



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*October 11, 2019*

## **Sabres host the Panthers following overtime win**

By Associated Press

October 11, 2019

Florida Panthers (1-2-0, seventh in the Atlantic Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (3-0-1, first in the Atlantic Division)

Buffalo, New York; Friday, 7 p.m. EDT

**BOTTOM LINE:** Buffalo hosts Florida after the Sabres knocked off Montreal 5-4 in overtime.

Buffalo went 33-39-10 overall and 11-12-5 in Atlantic Division action a season ago. The Sabres averaged 2.7 goals and 4.6 assists per game last season.

Florida finished 36-32-14 overall and 23-19-10 in Eastern Conference games in the 2018-19 season. The Panthers averaged 3.4 penalties and 8.4 penalty minutes per game.

The matchup Friday is the first meeting of the season for the two teams.

Sabres Injuries: Conor Sheary: out (upper body).

Panthers Injuries: None listed.

## **Sabres' grind line is driving play and causing fits for opponents**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 10, 2019

Hunting pucks.

Ask Kyle Okposo what the Buffalo Sabres' grind line has been doing through the first four games and that's his answer.

Along with center Johan Larsson and fellow winger Zemgus Girgensons, the group may not have any goals yet as a unit but is driving opponents crazy. Captain Jack Eichel mentioned the line's importance to Wednesday's overtime win over Montreal unprompted when speaking to reporters afterward.

And for three guys whom the fanbase probably preferred not to have on the roster at the start of training camp, they've clearly played their way up in coach Ralph Krueger's rotation.

"My whole career has been hunting. When I'm really on my game, I've hunted pucks," Okposo said after practice Thursday in KeyBank Center. "That's a term that I've always used and it's nice to play with two guys that kind of have that same mentality: If we don't have it, just go get it. If you're the first guy, the second guy, get in there. The third guy, go read and be responsible."

When the Sabres host the Florida Panthers here Friday night, don't be surprised to see Krueger put the trio into some prime spots. The coach used the line for two shifts in the final five minutes of regulation in Wednesday's 5-4 overtime win over Montreal, something former coach Phil Housley never would have considered.

"I'm not afraid at all to see them up against anybody because of the work they bring in," Krueger said. "They make it hard on anybody they play up against. They definitely deserve more offensive numbers than they've gotten. They're creating 'plus' scoring chances on a regular basis here and are probably the only line that hasn't had one game where they've slipped a bit."

How much is the trio possessing the puck and wreaking havoc in the offensive zone? Believe it nor not, Okposo entered Thursday's play leading the NHL in 5-on-5 Corsi rating at 73.08% (minimum three games played). Girgensons was fourth at in the shot attempt differential figure at 68.83, and Larsson was eighth at 67.07.

As a trio, the line led the Sabres in Wednesday's game at 65.22% and Okposo was at 68% individually. By minutes, usage and performance, the line has surpassed the trio of Casey Mittelstadt between Jimmy Vesey and Evan Rodrigues in the Buffalo rotation.

"It's just being aggressive. You see a loose puck and you go," Girgensons said. "The three of us have developed a lot of good chemistry where one goes, the second guy goes in and we kind of rotate and keep the momentum going."

Okposo has a power-play goal in the home opener against New Jersey while Girgensons has one assist. Larsson does not have a point. Okposo and Girgensons both had good scoring chances late in the third period Wednesday but were stymied by Montreal goalie Keith Kincaid.

"It's an honor to be out there at that time of game," Girgensons said. "I think (Krueger) sees our line plays simple, tries to get pucks deep. We're aggressive and we try to do the right thing."

As Krueger noted, some of the line's value is in the residual effects it can create for other lines by wearing down an opponent's defense corps in the offensive zone while cycling the puck down low.

"It's really hard when you're getting cycled," Girgensons said. "Everyone has been there in the defensive zone where you get stuck, and you kind of feel like you're just chasing the puck the whole time. It's hard to get it back."

Okposo also likes the frustration factor his line is causing.

"It's pretty normal for an NHL player to look across and you see a fourth line and say, 'What the hell am I doing in my 'D' zone?' We've got a good thing going," Okposo said. "We've just got to continue to work and good things are going to happen."

Told that Krueger made it a point earlier this week to tell reporters he doesn't number his lines and that the numbers say they're not in that spot anyway, a smiling Okposo said: "I think we're a pretty formidable line right now. You can call us whatever you want. It doesn't matter."

#### Panthers struggling

Florida is 1-2 over its first three games under new coach Joel Quenneville and has given up 14 goals. Sergei Bobrovsky was pulled after giving up four goals in the first period of Tuesday's 6-3 loss to Carolina, and the Panthers' new \$70 million goalie has an ugly 4.77 goals-against average and .859 save percentage.

#### Around the boards

\* The Sabres are looking to start the season 3-0 at home for the first time since 2008-09. At 3-0-1, they're on their longest point streak to open a campaign since starting that year 6-0-2.

\* Forward Victor Olofsson enters Friday's game looking to become the first Sabres rookie to score in four straight contests since Donald Audette tallied in five straight in 1991.

