



Buffalo Sabres

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Vladimir Sobotka hoping faceoff prowess is his ticket to better role with Sabres

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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The Buffalo Sabres' fan base was long ago done with Vladimir Sobotka. The mere mention of his name on social media can bring a flurry of heated replies. That \$3.5 million contract for this season? Had to be a prime buyout candidate.

But as we've learned, General Manager Jason Botterill is allergic to the thought of using any buyouts, so Sobotka survived the summer. For his part, Sobotka is parking last season and not talking about it much. Not a bad approach.

And a funny thing has happened this preseason: The guy who is one of the punching bags of the roster seems to have won over new coach Ralph Krueger and has almost certainly made the roster on merit. In fact, he rates as this team's No. 1 faceoff man going into the season.

"Last season was hard for me, definitely a season that was very disappointing for me and I've moved on," Sobotka, 32, said after practice Friday in LECOM Harborcenter. "I was disappointed. First year here and I know I can be better. I have to be. That's what I'm going to try to prove, so we'll see what happens."

Sobotka has skated on right wing in practice the last two days with Jeff Skinner and Marcus Johansson, not the kind of spot he was in at all last season. Maybe Sobotka moves down before Thursday's opener in Pittsburgh, but he's not starting this season as an extra forward, or probably even a fourth-liner, and his work in the faceoff circle gives Krueger lots of flexibility to use him both on the wing and down the middle.

Sobotka is 28-11 on faceoffs in three preseason games and that 71.7 percent figure is far and away the best on the team. It really should be no surprise, either. He's been at more than 51 percent for nine consecutive NHL seasons, including last year's 51.9 percent.

"He's a veteran player who understands this time of the year is a time to get through and get the league started. His 70-plus percent is quite high and shows there's an asset there," Krueger said. "He's a real smart player away from the puck who understands what we're trying to do here and has very quickly picked up those habits. We're excited to see that continue."

Sobotka came from St. Louis as part of the Ryan O'Reilly trade with 463 games of NHL experience, plus 51 games in the playoffs. His last season in St. Louis saw him play 81 games, collecting 11 goals and 31 points with a minus-6 rating and 54.3 percent clip on faceoffs. But he fell off quite a bit last year in 69 games with the Sabres (5-8-13/minus-20).

Why did Sobotka's game crater? His Corsi rating that had been around 53 percent most of his career sank to just 44.1 percent with Buffalo. And his usage under Phil Housley was seemingly a big reason for his struggles.

Sobotka's percentage of offensive zone starts last year was just 32.5 percent, a drop from the 45.6 percent of 2017-18 in St. Louis and a huge falloff from the first few years of his career before his three seasons in the KHL. The figure, for example, was 52.8 percent in 2009-10, his first full season in Boston and the year that culminated with him driving the Sabres crazy in the first round of the playoffs.

Sobotka is hopeful of getting a few more offensive chances with Krueger than he did under Housley.

"It all depends on what the coach wants. If he puts me in some offensive faceoffs, I want to do my best to take advantage of it and get more scoring chances," Sobotka said. "It's his decision who he puts on the faceoff. If he's going to trust me to take some in the offensive zone, that will help me."

"What everybody needs to do here — and that goes for the whole organization — is take the good things from the past and understand we're building a new journey," Krueger said. "Everybody got a blank slate as far as ice time and roles are concerned."

Faceoff prowess is an area the Sabres need more of and could keep Sobotka higher in the lineup than people anticipated. With new NHL rules this year allowing teams to pick the side of the ice they want the draw after an icing or a penalty, teams will look to play to their centers' strengths.

"That can be a big advantage. Some guys like to go to their backhand, some to their strong side," Sobotka said. "It's a big change for teams if you have something that gives them a better chance to win a draw and get quick scoring chances out of the faceoffs."

Sobotka's horrible year in Buffalo never really ended, of course. He played 329 games over six seasons in St. Louis only to get traded on July 1, 2018 — and then watch the Blues win their first Stanley Cup just more than 11 months later.

"They deserved to win. It was good to see. I was happy for them," he said. "They played so hard. They changed the coach and Craig Berube showed he was a great coach and brought everybody together. Work hard is the lesson. Get in the playoffs. That's what we need to do."

Keeping secrets in preseason finale

Saturday's preseason finale is a matinee in PPG Paints Arena against the Pittsburgh Penguins (4 p.m., MSG, Radio 550). The season opener is Thursday in the same place, so Krueger said he's likely to keep some tactics close to the vest.

"I'm pretty sure it's a game where there's going to be lines rolled and different looks taken," Krueger said. "There's no need to reveal any cards. Pittsburgh has a lot less to hide because they've got a very similar core group, management staff, coaches, everything. So it's us that maybe will just roll and play and work hard and hopefully save some secrets for Thursday."

The Sabres announced their lineup Saturday morning and notable names sitting this one out include Skinner, Johansson, Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Victor Olofsson, and Rasmus Ristolainen. Rasmus Dahlin is in the lineup, although it's possible he might only be an extra defenseman.

Bubble players like forwards Tage Thompson, Curtis Lazar, Scott Wilson and Rasmus Asplund and defensemen Henri Jokiharju and John Gilmour will get one last chance at game action.

The full lineup:

Forwards: Sobotka, Thompson, Wilson, Lazar, Asplund, Jimmy Vesey, Kyle Okposo, Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons, Casey Mittelstadt, Evan Rodrigues, Remi Elie.

Defense: Gilmour, Jokiharju, Dahlin, Will Borgen, Marco Scandella, Casey Nelson, Colin Miller.

Goal: Linus Ullmark, Carter Hutton.

Penguins center Sidney Crosby practiced Friday morning but might be a candidate to sit Saturday because he headed to Rimouski, Quebec, for the retirement of his jersey by his junior team Friday night.

As part of the ceremony, the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League made the surprise announcement that Crosby's No. 87 will be retired by the entire league starting next season.

Crosby played for Rimouski in 2003-04 and 2004-05 -- piling up 120 goals and 303 points in two seasons -- before he was the No. 1 overall draft pick after the lockout ended in 2005.

Sabres will play it close against Penguins in preseason finale

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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The Buffalo Sabres' marquee players aren't likely to play Saturday afternoon in the preseason finale at Pittsburgh and one reason is that they've gotten sufficient work in practice and over the first five exhibition games.

Another reason is that the team might be playing a little bit of possum with an eye on the regular season opener.

The Sabres open their first season under coach Ralph Krueger on Thursday night in PPG Paints Arena against the Penguins. So Saturday's preseason matinee figures to see Buffalo keep some tactics close to the vest.

"I'm pretty sure it's a game where there's going to be lines rolled and different looks taken," Krueger admitted Friday after his team practiced for an hour in LECOM Harborcenter. "There's no need to reveal any cards. Pittsburgh has a lot less to hide because they've got a very similar core group, management staff, coaches, everything. So it's us that maybe will just roll and play and work hard and hopefully save some secrets for Thursday."

