



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Dylan Cozens keeps raising eyebrows as Sabres fall to Leafs

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 20, 2019

TORONTO – As training camp narratives go, this one is getting pretty interesting. Dylan Cozens looks every bit the part of a first-round draft pick – and isn't remotely looking like an 18-year-old.

In the Buffalo Sabres' otherwise nondescript 3-0 preseason loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs Friday night in Scotiabank Arena, Cozens put up a strong showing in his first game in an NHL arena while playing against a Toronto lineup that included the likes of elite forwards Auston Matthews and William Nylander.

"It's interesting how somebody with that much skill and personality is able to adjust in such a short period of time," said coach Ralph Krueger. "He started camp a little tentative and hesitant, and the last few days we noticed it already in practice that he was opening up a little bit and just playing his game. Tonight, we saw a confirmation of that and what his ability is. The speed and some of the situations were exciting for us to watch."

Cozens, who didn't look out of place in the preseason opener against Pittsburgh Monday at Penn State, didn't register a point Friday but he had three shots on goal in the game and showed excellent body control with the puck both in the offensive zone and neutral zone. That was especially true in one first-period sequence where he got himself out of trouble by the Buffalo bench by keeping the puck out of the middle of the ice and getting it to the Sabres defense.

"Every day I'm getting more comfortable with the puck and making plays," Cozens said. "I didn't want to turn the puck over there. I wasn't seeing much so I just held on to it, turned it back and got it to the D."

"From first game to second, I thought he took a big step," said Conor Sheary, who played on Cozens' wing. "I think tonight he seemed a lot more confident with the puck. Him and I had a little bit of chemistry and were able to find each other a couple of times. You expect that from a young guy, being a little nervous in the first game. Tonight he really settled down and played his game."

Cozens, from the Yukon Territory, was particularly pleased to get a chance to play in one of Canada's hockey meccas.

"They're a team with lots of history," he said. "So to be able to play in that building in front of these fans who are so crazy was an amazing atmosphere."

With junior eligibility left, it remains more likely than not that Cozens could return to Lethbridge of the Western League. But more strong work from Cozens could have the Sabres pondering keeping him for nine games before the first year of his entry-level deal kicks in.

That's especially true if Cozens continues to outplay returnee Casey Mittelstadt, who has struggled mightily at times in his two preseason games to date.

Cozens has played two of Buffalo's three games thus far. If he gets in another one, perhaps Saturday's rematch against the Leafs in KeyBank Center, it would certainly be a sign the Sabres want to get as long a look at him as possible.

"We all know he's a good player. He was drafted where he was for a reason," Sheary said. "We had some chemistry which was good. Hopefully we can build off that and continue to grow. He likes to learn, talks to me a lot and that's a good thing as well."

"I'd be happy to play," Cozens said. "I like playing the game and I love playing at this level. I want to go out and prove myself, try to stick around as long as I can."

The game in brief: The Sabres hit the halfway mark of their preseason schedule as the result left both teams at 1-2. Matthews had an assist on the first Toronto goal and scored the second one, his third of the preseason. Matt

Read scored the other midway through the third period. Nylander had a monster game with six shots on goal and 15 attempts. Tage Thompson led Buffalo with four shots on goal.

Interesting contributions: Curtis Lazar had an active game up front for the Sabres with three shots and a team-high five hits.

Net report: Linus Ullmark had another strong showing in goal, stopping 21 of 23 shots for the Sabres while playing two periods. He stopped 18 of 19 shots while playing 30 minutes in Tuesday's loss at Columbus.

Another injury: Veteran Kevin Porter took the morning skate but did not play in the game due to a lower-body injury, believed to have occurred when he blocked a shot during the workout. Rasmus Asplund took Porter's place and the natural center played left wing on a line with Jean-Sebastien Dea in the middle and Lazar on the right side.

Line report: The Sabres started Vladimir Sobotka between Remi Elie and Tage Thompson. Cozens was between Sheary and Arttu Ruotsalainen and Mittelstadt centered C.J. Smith and Kyle Okposo. The defense pairs were Jake McCabe-Henri Jokiharju, John Gilmour-Will Borgen and Jacob Bryson-Zach Redmond.

