The Sabres got a late third period power play. Rasmus Dahlin saw Skinner right the crease, but somehow the puck didn't go in.

With less than five minutes remaining, Buffalo got another good chance when Evan Rodrigues came streaking through the right circle, but he hit the post.

Buffalo kept coming at Murray and Montour found a lane to the net for his goal. Sheary did a good job of tying his man up in front.

Sheary wasn't done because with just 49 seconds left in overtime, he came off the bench and took a screened shot that eluded Murray. Right before the game-winning goal, Evgeni Malkin had hit the post behind Ullmark.

There's no rest for the Sabres who are back in Toronto on Saturday.

Sheary sends Sabres to 4-3 overtime win against Pittsburgh

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

March 1, 2019

Conor Sheary scored twice against his former team, including the game-winning goal, to help the Buffalo Sabres to a 4-3 overtime win against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Jack Eichel scores just over three minutes into the game to give Buffalo a 1-0 lead over the Penguins. The goal was scored off of an offensive zone turnover that the blue and gold's captain capitalizes on. Sam Reinhart was credited with the only assist on the game's first goal.

Pittsburgh wasted no time answering back and tying the game at 1-1. Nick Bjugstad's eighth goal of the season found the top corner of the net for Pittsburgh. The tally was assisted by Juuso Riihola and Dominik Simon. The two goals came less than one minute apart.

Buffalo went to the power play for the first time in the game when Garrett Wilson was penalized for roughing. Sheary was able to score on the man advantage to give the team their second lead of the night, this time 2-1. Brandon Montour recorded his first point as a Sabre with an assist on the power play goal.

The Penguins recorded 20 shots on goal in the opening twenty minutes, with Linus Ullmark stopping 19 of the shots. Buffalo recorded seven shots in the first as well.

Matt Hunwick was penalized for hooking at the first period ended. However, his teammates were able to kill off the minor penalty to start the second period. The defenseman also took an interference minor that Pittsburgh failed to capitalize on.

Buffalo would not be so lucky on their next penalty kill, as the Penguins would tie the game 2-2 while on the power play. Scott Wilson was in the box serving a high sticking double minor when Patric Hornqvist tipped in a Justin Schultz shot from the point for the goal.

Sidney Crosby had a hand in the first power play goal, and also connected on his 28th goal of the season as Pittsburgh took their first lead of the game 3-2. Crosby slammed in a one-time pass to help the Penguins score on both of the Wilson minor penalties.

The Sabres failed to capitalize on a power play chance part way through the third period. Patric Hornqvist was whistled for high sticking, but the Penguins were able to kill off the two minute penalty.

Montour evened the game at 3-3 with less than three minutes to go in regulation. The defenseman took a wrist shot from the point that made it through traffic to beat Matt Murray.

Sheary capped off a frenetic overtime period with his second goal of the night after Pittsburgh turned the puck over in their own zone. The play was reviewed for offside, but was confirmed as a good goal to give Buffalo the 4-3 win.

Scoring Summary

Goal Summary

First Period

BUF: 3:09 - Jack Eichel (23) (Sam Reinhart). 12:53 - Conor Sheary (10) PPG (Kyle Okposo, Brandon Montour)
PIT: 4:05 - Nick Bjugstad (8) (Juuso Riihola, Dominik Simon)

Second Period

BUF: none

PIT: 17:18 - Patric Hornqvist (16) PPG (Justin Schultz, Sidney Crosby). 18:21 - Sidney Crosby (28) PPG (Evgeni Malkin, Justin Schultz)

Third Period

BUF: 17:28 - Brandon Montour (6) (Evan Rodrigues, Conor Sheary)
PIT: none

Overtime

BUF: 4:11 - Conor Sheary (11) (unassisted)
PIT: none

Penalty Summary

First Period

BUF: 17:02 - Brandon Montour (2 min., roughing). 19:59 - Matt Hunwick (2 min., hooking)
PIT: 11:02 - Garrett Wilson (2 min., roughing). 17:02 - Evgeni Malkin (2 min., roughing)

Second Period

BUF: 13:37 - Matt Hunwick (2 min., interference). 16:25 - Scott Wilson (4 min., high sticking)
PIT: none

Third Period

BUF: none
PIT: 11:47 - Patric Hornqvist

Shots on Goal

BUF: 30 (7, 9, 11, 3)
PIT: 44 (20, 13, 8, 3)

Saves

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 41 saves
PIT: Matt Murray - 27 saves

Power Play Chances

BUF: 1 for 2
PIT: 2 for 3

What's next

The blue and gold are in Toronto on Saturday night, dropping the puck at seven o'clock on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Brian Koziol begins at 6 p.m.

Botterill looking for more competition for Ristolainen's minutes

WGR 550

March 1, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres are falling out of the playoff race in the Eastern Conference faster than anyone thought possible.

The team now finds itself eight points back of the Carolina Hurricanes and the Pittsburgh Penguins, who both have 74 points and are tied for the final Wild Card spot in the East. If Carolina can manage to clinch a berth in the Stanley Cup playoffs, Buffalo will end up with the longest playoff drought in the National Hockey League. That's a drought dating back to the 2010-11 season.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill took the time on Friday to speak with the Bulldog at (716) Food and Sport before Buffalo's matchup with the Penguins at KeyBank Center. Botterill talked a bit on the progress of his team heading into the final stretch of the season, as well some thoughts on the trade deadline that passed on Monday.

Here is some of what he had to say:

Botterill on the possibility of trading Jeff Skinner:

"The deadline never came into play. Both sides are working to get a deal done here. There's never been threats or anything like that."

Botterill on the lack of production at center (other than Jack Eichel):

"We understood we were putting a young player in difficult spots. Did we think [Patrik] Berglund could ease the minutes on Casey [Mittelstadt]? For sure. That didn't materialize. [Evan] Rodrigues being a Swiss Army knife at center or wing has helped. "

Botterill on the play of Mittelstadt this season:

"Ask any player on our roster who played at a young age, it's a grind in the second half of the season. Casey played at Minnesota high school. This has been a big jump for him. He's a competitive young player, who gets frustrated when he's not producing. But you see he continues to fight on those 1-on-1 battles."

Botterill on wanting to lower Rasmus Ristolainen's minutes:

"He wants to be in all situations. We need to continue as an organization to have more competition, more depth. Taking a few minutes away will help him out a lot."

The Sabres host Sidney Crosby and the Penguins

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres watched another team go by them in the standings as Florida has passed them by. Buffalo is now in 12th place in the Eastern Conference, eight points out of the playoffs.

Things have reached the point now that the Sabres will have to go on another lengthy winning streak or we won't be talking about meaningful games in March. Phil Housley said, "We've done a really good job this year of just focusing on the day or the next day, we're not looking too far ahead."

"We realize the position we're in and we realize the position Pittsburgh is in, but what we can control is how we play, how we manage the game and our effort and attitude."

The Sabres host Pittsburgh tonight. The two teams have only played once this season and the Sabres won in overtime 5-4.

That was the game where the Sabres were behind 4-1 just five minutes into the second period. Zach Bogosian and Casey Nelson brought the Sabres back to 4-3 before the second period was over and then in the third, Casey Mittelstadt scored to send things to overtime. Jack Eichel won it just 45 seconds into the OT session.