The Sabres have yet to announce their lineup for Saturday but it seems possible their top two lines and top defense pair in practice Friday might be sitting this one out.

Olofsson-Eichel-Reinhart
Skinner-Johansson-Sobotka
Vesey-Mittelstadt-Sheary
Wilson-Rodrigues-Okposo
Girgensons-Larsson-Lazar
Elie-Asplund-Thompson

Dahlin-Ristolainen
Scandella-Miller
Nelson-Jokiharju
Gilmour-Borgen

That would give notable names on the bubble like Tage Thompson, Curtis Lazar, Scott Wilson and John Gilmour another chance to get some regular ice time in one more game to push for a roster spot.

"Tomorrow is definitely going to be a game where there's going to be some internal competition," Krueger said. "Head to head, just to see what players in difficult circumstances. ... It will be a good game to see how we can produce within that framework we're trying to work in here."

Penguins center Sidney Crosby practiced Friday morning but might be a candidate to sit Saturday because he's heading to Rimouski, Quebec, for the retirement of his jersey by his junior team Friday night. Coach Mike Sullivan didn't officially rule Crosby out for Saturday when asked Friday.

Olofsson running away with his opportunity in Buffalo

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

September 27, 2019

In his last season playing with Frölunda in the Swedish Hockey League during the 2017-18 campaign, Victor Olofsson led the entire league with 27 goals in 50 games played for the Indians. His 27 goals were three more than the next player in second place, and the most goals by a player in the league since the 2014-15 season.

His strong play in Sweden that year earned himself an entry-level contract with the Sabres, signing a two-year deal back on April 28, 2018.

Olofsson made his North American debut just this past season, where he took the American Hockey League by storm early with 15 points (5+10) in his first 10 games, earning him the honor as the CCM/AHL Player of the Month of October.

In 66 games with the Rochester Americans as a rookie, the scoring winger put up an astonishing 30 goals and 63 points.

His strong and consistent play as the season progressed eventually led to a call up to the Buffalo Sabres for the final four games of the 2018-19 season. During that time, Olofsson scored his first two NHL goals, and also earned two assists while playing on a line with captain Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

As Olofsson enters his second season in North America, he has already put in the work to earn a full-time spot in the NHL this season.

"I felt like I wanted to work a little bit on my lower-body strength and become a little faster and stronger. I felt like I was able to do that, and I got myself really prepared for the season," Olofsson said following practice on Friday at Harborcenter. "I've been excited all summer, I had a great summer as well, so I'm just super excited."

In Olofsson's first action of the summer at the annual Sabres Prospects Challenge, he looked dominant as a 24-year-old on the ice against a majority of players who were just getting their first breath of NHL action. In the three games he played, Olofsson managed to score two goals and add three assists, while also throwing a ton of pucks to the opposing nets.

It's arguable that Olofsson's play at the Prospects Challenge was a good litmus test for what was to come from him once training camp got underway.

"I came in early and had the Prospects Challenge, and that got me kind of prepared for training camp. I feel like it's been going very well, especially in the practices at first, and then I feel like in the last two games I've really picked up my game. I feel good right now."

At the start of training camp, Olofsson lined up on the left wing with fellow Swedes Rasmus Asplund and Marcus Johansson. His first preseason game against the Columbus Blue Jackets was a relatively quiet one for him, with no shots on goal while playing 15:52 of total ice-time in a 4-1 loss.

However, he kept putting up the work in practice and the results soon followed, which caught the eye of new Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger.

"Just from Day 1 here, in the rookie camp and all the way through, he has always just shown his professionalism and his growth through the summer time," Krueger said with the media following Friday's practice. "His confidence is very high. His mindset is healthy and strong. I think the world outside of the Sabres family is excited about his offense, but we're excited with what he's doing without the puck and how hard he works to get it back, and also to check and to play the game we want defensively. It's a good way to ice-time here in our lineup."

By his second game of the preseason against the Toronto Maple Leafs, Olofsson had been given the chance to play on the top power play unit with the likes of Eichel, Reinhart, Jeff Skinner and Rasmus Dahlin. He also was placed on a penalty kill unit, which he started to get a lot while in Rochester as the 2018-19 season went on.

"He's been really outstanding on both sides of the puck," Krueger said. "Then when we get to special teams, we feel comfortable that he can add value and give us depth on the penalty kill, for sure."

In the third period of the Leafs game, he found himself back on the ice with Eichel and Reinhart playing on the left wing. With time running out in regulation, Eichel forced a turnover in the Leafs' zone and Reinhart quickly thread the needle to Olofsson, who waited patiently for the perfect shot and beat goalie Michael Hutchinson high to the blocker side for the game-winning goal.

Krueger liked his play so much to that point, that he had given him the term, "permanently dangerous."

That trio stuck together into the upcoming week of practice and into the next preseason game this past Wednesday against the Blue Jackets. Once again, Olofsson was the benefactor of another forced turnover in the offensive zone by Eichel, and this time he got a slap shot off that beat goalie Elvis Merzlikins high on the blocker side to give Buffalo the lead again.

In three preseason games to this point, Olofsson has scored three goals on five shots on goal.

At Friday's practice, Olofsson was back with Eichel and Reinhart on Buffalo's top line. At this point of training camp and the preseason, it may be starting to look like that this line is going to be featured on opening night against the Pittsburgh Penguins on October 3 at PPG Paints Arena.

"Just to get to play with those guys it's a great learning experience as well, and I'm just trying to do my best and play my game too. I don't want to change anything," Olofsson said of his linemates. "I have great chemistry with both Jack and Sam, and I felt like I had great chemistry with [Marcus> Johansson as well. Having the chance to play with good players all camp is really exciting."

While that line has looked fast and in sync during training camp and the preseason, Olofsson admitted that there is still some learning to do at the NHL level. Having linemates like Eichel and Reinhart have only helped him continue to progress towards making the opening night roster in Buffalo.

"We kind of take it as it comes. If there's any situations out there where they feel like they can help me with, they will do that for sure," Olofsson said. "I'm trying to be a shooter on that line. Both Jack and Sam are great puck handlers and great passers, so I'm just trying to find that open ice and get some shots off."

The Sabres will close out the preseason on Saturday afternoon against the Penguins in Pittsburgh. It's likely that players like Eichel, Reinhart, Olofsson, Skinner, Dahlin and other top players will not see the ice in the preseason finale. Linus Ullmark is expected to get the start and play the entire length of the game.

Here is how Friday's lines looked:

Olofsson - Eichel - Reinhart
Skinner - Johansson - Sobotka
Vesey - Mittelstadt - Sheary
Wilson - Rodrigues - Okposo
Girgensons - Larsson - Lazar
Elie - Asplund - Thompson

Dahlin - Ristolainen
Scandella - Miller
Gilmour - Borgen
Nelson - Jokiharju

Join Brian Koziol and Paul Hamilton for pre-game coverage on WGR starting at 3:45 p.m. on Saturday, where you can hear more from Olofsson.