\* The Sabres' lineup was the same in practice Thursday as it was against Montreal, meaning defenseman John Gilmour will continue as a healthy scratch against the Panthers.

## **Sabres prospect Lawrence Pilut says he's feeling 'almost normal'**

By Bill Hoppe  
The Buffalo News  
October 10, 2019

ROCHESTER – Among the 25 red, white and blue jerseys on the ice for Americans practices over the past week, defenseman Lawrence Pilut has been easy to spot.

Just look for the only orange sweater.

Five months after the Sabres prospect injured his left shoulder and underwent surgery, he has started skating with his teammates in a non-contact role.

While Pilut hasn't been cleared to play, he said he could be ready in about two weeks.

"I'm feeling almost normal, and it's a good thing," Pilut told The News following Monday's practice in Blue Cross Arena. "I feel like I got my strength back and put on a couple pounds over the summer, and I feel like that's a good thing for me."

Pilut, 23, hasn't played since leaving Game 3 of the North Division semifinal playoff series against the Toronto Marlies on April 24.

"He's chomping at the bit," interim Amerks coach Gord Dineen said.

After Pilut had surgery in early May, the Sabres said he would need five to six months to recover. Despite having to rehab his shoulder, he still packed on about 13 pounds during the offseason.

The Amerks now list the 5-foot-11 Swede at 194 pounds.

"A lot of my focus in the summer went to putting on a couple pounds and just refreshing mentally," Pilut said. "It's a long season over here from Sweden. It's different. You just got to keep that mental shape up. ... I feel like I have more power this season."

Pilut's return will give one of the AHL's deepest blue lines a lethal offensive threat.

Following five seasons in Sweden, Pilut acclimated to North American hockey almost immediately a year ago, quickly morphing into a star.

Pilut registered two goals and 13 points in his first seven AHL games and three goals and 22 points in his first 15 outings.

"When I would I talk to him about the adjustment to the North American style, he talked often about the angles and the width of the ice and as a defenseman getting comfortable with that," Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton said. "But his performance didn't reflect that."

Pilut's combination of speed, playmaking ability and supreme vision made him perhaps the AHL's biggest early season surprise. Sabres fans began waiting for his arrival.

In late November, the Sabres recalled Pilut, and he compiled one goal and six points in 33 NHL games.

"I felt good when I was up last year," Pilut said. "Of course, I had a dip a little bit. But I've learned from it. I think I can play up there. I just need to be me, play with that confidence I can."

As Pilut mentioned, he struggled at times as a rookie.

He went pointless in his final 14 NHL appearances. The Sabres even scratched him. When he returned to the AHL in late February, he mustered only four assists in 15 games.

Pilut, like many young offensive defensemen, must learn to manage the puck.

"I still have some ways to go in just managing a little better decisions sometimes," he said.

So what would be growth for Pilut this season? He already proved he can score.

"He doesn't have to go out and put up the points he did last year," Dineen said. "He just has to play a type of brand that translates to the NHL.

"In the end, like we tell most of the guys, they got to punch a hole in the lineup up there, make the decision for management."

That brand must include more consistency.

"That's a big thing for me," Pilut said.

Given the Sabres' recent development record, they likely won't rush Pilut. Other than winger Tage Thompson, who spent most of last season in the NHL, they've kept their prospects with the Amerks for long stints.

"The one thing with our organization now is we're being very patient with players, making sure that when they are ready that they're ready to go and not come back," Dineen said. "For him, it's getting all the habits so it translates to him just being a regular, everyday NHL player."

## **Sabres' Miller has become a mentor for Rasmus Dahlin**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 10, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Colin Miller has now spent some time in his new town between training camp and the regular season starting. The former Golden Knight has enjoyed his time as a Sabre so far, "It's been fun, obviously with the good start here and it makes it fun, but there's definitely areas we can improve on."

Ralph Krueger put Miller together with Rasmus Dahlin before the last preseason game. Miller has become a mentor for the youngster and Krueger likes what he's seen, "You can see the conversations that they're having between shifts, the communication's strong, it's a very positive voice for Rasmus who sometimes can be a little hard on himself and be realistic about the experience level and age that he's at there's going to be bumps on the road and Colin has been good to smooth those bumps out for him and at the same time be an example."

Miller is almost 27 and has played on two other NHL teams. He said mentoring isn't something he's done before, "It's been a different role for sure, one that I haven't been in before, but I'm liking it, I'm enjoying it."

"He's working hard every day to improve and it's a lot when you're that age to come into this league and try to establish yourself right away, but he's been able to do it and it's just about the process every day."

Krueger talked about Dahlin being hard on himself and Dahlin has told me himself that he gets too down at bad plays. Miller is helping him work through it, "I think maybe at a younger age you over analyze stuff a little bit more than you should. I think sometimes you forget how good the guys are that you're playing against and the league you're playing in, but he's doing great. He handles everything very well and he definitely doesn't seem like a 19-year-old."

Dahlin is tied with Jack Eichel for third in league scoring with seven points. They trail Connor McDavid and Mika Zibanejad by just one point.