That win was in the 10-game winning streak and Housley said, "I just think the vibe of the team to that point, we were going through a very, very good stretch and we had a lot of confidence. We never frayed, we knew if we kept playing the full 60, we'd get back into the game and we have to get back to that belief." Housley added, "It's just those critical times where we've got to be more composed."

Buffalo has won just one of seven games giving up 10 goals in the last two to Philadelphia and Toronto. If you look at it since the All-Star break it's been 11 games and it's been a one goal game going into the third period and we've got to find ways to be composed in the critical times of the game and it's still a learning process for our team, but at the same time, this is a result oriented business."

The Sabres have a power play goal in three straight games, but it's only resulted in one win.

Jack Eichel has points in six straight games scoring four goals and four assists for eight points. In his last 17 games, Eichel has 20 points.

Matt Hunwick and Tage Thompson will be in the lineup for the injured Marco Scandella and Vladimir Sobotka.

Carter Hutton is OK and will backup Linus Ullmark. Ullmark has lost his last three games posting a 4.40 goals against and .878 save percentage.

Pittsburgh has big injuries on the defense. Kris Letang, Olli Maatta, Brian Dumoulin and Chad Ruhwedel have all been out.

Sidney Crosby missed that November game against the Sabres and it's a good thing because in 37 games against Buffalo, Crosby has 19 goals and 38 assists for 57 points.

Evgeni Malkin also feasts on the Sabres. He too has played 37 games and has 15 goals and 33 assists for 48 points.

Pittsburgh has won one of its last three games. Matt Murray has played six of the Pens last eight games going 4-1-1. In that time Murray has had a .924 save percentage and 2.81 goals against.

Casey DeSmith has given up 14 goals in his last three starts.

Join Pat Malacaro and Brian Koziol at 6:00 for the pregame when they'll be joined by Phil Housley, Jeff Skinner and Conor Sheary.

Mission impossible? How the Sabres' playoff chances compare to other teams who've made improbable late-season comebacks

By Joe Yerdon
The Athletic
March 1, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have been staring into the abyss since they fell out of a playoff position in mid-January. Now they're looking at the impossible task of trying to make the postseason while being (for now) eight points behind the Carolina Hurricanes for the second wild card.

They're facing the Pittsburgh Penguins, who are tied with Carolina, on Friday followed by another match-up in Toronto with the Maple Leafs on Saturday. The Sabres still believe they're in the race with 19 games to go, which is what they're supposed to think. But if they're going to play into the second week of April, they're going to have to do something no team has managed since the NHL implemented the shootout in 2005-2006. No team that's been behind by this many points with this many games left has been able to advance to the postseason.

With three point games and a pile of teams to contend with for the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference, the Sabres need to go on a run like they had in November when they won 10 in a row. They'll probably need to have an even better streak than that. There are a few examples of teams since the 2004-05 lockout hell that made a late run to get in the playoffs. Most of them needed superhuman performances to make it happen.

Here are a few of the standout comeback teams and how they were positioned after 63 games:

2014-2015 Ottawa Senators: The Sens were five back of Boston for the second wild card after being 14 points out of eighth on Feb. 10 (Game 52). They roared into the playoffs thanks to the play of goalie Andrew Hammond, captain Erik Karlsson, and young stars Mark Stone and Mike Hoffman. Hammond was a sensation after taking over in goal following Robin Lehner's season-ending concussion and Craig Anderson's hard-luck losses. Hammond went 20-1-2 to end the season with a .941 save percentage all while earning the nickname the "Hamburglar." They lost to Montreal in six games in the first round but go down in history as the only team in the modern era (1943-1944) to make the playoffs after being out of it by 14 points at any time during the season.

2010-2011 Buffalo Sabres: They were two points out of the playoffs after their 63rd game of the season and wound up finishing seventh in the East tied in points with Montreal and three ahead of the Rangers. They went 8-1-1 in the final 10 games to head into the playoffs on a hot streak. Of course, this would be the last time we'd see Buffalo in the postseason. They ran out of gas and lost in seven games in the first round to a Flyers team led by former Sabres star Danny Briere and future free agent bust Ville Leino despite having a 3-2 series lead.

2008-2009 St. Louis Blues: The Blues were nine points back and last in the Western Conference through their first 38 games. After 63 games, they were four points behind Nashville, Edmonton, and Anaheim. St. Louis was led by Brad Boyes (72 points, 33 were goals and 16 of those were on the power play) and Andy McDonald (44 points in 46 games). Boyes had 21 points (eight goals, 13 assists) in the final 19 games and McDonald had 18. They ended up sixth in the West after it was all said and done, but lost in the first round of the playoffs.

2008-2009 Pittsburgh Penguins: The Penguins were one point out of the playoffs after Game 63, but they'd already made up ground after they fired Michel Therrien after Game 57 and replaced him with Dan Bylsma. At that point they were five points back of the last playoff position, but in six games they made up four points worth of ground and went on to finish with the fourth seed in the East on their way to returning to the Stanley Cup Final, winning a rematch with the Detroit Red Wings in seven games.

2007-2008 Washington Capitals: The Capitals were five back of Philadelphia and Buffalo. They began the season 6-14-1 under coach Glen Hanlon before he was fired and Bruce Boudreau was brought in. The Caps went 37-17-7 the rest of the way to win the Southeast Division. When Hanlon was fired, the Caps were last in the Eastern Conference and nine points back of eighth and 14 points behind Carolina in the division. Washington caught and passed Carolina to win the Southeast by two points and had the same number of points (94) as fellow playoff teams Boston and Ottawa thanks to Alex Ovechkin scoring 65 goals with 112 points. Ovechkin won the Hart Trophy and Boudreau took home the Adams for coach of the year. Well earned.

2006-2007 New York Rangers: The Rangers were six out of the last playoff spot in the East at this point in the season and in 11th place behind Carolina and Toronto. They went 12-3-4 in the final 19 games, led by Jaromir Jagr's 20 points (seven goals, 13 assists) and the brilliant play of Henrik Lundqvist (18 GP, 11-2-4, .938 SV%) to finish with 94 points and roar into the playoffs, where they swept Southeast champion Atlanta before bowing out in six games to the Sabres.

2005-2006 San Jose Sharks: The Sharks were three behind eighth place Edmonton after 63 games, but their season had already changed for the better in November when they acquired Joe Thornton from the Bruins in a wildly lopsided trade. Thornton went on to win the MVP that season and led the Sharks into the playoffs as he put up 92 points (20 goals, 72 assists) in 58 games with San Jose. He led the NHL with 125 points in 81 games including 96 assists. Jonathan Cheechoo beat him out for the team scoring total by one point even though he played all 82 games with the Sharks. San Jose finished fifth in the West with 99 points and upset Nashville in the first round in five games before losing to Edmonton in six games in the Western Conference Semifinal. All things are possible when you acquire a MVP-caliber player mid-season.

If you're in need of a bright spot, according to the stats researchers at the NHL two teams have recovered from an eight-point deficit after 63 games played: The 1992-1993 St. Louis Blues and the 1985-1986 Hartford Whalers. The caveats there are that they had ties instead of shootouts.