Inside the offseason organizational coaching summit designed for ‘building Sabres hockey’

By John Vogl

The Athletic

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BUFFALO, N.Y. – They walked into the room more than a dozen strong, each carrying their own recipe for winning. Ralph Krueger’s goal was to combine the best ingredients – a sprinkle of Rochester’s defense, a dash of Cincinnati’s offense, a spoonful of his own special teams – and cook up one cohesive dish to feed the whole organization.

“We’re building Sabres hockey here,” Krueger said.

The meetings, which took place ahead of the team’s Prospects Challenge in early September, were comprehensive. The entire coaching staffs for Buffalo, Rochester and Cincinnati, including assistants and video personnel, sat down for free-flowing conversations about game plans, practice sessions and player relationships.

“It’s always a great opportunity when you get a bunch of guys together in a room that study the game for a living,” said Cincinnati coach Matt Thomas. “It was just a lot of dialogue that makes you think about the game in ways that maybe you haven’t thought about it before. It was a unique experience and I think just a healthy way to go about it.”

Like a Rasmus Dahlin rush, the 13 coaches went end to end. In tic-tac-toe passing style, they went side to side.

Take the offensive zone, for example. They drew up cycles based on their team having the puck. But they also jotted down what players should do when the Sabres, Amerks and Cyclones don’t have it, where the system should shift in order to get the puck back.

It went on from there, zone by zone and situation by situation. And during every conversation, the Krueger asked each coach how he played his system in the past and how he preferred to do it in the future.

“He asked a lot of questions about what we did last year and what our thoughts are, and it was vice versa with what he believes in,” Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. “We all came up and collaborated, and that’s what it’s all about.”

“The one thing you’re probably getting to realize with Ralph and I certainly did,” Thomas added, “is he’s very encouraging to get others’ opinions and very inclusive in the way he approaches it. The meetings were very much that.”

The coaching summit was more than just theory. They put their ideas to practical use. The coaches split into groups and mapped out practice sessions, each one designed to teach players a different topic. Then those designs came to life on the ice during the prospect tournament and training camp.

“That was neat just to get different viewpoints with different coaches at different levels on how they would design a practice that is comprehensive on, say, breakouts and maybe forecheck,” Thomas said. “Then each group presented to the rest of the group on their area that they met with. It was just a really eye-opening way of including everybody and getting their thoughts on different ways to practice the systems that we had just spent a full day talking about.”

The group was certainly diverse:

* From the Sabres, Krueger imported European, NHL and motivational ideas. Assistant Steve Smith, who worked with Krueger in Edmonton, brought 16 years of NHL playing experience, including three Stanley Cup titles.

“We’ve been off and on connected for the last decade,” Krueger said of Smith, “so the synergy is there and the trust that I have in him and the way he processes information and gives you honest feedback all the time. He doesn’t tell me what I want to hear. He tells me what I need to hear.”

Meanwhile, new Sabres assistant Don Granato has a background in college and junior hockey. Fellow newcomer Mike Bales, a former goalie coach, views things from the crease.

"Donnie is a coach lifer, which is more what I am, so our conversations go more often into the bigger picture, into the principles of play and the way we want to practice and set up things," Krueger said. "Balesy is much more than a goalie coach. He's an assistant coach in the way he thinks and sees the game and what he's watching during games."

* The Amerks have Taylor, who has played or worked for 11 organizations; Gord Dineen, who comes from a professional hockey family and has been on a bench for two decades; and Toby Petersen, who skated in nearly 400 NHL games.

"After our first conversation at development camp," Taylor said of Krueger, "I was talking to him about what I believed in and he was telling me what he believed in, and I was like, 'Ohhhh, we're on the right path together.'"

* Cincinnati's Thomas is the reigning ECHL Coach of the Year after guiding the Cyclones to a 51-13-8 record. He has also won a league championship. Cyclones assistant Jason Payne has been a general manager and head coach of junior teams and runs a skating school.

They've seen what works – and what doesn't – at every level.

"A good coach is a great thief," Thomas said. "Everybody steals stuff from everybody and you're always watching."

Indeed, while the exchange of ideas and development of a game plan was unique for the Sabres' organization, the system is not.

"We're not reinventing the game here," Krueger said. "We just have our own package of how we're going to do it."

Some of the mantras the coaches are drilling into the players couldn't sound more basic. It's things such as "create and capitalize on chaos," "generate effective shots," "come back hard with support" and "play connected." But simplicity is what has some players excited after previously being overwhelmed with information.

"There's not going to be any question what our systems are, what our attitude's going to be, what our mentality's going to be," Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues said. "There could be X's and O's that maybe are different, but at the end of the day you're playing hockey."

"You've got to be fast, you've got to be skilled and you've got to put out 100 percent every time you're out there. I think that's what the coaches expect from us and that's what you should expect from yourself as a player."

Early in training camp, Krueger said it would be easy to define what Sabres hockey is after three weeks or so. The team is not quite there yet, but Krueger is happy with the progress after analyzing the preseason games.

"We were quite pleased with a lot of the attempts to execute within the framework we want," he said Friday. "There were mistakes being made, of course, but the effort and the attitude within the group is outstanding. We really are feeling a progression here, which is exciting to build on."

"More than anything, it's the understanding of what's needed away from the puck, what's needed defensively to be competitive every night in the National Hockey League. We really need everybody to buy into that to give us a chance. The offense is going to come. We can see it here game in and game out. We have a lot of skill and a lot of talent when it comes to what we can do with the puck and how we can score. It's the flip side that we need to equally match, and that's what we're working hard on."

That work will be the same from the top of the organization to the bottom. During the coaching summit, they established a specific language to use in all three dressing rooms. So when a player goes from Cincinnati to Rochester or the Amerks to the Sabres, he won't be confused by terminology.

It could stay the same for an extended period. Krueger is just starting his multiyear contract. Taylor is happy in Rochester. Thomas just signed an extension with Cincinnati. So while this summit allowed them to learn about each other and the game for the first time, they can use the next one to further their system – provided this one works, of course.

“The one thing in our business is there’s an ability to implement something, but then to carry it through is a really unique thing,” Thomas said. “A lot of times in the professional game, it’s a short-term situation in the majority of cases because results matter. But the one thing that I think we all kind of agree on is there’s a certain way that the game needs to be played and needs to be coached.”

It’s time to get to it.

“It’s starting to feel like home here, which is what you look for before the season starts,” Krueger said. “We’ve solidified a way to play that we believe is going to give us a chance to be competitive every night.”