There was nothing new at practice on Thursday. The lines and the defense remained the same. Krueger did rave about the Johan Larsson line. Those three have spent almost every shift in the offensive zone. The head coach said, "Five-on-five the way they show the direction for the other lines and yesterday they were the ones with the most O-Zone time and we're all cheering for them to get a goal for all of that work that they put in."

Krueger added they've been Buffalo's most consistent line, "Larsson, Girgensons and Okposo have really been somebody that we can trust and we feel comfortable with. I'm not afraid to see them up against anybody because of the work that they bring in and they make it hard on anybody they're up against."

"They're probably the only line that hasn't had one game where they've slipped a bit and what they also do is soften the opposition D for other lines to follow."

The Sabres continue their three game homestand Friday against Florida.

## **'We've got a good thing going': Sabres' fourth line shows early returns under Ralph Krueger**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

October 11, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Without a hint of irony, condescension or disbelief, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger lauded the line of Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo as the trio for all Buffalo forwards to emulate. And he's not wrong.

It really is a new year in Buffalo.

"We're a pretty formidable line right now," said Okposo, who's noticed the pain in opponents' faces as they futilely chase the Sabres' surprising trio. "You look across, you see a fourth line and you say, 'What the hell am I doing in my D-zone?'"

"We've got a good thing going."

The numbers say it's better than good. Through four games, the Larsson line is leading the Sabres in significant offensive categories. They may not have the skills of Victor Olofsson, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, the skating of Jeff Skinner, Marcus Johansson and Vladimir Sobotka or the expectations carried by Jimmy Vesey, Casey Mittelstadt, Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues, but they're buzzing goalies and burying defensemen better than anybody.

Line	Corsi	Shots	Goals
Larsson	47-20	25-10	1-1
Johansson	38-37	25-17	3-1
Eichel	45-50	22-22	3-3
Mittelstadt	17-28	7-19	1-0

"We're working hard for each other, supporting each other," Larsson said Thursday. "We want to be a tough line to play against. We've had a lot of scoring chances. We haven't really converted on them, so that's the next step. Maybe get a goal here and get some confidence in that area."

The confidence that they will score is infinitely higher than last year. They would have a few chances here and there last season, but the line was not a consistent scoring threat. It wasn't the opponent pinning them in the defensive zone. It was their coach.

Former bench boss Phil Housley started Larsson and Girgensons in the offensive zone just 16 percent of the time, the lowest total of every forward in the NHL. Krueger has boosted the numbers above 42 percent this year and it's clearly appreciated. Girgensons flashed a smirk when the differences were noted to him.

"It's a confidence builder," the left winger said. "You see that they trust you to be out there. We've had some good O-zone times. I just don't think we've got the reward yet, so we've just got to stick to it, stay with the same game plan and it will come."

Krueger's game plan – which features the forwards relentlessly pressuring defensemen into mistakes – is compatible with every line. But the Larsson group has really adapted to the change.

"This year it's just a little bit different system," Okposo said. "It's just given us a little more opportunities to be aggressive, so I think that we're having the puck a little more. My whole career it's been hunting. When I'm really on my game, it's like I've hunted pucks. I think that's a term I've always used. It's nice to play with two guys that kind of have that same mentality."

"If we don't have it, just go get it. If you're the first guy or the second guy, get in there. If you're the third guy, read and be responsible. Those two guys have definitely done a good job of that."

And it's not like the Sabres' lunch-pail crew is simply beating up on other fourth lines. Larsson and Co. have held their own against Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Max Domi and dominated Jack Hughes and Nick Foligno.

"Larsson, Girgensons and Okposo have really been somebody we can trust and feel comfortable with," Krueger said. "They play up and down the lines of the opposition. I'm not afraid at all to see them up against anybody because of the work they put in. They make it hard on anybody they play up against, so they'll be an important line moving forward.

"They're really setting an example with their game away from the puck that we need to build right through our lineup on a consistent basis."

While Krueger said the line definitely deserves more than its one goal by Okposo, he credits other players' goals to them.

"They soften the opposition D for other lines to follow a shift or two later," the coach said. "You never know how that residual work pays off, but I'm sure it does. When a line grinds them down for 45 seconds, that D pair comes out two minutes later and I look for a certain matchup. I've seen opportunities grow out of that, too, so it's not always the direct work that has paid off. Sometimes it's indirect."

Though the Larsson trio is generally regarded as the fourth line – "You can call us whatever you want, it doesn't matter," Okposo said – the group is getting more minutes than Mittelstadt and more high-danger chances than Eichel's unit (11-5).

"It gets you a little confidence, gets your feet wet," Larsson said. "It's good to see that the plan works, you know?"

Will the line end up outscoring the Sabres' high-powered units? Probably not. But they're showing everyone else how it's done during the early days of the season.

"We don't do a lot of fancy stuff," Okposo said. "We just grab our lunch pails and go to work."

## **Sabres' Victor Olofsson has chance to enjoy dynamic rookie season**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 10, 2019

BUFFALO – Winger Kyle Okposo still remembers the first time he and some other Sabres watched rookie Victor Olofsson shoot the puck.

It was training camp in 2018, and Olofsson had just arrived for his first North American season after leading the Swedish Hockey League in goals.