The Blues recovered ground with 21 games left in the season (teams played 84 games that season and in 1993-1994) and went on to sweep Chicago 4-0 in the Norris Division semifinal before losing to Toronto in the division final in seven games. The Whalers made up eight points in the final 17 games and went on a wild run into the Adams Division Finals after they swept the Quebec Nordiques in the best-of-five division semifinals before losing to eventual Stanley Cup Champion Montreal in seven.

Buffalo hasn't seen a Game 7 since 2011, but every game from here on out will have to be treated like one.

The Sabres will need Jack Eichel or Jeff Skinner to go on Ovechkin or Thornton-like runs and either Carter Hutton or Linus Ullmark will have to assume the role of Lundqvist or Hammond if they're going to do what's seemingly impossible and make the playoffs.

Sabres could turn to goalie Carter Hutton again

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 3, 2019

BUFFALO – After receiving the weekend off, Sabres goalie Carter Hutton could start Monday's game against superstar Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers, his fifth nod in the last seven games and 40th appearance overall.

Following a rough six-week stretch in which he often took a backseat to Linus Ullmark, Hutton, 33, has started looking like his old self at times.

Hutton channeled his early-season form in two recent outings, stopping 70 of 73 shots and helping the Sabres earn three out of four points against the Tampa Bay Lightning and Washington Capitals.

Still, Hutton has only won two of his last 10 games, a run in which he has compiled a 3.76 goals-against average and an .886 save percentage. Thanks to a porous defense – the Sabres have allowed an NHL-high 85 goals in the last 22 games – neither goalie has enjoyed much consistency throughout the team's awful second half.

In last Monday's 5-3 loss in Toronto, the Sabres imploded in front of Hutton, hanging him out to dry. Sabres coach Phil Housley mercifully yanked Hutton after the Maple Leafs scored three times in barely two minutes during a wretched second period.

Hutton, who tweaked a lower-body injury last week, stopped 40 shots in Tuesday's 5-2 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers.

Ullmark, 25, played dynamically throughout Friday's 4-3 overtime win against the Pittsburgh Penguins inside KeyBank Center, stopping 31 shots through two periods and 41 overall.

But the Swede couldn't bail the Sabres out again in Saturday's 5-2 defeat in Toronto.

To wit: In the second period, Trevor Moore stymied Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen's feeble attempt to rim the puck around the boards behind the net. Moore quickly grabbed it and fed Nic Petan in front for the winning goal.

The Sabres' inability to execute a simple play burned them.

Housley has been riding the hot hand in net for weeks. Last week, Hutton and Ullmark both earned starts on back-to-back days.

Neither goalie had done that all season.

Hutton started the Sabres' ugly 7-2 loss Jan. 14 in Edmonton, stopping only seven of the 12 shots he faced before getting pulled.

Hutton's next appearance will tie the career high he set with the Nashville Predators in 2013-14.

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Until his current eight-game drought, Sabres winger Jeff Skinner hadn't gone more than four straight contests without scoring a goal this season.

The NHL All-Star has been stuck on 36 goals since scoring twice Feb. 15.

Still, Skinner has been generating plenty of chances. On Saturday, he pumped seven shots on goal. A night earlier, he had six shots.

If Penguins defenseman Marcus Pettersson hadn't put his hand on the puck in the crease Friday, Skinner probably would've scored.

"He's getting his looks," Housley said.

Skinner, 26, has recorded 30 shots since over his slump. He is on pace for 46 goals in his first campaign with the Sabres.

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Two days after New York Islanders fans booed Leafs star John Tavares mercilessly throughout his return to Long Island, the crowd inside Scotiabank Arena in Toronto cheered him wildly when he was introduced in Saturday's starting lineup.

"That was a pretty special moment certainly to be recognized like that and to get the support from the city and the fans," Tavares said. "Shows you why it's special to be a Maple Leaf. Definitely got some goosebumps. It was a nice little boost there."

Notes: Sabres winger Jason Pominville scored his 15th goal Saturday, the 11th time in 14 seasons he has hit the mark. ... Sabres center Evan Rodrigues' second-period fight with Kasper Kapanen on Saturday was the first of his NHL career, according to hockeyfights.com. "Before I could get mine off, he was throwing," Rodrigues said of his gloves. ... McDavid has compiled 33 goals and 90 points in 61 games this season. ... Former Sabres defenseman Andrej Sekera recently returned to the Oilers lineup after tearing his Achilles during the summer. ... The Sabres had Sunday off.

Loss to Maple Leafs essentially dashes Sabres' faint playoff hopes

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 3, 2019

TORONTO – Now back to reality. A night after a thrilling come-from-behind victory generated some optimism, the Buffalo Sabres reverted to their all-too-familiar form Saturday, falling 5-2 to the Maple Leafs.

The loss, the Sabres' seventh in nine outings, should extinguish their faint playoff hopes. Right now, the 11th-place team trails the Columbus Blue Jackets by seven points for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot.

Forget that the Sabres rattled off a 10-game winning streak in November. The odds of them suddenly going on a late-season run and surging up the standings are minuscule.

Fresh off Friday's 4-3 overtime win against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Sabres failed in their 11th straight attempt to win consecutive games.

They haven't won back-to-back games since Dec. 11 and 13, a shocking stretch of futility for a team that ranked first overall in late November.

"I don't know," captain Jack Eichel said on the Sabres' inability to win two straight contests. "I don't have an answer for you right now."

And how's this for the an additional kick in the teeth? Over their 48-year history, the Buffalo Sabres have regularly beat up on the Maple Leafs, their closest and often fiercest rival.

But the Sabres have lost all three meetings to the Leafs this season and four consecutive dating back to last year.

Incredibly, the Leafs hadn't beaten Buffalo four straight times since way back in 1971-72, the Sabres' second season!

"I've been fortunate to be on the good side of things for a while," said veteran winger Jason Pominville, who remembers when the Sabres regularly throttled Toronto. "But we got to find a way to get that hate a little bit more, especially at home. ... We got to find a way to win a game against this team."

Like so many other recent outings, the Sabres played well for spurts.

After Leafs star John Tavares opened the scoring 4:20 into the game, the Sabres roared back. Pominville tied it at 6:00 before winger Conor Sheary put them up at 7:34, his third goal in two nights after scoring three times in 43 games.

But Morgan Rielly tied it at 19:40, beating a screened Linus Ullmark. Then Nic Petan and Nikita Zaitsev scored in the second period before the capacity crowd of 19,088 inside Scotiabank Arena.

The Sabres pumped 20 shots on goal in the third period, something coach Phil Housley will take solace in.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush, it's disappointing we didn't get the result," Housley said. "We didn't meet our standard tonight. ... But I like the way we played in the third period. I mean, these guys fought and battled together – fought for each other – in the third period.

"We get one goal, it changes the complexion of the game."

Still, the Sabres couldn't score, and Mitch Marner's empty-net goal sealed it.

Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe left the game with an undisclosed injury. Housley said the team will know more today.

Sabres notes: Tage Thompson understands development takes time

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 3, 2019

TORONTO – Tage Thompson said he views his development as a marathon, not a sprint. Having played only 97 NHL games, the Buffalo Sabres winger understands he's raw.

"Everyone's got their own path," Thompson said prior to Saturday's 5-2 loss to the Maple Leafs. "It's going to take a little bit of time. You never want to rush into things."

So Thompson, 21, has embraced the Sabres' plan for him. While they've kept him in the NHL all season, his opportunities have sometimes been limited.

Early in the campaign, the Sabres scratched him seven out of nine games. After months of regular duty, he has sat out twice in the last month, including Tuesday's 5-2 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers.

"I don't think they're doing it to punish you," Thompson said of getting scratched. "They're not angry at you. It's to help you and help my development and help the team as well. That goes back to the marathon not a sprint part. They have the best interest out for me. I trust them, I trust their decision making."

At times during his first season in Buffalo, Thompson has showcased the talents of an elite power forward.

But after scoring four times in six games after returning to the lineup in November, he has mustered just three goals in 36 outings.

The former first-round pick possesses a lethal shot and speed. Once he learns how to better utilize his 6-foot-6, 205-pound frame – he mentioned moving his feet and protecting the puck – his consistency should improve.

"When I'm doing those two things, using my body, that's where you see me holding on to the puck a little longer, making plays," said Thompson, a big piece of the Ryan O'Reilly trade with the St. Louis Blues.

In Friday's 4-3 overtime win against the Pittsburgh Penguins, Thompson displayed strong chemistry on a line beside center Casey Mittelstadt and Scott Wilson.

"They attacked the game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "(They had) a lot of really good rushes into the offensive zone, and when they got into the offensive zone, they created, they were first to pucks, they protected the puck well. They got to continue to do that. I do like the speed element on that line."

The trio skated together again Saturday inside Scotiabank Arena. Thompson endured a rough night, compiling zero shots and a minus-2 rating. He also look weak defensively on Martin Marincin's early scoring chance.

The Sabres' plan for Thompson now includes a possible trip to Rochester. In a paper move on Monday, the Sabres sent him to the Americans, making him eligible for the AHL playoffs.

"When the time comes, we'll cross that bridge," Thompson said of going to the AHL, a place where he hasn't played since last season. "But right now, my focus is here."

Thompson played 10 AHL playoff games with the Chicago Wolves in 2016-17 after leaving UConn.

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Thanks to the Sabres' late-game comeback and winger Conor Sheary's exploits in Friday's thrilling victory, goalie Linus Ullmark's 41-save effort almost got overshadowed.

Ullmark, 25, was terrific all night, especially early as the Penguins pumped 33 shots on him in the opening 40 minutes.

Fresh off that outing, it seemed like Ullmark might earn a well-deserved night off Saturday.

But Housley started Ullmark against the Leafs.

"We just felt the play of Linus last game deserved to get him back in the net," Housley said.

Housley's move isn't without precedent. He started goalie Carter Hutton in Monday's 5-3 loss here and again Tuesday in Philadelphia. Hutton, however, was pulled from Monday's contest.

It was the first time Ullmark started games on back-to-back days this season.

Notes: The start of the game was delayed about nine minutes because a pane of glass had to be replaced. ... The Sabres made one lineup change Saturday, inserting defenseman Marco Scandella, who missed Friday's game with an upper-body injury, for Matt Hunwick. ... The Leafs scratched former Sabres winger Tyler Ennis so newcomer Nic Petan could play.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark to start against Maple Leafs

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 2, 2019

TORONTO – Thanks to the Sabres' late-game comeback and winger Conor Sheary's exploits in Friday's thrilling 4-3 overtime victory, goalie Linus Ullmark's 41-save effort almost got overshadowed.

Ullmark, 25, was terrific all night, especially early as the Pittsburgh Penguins pumped 33 shots on him in the opening 40 minutes.

Fresh off that outing, it seemed like Ullmark might earn a well-deserved night off against the Maple Leafs.

But Sabres coach Phil Housley will start Ullmark tonight in Scotiabank Arena.

"We just felt the play of Linus last game deserved to get him back in the net," Housley said. "He played well when he was in net here last time."

Housley's move isn't without precedent. He started goalie Carter Hutton in Monday's 5-3 loss here and again Tuesday in Philadelphia. Hutton, however, was pulled from Monday's contest.

This will be the first time Ullmark has started games on back-to-back days this season.

The Sabres will make one lineup change tonight, inserting defenseman Marco Scandella, who missed Friday's game with an upper-body injury, for Matt Hunwick.

Conor Sheary busts out, helps Sabres down Penguins in overtime

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 2, 2019

BUFFALO – For months, Conor Sheary’s performances had mostly been underwhelming.

As the Sabres have played some of their most important games in years, Sheary, 26, has usually been silent, sometimes going weeks without scoring a goal.

No one on the Sabres has played more meaningful NHL games than Sheary. Just four seasons into his NHL career, the diminutive winger has won two Stanley Cups and played 55 playoff contests.

Sooner or later, it felt like Sheary might bust out in a big way. Not surprisingly, it came in Friday’s wildly entertaining 4-3 overtime win against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the team that traded Sheary here last June.

Sheary scored twice Friday, including the winner 4:11 into the extra session, and added an assist, helping the Sabres end their two-game losing streak.

After Sheary secured only the Sabres’ second win in eight outings by beating goalie Matt Murray from the slot, he got down and on one knee and swung his right arm as his teammates mobbed him.

“It’s always fun to play in these games,” Sheary said. “It’s easy to get up for these. You know you want to prove a couple people over there wrong.”

He added: “Just overall, I think I needed to start scoring more, but it was a little bit more special against my old squad.”

Sheary, who also scored a power-play goal in the first period, ended a nine-game goal drought. The UMass product also assisted on defenseman Brandon Montour’s tying goal 17:28 into the third period and provided a valuable screen in front.

After scoring six times in the first 16 games, Sheary, a former 23-goal scorer, went silent. He had scored just three goals his last 40 contests entering Friday.

One of those goals was an empty-netter. So in one night, Sheary beat a goalie as many times as he had since Nov. 10. He hadn’t enjoyed a two-goal game since Oct. 6. He hadn’t compiled a three-point outing since 2016-17.

“He elevated his game,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

The 11th-place Sabres, who are teetering on falling out of the playoff race, sorely needed a win. They moved past the idle Florida Panthers and now trail the Columbus Blue Jackets by seven points for the Eastern Conference’s second wild card spot.

The Sabres play a road contest tonight against the Maple Leafs, who beat them 5-3 on Monday in Toronto. Remember, the Sabres haven’t won back-to-back games since Dec. 11 and 13.

For one of the few times in recent weeks, the Sabres looked confident throughout the game. The Penguins outshot them 20-7 in the first period and 33-16 through 40 minutes.

Still, the Sabres kept attacking and led 2-1 late into the second period before Patric Hornqvist and Sidney Crosby scored power-play goals.

Of course, some terrific goaltending from Linus Ullmark, who made 41 saves, helped.

But Friday’s game felt like one of the Sabres’ early-season efforts or one of their victories from their 10-game winning streak.

Somehow, they found a way to eke out a win.