Graduate class mini-series: Sizing up Elias Pettersson and other sophomore talent

By Alison Lukan

The Athletic

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Youth is one of the hardest variables to account for in predictions. As talented players make the jump to the NHL and the highest level of hockey, we often don't know who will continue their development or may lag in their production as they adjust. That can be a level of risk that fantasy owners are reluctant to take on, but if you can find the right players, they can provide value that your competitors may not have identified.

With that in mind, The Athletic's Shayna Goldman and I put together a "graduate class" miniseries. You've seen our review of rookies who are worth adding to your roster. Now let's look at the sophomore class:

Elias Pettersson, C, Vancouver Canucks

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 45 | ADP: 44.7

If you win the Calder Trophy, you're probably going to get solid fantasy attention in your sophomore season. Pettersson comes in as the top sophomore in Luszczyszyn's rankings this year, and there are reasons to be bullish on the young Swede. Pettersson looks to be the guy in the middle of the top line for the Canucks this season, and if Brock Boeser is on his right, that puts the two highest-impact players by GSVAs together for dynamic possibilities.

He will be a power-play weapon as well. As our Thomas Drance notes, Pettersson was already scoring at a top-50 rate on the power play last season, and now he is projected to play the half wall on the top unit that should be quarterbacked by incoming Quinn Hughes.

Fantasy owners seem to be right in line with this player, but it will be important to not overpay. While Pettersson projects as possibly a point-per-night player, his production last season dipped late, and his shot rate (6.56 per 60) was 11th on the Canucks roster last season while his shooting percentage (19.44) was fourth. He also took just 627 faceoffs last season and won only 41 percent of those.

Andrei Svechnikov, LW/RW, Carolina Hurricanes

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 119 | ADP: 147.6

Svechnikov is poised to have a strong breakout season in Carolina. Last year's second-round draft pick is expected to move up to the top six this season, and while his point totals last year (20-17-37) say he didn't light up the scoreboard, he had 187 shots last year — one more than Evgeni Malkin — and had the 37th-best shot quality among all forwards. Moving up in the lineup might cure some of those finishing ills.

Feel free to bet higher on this player than some historically based projections may have him placed.

Brady Tkachuk, LW, Ottawa Senators

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 117 | ADP: 151.8

Tkachuk in and of himself is worth your fantasy investment. It's going to be the company he keeps that will be important to monitor in terms of finding this forward's value. Last year, through 71 games, Tkachuk was the highest-rate shooter on the team (11.29 per 60), and the fourth-highest scorer on the Senators (22-23-45), behind only Mark Stone, Matt Duchene, and Chris Tierney. But that production came in a season when Tkachuk's most frequent linemates were Mark Stone and Colin White. With Stone gone, can Tkachuk's production continue on a natural progression or will there be bumps as the rest of the roster catches up? It's also worth noting that Tkachuk adds fantasy value with hits and penalty minutes, but with so much relying on offensive categories, be sure to keep an eye on his scoring progression.

Andreas Johnsson, LW/RW, Toronto Maple Leafs

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 189 | ADP: 170.8

Johnsson is a player who's been pushing for more and more fantasy consideration for a while now. It's all about opportunity. When he has moved up the lineup, he's produced points (20-23-43) and earned the fourth-best five-on-five scoring rate among all Leafs last season (2.49 per 60). Going into this season, Johnsson looks to slot into a second-line role and possibly the top power-play unit. Here's how those units looked in Toronto's most recent preseason game, on Sept. 25:

The key to mining value from Johansson will be his role. He's not a high-volume shooter (7.07 per 60) nor is he driving individual quality at a high rate (.65 individual expected goals per 60). But when he's locked in with talent like that on the Toronto roster, he can produce.

Rasmus Dahlin, D, Buffalo Sabres

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 56 | ADP: 84.2

Dahlin is the highest-ranking sophomore defenseman available this year, and with good reason. Luszczyszyn projects Dahlin to be a top back for Buffalo. He's slotted to play top-pair minutes in five-on-five play, as well as handling duties on the top power-play unit. That should only increase his point production. Even playing on a struggling Sabres team last season, Dahlin had 22 even-strength points (4-18-22), putting him in the top 40 of all NHL defensemen, and was 12th in power-play points (5-15-20). Dahlin was also in the top 25 in shots (177), and it's worth mentioning that he played all 82 games last season, which may hint at durability as a player you can expect to be in your lineup.

Filip Hronek, D, Detroit Red Wings

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 199 | ADP: 184.0

Hronek could be a good late-round add for a manager. He has a bit of the "bad team effect," but last season he came in 27th in points per 60 (1.12) among defensemen with 500-plus minutes and is projected to play top-pair minutes this season. He's middle of the road in shots (4.47 per 60) and hits (10.2 per 60) but has the talent of a top-pair defenseman. Watch, too, if he can own a spot on the top power play.

Jordan Binnington, G, St. Louis Blues

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 81 | ADP: 48

Of course Jordan Binnington is one to look to this season after being a big part of turning the Blues from worst to literal first in the NHL. This season, he will look to build on a .917 save percentage that resulted in 14.38 goals saved above expectations. Rated out, that's ninth-best in the league (.44 GSAA/60) for goalies with 10 games or more under their belt. He's sure to get lion's share of starts and should stick right around last year's total of 24.18 saves per game.

Carter Hart, G, Philadelphia Flyers

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 159 | ADP: 73.1

We have Hart here to ensure proper perspective on what his second year might look like in net. Hart burst onto the Philadelphia scene last year and seemed to buoy a team that had quite a merry-go-round in net before his arrival. But while his five-on-five save percentage looks fine (.917), it actually resulted in 1.85 fewer goals saved than expected based on the shots he was facing in terms of volume and quality. Extrapolate that to all situations, and he was just below seven goals against more than expected.

Hart also played just 31 games last year, and that may not jump to a true starter's workload this season. Hart could be a viable candidate for a backup job, but manage against the hype last season generated.

Others worth watching:

Miro Heiskanen, D, Dallas Stars

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 130 | ADP: 109.3

Heiskanen will bring you volume in five-on-five time. He is going to get top-four minutes game in and game out (18:52 per game last season), and he'll bring you shots from the back end (5.89 shots per 60) and just over a hit

per game on average. But with limited special-teams time, it will require a unique fit for Heiskanen on your roster.

Filip Chytil, RW, New York Rangers
Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: NR | ADP: NR

As training camp comes to a close, it looks like Chytil — who was quietly good last season — may end up getting top-six minutes playing on a line with Chris Kreider, and time on the second power-play unit. He'll get you shots (7.96 per 60, second only to Kreider) and drive to the dangerous areas, thus increasing his chance to finish (4.61 high-danger attempts per 60).

Mackenzie Blackwood, G, New Jersey Devils
Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: NR | ADP: NR

There's no defined starter yet in New Jersey, but there is a dogfight. And Blackwood comes in with a good chance, if not a slight edge in terms of start share. Keep an eye on this one.