What Okposo and the others saw wowed them.

"We were just like, 'Who is this kid who can shoot the puck like this?'" Okposo said Thursday inside KeyBank Center. "You always hear that he was going to come up here and score goals, and he has."

Olofsson, 24, has quickly become perhaps the NHL's best early-season story.

The same player who lasted until the 181st pick in the 2014 NHL Draft has scored four power-play goals in the last three games and owns a spot on the left wing beside No. 1 center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

Dating back to last season, Olofsson has scored his first six NHL goals on the power play, a record he shares with three others.

Overall this season, Olofsson has compiled four goals and five points in four outings entering Friday's home contest against the Florida Panthers.

"He's such a talented player," Sabres winger Marcus Johansson said.

Olofsson led all rookies in goals, points and shots (13) entering Thursday's games. His four power-play goals also topped the league.

He could become the first Sabres rookie to score in four straight games since Donald Audette scored in five consecutive from Nov. 8 to 20, 1991.

A Sabres rookie hasn't started a season this hot since 2011-12, when center Luke Adam scored three goals and six points in the first four games.

Olofsson has looked dynamic in and around the faceoffs circles, utilizing his lethal wrist shot to beat goalies.

"One of the best releases I've ever seen," Okposo said.

Okposo said Olofsson's shot already ranks among the NHL's best.

"The quickness, accuracy, the speed of the shot," Okposo said of what makes it so good. "He shoots ... with his hands really close together and really in tight, and that's something that's really tough to do and get velocity on it."

The presence of his parents, Maria and Tony, made Olofsson's goal in Wednesday's 5-4 overtime win against the Montreal Canadiens especially meaningful.

The Olofssons, who will also be at Friday's game, hadn't seen their son play for the Sabres in person.

"It's obviously a dream for me to play in the NHL, and I think been kind of a dream for them as well supporting me through the years," Olofsson said. "It was very special to have them here and watching me play."

Olofsson knows he can play a lot better five-on-five. Other than his assist on defenseman Rasmus Dahlin's goal opening night, he has done all his scoring on the power play.

Late in Wednesday's game, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger replaced Olofsson on Eichel's line.

Olofsson knows he has been too one-dimensional.

"(I need to) win some more battles down low and win more pucks on my own and create scoring chances on my own," Olofsson said of his even-strength play. "You don't always have to get that perfect pass from Jack or Sam to get a scoring opportunity."

Olofsson developed a strong two-way game in the AHL last season. In addition to scoring 30 goals with the Rochester Americans, he earned time killing penalties, an opportunity he called a big step in his career.

"Throughout training camp and on the way to playing the role he has been playing here, his game away from the puck and his decisions and energy and his speed coming back and tracking into our end has been elite," Krueger said. "So the foundation is there. What you're going to see in a player at that experience level is, if he does get a little fatigued, he will wander maybe a little outside of that area.

"It's just getting used to the pace of the NHL and the amount of games and keeping your mind in focus because the instincts with him will be offensive.

"The other part he's learning and growing, but the attitude is correct. He's been an outstanding player in both directions since the beginning of camp."

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The 3-0-1 Sabres have started a season with points in four games for the first time for the first time since they began the 2009-10 campaign 4-0-1.

## **Former Sabre Jochen Hecht enjoying life as scout in Germany**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 10, 2019

**BUFFALO** – After Jochen Hecht retired from the DEL in 2016, the former Sabres forward spent two seasons coaching with his hometown team, Adler Mannheim.

One of his players, defenseman Mark Stuart, played 673 NHL games over 12 seasons.

Hecht knew him well.

On Nov. 7, 2009, Hecht fought for the fifth and final time in his NHL career against, of all opponents, Stuart, according to hockeyfights.com.

After a coaching change, Hecht was put in charge of Mannheim's defensemen.

"I never played D as a professional, and then I got to tell (Stuart) what to do out there," said Hecht, one of 15 former captains the Sabres honored as part of their 50th anniversary celebration before Saturday's 7-2 win against against the New Jersey Devils.

Hecht said he left Stuart alone.

Following his short run on the bench – "It was a lot of fun," Hecht said – he started scouting for Mannheim, the team he played three seasons with after he left the Sabres in 2013.

Hecht, a huge piece of the Sabres' rollicking post-lockout teams of 2006 and 2007, was thrilled to be back in a city that remains close to him.

The German spent 11 seasons with the Sabres, morphing into one of their top two-way forwards.

When former Sabres coach Lindy Ruff rotated the captaincy monthly in 2007-08, he awarded the 'C' to Hecht in October and February.

"I feel honored that I was asked to come in, be a part of this group of special captains," Hecht said. "I had a great time. I pulled into the town, got to the airport, and it still feels like home."

Hecht, 42, sounded a little nostalgic talking about his memories of the city and the special teams he played for in the mid-2000s.

The Sabres quickly became the NHL's biggest surprise in 2005-06, showcasing skill, speed and depth few teams possessed.

Hecht said winger Jason Pominville's series-clinching overtime goal against the Ottawa Senators in the 2006 Eastern Conference semifinal convinced the Sabres they had the talent to win the Stanley Cup.