Missing persons report: The notable scratches for the Sabres included Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Jeff Skinner, Rasmus Dahlin, Jimmy Vesey, Rasmus Ristolainen, Marcus Johansson, Colin Miller, Marco Scandella, Evan Rodrigues and goalie Carter Hutton. The Leafs played this one without the likes of John Tavares, Mitch Marner, Tyson Barrie, Jake Muzzin and Jason Spezza.

The rematch: The teams meet again at 7 Saturday night in the first of two home preseason games for the Sabres. Many of the above scratches on both sides are likely to play in that game. The game will be televised on MSG using the Leafs' Sportsnet announcers.

John Gilmour trying to show Sabres he can make an impact without the puck

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

September 20, 2019

John Gilmour received the pass on the tape of his left-handed stick, blew by an out-of-position Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman and skated toward the net with the speed of a forward.

Penguins goalie Casey DeSmith barely moved his glove before the puck hit the back of the net Monday night at Penn State. Gilmour's goal, the Buffalo Sabres' first of the preseason, was the first tangible evidence of the speed with which new coach Ralph Krueger wants the team to play with the puck.

"Of course, the goal caught everybody's attention," Krueger acknowledged Friday morning.

However, the Sabres expected that sort of play from Gilmour. The defenseman's remarkable speed and skill made him a priority signing when free agency opened July 1. They're more interested in seeing what the 26-year-old can do without the puck.

Playing strong in the defensive zone could help Gilmour emerge from a position battle that has intensified with the absence of Brandon Montour, who will miss an undetermined amount of time because of a hand injury. Gilmour's next test will come tonight against the Toronto Maple Leafs, who will have Auston Matthews in the lineup when the puck drops at 7 p.m.

"It's nice with the puck but we need to first of all get a strong defensive foundation here, which we could then explode out of hopefully," Krueger continued. "John shows that potential, so we're excited to work with him here and seeing him in action again today."

In addition to Montour, the Sabres will be without Zach Bogosian (hip) and Lawrence Pilut (shoulder) at the start of the regular season. Matt Hunwick is not expected to play this season because of a neck condition. Though Gilmour still faces difficult odds, he's been given an opportunity to showcase his skills on the power play and earned a more prominent role as the game progressed at Penn State.

Gilmour finished with two shots on goal and a plus-2 rating. Most important, he did not make any egregious mistakes with defensive-zone coverage or puck management. The performance was the latest example of Gilmour's progress since he joined Hartford, the New York Rangers' AHL affiliate, in 2016-17.

Gilmour scored six goals among 25 points with a minus-39 rating in 76 games as a rookie. Like many young players, he struggled to transition from college hockey to the professional game. Last season, Gilmour ranked second among all AHL defensemen in goals (20) – which was a Hartford franchise single-season record for a defenseman – and points (54), trailing only Rochester's Zach Redmond (21) in the former category. Gilmour was named an AHL all-star for a second consecutive season.

"My defensive play has gotten better every year since I've turned pro," Gilmour, who won an NCAA Championship with Providence in 2015, said. "It was definitely a learning curve going from college to the pros. The forwards are a lot better. There's world-class talent. The best players in the world. I think I'm defending just fine. I'm using my feet and stick to defend well. It's all about effort in the D zone."

Gilmour has played 33 NHL games with the New York Rangers, scoring two goals among five points with a minus-14 rating. The former seventh-round draft pick became the first rookie defenseman in Rangers history to score a game-winning overtime goal, accomplishing the feat against the Vancouver Canucks on Feb. 28, 2018.

Despite his upside, Gilmour's future is uncertain. Since he's on a one-way contract, Gilmour would need to clear waivers in order to be sent to Rochester at the end of camp. He likely would be an attractive option for teams in need of a defenseman. The goal against Pittsburgh was not an isolated display of skill, either.

"That's something I try to bring to the table every night," Gilmour said. "I try to showcase my speed every night. That goal was a good example of it. I'm going to try to make plays like that all the time."

Ullmark in goal

Linus Ullmark will receive the start in goal Friday against Toronto and will play longer than he did Tuesday against Columbus, Krueger said. Ullmark stopped 19 of 20 shots before he was replaced by Andrew Hammond with 10:12 left in the second period.