Devon Toews, D, New York Islanders
Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 200 | ADP: 169.1

Toews is heading into his sophomore season as the likely quarterback of the Islanders' top power-play unit and a solid fixture in the top four.

Sabres' Johan Larsson impressing coach Ralph Krueger

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 27, 2019

BUFFALO – Five coaches and three general managers later, Sabres forward Johan Larsson is still here.

Earlier in training camp, there was speculation Larsson's long tenure with the Sabres could be ending.

The Sabres have boosted their depth. They have Ralph Krueger, another new coach.

But it sure sounds like Larsson, a mainstay throughout all the losing and upheaval, has possibly secured a roster spot to start his seventh season.

"We see Johan as a stabilizing type of player that's consistent within what we need to do, especially without the puck and on the puck," Krueger said.

The Sabres still have 18 forwards in camp. That high number, of course, will be whittled down in the coming days.

Krueger, who wants to give everyone a clean slate, said earlier this week the Sabres could carry 14 forwards.

"We have a lot of competition, a lot of good guys," Larsson said of the forward group. "I think we have four good lines."

On Friday inside Harborcenter, Larsson, 27, centered the fifth or sixth line between Zemgus Girgensons and Curtis Lazar.

The 5-foot-11, 204-pound Larsson will likely play in Saturday afternoon's preseason finale in Pittsburgh. He missed about a week after suffering an upper-body injury early in camp, so Krueger probably wants to examine him against the Penguins.

Krueger said the lineup will mostly feature depth players and others battling for spots.

In past years, Larsson's spot was usually pretty secure. At his best, the Swede can be a tenacious checker capable of chipping in some clutch offense. In 2015-16, five of his career-high 10 goals were game-winners.

But about halfway through 2016-17, Larsson dislocated his elbow and wrist. He struggled after returning the next season, compiling a ghastly minus-30 rating.

"I had a tough year," he said.

While Larsson enjoyed a better year in 2018-19 – general manager Jason Botterill and former coach Phil Housley challenged him to change – he didn't like his role.

"It was too much maybe defensive last year," said Larsson, who signed a one-year, \$1.55 million contract on July 12. "I think it got too much. I think I kind of want to be an offensive guy, too. It kind of took away from me."

Larsson started only 15.6 % of his even-strength faceoffs in the offensive zone, according to hockey-reference.com. He scored six goals and 14 points in 73 games.

Still, Larsson said he never spoke to Housley about changing his role.

"I go in, do my job, it's 100 percent," he said. "But it was tough in the end. You always want to be out there. I felt like I had a decent season. I felt good about my game."

Krueger acknowledged he's still "getting to know" Larsson as a player. But from what he has seen, he believes Larsson can add more offense.

"You can see his base understanding of that defensive game ... is very high," Krueger said. "It's just like for the offensive players to be solid without the puck, we need the defensive players to be a threat without the puck.

"Every line should be a threat to score. We expect Johan has that ability to take it to another level when you look at his skill set."

Does Larsson believe he can showcase more offense?

"It's hard for me to say," he said. "I've always been a guy (who) worked for my ice time, I work for my opportunity. It's not going to change.

"I'm a proud guy, I do whatever they want me to. But I kind of want to be a two-way guy."

Larsson is one of three Sabres left from the 2013-14 squad that finished dead last in the NHL. Girgensons and defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen are the others.

—

Don't expect either team to show much Saturday. They meet again for the season opener Thursday in Pittsburgh.

"I'm pretty sure it's going to be a game where it's lines rolled and different looks taken," Krueger said. "There's no need to reveal any card. Now Pittsburgh has a lot less to hide because they've got a very similar core group, coaching staff, management. ...

"So it's us that will maybe just roll and play and ... hopefully save some secrets."

Quick Shifts: Can Egor Korshkov slide onto the Maple Leafs roster?

By Luke Fox

Sportsnet

September 28, 2019

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. Written from a basement in Toronto.

1. If Egor Korshkov keeps playing against NHL-calibre competition the way he did in the Toronto Maple Leafs B-squad's victory over the Montreal Canadiens' A-team Monday in Montreal, Ilya Mikheyev might not be the only KHLer making a jump onto Toronto's NHL roster next week.

After five seasons with Lokomotiv, the six-foot-four Korshkov got his first taste of North American hockey last spring, when he played nine playoff games for the Marlies.

Korshkov, 24, scored twice in the 3-0 exhibition victory, earning a look Saturday night at Scotiabank Arena alongside fourth-liners Jason Spezza and Frederik Gauthier as part of the Leafs' "NHL roster" for the club's final pre-season game.

It's his best chance to make the cut.

"I've been seeing a real good player right from the get-go, just because of his hands and his hockey sense for a man that big," said coach Mike Babcock. "I mean, he makes plays every time he has it. We've seen that right through.

"We often say he's not that quick, but then I saw him skate by three NHL D-men (Monday) night. Maybe he's just that big he doesn't look that quick."

The Maple Leafs believe Korshkov (and Mikheyev, for that matter) will only up their performance and reaction time once they acclimatize themselves with the size of the rink and, perhaps more importantly, the language.

"It didn't seem to hurt Korsh," Babcock quipped.

"It's not easy for 'em. I can't imagine if I'm in Russia and I'm trying to keep up to things going 100 miles an hour. Over time, they're gonna get it. It goes to show you how good a player."

Has the veteran coach picked up any Russian in his travels and dealings with so many imports to his roster?

"No," Babcock replied. "Sure none I can repeat."

2. Never underestimate the dressing room seating map.

It's seemingly a small thing, but clubs and players — much like wedding planners — put more thought into who sits where than you might imagine.

When you secure a special young talent in Jack Hughes, it's important to have another skilled veteran in his ear. That why Team USA purposely sat Hughes beside Patrick Kane at the world championships.

We love this display of leadership from Taylor Hall:

3. On Friday morning, Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff woke up knowing there were just four unsigned restricted free agents still on the board and he owned the rights to half of them.

When looking at Winnipeg's predicament — now exacerbated by Dustin Byfuglien's indecision — I was compelled to go back and read my notes from a business-of-hockey conference panel Cheveldayoff appeared on last winter.

For one, how much is the Jets' reluctance to juice their player contracts with signing bonuses hindering these talks?

High-end players will often take a little less on average annual value if they're able to get big chunks of real cash upfront and earn some loot through investments.

That approach certainly helped cash-rich Toronto in the John Tavares sweepstakes.

The other thing Cheveldayoff may be wary about is investing too high a percentage of his payroll into wingers, conventionally presumed to be the least important position.

Blake Wheeler is on the books long-term at \$8.25 million, Patrik Laine comes in very short term at \$6.75 million, Nikolaj Ehlers is at \$6.125 million and Mathieu Perreault costs \$4.125 million.