"That was the moment where everybody thought we could go really deep here, win this thing," he said. "I think we had the team at the time."

The Sabres made the Eastern Conference final two straight seasons and won the Presidents' Trophy in 2006-07. While they fell short of the Stanley Cup, those teams hold a special place in the heart of fans and players.

"We had a lot of fun," Hecht said. "We were a lot of fun. We were a tight group, and when things didn't go well, we had some fun off the ice, too. That kept us together and working for us each other."

These days, Hecht scours Germany and Switzerland looking for talent.

"The first thing we look for is skating ability, quickness and then hockey sense," he said of scouting. "Those are the (three) major things. Everything else you can work on."

## **Power Surge! Sabres boast top power play in NHL**

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

October 10, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Led in part by rookie winger Victor Olofsson, the Sabres currently lead the NHL with eight power play goals.

Olofsson picked up his sixth career tally on the man-advantage in Wednesday's overtime win against the Canadiens and joined four other players in NHL history with the first six goals of his career coming courtesy of the power play.

"It's always fun to have some type of record," Olofsson said. "I want create more 5-on-5 too though and score some 5-on-5 for us."

"It's fun to watch him. He's playing with confidence. He sees the game really well," added center Marcus Johansson. "It's not just his shot that's unbelievable. The poise he's got with the puck and also readying the game, and to shoot it at the right time, it's a special talent he's got."

As the season started, captain Jack Eichel said opponents should fear committing a penalty against the Blue & Gold considering the firepower they boast on special teams. So far, the Sabres have made opponents pay, converting eight of their 15 on the man-advantage.

"I think we're just moving puck quickly. Just trying to put the opposition of their heels. We've done a good job retrieving pucks as well and not letting them get set up and I think we've kind of dictated it. It's good to see," Eichel said. "Power play and special teams are so important in this league and it can mean the difference between whether you win or lose a lot of nights. So it's good to see our power play has been good so far this year."

While the Sabres might not convert at a 50-percent rate for the duration of the season, with the skill they have, they could flirt with history. No NHL team has had a power play percentage above 30 since the 1978 New York Islanders.

The Tampa Bay Lightning nearly reached that mark last season and finished with a 28.2 power-play percentage.

## Top Six: Sabres Observations One Week In

By Greg Vorse

Spectrum News

October 10, 2019

The Sabres are a week into their 50th season and so far there are a lot of positives to talk about — here are my top six observations so far.

### 1. Winning Is Fun

— The Sabres are now 3-0-1 on the year and 2-0-0 at home, and the atmosphere in the home opener where they blitzed New Jersey to a 7-2 win was one of the best I've experienced in my 14 years of covering the NHL. As we saw during the 10-game winning streak last year, if the Sabres give this fan base a reason to be juiced, they will take the top off KeyBank Center.

### 2. Powerful Power Play

— If you have some combination of Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Sam Reinhart, Victor Olofsson, and Rasmus Dahlin on your fantasy team you are currently smiling, and a lot of it has to do with the power play. The Sabres currently have eight power play goals in just four games — that's three more goals than the next most (Carolina). Buffalo is also lighting the lamp on the man advantage at an alarming rate of 53.3 percent.

### 3. Goalofsson

— I mentioned all the power play scoring above, welp, rookie Victor Olofsson has been the biggest benefactor in all of this with all four of his team-leading goals coming on the man-up. Add to that a pair of PP goals last season and Olofsson has tied an NHL record for most power play goals to start a career at six. The forward is on pace to score 82 goals this season — that won't happen, but if he gets to 30, a trip to Vegas as a Calder finalist should be in his future.

### 4. Electric Eichel

— Jack Eichel has a gear that not many players can reach and when he decides to shift to it you have a man who is damn near unstoppable. We saw that level reached in the 5-4 OT win over Montreal where he had a pair of goals and assists and was flying all over the ice making plays that don't go into the box score. His seven points are tied with Rasmus Dahlin for tops on the team and third overall in the NHL.

### 5. Learning in a Win

— Rasmus Dahlin has been amazing, but the win over Montreal wasn't his best performance. The second-year stud (see his stats in #4) was sloppy at times with the puck and out of position on a few key plays for the Canadiens, but as Ralph Krueger said in the post-game he would much rather his squad learn from mistakes in a win than a loss.

### 6. Depleted Depth

— It's not all rainbows and cupcakes at 1 Seymour H Knox III Plaza as the Sabres still only have one or two good lines. The Girgensons-Larsson-Okposo line has been decent for what you expect, but they have two points through four games. I hate box score scouting, but after several seasons where only Eichel's line has scored it would be nice to get something from the bottom six. Also, Vladimir Sobotka needs to make way for someone younger who can move the puck and maybe score.

## **Victor 'Goal-ofsson' turning into another offensive weapon for Sabres**

By Sean Leahy

NBC Sports

October 10, 2019

At 24 years old, Buffalo Sabres forward Victor Olofsson is one of the NHL's oldest rookies this season. But that extra development time at home in Sweden with MODO and Frolunda, as well as spending most of 2018-19 in the AHL with Rochester, is paying off.