Lines/pairings

The Sabres will have Gilmour, Will Borgen, Zach Redmond, Jacob Bryson, Jake McCabe and Henri Jokiharju on defense. Meanwhile, here are the lines they will deploy against Toronto:

The Sabres will face their most difficult test of the preseason to date tonight in Scotiabank Arena. The Maple Leafs' lineup will include Matthews, Andreas Johnsson, Alexander Kerfoot, William Nylander, Cody Ceci, Morgan Rielly and goalie Frederik Andersen.

That means Sabres fans likely will get to see Mitch Marner, Kasper Kapanen and John Tavares on Saturday night at KeyBank Center. Goalie Michael Neuvirth also confirmed to reporters that he will face the Sabres on Saturday.

Sabres blanked by Maple Leafs

WGR 550

September 20, 2019

It was a generally even 1st period, but it was the Leafs who came away from the 1st period with the lead as Andreas Johnsson was able to tap it in off a play from Kenny Agostino in front of the net.

In the 2nd period, Linus Ullmark made a couple of remarkable saves on William Nylander, but Nylander helped Auston Matthews on the Leafs 2nd goal of the night to carry a 2-0 lead into the 3rd period.

Late in the 3rd, Matt Read potted one past Sabres backup Andrew Hammond, who stepped in for Linus Ullmark at the beginning of the 3rd period. The Sabres tested Andersen and Hutchinson, but they weren't able to put any pucks past them.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 9:48 - Andreas Johnsson (1) (Kenny Agostino, Auston Matthews)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 12:15 - Auston Matthews (1) (William Nylander, Andreas Johnsson)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 9:40 - Matt Read (1) (Rasmus Sandin)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 8:51 - Will Borgen (Hooking - 2 min)

TOR: NONE

Second Period

BUF: 10:06 - Curtis Lazar (Kneeing - 2 min)

TOR: 12:37 - Martin Marincin (Interference - 2 min)

Third:

BUF: NONE

TOR: Timothy Liljegren (Cross Check - 2 min)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 29 (11, 13, 5)

TOR: 34 (10, 13, 11)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 21 saves; Andrew Hammond - 10 saves

TOR: Frederik Andersen - 23 saves, Micheal Hutchinson - 5 saves

Borgen relishing his opportunity with the Sabres

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 20, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Will Borgen seemed to improve every game in his first professional season. Borgen was a physical presence in Rochester and was a very good stay at home defenseman, Borgen credits his growth to one of the veterans, "I learned a lot, especially from the older guys. I played with [Andrew] MacWilliam last year and he helped me out a lot watching how they prepare for every game it's completely different than the college level."

Most college players talk about the physical and mental fatigue they experience from a longer season. Borgen was no different, "Yes, 100%. I think maybe games 50 through 60 like after a while you aren't used to it because I was used to playing 30-40 games. I knew it was different, so I followed their lead and they helped me get past that, so I think I'll be ready this year for it."

There is more of an opportunity on defense with injuries to Brandon Montour, Lawrence Pilut, Zach Bogosian and Matt Hunwick. Borgen is not afraid of competition, "There's a lot of good internal competition. There's a lot of good defensemen and I think it just helps everybody boost their game up."

College players in their first NHL training camps sometimes are surprised. This is Borgen's second camp and he knows what to expect, "I got a taste of it in the year past, so you know what's coming and you know what to expect, so nothing is a surprise."

When I called the Prospects Challenge, I noticed that Borgen did a lot more pinching and joining the play. He said, "They want us to play a little bit more aggressive this year like pinching and reading plays, not letting the other team get time and space and I'm just playing my game. I tried to learn last year with Gord Dineen and video, so I don't know if I've changed too much, but I'm trying to."

Ralph Krueger likes what he's seen so far from the youngster, "I've talked about the aggressive defense that we'd like to play and it doesn't mean always running over everybody wildly without any type of plan. It's structured kind of pressure on the other team and players like Will are really helpful to bring that into fruition here and I think we're way, way further ahead than I expected after two games in the commitment to play that game without the puck and you've picked a good example who gets that aggressive gap that we're looking for."

Borgen got a chance to play four games with the Sabres last season and for the first two, looked very good. That combined with 71 games in Rochester provided him with a solid first professional season.

Krueger said that Linus Ullmark will play more than the 29 minutes he played in Columbus, but it will be an in-game decision on if he goes the distance.

Join me and Brian Koziol for the pre-game starting at 6:45 when you'll hear my chat with Borgen in its entirety.

Friday's lineup:

Elie - Sobotka - Thompson

Smith - Mittelstadt - Okposo

Sheary - Cozens - Ruotsalainen

Dea - Porter - Lazar

The defensive pairs weren't evident in the morning skate. The six defensemen playing are McCabe, Jokiharju, Bryson, Borgen, Gilmour and Redmond. Hickey is the extra.

'Full-time job' eating helped Sabres' Tage Thompson pack on muscle

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 20, 2019

TORONTO – In the offseason, Buffalo Sabres winger Tage Thompson started what he called a “full-time job.”

“I was eating a lot,” Thompson said prior to Friday’s 3-0 exhibition loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Yes, Thompson, 21, spent much of the spring and summer devouring food.

“I was probably eating five square meals a day with snacks in between,” Thompson said in Buffalo before the Sabres traveled to Scotiabank Arena.

Sound like fun? Well, it wasn’t that great, according to the 6-foot-6 Thompson.

“It was tough,” he said. “I mean, you got to force yourself to eat even when you’re not hungry. It was a chore.”

Thompson, of course, scarfed down food – lots of chicken, pasta and steak, he said – so he could pack on pounds and muscle.

Naturally, he complemented his massive caloric intake by working out regularly.

“The workouts were really tough, a lot of leg days, a lot of lower half,” he said. “Definitely not fun but definitely needed.”

Thompson, who scored a power-play goal Monday, needed to get bigger and stronger, so he embraced an arduous program.

The former first-round pick said he finished last season at about 200 or 202 pounds. He looked like a string bean.

Right now, Thompson said he weighs 215 or 216 pounds. He added about 10 pounds of muscle during the offseason.

“I’m feeling good right now,” said Thompson, who skated at right wing beside center Vladimir Sobotka and Remi Elie on Friday.

The extra muscle, of course, will make Thompson tougher to knock off pucks and better equipped to be a power forward.

One week into training camp, he said he can already feel a difference.

“I feel stronger on the ice, I feel stronger on my skates, on the puck,” he said.

New Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said: “What I like so far is the commitment he’s shown and the ability he’s shown to use his body and play a big man game. He obviously got more muscle to back that up.”

Thompson’s productive summer helped him generate more confidence following an often tough 2018-19 NHL campaign.

Instead of assigning Thompson to the minors after acquiring him from the St. Louis Blues last year, the Sabres kept him in Buffalo most of the season.

While Thompson occasionally showcased his talents – he can toe drag and shoot the puck like few other players – he look better suited for another season in the AHL.

After sitting out a handful games as a healthy scratch in the opening weeks, Thompson briefly caught fire, scoring four times in a six-game stretch.

But Thompson quickly went cold. When the Sabres demoted him to the Rochester Americans in late March, he hadn't scored since Jan. 29, a 23-game drought.

Looking back, Thompson is grateful he has experienced adversity early in his NHL career.

"It makes you a better player," said Thompson, who compiled seven goals, 12 points and minus 22-rating in 65 NHL games with the Sabres. "I mean, everyone's going to go through adversity, so go through it at a young age for a couple years now.

"It's something, I think, that's made me a stronger person. I think I'm able to handle things that don't go my way better than I was previous years."

Thompson thrived with the Amerks, compiling six goals and nine points in eight games before scoring twice in three playoff outings.

The short stint down the thruway provided a much-needed confidence boost.

"I needed that," Thompson said. "They were in first place and a great team and they were going to the playoffs, so it was a big opportunity for me to go down there and get some key situations and puck touches and get some confidence in my game. I think it was huge."

Thompson looked sharp early Friday, nearly scoring twice in the first period.

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Andreas Johnsson's power-play goal 9:48 into Friday's contest was all the Leafs needed. The Sabres, who host Toronto tonight at KeyBank Center, fell to 1-2 this preseason.

Auston Matthews and Matt Read also scored for the Leafs.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark looked sharp during his 40 minutes of action, stopping 21 of the 23 shots he faced.

"You have to feel good about where he was at, made some great saves," Krueger said.

Backup Andrew Hammond replaced Ullmark for the third period.

The Sabres used a lineup devoid of stars.

Notes: In just his second preseason appearance, center Dylan Cozens, the seventh overall pick in June, was one of the Sabres' best players Friday. "He started camp a little tentative and hesitant," Krueger said. "The last few days we noticed it already that he was opening up a little bit and just playing his game, and tonight we saw a confirmation of that." ... Former Buffalo goalie Michal Neuvirth, who's on a tryout with Toronto, is scheduled to start and play the first two periods. Neuvirth, 31, has battled injuries for years. ... A lower-body injury kept Sabres center Kevin Porter from playing. Rasmus Asplund replaced him. ... Most of the Sabres' big names – captain Jack Eichel, defenseman Rasmus Dahlin and winger Jeff Skinner – will likely play tonight. ... The Leafs announced a crowd of 16,232.

Conor Sheary knows consistency must improve to help Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 20, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres winger Conor Sheary certainly showcased flashes of his scoring prowess last season.

On Nov. 18, Sheary scored in his third straight game, his sixth goal in just his 16th outing with the Sabres.

Then suddenly, Sheary, 27, went cold.

The speedy UMass product endured a 16-game goal drought. After scoring an empty-netter Dec. 22, he experienced an 11-game dry spell.

On Jan 29, Sheary finally scored past a goalie again.

In an inconsistent, underwhelming 2018-19 season, Sheary, who will play tonight in Toronto, compiled 14 goals in 78 contests.

"I take away that just because I had a down year I don't think I lost my game in this league and I don't think I'm as effective anymore," Sheary said after the Sabres prepared for their preseason game against the Maple Leafs. "I've proved that over ... the course of my career.

"I think if I'm a little bit more consistent this year and stick to that more often and not get away from that, I think I can really help this team win."

Sheary, who scored 23 goals in 2016-17, the same season he earned his second Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins, has a history of producing offense and winning.

A "refreshed" Sheary grabbed new coach Ralph Krueger's attention in Monday's 5-4 win over Pittsburgh, scoring and setting up captain Jack Eichel's late overtime winner.

"He had a big impact on the first game, I thought, with the goal and then the play to Jack in overtime," Krueger said. "It might have looked easy from above, but you know the clock's ticking down, you've got 10 seconds to go, you've got to make that pass and overall, he showed the ability to play on different sides.

"I think he definitely can play left or right side. He seems to be a player who will add value to any line he's on, but he gives us an interesting game."

The Sabres have a surfeit of left wingers in training camp, so Krueger has been testing Sheary on the right side.

Sheary skated there this morning beside center Dylan Cozens, the seventh overall pick in June, and Arttu Ruotsalainen, a newcomer from Finland.

Here are the forward lines the Sabres will likely use tonight at Scotiabank Arena:

- C.J. Smith, Casey Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo
- Remi Elie, Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson
- Curtis Lazar, Kevin Porter and Jean-Sebastien Dea

The Sabres will bring the following defensemen to Toronto: Will Borgen, Jacob Bryson, John Gilmour, Brandon Hickey, Henri Jokiharju, Jake McCabe and Zach Redmond.

Krueger said goalie Linus Ullmark will start tonight and could be relieved by Andrew Hammond later than he did Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets. Hammond replaced Ullmark about halfway through the 4-1 road loss.

The Sabres play the Leafs again Saturday at KeyBank Center.

Sabres blanked in 3-0 preseason loss to Leafs

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

September 20, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Tage Thompson and Dylan Cozens continued to have strong preseason showings, but it wasn't enough Friday night in a 3-0 loss to the Maple Leafs.

Thompson had a chance to give the Sabres an early lead just 11 seconds into the game but was turned away by Frederick Andersen — one of 23 saves the Toronto netminder made.

Thompson finished with four shots on goal.

Cozens finished with three shots on goal but went 1-for-11 in the faceoff circle.

Andreas Thompson opened the scoring midway through the first period while Auston Matthews doubled that lead with a backdoor tap-in for the Leafs' in the second period.

Matt Read rounded out the scoring in the third period.

The Sabres and Leafs will play again on Saturday in Buffalo.

Sabres first-round pick Dylan Cozens continues strong preseason

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

September 20, 2019

Even though he didn't register a point, Sabres first-round pick Dylan Cozens had a strong showing in a 3-0 loss to the Maple Leafs in their third preseason game.

He had a couple solid scoring chances and ended with three shots on goal while Tage Thompson had four.

The Sabres lineup was thin considering most of their big names like Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin, Jeff Skinner, etc. did not play.

Cozens was going against Leafs forwards like Auston Matthews and William Nylander.

Andreas Thompson scored first for Toronto in the first period, then Matthews in the second while Matt Read scored again to make it a 3-0 Leafs shutout.

The Sabres next host the Leafs in Buffalo on Saturday.

Maple Leafs shut out Sabres

NHL.com

September 20, 2019

Frederik Andersen and Michael Hutchinson combined for 29 saves for the Toronto Maple Leafs in a 3-0 preseason win against the Buffalo Sabres at Scotiabank Arena.

Auston Matthews and Andreas Johnsson each had a goal and an assist, and Matt Read, in Toronto training camp on a professional tryout contract, scored at 9:40 of the third period to make it 3-0.

Andersen made 24 saves through the second period, and Hutchinson made five in the third.

Linus Ullmark made 21 saves on 23 shots for Buffalo through the second period, and Andrew Hammond made 10 saves in the third.

Coach Krueger aims for Sabres' stability

By Lance Hornby

Toronto Sun

September 20, 2019

Before his face was known around Buffalo, Ralph Krueger went on a secret summer pub crawl, quizzing Sabres fans about their feelings on the hockey team.

The new coach heard there's a big job ahead to put the club back on the map, but a couple of weeks into the process has not discouraged him, nor have consecutive exhibition losses to Columbus and Toronto, outscored 7-1.

"The scores are really secondary," Krueger said after Friday's 3-0 shutout at Scotiabank Arena. "I'm very, very pleased with the willingness to conform to what we're doing. We have a whole new coaching staff, we have all kinds of new principles and concepts going in. We're going up against teams very comfortable in their skin and have had successful seasons in the past (Buffalo did beat a watered-down Pittsburgh lineup 5-4 in OT). We're playing catch-up against them."

Buffalo will likely have a better lineup at home on Saturday with Jack Eichel and others, but it gets no less difficult trying to cover Auston Matthews' line on Friday to holding off John Tavares at KeyBank Center.

Encouraging signs for the Sabres include the play of No. 1 pick Dylan Cozens, the Yukon product who showed plenty of poise on Friday in most places but the faceoff circle.

"We really saw in Dylan the last few days his maturity," Krueger said. "That somebody with that much skill and personality is able to adjust in such a short period. He was tentative at the start of camp, then in the last few days we noticed he's opened up. Some of his speed and some of the situations, he was in were exciting for all of us to watch."

Cozens could stick through the nine-game window for juniors to be judged before being returned, but the Sabres aren't at the stage where they want to pin anything to do with the team on early-season results.

After winning the first 10 last season, they won just 23 the rest of the way. And Krueger, 60, is here to not just implement systems, but build a cohesive dressing room and one-on-one relationships, the latter which predecessors such as Dan Bylsma and Phil Housley did not.

"He's been great," veteran forward Kyle Okposo said. "He's got a unique way of looking at things, definitely a different perspective, but very welcomed."

Winger Conor Sheary called the Winnipeg-born, European-trained Krueger a calming presence on the bench.

"He doesn't yell too much, he kind of shifts through lines and gets everyone in the game. His message is always consistent.

"We're being really aggressive, trying to eliminate time and space, our 'D' are pinching down walls and keeping pucks alive for forwards and the forwards are doing a good job getting back."

In a heavily competitive Atlantic Division, the Sabres can't stray from that script.

Cozens continues to impress with maturity in Toronto

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 20, 2019

TORONTO - Ralph Krueger could see the signs in practice. In recent days, Dylan Cozens has begun to look less like an 18-year-old adjusting to his first NHL camp and more like a player who feels he belongs.

"It's interesting how somebody with that much skill and personality is able to adjust in such a short period of time," Krueger said. "He started camp a little tentative and hesitant. The last few days, we noticed it already in practice, he was opening up a little bit and just playing his game.

"Tonight, we saw the confirmation of that."

Cozens turned in a highlight performance for the Sabres during a 3-0 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena on Friday, a game in which he was the youngest in a lineup that featured seven players under the age of 22.

It was a heightened environment in comparison to Cozens' preseason debut on Monday, which came in the collegiate confines of Pegula Ice Arena at Penn State against a prospect-heavy Pittsburgh Penguins lineup. This was a real NHL rink in one of hockey's storied cities, with All-Stars lining up across from him.

Cozens began his night by stripping the puck from one of those All-Stars, defenseman Morgan Rielly, and turning it into a scoring chance in the first period.

"From first game to second, I thought he took a big step," his linemate, Conor Sheary, said. "I thought tonight he seemed a lot more confident with the puck. I think him and I had a little bit of chemistry and were able to find each other a couple times. I mean, you expect that from a young guy. He might be a little nervous for his first game, so I think tonight he really settled down and played like himself."

The moments kept coming. There was one play in the first period that saw Cozens spin from one defender as he crossed his own blue line, then evade a double-team along the boards before passing back to his defenseman. That's poise.

"Every day I'm getting more comfortable with the puck and more comfortable making plays," Cozens said. "I didn't want to turn the puck over. I wasn't seeing much, so I just held onto it and turned back and gave it to the D."

In the second period, Cozens skated hard through the neutral zone and made a perfect pass to Sheary off the boards, setting the winger free for a scoring attempt. That's skill.

Later, he gained momentum as he rushed from one end of the ice to the other, weaving through traffic along the way. There's the skating.

"That's exactly the maturity we were seeing, the comfort of being in this group, in the National Hockey League, at this level," Krueger said. "We saw not only the puck skills, but the foot speed that he brings to a game."

It remains an uphill climb for Cozens, the seventh overall pick in this year's draft, to make the NHL roster out of training camp. It is for any 18-year-old. If the best course for his development is to lead his junior team in Lethbridge for one more season, he's said he'll embrace that challenge openly.

Yet he's also maintained since the draft that it's his goal to stick around in Buffalo as long as possible. The Sabres have three preseason games remaining, two of which will be played at home.

"Obviously I'd be happy to play," Cozens said. "I love playing the game of hockey and I love playing at this level. I want to go out and prove myself, so I want to stick around for as long as I can."

Ullmark, Andersen duel

The Sabres were stifled by Frederik Andersen from the first shift of the night, when Tage Thompson drove in alone and had his backhand attempt stuffed by the Maple Leafs goalie. Andersen combined with backup Michael Hutchinson to stop 31 shots in the shutout effort.

Linus Ullmark kept Buffalo in the game during his 40 minutes of work, stopping 21 of 23 shots before giving way to Andrew Hammond. Ullmark's night included a sprawling pad save to rob William Nylander of a goal in the second period.

"When you speak about Linus, you have to feel good about where he was at," Krueger said. "He made some great saves, there was some excellent goaltending at both ends of the rink and I thought Linus really matched Andersen step for step."

Lessons learned

Andreas Johnsson opened the scoring with a power-play goal at 10:12 of the first period. Ullmark stopped an initial shot by Auston Matthews from the right circle, but Kenny Agostino corralled the rebound and passed through the crease to find Johnsson staring down a wide-open cage.

Matthews extended Toronto's lead to 2-0 at 12:15 of the second period, slipping behind the defense to bury a one-time feed from Nylander. Matt Read beat Hammond to cap the scoring in the third.

Aside from the score, Krueger was pleased with how his young lineup embraced the game plan against a veteran Toronto roster.

"I've told you all along, the scores are really secondary," Krueger said. "I'm very, very pleased with the willingness to conform to what we're doing. We've got a whole new coaching staff. We've got all kinds of new principles and concepts going in. We're playing up against teams that are very comfortable in their skin and have had successful seasons in the past, so we're playing catchup against them."

"When I look, again, at the first two periods and take the score out of the equation, we saw an effort in the direction that we want to see it and we want to see Sabres hockey in the third game of our preseason. We're pleased with that and we're going to build on it tomorrow."

Up next

The Sabres return to KeyBank Center for the home portion of their two-game set with the Maple Leafs. Tickets are available [here](#).

The Sportsnet feed of the game will be carried on MSG, or you can listen to Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray call the game on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7 p.m.