If/when Kyle Connor, whom the Jets had been more open to giving term, comes in at market value, he'll really tilt the team's payroll to the wings.

Calgary Flames winger Matthew Tkachuk (three years times \$7 million) rewrote the rules for a short-term scorer. Connor has found the back of the net at a greater rate than Tkachuk over their short careers.

"The outlier sometimes skews the league and skews the cap system to a point where it does make it difficult to kinda keep those players. Is it the exception or is it the rule?" said Cheveldayoff, speaking in general terms.

"I'm representing the pie. I got to fit it into this pie. They're trying to get the biggest slice."

4. Brad Treliving was relieved to squeeze Tkachuk back into the fold without having to make a zero-leverage trade off the roster. He'd much rather do the demote and recall dance with fringe players to save cap space than have his hand forced.

That said, it won't be ideal when cornerstone young scorers Tkachuk (RFA, requiring a presumed \$9 million qualifying offer) and Johnny Gaudreau (UFA) both come knocking for raises on July 1, 2022.

Sean Monahan (\$6.375 million AAV) will look like a virtual steal that day, and the U.S. broadcast revenue better be as lucrative as everyone is banking on.

5. The titleholder for "My Favourite Player I'd Never Heard Of Before But Now Think He'll Tear It Up" is Buffalo Sabres winger Victor Olofsson.

A seventh-round gamble in 2014, the slick-shooting Swede lit up the AHL last season, his first in North America, and put up four points in a six-game call-up with Buffalo at the end of 2018-19.

He's had the hot hand in pre-season, creating highlights and reaping so much praise from coach Ralph Krueger, he could get a look on Jack Eichel's left side — even though the organization just signed Jeff Skinner for \$72 million.

"Victor is just permanently dangerous," Krueger told reporters. "He's a shooter.

"In practice, we've been watching it. We've seen it in the other games already. He's a threat all the time."

Fantasy deep sleeper, kids.

6. My, how quick things can change.

As the internal race for the fifth, sixth and seventh D-man spots on the Maple Leafs roster wages on, the tallest man in the race, Ben Harpur, has seen his stock tumble.

Teenager Rasmus Sandin and refreshed journeyman Martin Marincin are your clubhouse leaders, with Justin Holl and Kevin Gravel seemingly passing Harpur, who had curried Babcock's favour early in camp — in part by fighting Ottawa Senators agitator Scott Sabourin.

"He's a big, physical guy who can look after his teammates, so he's way different than most of us on this team. That separates him," Babcock said. "He just has to keep grinding away and do his thing."

Yet Harpur's pre-season will end without a taste on the A-team and needs waivers to be sent down to the Toronto Marlies. Read into that what you will.

Harpur said his willingness to drop the gloves makes him "unique" on a roster — and, increasingly, a league — that favours speed and skill. He fought six times with the Senators last season, equalling his total from four years of junior.

Throwing fists wasn't part of Harpur's repertoire until he reached the AHL. The Sens encouraged him to fight, essentially saying it would give him his best shot of making the big league.

We asked the big man to think back to his very first fight in Guelph. He was nervous and not very good.

"Fighting's kinda weird in the sense where if you think about it, you become more nervous. Him and I had gone at it a bit during the game, and I thought about it too much," Harpur said. "But over the years, I've learned to dive in and get right into it. I think you do better that way. You never want to be in a position where you're thinking about it, whether it's the night before a game or throughout the game. It gets in your head and kinda freezes you when you get into the actual fight."

"The game's different now. There's no staged fights anymore. It's more a reactionary thing. You don't have to think about it too much beforehand."

Harpur's dance card filled up as soon as he was getting paid in Binghamton.

"I found that being a rookie and being a bigger guy, there's a lot of guys who go out of their way to challenge you. It was just a byproduct of playing with an edge," he explained.

"Ottawa was big on me introducing something to my game that they really emphasized was something I needed to do to make the jump to the NHL and earn that call-up."

"There's not a ton of guys who really do it anymore. That's not to say I'm going out looking for it or anything. It's just a reactionary thing, like what happened the other night. If something happens in the game where I feel it's needed, then I can do it for sure."

Harpur has been partnered with righty Jordan Schmaltz, another AHL/NHL tweener destined for a year on the bubble.

"With Harp, he's a guy who's 6-6. He's a pretty big tower back there, so I think if we can complement each other well, whether that's with our skating or our sticks to defend the blue line, then go in our end and be hard, everything else will come easy," said Schmaltz.

It's important to remember that guys like this aren't just auditioning for the Leafs but for the other 30 clubs as well.

7. Of all the 2018-19 St. Louis Blues whose names are now etched into the Stanley Cup for eternity, 10-year veteran Michael Del Zotto is the only one who never appeared in a single playoff game for the club.

Del Zotto only played seven regular-season games for St. Louis and has since rejoined the Anaheim Ducks, but the club can request that a name or two be added.

Del Zotto describes his hours with the Cup as the "best day of my life." His brother, David, flew from New York to Toronto for the party, and Michael was moved seeing his parents' happiness after all their sacrifices of working full-time plus putting two sons through high-level hockey.

"It was an emotional day," said Del Zotto. "Seeing my brother lift the Cup over his head ... he's a bigger hockey fan than I am. He loves hockey. That was probably the coolest moment of my life: seeing my brother with the Cup over his head and a big grin on his face."

8. Happy cap compliance season!

By Tuesday afternoon, all 31 teams must tuck themselves under the \$81.5-million ceiling. As of Saturday, nine (!) teams are over that limit, according to CapFriendly.com. Another three have a cushion of less than \$1 million. Seven more have less than \$2 million to spend.

So, keep your eyes on the transaction wire.

Also, with roughly 61 per cent of the league entering the season with under \$2 million in wiggle room, the number of buyers for pure rentals come trade deadline time should shrink.

On the flip side, this is good news for the few clubs that may be willing to spend instead of save in-season.

The Canadiens, New Jersey Devils and Columbus Blue Jackets pop to mind as teams that could add a significant piece without carving from the core.

9. A familiar name is in the early running for KHL's scoring lead. A 35-year-old Alexander Semin ranks third in points in the Russian league, putting up 12 through his first 10 games.

Only former Golden Knight Vadim Shipachyov and Minnesota Wild prospect Kaprizov Kirill (13 points apiece) have more.

Kirill, one of the most intriguing point-producers outside the NHL, is an interesting project. New Wild GM Bill Guerin, who holds Kirill's rights on this side of the Atlantic, has explored the possibility of bringing him stateside.

Minnesota needs offence. The 22-year-old winger is reportedly open to the idea. His contract with CSKA expires in April.

10. Hey, Leafs: Don't announce John Tavares as captain via press release and stiff press conference prior to opening night.

Just have him come out to take the season-opening face-off casually wearing the "C" on his crest.

Zoom in with your Jumbotron cam, and let the fans react.