"It shows them that they can still come back again if they stay the course and stick with it," Housley said. "These guys fought right through to the end."

Sheary said: "Early on in the season we had that (belief) a little bit more often. I hope tonight's a reminder of how good of a team we are and how good of a team we can be."

As the Sabres and the capacity crowd of 17,090 inside KeyBank Center celebrated Sheary's goal, a review was announced. While a replay showed Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin offside, officials ruled the rookie had possession of the puck as he entered Pittsburgh's zone long before Sheary scored.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel's power-play goal opened the scoring, extending his point streak to a season-long seven games. The slick center also hit 70 points, making him the first Sabre to hit the mark since winger Jason Pominville in 2011-12.

Meanwhile, Montour, a puck-mover the Sabres acquired from the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday, scored and added an assist in his home debut, his first points with his new team.

"He brought a physical element tonight and got rewarded because Conor Sheary was standing in front of the net," Housley said.

Sabres notes: Scott Wilson earning regular duty after stay with Amerks

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 2, 2019

BUFFALO – When the Sabres waived winger Scott Wilson and assigned him to the AHL in early January, it wasn't a normal demotion to the minors.

Having won two Stanley Cups over nearly three years in the NHL, Wilson was already an established talent.

A season ago, Wilson earned regular duty with the Sabres, playing 49 games following his arrival from the Detroit Red Wings.

But Wilson, who faced his old team, the Pittsburgh Penguins, for the first time Friday, broke his right ankle Sept. 30. After missing more than three months, he needed to play games.

So on Jan. 9, the Sabres sent Wilson to the Rochester Americans, his first stint in the AHL since early 2016.

Wilson's acclimation to game action was a little slow. Early on, he said he even felt a step behind in practices.

"That kind of took longer than I thought," Wilson said of his skating legs. "You feel good in practice and you go in games and you're getting tired faster. You just feel not as fast."

Instead of rushing Wilson back and giving him a handful of games, the Sabres kept him in Rochester for more than five weeks.

"You got to take it day-by-day," Wilson said prior to Friday's 4-3 overtime win inside KeyBank Center. "I think sometimes I'd wake up and I wouldn't be feeling good with regards to my foot and stuff. Some days I was feeling better. Kind of once you kind of string a few together and not have too many of those days that you're feeling a little bit off, you kind of get (on) a roll.

"I think the biggest thing is just kind of focusing every day doing the same things."

Finally, after compiling three goals and seven points over 17 appearances, the Sabres recalled Wilson last Friday.

"It's kind of good for me in a way," Wilson said of going to the AHL. "I think it had been three years or so. It was a little different just being down there, but they got a great group of guys down there."

Wilson said "the last 10 days is probably when I felt the best."

Friday was Wilson's fourth straight appearance. Sabres coach Phil Housley has mostly utilized him as a fourth-line winger.

"He's done a terrific job down there in his game and developing his game," Housley said. "But I really like the way he's brought it since he's been here. He's creating offense down low, he's finishing his checks, he's tough to play against. He's a very reliable player."

Wilson, a regular during the Penguins' run to the Cup in 2017, said he doesn't have any extra motivation facing his old team.

"It's been a couple years now, so it's not super, super fresh," Wilson said.

Wilson skated at left wing on the third line Friday beside center Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson and also killed penalties.

Shortly after Penguins goalie Matt Murray stymied Wilson's splendid second-period scoring chance, Wilson took a four-minute high-sticking penalty. The Penguins quickly scored twice, roaring back to take the lead.

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The Sabres made three lineup changes Friday, inserting defenseman Matt Hunwick for Marco Scandella (lower body) and Thompson for Vladimir Sobotka (upper body). Housley said Scandella and Sobotka are both day-to-day.

Sabres goalie Carter Hutton, who left Thursday's practice early after he tweaked something in his lower body, dressed for the game.

Notes: The Sabres scratched Casey Nelson again. The defenseman has sat out six straight games since returning from an AHL conditioning assignment. Nelson hasn't played an NHL contest since Dec. 4, when he suffered an upper-body injury that sidelined him more than two months. ... The NHL honored linesman Brad Kovachik for his 1,500th game prior to the opening faceoff. ... Brandon Montour played his first home game with the Sabres on Friday and recorded his first point, an assist, on winger Conor Sheary's power-play goal. Montour scored the tying goal late in the third period. The defenseman is the first player in franchise history to wear No. 62.

Sabres have lost confidence since last meeting with Penguins

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 1, 2019

BUFFALO – On Nov. 19, the Sabres enjoyed one of their most impressive victories in years, roaring back to beat the Penguins 5-4 in overtime.

Back then, the Sabres possessed a strong belief they would conquer any deficit and triumph. On that night in Pittsburgh, they trailed 4-1 in the second period, yet still found a way to win their sixth straight game.

“Just the vibe of the team at that point,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said of what helped the Sabres that night. “I mean, we were going through a very, very good stretch. You can ask the players, we had a lot of confidence. We never frayed. We knew if we kept playing the full 60, we could get back into the game.

“We have to get back to that belief. I still think it’s those critical times we have to be more composed and we don’t have to force things that aren’t there.

The Sabres have completely fallen apart since the teams last met 102 days ago, dropping from first overall to 12th in the Eastern Conference. Incredibly, they’ve won only 12 times since their 10-game winning streak ended Nov. 29.

The Penguins, meanwhile, still haven’t gotten on track yet. Right now, having earned 74 points, they rank ninth in the Eastern Conference.

Remember, the Penguins, who won the Stanley Cup in 2016 and 2017, haven’t missed the postseason since 2006.

But it’s March 1 and the Penguins aren’t in a playoff spot.

“It’s a tight league,” Penguins center Sidney Crosby said this afternoon inside KeyBank Center. “I don’t think you’re going to look at it that way. I think you look at the standings, how tight the teams are, what’s separating from second in your division to out of the playoffs isn’t much.”

The Sabres will make three lineup changes tonight, inserting defenseman Matt Hunwick for Marco Scandella (lower body) and winger Tage Thompson for Vladimir Sobotka (upper body). Housley said Scandella and Sobotka are both day-to-day.

Housley said goalie Linus Ullmark will start. Carter Hutton, who left Thursday’s practice early after he tweaked something, will dress for the game.

Some other notes on tonight’s game:

– Crosby has dominated the Sabres over his career, compiling 19 goals and 57 points in 37 contests. The superstar has recorded at least one point in 33 of those outings.

In Buffalo, Crosby has scored 12 goals and 32 points in 20 games, only going pointless once.

“It’s a new game tonight,” Crosby said this afternoon when asked why he has performed so well here. “I’m just going to get ready for it the same way I always do.”

The Penguins are 14-4-2 against the Sabres here with Crosby in the lineup.

– Sabres winger Jeff Skinner has a season-long six-game goal drought entering tonight’s contest. Still, Skinner had scored a team-best 36 goals.

Sabres pick up much-needed win, top Penguins in overtime

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

March 1, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Conor Sheary scored twice against his former team including the game-winner as the Buffalo Sabres topped the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 in overtime.

Sheary wasn't the only one who shined on the stat sheet Friday night. Playing in his first ever game at KeyBank Center, defenseman Brandon Montour picked up his first assist on Sheary's first goal and then scored the game-tying goal late in the third period, his first as a Sabre. Jack Eichel also scored in the win.

The Sabres are now 30-26-8 on the season and are 11th in the Eastern Conference standings and seven points out of a wildcard spot. They travel to Toronto on Saturday night for a 7 p.m. matchup.

5 Observations: Maple Leafs score four unanswered, beat Sabres 5-2

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 2, 2019

TORONTO, ON (WKBW) — Despite a lead in the first period, the Buffalo Sabres wouldn't score again, dropping their third game to the Toronto Maple Leafs this season 5-2. Jason Pominville and Conor Sheary scored for the Sabres while John Tavares, Morgan Rielly, Nick Petan, Nikita Zaitsev, and Mitch Marner scored for the Maple Leafs. With the loss, the Sabres fall even farther out of the playoff picture as their record slips to 30-27-8.

5 Observations from Saturday's loss:

Depth = Success

If the Maple Leafs make a run this season it'll be because they can roll three awesome lines that capitalize on scoring chances. At times they look sloppy on defense, which isn't a surprise considering all the talent they have up front. Just look at how the two teams top-three lines compare and that's **without** Nazem Kadri, who is still nursing an injury.

First line:

Hyman -Tavares - Marner / Skinner - Eichel - Reinhart

This is basically the only line the Sabres have that's even close to as talented as Toronto. For the sake of the argument, we'll call it a wash.

Second line:

Johnsson - Matthews - Kapanen / Sheary - Rodrigues - Okposo

Toronto's second line has combined for 137 points this season while the Sabres trio has combined for 77. I'll save you the math -- that's a 60-point difference. Sure, a big part of this is Auston Matthews but for the Leafs it's a blessing that he can play on the second line.

Third line:

Marleau- Nylander - Brown / Wilson - Mittelstadt - Thompson

Mittelstadt will likely turn into a solid top-six forward but he's certainly not there yet. Toronto has a veteran center normally slotted down the middle on the third line alongside a super skilled forward [Nylander] and one of the most productive goal scorers of all-time [Marleau]. Meanwhile, the Sabres have two players who often make mistakes in their own end and a player who should be playing on the fourth-line.

Let's not kid ourselves, Toronto's roster has several flaws and in the playoffs, they'll be pushed to the limit. Yet their depth up front is something to envy and a big reason why they've won all three games against the Sabres this season.

Back to Back

It would've been fitting for the Sabres to snap their nearly three-month stretch without back to back wins in Toronto.

Instead, the Sabres once again came up short, falling to the Maple Leafs for the third time this season [0-2-1]. Buffalo has now lost their last four games against Toronto, something that hasn't happened since 1972. Toronto is surely the better team but the Sabres had a first-period lead and squandered it.

Super Sheary

In his last three games, Conor Sheary has three goals and two assists. Not bad for a guy who went 16 games without finding the back of the net earlier in the season. Slotted alongside Evan Rodrigues and Kyle Okposo, Sheary and his new linemates have created several scoring chances and played a big role in the Sabres last two games.

In 61 games this season, Sheary has 30 points [12G, 18A] in 61 games played. With an expiring contract after the season, Sheary will need to be resigned if he's going to suit up with the Sabres for a second season. Despite streaky numbers for much of this season, bringing Sheary back as a third line winger seems like a good idea if he's willing to stay.

The good and the bad

In his third game with the Sabres since he was acquired from the Anaheim Ducks at the deadline, Brandon Montour once again did some really impressive things. In the first period, he sent a pass to Marco Scandella, that eventually led to a goal from Jason Pominville. Montour was initially awarded a secondary assist but it was later credited to Zemgus Girgensons instead.

Nevertheless, Montour's ability to join the rush and create offense is something this team needed. He's by no means a finished product, especially defensively.

That was on display in the dying minutes of the second period, when Montour was on the wrong end of a bounce into his own net. While parked in front of the net battling a Leafs forward, Nikita Zaitsev threw a pass to the middle of the ice. It redirected off Montour's foot and went right into the Sabres net, giving Toronto a 4-2 lead.

Overall, the good has outweighed the bad. Despite the mistakes, it's clear why GM Jason Botterill was willing to part ways with a first-round pick to add the 24-year-old defenseman.

Too little, too late

In the final frame the Sabres dominated play but their strong period wasn't enough to dig themselves out of the two goal hole they were buried in. Give credit to Maple Leafs goaltender Frederik Andersen for keeping the Sabres off the board despite the 20 shots he faced in the final 20 minutes. Buffalo actually outshot Toronto 37-32 but the scoreboard certainly didn't reflect the shot differential.

Sabres Fall To Toronto 5-2

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

March 2, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - A night after defeating Pittsburgh in overtime, the Buffalo Sabres dropped the second game of their back-to-back 5-2 to Toronto.

The Leafs would get on the board first off a goal from John Tavares just over four minutes into the opening period.

Just about two minutes later, the Sabres would respond when Jason Pominville finished home a rebound in front to tie the game 1-1.

His 15th of the year ties us up.

However, with twenty seconds remaining in the first period, Toronto would even the game up as a puck trickled past Linus Ullmark.

The Leafs would add two goals in the second period, and an empty netter in the final minutes of the third to earn the 5-2 win.

Ullmark recorded 27 saves in the loss. Buffalo hosts Edmonton Monday, March 4th, at 7pm.

Sabres Beat Penguins 4-3 in OT Thriller

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

March 1, 2019

Buffalo Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues (71) and defenseman Brandon Montour (62) celebrate a goal during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, Friday, March. 1, 2019, in Buffalo N.Y. (AP Photo/Jeffrey T. Barnes)

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Conor Sheary scored two goals against his former team, Brandon Montour scored his first goal as a Sabre and Jack Eichel extended his point streak to seven straight as Buffalo defeated Pittsburgh in overtime 4-3.

Eichel scored his fourth goal in three games just minutes into the openign period.

However, the Penguins answered less than a minute later, as Nick Bjugstad sniped a shot past Linus Ullmark.

Sheary would give the Sabres a 2-1 lead midway through the first period off a feed from Kyle Okposo on the power play.

Pittsburgh would score two unanswered to take a 3-2 lead in the second period. However, with less than three minutes to go, newly acquired defenseman Brandon Montour would rifle a shot on net from the blue line to tie the game.

4:11 into overtime, Sheary would light the lamp again to give the Sabres the 4-3 overtime victory. Buffalo heads to Toronto Saturday for a matchup with the Leafs.

Late push comes up short in loss to Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 2, 2019

TORONTO - Jeff Skinner had a backhand shot stopped and a second chance stuffed, prompting chants of "Freddy" from the crowd at Scotiabank Arena.

The chance was one of several for the Sabres during a 20-shot third period, but they were unable to push a third goal past Toronto Maple Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen in a 5-2 loss on Saturday night.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "It's disappointing we didn't get the result. We didn't meet our standard tonight.

"... I liked the way we played in the third period. I mean, these guys have fought and battled together and fought for each other in the third period. We get one goal, it changes the complexion of the game. But the bottom line is we just didn't get the result."

Conor Sheary and Jason Pominville scored goals for the Sabres. Linus Ullmark allowed four goals on 31 shots, making his second start in as many nights.

Nic Petan and Nikita Zaitsev scored goals for the Maple Leafs in the final five minutes of the second period to break what had been a 2-2 tie. Petan buried a one-time shot from the slot; Zaitsev scored with a shot from the half wall that deflected in off the skate of Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour.

Zaitsev's goal could be chalked up to an unfavorable bounce, but Housley pointed to Petan's go-ahead marker as a breakdown in defensive coverage. Trevor Moore won a puck battle with Rasmus Ristolainen, who had two men on him behind the Buffalo net, and found Petan all alone in the slot.

"I think it's just communication," Housley said. "We're all marked up on our guys and they just move it high to low. It's unfortunate. We're getting the puck on the wall, and now we talk about sensing that danger and just realizing that doesn't look good, being alert that it could get turned over."

The Sabres led 2-1 in the first period, when Pominville and Sheary both scored goals within 3:14 of John Tavares' opening marker. They had chances to extend their lead, too. Andersen stopped a turn-around shot from Jack Eichel as well as a rebound from Skinner, and Sam Reinhart rung a shot off the post.

Instead, the Maple Leafs tied the game on a shot from the point by Morgan Rielly that found its way through traffic and crept in between Ullmark's pads with 18.4 seconds left in the period.

"It was a big key," Housley said. "We go into the period 2-1, we certainly have an advantage stepping into the second period. We get a lot of good looks in the first period."

Maple Leafs forward Patrick Marleau bumped Ullmark as he battled for position with Evan Rodrigues, but Housley decided not to challenge for goaltender interference as it appeared Rodrigues had forced the contact.

"I just thought they got inside position and ... [Rodrigues] was pushing their player into our goalie," Housley said. "I just felt that we weren't going to win that challenge."

Ullmark said he agreed with the call on the ice.

"It's kind of a playoff hockey sensation when we play right now, so things are going to get rougher in front of the net," Ullmark said. "For me, you've just got to keep on battling."

Despite the late goals allowed in each of the first two periods, the Sabres came into the third with the sort of effort that propelled them to a comeback win against Pittsburgh on Friday. Andersen held long enough for Mitch Marner to score into an empty net with 1:57 remaining.

"We're not going to quit," Pominville said. "We know that we've got to get every point we can. I thought we threw everything at them. We unfortunately weren't able to put one in. Definitely had some looks and not a lot of puck luck in the third. I don't think it was from a lack of effort or execution. The goals we gave up were at costly times and we weren't able to rebound from it."

Sheary stays hot

Sheary's goal was his sixth point in five games (3+3), including a three-point outing that included the winning goal in overtime against Pittsburgh on Friday.

Kyle Okposo lofted a pass in the air from deep in the defensive zone, hitting Sheary in stride as he crossed the offensive blue line. Sheary buried his 12th goal of the season from the high slot.

Population: 216

Pominville's goal was his 216th as a member of the Sabres, tying Don Luce for 10th-most in franchise history. He needs six goals to tie Rene Robert for ninth.

The goal came at the net front, after Zemgus Girgensons got a piece of a Marco Scandella shot from the point. The puck crept behind Andersen in the crease, and Pominville was there to push it past the goal line.

Pominville ranks eighth in franchise history in both assists (301) and points (517).

McCabe leaves with injury

Jake McCabe did not come out for the third period after sustaining an injury. Housley did not have an update on the defenseman after the game.

Up next

The Sabres return home to host the Edmonton Oilers 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.

Sabres look to build off win with rematch in Toronto

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 2, 2019

TORONTO - Two desperate teams will meet when the Sabres visit the Toronto Maple Leafs for the second time in six days tonight at Scotiabank Arena.

The Sabres are coming off a dramatic comeback victory in overtime against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday but know that more wins need to come in short order if they're going to overcome a seven-point hurdle in the standings with 18 games left to play.

The Maple Leafs, meanwhile, should have no shortage of motivation after losing 6-1 in Long Island on Thursday.

"It's a big rivalry, it's a divisional game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "... It's going to be a tough task. They're a very good hockey team. But at the same time, if we can shut things down and play a boring game so to speak, we're going to get opportunities and chances to score.

"That's the way we look at it. We're going to be focused tonight and ready to score."

The Sabres answered the bell to begin their game against the Maple Leafs on Tuesday, playing to a 16-6 shot advantage in the first period and taking the lead on a power-play goal from Jack Eichel.

They followed that strong start with three goals allowed in the span of 2:04 early in the second and never fully recovered in what would end as a 5-3 loss.

"This is a high-octane, offensive team," Housley said. "They're very opportunistic and you can't let your guard down for a moment, because they're going to take advantage of it. And that's what we did, we lost our composure.

"It's going to be important tonight on a back-to-back situation, understanding when we can attack, when we can't and just being ready and alert because we know they're going to try to stretch the ice on us."

Marco Scandella will return from a one-game absence caused by a lower-body injury, replacing Matt Hunwick in the lineup on defense. Linus Ullmark will start in net after making 41 saves against the Penguins.

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.

Projected lineup*

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 21 Kyle Okposo

20 Scott Wilson - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 72 Tage Thompson

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 29 Jason Pominville

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian

6 Marco Scandella - 62 Brandon Montour

35 Linus Ullmark

40 Carter Hutton

*Subject to change

Sheary scores twice as Sabres beat Penguins in overtime

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 1, 2019

Down a goal heading into the third period against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Buffalo Sabres rekindled some magic from earlier in the season put themselves back in the game.

In the last meeting between the two clubs on Nov. 19 in Pittsburgh, the Sabres rallied back to win 5-4 in overtime for the fifth victory of a 10-game winning streak.

On Friday at KeyBank Center, the Sabres tied the game late thanks to a wrist shot from Brandon Montour, his first as a member of the team. Then Conor Sheary scored his second of the night in a wild overtime period to win it 4-3.

"I just think it shows them that they can still come back again if they stay the course and stick with it," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "These guys fought right through to the end ...It just shows if you keep fighting - and our determination was really solid in the third and overtime - that we can find a way to win. It just reminds them that they can still do it."

Sheary, acquired in a trade with the Penguins over the summer, now has two goals and two assists in two games against his former club. He has 11 goals on the year.

"That was a good one for me to get," he said after his three-point night. "Just overall, I think I needed to start scoring more, but it was a little bit more special against my old squad.

"...We know at this point of the year, we got to press for every point we can get. So those two points were really important. I get the opportunity to be in some really good positions being out there in overtime. I was able to take advantage tonight."

Montour's goal, which came with 2:32 remaining in regulation, was his sixth of the season and his first since Dec. 12 when he was with the Anaheim Ducks. His shot from the point deflected in off a Penguin who was trying to tie up Sheary near the top of the crease.

Montour finished the night with a goal, an assist and three shots on goal in 19:45 of ice time.

"He plays to win and he attacks the game," Housley said. "He's trying to make a difference. He brought a physical element tonight and got rewarded because Conor Sheary was standing in front of the net. ... I really liked the tenacity in his game."

Jack Eichel opened the scoring 3:09 into the game with his 23rd goal of the season. He's now on a seven-game point streak, which ties his season high. He has five goals and four assists over that stretch. He also became the first Sabres player with at least 70 points since Jason Pominville recorded 73 points in 2011-12. Pittsburgh, however, tied it up 56 seconds later on a goal from Nick Bjugstad.

Sheary made it 2-1 Buffalo on the man advantage with 7:07 left in the first period, but the Penguins power play would be the story of the second period.

The Penguins capitalized twice on a high-sticking double minor assessed to Scott Wilson late in the second. With 2:42 remaining, Patric Hornqvist deflected in a shot to tie the game 2-2 and then Sidney Crosby one-timed the puck in 1:03 later to give the Penguins the lead.

The Sabres didn't take another penalty the rest of the game. Eichel believed that level of discipline was key to the comeback.

"We stayed out of the box," he said. "I know if you're on that opposite side and you're getting all those power plays, your game starts coming because you're feeling the puck a lot. I thought we did a good job coming out in the third and finding a way."

Linus Ullmark made 31 saves through two periods and finished with 41 stops overall. At the other end of the ice, Matt Murray turned aside 36 Sabres shots.

Coming up

The Sabres now have 68 points on the season heading into Saturday night's matchup against Toronto. They did not receive much help around the league as Philadelphia, Montreal and Carolina - three teams they're chasing - all won in regulation on Friday. The Sabres are currently seven points behind Columbus for the second Wild Card spot.

Buffalo knows they face an uphill battle, but Sheary, a two-time Stanley Cup champion with the Penguins, understands what it takes to string together wins late in the season.

"The most important thing is playoff teams play their best hockey at this time of the year," Sheary said. "No one wins in the playoffs because they had the most points before. I think the eight teams get in for a reason."

The Sabres were coming off back-to-back losses against the Maple Leafs and Flyers, and they'll see Toronto again tomorrow night for a 7 p.m. faceoff from Scotiabank Arena.

"It was big. We've been in a tough rut lately. It seems like we've been back and forth. We've played some good hockey, we haven't," Eichel said. "So it was good to come out against a team that's, you know, they're in a tough spot too. So they're obviously desperate and I thought we played a good game and we find a way to get two points, which is what's important."

Catch the GMC Game Night pregame show starting at 6:30 p.m. on MSG on Saturday. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will have the call just after 7 on MSG and WGR 550.

Dan and Marty go Bald For Bucks

Speaking of Dan, he and Martin Biron had their heads shaved during the broadcast as part of the Bald For Bucks fundraising initiative.

Prior to the start of the broadcast, fans had helped raise over \$107,000. You can donate through March 2 by clicking here.

Murray keeps hold of USHL scoring lead with big weekend for Youngstown

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 1, 2019

Brett Murray (fourth round, 2016) continued his torrid scoring pace with a four-point weekend for the Youngstown Phantoms, who took two out of three road games.

Murray leads the USHL with 32 goals and is tied for first with 60 points.

The winger kicked off the weekend with a goal on three shots in Youngstown's 5-2 loss at Des Moines on Friday. He did his damage in front of the net, burying the rebound off a shot from the blue line.

After tallying a pair of shots in a win at Des Moines on Saturday, Murray tallied two goals and an assist in a 3-0 victory at Central Illinois on Sunday.

His first goal of the night came in a familiar spot, at the edge of the crease:

His second came on a shot from the half wall along the left boards:

Murray, who's committed to play at Miami University (Ohio) next season, has 10 goals in his last seven games for the Phantoms.

Weissbach's big night

Linus Weissbach (seventh round, 2017) put together the first three-point outing of his NCAA career with a goal and two assists in Wisconsin's 7-3 win at Penn State on Saturday.

The sophomore has 20 points (6+14) in 22 games, six shy of the career high he established in 34 games as a freshman. The Badgers conclude their regular season with a two-game series against Michigan this weekend.

Checking in with UPL

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (second round, 2017) made three appearances in as many days last weekend for the Sudbury Wolves, stopping a combined 61 of 65 shots.

Luukkonen earned second star honors for a 28-save performance in Sudbury's 1-0 overtime loss to Barrie on Friday.

The goaltender got retribution the following night, stopping 10 of 11 shots in relief to earn the win in Sudbury's 6-4 win at Barrie. He concluded the weekend with a 23-save effort in a 6-2 win at Hamilton on Sunday.

Luukkonen leads the OHL in goals-against average (2.49), save percentage (.920), wins (33) and shutouts (5).

Sabres aim to find consistency in matchup with Penguins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 1, 2019

With good and bad stretches to be found in each of their last two losses, the Buffalo Sabres are striving to find consistency when they host the Pittsburgh Penguins tonight at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres were shot out of a cannon in their game against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday but lost because of three goals allowed during a short stretch in the second period. It was their start that cost them the following night in Philadelphia, digging an early two-goal deficit that proved to be insurmountable.

"People have talked about it a lot, just trying to bring that consistency," Jeff Skinner said. "We're going to need it from game to game but in game, I think throughout the game, you can't really spot teams five, 10 minutes or they'll make you pay.

"I think there's some positives in some of our last games. I think we'll try to build off those and go from there."

It will be the first meeting between the Sabres and Penguins since Jack Eichel's overtime goal put the finishing touches on a dramatic comeback in Pittsburgh on Nov. 9. The Sabres erased a 4-1 deficit on their way to a 5-4 victory.

"We were going through a very good stretch and you can ask the players, we had a lot of confidence," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We never frayed. We knew if we kept playing the full 60, we could get back into the game.

"We have to get back to that belief. But I still think it's just those critical times where we have to be more composed. We don't have to force things that aren't there that are going to come back at us. It's just being comfortable in those situations."

Linus Ullmark will start in net for the Sabres. Carter Hutton will serve as back up despite tweaking a lower-body injury in practice on Wednesday.

Vladimir Sobotka (upper body) and Marco Scandella (lower body) both remain day-to-day, so Tage Thompson and Matt Hunwick will step back into the lineup at forward and on defense, respectively. Thompson sat as a healthy scratch on Tuesday after being held without a point in 12 straight games.

"I think it's important for him to get his feet moving," Housley said. "He's a much better player. When he's standing still trying to stickhandle through people, it doesn't bode well for him. But when he's moving his feet, he's using his speed because he is fast player.

"He attacks the game the right way and he uses that deadly release. You look at the goals that he's scored, it's either coming off the wing or going to the net hard, getting a second opportunity. So, he just has to get back to his foundation of just moving his feet."

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.

Numbers to know

0 - The Sabres haven't allowed a power-play goal in their last five games, going 12-for-12 on the penalty kill in that span. Their 88.9 percent success rate since the beginning of February ranks second in the NHL.

6 - Eichel has points in six straight games (4+4), with a chance to tie his longest streak of the season with a point tonight. His 69 points (22+47) in 60 games this season are already a career high.

33 - Skinner leads the Sabres with 33 points (20+13) in 31 games at KeyBank Center this season. The last Sabres player to score 20 goals at home in a single season was Derek Roy in 2007-08.

Projected lineup*

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26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
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*Based on Thursday's practice and subject to change