Though he's only played 10 NHL games, the Örnsköldsvik native has already tied an NHL record. His goal during Wednesday night's 5-4 overtime win over the Montreal Canadiens gave him six for his young career, with all of them coming on the power play.

Olofsson now joins such names as Craig Norwich, Sylvain Turgeon and Jeff Norton as players who scored their first six NHL goals on the power play.

Not bad for a 2014 seventh-round pick, eh?

This production from Olofsson, better known as "Goal-ofsson," has been a long time coming. While he's been helped playing alongside Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, he's an older forward who's been playing against men for years. It also helps that he played six games for the Sabres at the end of last season, which gave him an idea of the level he needed to reach to earn a regular roster spot and helped him feel much more comfortable in North America as he entered training camp.

It's not just his offense that's impressed. Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger, who has described the forward as "permanently dangerous," has praised Olofsson's work without the puck. That complete package has earned trust from the coaching staff.

But the offense is what will get Olofsson on the nightly highlights. As he makes his Calder Trophy case, his shot has proven to be incredibly lethal. Here are just two examples of how "permanently dangerous" he can be on the ice.

"I think probably the biggest thing is just to shoot it really quick," Olofsson told the Sabres website last month. "Just to get the puck off the stick as fast as you can before the defenders can get his stick there or the goalie can get in position, because then you don't have to be as accurate.

"If you're handling the puck a little bit too long, everyone is going to be in position and it's going to be a lot harder for you to get that shot through. I think the biggest thing in my mind anyways is I'm just trying to get it off as quick as I can."

The Sabres are 3-0-1 through four games and Olofsson, Eichel, Reinhart, Rasmus Dahlin, and Jeff Skinner are helping lead the way offensively. Things are looking up so far under Krueger, but as Eichel understands after last season, consistency will be key for this season. Same goes for their new rookie weapon up front. But maturity and his confidence in his first full NHL season will serve him well.

## Why are Sabres, Rangers, Oilers, Ducks off to hot starts?

By James O'Brien

NBC Sports

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It's far too early to talk about hot streaks for the Ducks, Sabres, Rangers and Oilers ... but it's far too fun not to. But before we get into that, you might be wondering: are any of these teams for real?

The quick answer isn't sexy: we don't know much of anything yet.

In 2018-19, the Devils began the season with a four-game winning streak, yet they were bad enough (31-41-10) to win the draft lottery and land Jack Hughes. Meanwhile, the Avalanche started off last season 6-1-2, and ended up proving that their 2017-18 breakthrough wasn't a fluke.

So ... yeah, apply your grains of salt here, but let's dive into what's driving some quick starts.

(Note: this post is limited to four teams that are off to hot starts who missed the playoffs in 2018-19. Hence, no Hurricanes, who made it to the 2019 Eastern Conference Final, for example.)

**Anaheim Ducks (3-0-0, six points)**

If someone told you that the Ducks began the season on a three-game winning streak, you'd probably assume that goaltending would be the key. And you'd be right.

John Gibson has earned all three wins, generating a ridiculous .970 save percentage, making at least 31 saves in each game so far.

As all-world as Gibson is, this pace is unsustainable. The Ducks have killed every penalty so far, going 7-for-7. Looking at Natural Stat Trick's all-strengths stats, there are some absurd numbers, including Gibson making the save on a league-leading 94.12 percent of the high-danger scoring chances he's faced.

It's not all bad news for the Ducks, necessarily. The early returns on Dallas Eakins seem positive, as Anaheim is more or less breaking even in possession stats, which wasn't always a safe assumption under former coach Randy Carlyle, who was notorious for submarining his team's puck possession numbers.

The formula of Gibson (and, to an extent, strong backup Ryan Miller) plus respectable overall play and timely offense might just work for the Ducks. If nothing else, there's a decent chance that they'll make gains after a lousy 2018-19.

Just don't expect Gibson to remain superhuman.

(If I had to bet on any goalie to be superb in 2019-20, it would be Gibson, though.)

**Buffalo Sabres (3-0-1, seven points)**

While the Ducks have had a perfect penalty kill so far, the Sabres' power play has been outrageous. Buffalo leads the NHL with eight power play goals, converting on eight of 15 opportunities.

The Sabres have a power-play shooting percentage of 25. Last season, the Lightning led the NHL with a 21.64 power-play shooting percentage, while no one else even hit 19 (Boston was second at 18.84 percent).

Eichel and Rasmus Dahlin are tied for the league lead with five power-play points, while Victor Olofsson chisels out a reputation as "Goal-ofsson" for his deadly work on the man advantage.

So far, the Sabres' expected goals on the power play was 3.17, which ranks third in Natural Stat Trick's listings, so there's certainly some strength to the unit. Perhaps that's where Ralph Krueger really picked up some especially strong tricks in soccer?

The Sabres are playing over their heads, yet there are positive signs possession-wise.

Edmonton Oilers (3-0-0, six points)

With 14 goals on 80 SOG, the Oilers lead the NHL with a 17.5 shooting percentage.

Not shockingly, James Neal is on fire after that four-goal game, generating six goals on 14 SOG for a 42.9 shooting percentage. Connor McDavid's hot hand isn't so surprising (22.2 percent), but Zack Kassian won't convert three goals on five SOG (60 percent) very often.

Looking deeper at the Oilers' stats, they've struggled with the seventh-worst Corsi For and Fenwick For percentages, although they've generated slightly more high-danger chances for than against (34-30) early on under Dave Tippett. There are worse strategies than "being middle-of-the-pack while having McDavid."

New York Rangers (2-0-0, four points)

The Rangers have the highest PDO (1.098) so far this season with a high shooting percentage (16.13) and save percentage (93.67). You probably won't be stunned to realize that the Oilers rank second in PDO (1.077), the Ducks come in fourth (1.058), and the Sabres are ninth (1.043).

Mika Zibanejad's been worthy of more attention during the last couple of years, but he won't generate four points per game (he has eight in two games so far). Artemi Panarin could very well maintain strong chemistry with Zibanejad, but this pace will inevitably subside.

New York's underlying numbers are rough thus far, even when you factor in score effects.

The Rangers' 6-4 win against Winnipeg to open the season on Oct. 3 might be the template for the Rangers: lots of goals and chances going both ways, goalies ending up miserable, and chaos generally ensuing. It might not always be pretty, but it could end up being fun to watch.

## **For now, the Sabres are willing to live with Dahlin's mistakes in exchange for his brilliant play**

By Ken Campbell  
The Hockey News  
October 10, 2019

Back in the day, Bobby Orr was a teenaged defenseman in the NHL. So were Paul Coffey, Phil Housley, Larry Murphy, Raymond Bourque and (for a very short time) Denis Potvin. All of them were stars who ended up in the Hall of Fame. None of them had seven points in their team's first four games of the season while they were teenagers.

Do you know who does, though? 19-year-old Rasmus Dahlin, that's who. Like the rest of his team, Dahlin has feasted on a Buffalo Sabres power play that is white-hot through the first four games of the season. Of their 18 goals, the Sabres have scored seven of them on the power play and of Dahlin's seven points, five of them (all assists) have come with the man advantage. But the last time we checked, power plays were a significant part of a team's ability to win games, so the Sabres will take it.

Like all young defensemen, Dahlin still has a ways to go in his own end and, judging by his play in a 5-4 overtime win over the Montreal Canadiens Wednesday night, with his neutral-zone awareness and play with the puck. On the Canadiens' shorthanded goal, Dahlin lost the puck to Joel Armia in the neutral zone and was out of the play when it came back the other way. That left Armia uncovered in front of the net for an easy goal on a pass from Nate Thompson.

It's not quite the same as it was growing up in Sweden, where Dahlin said coaches are much more tolerant of those kinds of mistakes. The fact that he kept getting thrown out on the ice, he said, is part of what developed his skills to where they are now. "You can do more mistakes," Dahlin said during the NHL's pre-season media tour. "The coach just says, 'Do it again, do it again,' until it works out. I think that helped me a lot when I was younger. I try stuff out there and I got a lot better on the stuff I was trying. I think it's good for young players, that coaches just let them play."

To the Sabres credit, though, those are the kind of mistakes they are willing to live with from a 19-year-old phenom defenseman. When the Sabres purged their coaching staff after last season, they decided to keep Steve Smith on as an assistant coach under Ralph Krueger. Smith runs the defense and Dahlin was happy he was kept on. "You can make a mistake and coaches say, 'Get in there and do the same thing. It'll work out next time,'" Dahlin said. "Our coach 'Smitty' is an unreal coach. He really trusts the players. I'm super happy that he stayed. He's so calm and he knows what he's talking about. He's won a few Stanley Cups. I respect that man a lot. Everyone does in the locker room."

(Of course, Smith was guilty of one of the most egregious errors in hockey history, attempting a pass through the middle of the ice from behind his own net and banking the puck off goalie Grant Fuhr in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference final in 1986, a goal that cost the Oilers the series and prevented them from having a chance to win five straight Stanley Cups. Smith was a 23-year-old rookie at the time and went on to have a solid career, winning three Cups with the Oilers. So the guy knows something about having patience with young defensemen.)

One thing helping Dahlin is that defensively he's being given a reasonable workload. The tandem of Jake McCabe and Rasmus Ristolainen are charged with the task of doing most of the Sabres' heavy lifting on that front, both in terms of ice time and matchups. So far, Krueger has Dahlin playing 18:36 per game, which is 2-1/2 minutes less per game than he logged during his rookie season, so perhaps less is more here. He's also second among Buffalo defensemen in offensive zone starts, which indicates he's being put in a position to succeed. Last season, Dahlin felt he really flagged in the last 20 games of the season, which is understandable since that was double the schedule he played in Sweden, but says he'll be more prepared for the rigors of the NHL this season. So far, he's off to a phenomenal start.

"Of course I want to score more goals and get more assists, stuff like that," Dahlin said. "But last year I had more points than I expected. This year, I want more. That's why I play."

## **Dahlin's play at the point has contributed to power-play success**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 10, 2019

Rasmus Dahlin smirked when asked what's changed for the Sabres on the power play from a year ago.

"Olofsson is here," the defenseman said matter-of-factly.

Yes, Victor Olofsson's lethal shot had been a difference maker for a Buffalo power play that leads the NHL with eight goals in four games. Olofsson has six goals in 10 contests dating back to the end of last season, all of which have come with the extra man.

The addition of Olofsson makes life difficult on penalty killers, who have a variety of threats to keep their eye on. Jack Eichel is usually on the flank opposite Olofsson, and he's a threat to either thread the needle with a pass or bury one himself. Sam Reinhart is there to tip pucks, collect rebounds, or feed his teammates from the net front. Forty-goal scorer Jeff Skinner is positioned in the slot.

"Everyone is a threat out there," Dahlin said. "Everyone can shoot, so our opponent doesn't really know what to expect."

The task of assessing and directing those options falls on Dahlin, who is tied with Eichel for the league lead with five power-play points. His seven points overall lead NHL defensemen and are tied for third among all skaters, one behind leaders Connor McDavid and Mika Zibanejad.

Dahlin's four-game point streak is the third-longest by a teenage defenseman to open a season in NHL history. He had points in five straight games as an 18-year-old rookie last season.

"It's just everything kind of running through him from the one side to the other and to the net," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "That's what the playmaker at the top needs to be able to do. We haven't used his shot maybe as much as we could in future games, but overall just his ability to see where the options are.

"He's still got an upside, which is really exciting. We see opportunity. We're working on learners with him every single day so that's far from a finished product. It's really just his offensive skill set mixed with his vision is what makes him so lethal on the power play."

Dahlin is used to making the short pass to Olofsson, having played with him for two seasons for Frolunda of the Swedish Hockey League. The pair passed back and forth six times on the play that led to Olofsson's tying goal in Columbus on Monday.

Each time he saw Olofsson covered, Dahlin slapped his stick hard on the ice to call for the puck back. He drifted and head-faked toward the other side until a lane finally opened.

"Who's got the most time and who's ready to shoot?" Dahlin said. "We want shots on net. That's what I'm looking for."

Krueger has stressed that the Sabres are keeping numbers - be it personal statistics or points in the standings - out of the dressing room. His focus is on keeping players' minds clear and focused on improving each day.

To that end, Dahlin is more worried about rounding out his own game than his success with the extra man. He was the first one on the ice for practice and the last one off it Thursday after being on for two goals against in the team's win over Montreal on Wednesday.

He hadn't been on the ice for a five-on-five goal against in the three games prior.

"I think he's looking at the total performance and he wants to be a complete National Hockey League defenseman and he's going to be one with the attitude he has," Krueger said. "Every day, we've got things to work on with him, which is fun because of how coachable he is."

### **Larsson's line continues to set the tone**

Peruse the league leaders in five-on-five shot attempts percentage through the first four games of the season and you'll find a trio of Sabres linemates near the top of the list.

Among skaters with at least 10 minutes played at 5-on-5, Kyle Okposo ranks third with a 73.08 percent shot share. Zemgus Girgensons ranks ninth (68.83) and Johan Larsson ranks 16th (67.07).

Those numbers speak to the time spent in the offensive zone by a trio that Krueger credited with being an example for other lines to follow in terms of how he wants the Sabres to play.

"Larsson, Girgensons, and Okposo have really been somebody we can trust, and we feel comfortable with," Krueger said. "They can play up and down the lines of the opposition. I'm not afraid at all to see them up against anybody because of the work they bring in.

"They make it hard on anybody they play up against, so they'll be an important line for us moving forward."

Krueger has shown a willingness to call upon that trio late in close games, including when the Canadiens were in the midst of a late push with the game tied on Wednesday. Their ability to forecheck and extend possessions in the offensive zone can wear down opposing players, which can lead to production for the team's other lines.

"What they also do is soften the D, the opposition D, for other lines to follow and possibly a shift or two later," Krueger explained. "You never know how all that residual work pays off, but I'm sure it does when a line grinds them down 45 seconds.

"That D pair comes out two later and I look for a certain matchup and I've seen opportunities grow out of that, too. So, it's not always the direct work that has paid off. Sometimes it's indirect."

If they keep playing the way they have been, they should see some production of their own. Though they only have one goal at 5-on-5 - a tip from Okposo against New Jersey on Saturday - the havoc they wreak in front of opposing nets has led to plenty of chances.

According to NaturalStatTrick.com, the Sabres have out-chanced teams 23-7 with Girgensons, Larsson, and Okposo on the ice at 5-on-5.

"Yeah, they definitely deserve more offensive numbers than they've gotten," Krueger said. "They're creating plus scoring chances on a regular basis here and are probably the only line that hasn't had one game where they've slipped a bit."

### **Lines at Thursday's practice**

The group remain unchanged from Wednesday's game, with John Gilmour working in as the extra defenseman:

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart  
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo  
53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka  
13 Jimmy Vesey - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 71 Evan Rodrigues

6 Marco Scandella - 10 Henri Jokiharju  
19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 33 Colin Miller  
58 John Gilmour

40 Carter Hutton  
35 Linus Ullmark