11. The Dallas Stars raised the creative bar with their Super Mario Bros.-inspired announcement of the Tyler Seguin contract extension last September, and it's awesome to see teams like the Senators, Tampa Bay Lightning and Flames following suit when they have some big news to splash.

Sports are supposed to be fun.

"I love it," said Steve Mayer, the NHL's chief content officer.

"When Brayden Point gets signed, how do you let people know — not only Tampa Bay Lightning fans and hockey fans but sports fans? I've gotta give the teams a lot of credit. Many teams have invested in personnel that bring that creativity and have a significant amount of experience and aren't these entry-level, never-done-this-before people. And it shows."

Hockey's reputation as rigid and straight-faced, particularly at the league and team levels, is slowly but surely cracking a smile. And that should have a trickle-down effect on the players.

"It's cool to push the envelope a little bit. Let's be super creative. How do we catch people's eye? How do we cut through the clutter?" said Mayer, giving kudos to teams' efforts toward keeping hockey fresh in people's minds on social media through the off-season.

"And that's not easy to do. A lot of teams got significantly creative in order to do that, and I think that's super cool."

The NHL is not just competing with, say, the NBA for your attention, but with Netflix and Spotify and every other entertainment outlet in your pocket.

Mayer was especially impressed with the outrageous/goofy/bombastic ceremony the Devils threw to celebrate the arrival of P.K. Subban.

"They thought out of the box and got attention for it," Mayer applauded. "We at the league, we need the teams to be contributing, and the level they're contributing is significant right now. They're doing a great job, and we encourage it to continue."

Cale Makar adds more 'wow' to Colorado Avalanche offense, leads NHL rookie class

By Kevin Allen

USA Today

September 28, 2019

Adding dynamic puck-moving defenseman Cale Makar to the high-octane Colorado Avalanche last season was like tweaking the engine of an Indy race car.

When something already moves that fast, it's difficult to notice any difference.

But Makar noticed the difference in how fast he had to move, especially when he was moving up ice with forward Nathan MacKinnon.

"It was unbelievable," Makar said. "His jump and agility is insane. His ability to stop on a dime and change directions is wild. I haven't even mentioned his shot."

Makar might come across as star-struck, but he is not. At 20, he carries himself like a veteran on and off the ice. He self-aware, curious and is a quick study. You don't have to explain the mission twice.

He played 10 NHL games, all in the playoffs, and he could win a Norris Trophy someday.

Makar, a strong skater, generated six points in those 10 games and looked like he will be the trigger man on the Avalanche's offensive attack. He's too smart to bite on the Norris projection, but he is willing to offer an appraisal of his game heading into his first NHL regular season.

"One of my strengths is being able to read offensive situations and knowing when to jump (into the play)," Makar said. "I think I'm right where I want to be in terms of my D zone play. But obviously there are a lot of areas that I can improve on."

Makar has a strategy when it comes to playing with MacKinnon.

"I just try to keep up with the guy," he said, chuckling, "and see where it goes from there."

The former UMass-Amherst standout leads a strong group of 2019-20 NHL rookies.

Here's the rest of our top 15:

2. Center Jack Hughes, New Jersey Devils: The No. 1 pick is an American-born difference maker who has the skill set to be a No. 1 center and the Devils' eventual flag carrier. He needs to get stronger, but he might be able to generate decent offensive numbers this season.

3. Left wing Kaapo Kakko, New York Rangers: There's as much excitement about Kakko as there is about Hughes. Kakko is bigger and more physically mature, and no one would be shocked if he scored 25 goals as a rookie. The premium player drives hard to the net and has strong offensive instincts.

4. Defenseman Quinn Hughes, Vancouver Canucks: He has a chance in the long run to have as big impact on the Canucks as much as his younger brother Jack will have on the Devils. The defenseman can quarterback the power play and ignite offensive rushes with his skating and passing. He has a chance to become one of the league's top American offensive defensemen.

5. Center Ryan Poehling, Montreal Canadiens: He played one NHL game last season and left the building with a hat trick. Expectations for the former St. Cloud State player are high. He will need some time to adjust to the rigors of the NHL, but he will contribute instantly. He could total 15-plus goals in a middle six forward role.

6. Center Alexandre Texier, Columbus Blue Jackets: There's genuine excitement about Texier's potential. The French-born forward is a high-energy, skilled performer who has expedited his climb since being drafted 45th overall in 2017. Playing in Finland last season, Texier, then 19, had 14 goals and 41 points in 55 games with

KalPa. He came to North America and netted five goals in seven American Hockey League games. After he scored once in two NHL regular-season games, coach John Tortorella saw enough to use him in the postseason. He scored twice in the clinching game of the first-round sweep of Tampa Bay.

7. Left wing Victor Olofsson, Buffalo Sabres: The 24-year-old knows how to score. In 2017-18, he had 27 goals in 51 games for Frolunda in the Swedish Elite League and he was a 30-goal scorer last season in the AHL. When he was called up to the Sabres last season and placed on a line with Jack Eichel, he had four points in six games. If given the opportunity, he could be among the NHL's top rookie scorers.

8. Left wing Joel Farabee, Philadelphia Flyers: At 19, he seems to be forcing the Flyers to keep him on the roster. He thinks the game from a scoring perspective. In a recent 2-1 loss to the Rangers, he attempted 10 shots, put five on goal and hit the post twice. He scored 17 goals in 37 games last season as a Boston University freshman.

9. Center Cody Glass, Vegas Golden Knights: With William Karlsson, Paul Stastny and Cody Eakin at center, the Golden Knights don't seem to have room for Glass. But Glass is such a smart, effective player that it's difficult to believe that Vegas won't find a place for him, even if it means moving him temporarily to the wing. He had 69 points in 38 games in the Western Hockey League last season and another five points in six AHL games.

10. Right wing Vitali Kravtsov, Rangers: He's 6-3 and knows how to use his size effectively. Kravtsov, 19, is a former Kontinental Hockey League rookie of the year and was the league's best teenager last season. In 2017, he became the youngest player (17 years, 61 days old) to score a KHL playoff goal.

11. Center Sam Steel, Anaheim Ducks: With Ryan Kesler out for an extended period, the Ducks need Steel to be ready to step in. He had a 50-goal season in the Western Hockey League and he netted 20 in 53 games playing for the AHL San Diego Gulls last season.

12. Center Martin Necas, Carolina Hurricanes: Necas, 20, showed his potential last season in the AHL when he netted 16 goals and 52 points in 64 games. He should be able to play 14 or 15 minutes a game and provide secondary scoring. He's a gifted player.

13. Right wing Carl Grundstrom, Los Angeles Kings: With five goals in 15 games last season, Grundstrom showed he can produce at the NHL level. Given the Kings' rebuilding effort, he deserves a chance to play in the top six.

14. Defenseman Erik Brannstrom, Ottawa Senators: The desirable young, smallish puck-mover came to the Senators from the Golden Knights in the Mark Stone trade. The 20-year-old had 28 points in 41 AHL games last season. He seems to be on a path to be with the Senators at the start of the season. He's a skilled player, but he needs to prove he's ready.

15. Right wing Drake Batherson, Senators: The Senators want Batherson, 21, to make the team because they need his offensive ability. He produced 22 goals and 62 points in 57 games last season in the AHL. He also totaled three goals and nine points in 20 games in the NHL.

Dylan Cozens assigned to Lethbridge

By John Hopkins-Hill

Yukon News

September 27, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres assigned Whitehorse's Dylan Cozens to the Lethbridge Hurricanes of the WHL on Sept. 26 after the 18-year-old forward impressed many in the Sabres organization with his play in three preseason games.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill made it clear to the media and the public from the time the club selected Cozens seventh overall in the NHL entry draft that he would be a longshot to make the club out of his first training camp.

Cozens returns to the Hurricanes, where he finished last season with 34 goals and 50 points in 68 regular season games.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said Cozens has a bright future with the club, but isn't ready for the 82-game grind of an NHL season.

"This decision today is about the development and the future of an outstanding young man and athlete," said Krueger. "Dylan has been a joy to be around as a coach since the draft where I met him the first time. The way he dealt with the adversity of the injury to his hand – he could have easily slipped out of rookie camp with that, but no, he fought his way into that."

Krueger added that while his first week at training camp was "tentative," Cozens quickly adapted and showed improvement in his second week.

"We believe he goes away from here a better player than when we drafted him and we believe he's going to come back and make a very hard push for being part of this team next year."

Matt Hunwick joins Wolverines' coaching staff

By Michael Caples

MI Hockey

September 27, 2019

The Wolverines have announced the return of a notable alum to Ann Arbor.

Matt Hunwick is joining the Michigan coaching staff as a volunteer assistant coach.

Hunwick, a Sterling Heights native, spent the last 12 years playing in the NHL, registering 535 games with the Boston Bruins, Colorado Avalanche, New York Rangers, Toronto Maple Leafs, Pittsburgh Penguins and Buffalo Sabres.

Before that, he was a four-year letterwinner with the Wolverines, earning All-American, CCHA first team and CCHA defensive player of the year honors along the way.

"I am thrilled for the opportunity to be back at Michigan," Hunwick said in a release. "I look forward to working with the players as well as learning from Coach Pearson and his staff."

Along with the Hunwick news, Steve Shields will be moving to the role of player development-program assistant; he had held the volunteer assistant role since 2015.

Sabres announce roster for today's preseason game in Pittsburgh

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 28, 2019

The Sabres have released the roster for their preseason finale in Pittsburgh on Saturday.

The team will travel 12 forwards and seven defensemen for the game, with an emphasis on continuing the internal competition that Sabres coach Ralph Krueger has stressed throughout training camp.

"We will be moving with more of a view to look at our depth on Saturday than with a lineup that will start against Pittsburgh," Krueger said Wednesday. "I think it's important to see who we want to look at, what we need to look at, and keep that competition alive until after the game on Saturday."

Here is the roster for tonight's game:

Forwards

13 Jimmy Vesey
17 Vladimir Sobotka
20 Scott Wilson
21 Kyle Okposo
22 Johan Larsson
27 Curtis Lazar
28 Zemgus Girgensons
37 Casey Mittelstadt
71 Evan Rodrigues
72 Tage Thompson
74 Rasmus Asplund
81 Remi Elie

Defense

3 William Borgen
6 Marco Scandella
8 Casey Nelson
10 Henri Jokiharju
26 Rasmus Dahlin
33 Colin Miller
58 John Gilmour

Goalies

35 Linus Ullmark
40 Carter Hutton

Visit our most recent practice report to see how the Sabres lined up on Friday.

Puck drop on Saturday is scheduled for 4 p.m. AT&T Sports' feed of the game will air on MSG in the Sabres' local broadcast market. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will have the call on WGR 550.

Internal competition will continue in preseason finale

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 27, 2019

Ralph Krueger has made it clear that there will be no ends following the Sabres' preseason finale in Pittsburgh on Saturday.

The Sabres practiced with 28 players on Friday. That number needs to come down to 23 before next Thursday's regular-season opener. But, whether they are with Buffalo on opening night or not, the competition for all 28 of those players continues beyond this weekend.

To that end, the young players who take the ice Saturday can simply view the exhibition as another chance to make an impression.

"I'm still here," forward Rasmus Asplund said. "It's [18] forwards left, and I really think that I have a chance to be here next week. If I'm not, I still feel that I'm going to push myself to make the team."

The Sabres will utilize their final preseason contest both as a last chance to evaluate the players who might claim the final spots available in the NHL lineup and as an opportunity to reinforce the concepts that will be stressed at all levels of the organization.

"Tomorrow's definitely going to be a game where, first of all, there's going to be some internal competition, head-to-heads just to see what players [perform] in difficult circumstances ... how they can produce within that framework that we're trying to work at here," Krueger said.

"What we want to see tomorrow is a continued growth in our game. Consistency. I thought we've been a little inconsistent. We haven't pulled it through 60 minutes really as of late. We'd like to see a solid 60-minute defensive performance and, again, continue to work hard the way they have been, and we'll automatically grow."

The circumstances of the game present a unique situation for both teams, who will meet again in the same building for the regular-season opener five days later. With that in mind, Krueger said there will be no rush to showcase any specifics of the Sabres' game plan.

"There's no need to reveal any cards," he said. "Now, Pittsburgh has a lot less to hide because they've got a very similar core group: management, staff, coaches, everything. So, it's us that maybe will just roll and play and work hard and hopefully save some secrets for Thursday."

On an individual level, Krueger has stressed that players will be evaluated on their entire body of work more so than their performance in any one game. Young players like Asplund and William Borgen will lean on the strengths that helped them earn their way to the final stage of camp.

"I don't want to change too much in my game," Asplund. "I'm here for a reason. I'm here because I've been the player I am. I don't want to change anything, just want to get better every day and get used to the NHL level."

"If I'm in the lineup, just give my all, play my game, not do anything out of the ordinary," Borgen added. "I think that's what's gotten me this far. I'll just stick to it."

The game on Saturday can be seen live on MSG, with puck drop set for 4 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will have the call on WGR 550.

Lines at practice

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka

20 Scott Wilson - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 21 Kyle Okposo

13 Jimmy Vesey - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 43 Conor Sheary

81 Remi Elie - 74 Rasmus Asplund - 72 Tage Thompson
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 27 Curtis Lazar

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Marco Scandella - 33 Colin Miller
58 John Gilmour - 3 William Borgen
10 Henri Jokiharju - 8 Casey Nelson

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark