



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

October 16, 2019

Anaheim plays non-conference foe Buffalo

Associated Press

October 16, 2019

Buffalo Sabres (5-0-1, first in the Atlantic Division) vs. Anaheim Ducks (4-2-0, third in the Pacific Division)

Anaheim, California; Wednesday, 10 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: Anaheim faces Buffalo in a non-conference matchup.

Anaheim finished 35-37-10 overall during the 2018-19 season while going 19-14-8 at home. The Ducks were called for 320 penalties last season averaging 3.9 penalties and 9.0 penalty minutes per game.

Buffalo went 33-39-10 overall and 12-24-5 on the road a season ago. Goalies for the Sabres allowed 3.1 goals on 32.8 shots per game last season.

The matchup Wednesday is the first meeting this season for the two teams.

Ducks Injuries: Brendan Guhle: day to day (lower body).

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

Sabres game day: Victor Olofsson showing progress defensively

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 16, 2019

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (5-0-1) vs. Anaheim Ducks (4-2-0)

Where: Honda Center

When: 10 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

Sabres' lineup: Winger Conor Sheary joined the Sabres for the three-game road trip but is still "day to day" with an upper-body injury, according to coach Ralph Krueger. Forward Curtis Lazar, who was recalled from Rochester on Sunday, and defenseman John Gilmour are expected to be the healthy scratches.

Krueger won't announce his starting goalie until he addresses the media at approximately 8:30 p.m., EST. Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark both have a .931 save percentage, though the former has started two more games.

Here is how the Sabres lined up during practice Tuesday in Honda Center:

Olofsson-Eichel-Reinhart
Girgensons-Larsson-Okposo
Skinner-Johansson-Sobotka
Vesey-Mittelstadt-Rodrigues

McCabe-Ristolainen
Dahlin-Miller
Scandella-Jokiharju

Goalofsson: Victor Olofsson is a very early candidate for the Calder Trophy. That's a remarkable story considering how many talented rookies are in the National Hockey League this season, including New Jersey's Jack Hughes.

Olofsson, 24, has a team-high five goals among seven points in six games this season. His goal Monday against Dallas made him the first player in NHL history to score each of his first seven career goals on the power play. However, the more notable development was Olofsson's 5-on-5 play against the Stars.

Olofsson has shown he's strong enough away from the puck to remain on the Sabres' top line and his emergence has allowed Krueger to separate Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel.

"Just in general, if you look at somebody in a rookie season dealing with the pace we've had here right off the hop and the pressure that we're putting on ourselves right now to perform and maintain a certain level, he's one of many players I could speak about today playing on both sides of the puck," Krueger said of Olofsson on Monday. "I mean, everybody's working hard back and they're finding their work and we were much more physical tonight than we were in the last two games. Victor does his job, and that line in general, they had five-one scoring chances playing against a couple of the top players in the world. I think that's a real compliment to what the Eichel line's doing defensively."

Sobotka on the rise: Vladimir Sobotka isn't going anywhere. The winger will remain on Skinner's line until further notice. After all, Sobotka has provided a much-needed checking presence to complement Skinner and Marcus Johansson.

Additionally, Sobotka is contributing on offense, as illustrated by his assist on Skinner's goal against the Stars. Sobotka is another strong example of how a new coach and system can make a difference for a player.

"Sobotka just doesn't get the credit he deserves here," Krueger said Monday. "He's allowing Johansson and Skinner some freedom to take some risks here and there. He's an unbelievable physical presence on that line, and we're so pleased he was rewarded with something offensively today. I'm sure that will give him confidence for the future."

Ducks' lineup: Anaheim is also opting to not hold a morning skate Wednesday. Coach Dallas Eakins and his players will speak to the media at approximately 10 a.m., local time. Former Sabres prospect Brendan Guhle, a defenseman whom Anaheim acquired in the Brandon Montour trade last February, has been out with a lower-body injury.

It's unclear whether the Ducks will start John Gibson or Ryan Miller in net. Here's how they lined up Monday in Boston:

Coaching ties: Eakins was considered a top up-and-coming candidate when he took over as coach of the Edmonton Oilers in 2013-14 following Krueger's dismissal, but he lasted only one-plus seasons. Eakins has spent each of the past four seasons as coach of the Ducks' American Hockey League affiliate in San Diego, leading the Gulls to the playoffs three times.

The Ducks have been an early surprise under Eakins. Their eight points were tied for second in the Pacific Division entering play Tuesday. However, they've scored only 13 goals in six games and they're 0-for-14 on the power play.

Conor Sheary joins Sabres on road trip, remains 'day to day'

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 15, 2019

ANAHEIM, Calif. – Conor Sheary accompanied the Buffalo Sabres on their three-game West Coast road trip and practiced with the team Tuesday in Honda Center.

However, Sheary remains "day to day" with an upper-body injury and his availability for any of the three games has yet to be determined, coach Ralph Krueger told the media following practice. Sheary, a 27-year-old winger, has missed each of the past three games and was replaced by Evan Rodrigues in the Sabres' lineup.

Sheary scored two goals in the Sabres' season-opening win in Pittsburgh and had three points in three games while playing on a line with Casey Mittelstadt and Jimmy Vesey.

"Conor's feeling better," Krueger said of Sheary. "We'll assess him this afternoon. He's still day to day, but looking good and back in the group."

Sheary, who had not practiced with the Sabres since their overtime loss to Columbus on Oct. 7, participated in most drills Tuesday but was not involved in line rushes. Krueger opted to not make any changes to his group of forwards, though Curtis Lazar joined the rotation.

Lazar, a 24-year-old forward, was recalled from Rochester on Sunday and served as a healthy scratch for a 4-0 win over the Dallas Stars inside KeyBank Center on Monday. Lazar, who cleared waivers at the conclusion of training camp, had one assist in three games with the Rochester Americans. It's unclear how the Sabres will handle their roster once Sheary returns.

They currently have 14 forwards, including Sheary, with seven defensemen and two goalies. Defenseman Brandon Montour has yet to play during the regular season because of a hand injury and did not join the Sabres on the road trip.

General Manager Jason Botterill could opt to keep the roster as is until the Sabres are forced to clear space for Montour, who is on injured reserve. Their extra defenseman, John Gilmour, has yet to appear in a regular-season game and is expected to sit Wednesday night against the Anaheim Ducks.

Krueger has benefited from not having to make many changes to his lines and pairings, though he told the media that he is constantly evaluating his lineup.

"We've changed minimally so far in the lineup, but again, it's looking at every day individually," Krueger said. "Who are the players we think are going to give us the best chance to perform has been the motto since the beginning of the season and working with that group. It's more the group principles and the execution of those that we care about. It's about looking for that constant improvement every day that we care about and again, that we've been able to keep a core group has been very helpful in the process."

Granato improving

Sabres assistant coach Don Granato, who has been away from the team while recovering from severe pneumonia, is "doing much better," Krueger said Tuesday.

Additionally, Krueger told the media that Granato has provided the coaching staff with feedback after watching Sabres games on television. The progress report from Krueger is notable considering Granato's brother, Tony, told the Wisconsin State Journal last week that Don would be hospitalized "for a while."

Rochester coach Chris Taylor has served on the staff in an interim capacity since Granato took an official leave of absence Oct. 1.

Pilut making progress

Defenseman Lawrence Pilut, who has yet to play this season while recovering from shoulder surgery, was a full participant in the Rochester Americans' practice Tuesday. Pilut had been wearing a red non-contact jersey since

joining the Amerks following Sabres training camp and told The Buffalo News last week that he was close to returning.

Additionally, the Amerks practiced without goalie Andrew Hammond, and they recalled Michael Houser from Cincinnati on Monday. Jonas Johansson likely will serve as Rochester's starter if Hammond misses time.

Ducks update

The Anaheim Ducks won't hold a morning skate Wednesday, so their lineup will be a mystery until pregame warmups. Former Sabres prospect Brendan Guhle, who was acquired in the Montour trade last February, has been out with a lower-body injury.

The Ducks are 4-2-0 under new coach Dallas Eakins, who replaced Krueger as the Edmonton Oilers' coach in 2013-14.

Rasmus Ristolainen 'happy,' not satisfied with Sabres' hot start to season

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 15, 2019

ANAHEIM, Calif. – Rasmus Ristolainen placed his right hand against the wall opposite his stall inside the Honda Center dressing room and did not hesitate when asked what the Buffalo Sabres' 5-0-1 start to the season means to him.

"Great," the 24-year-old defenseman said with a slight smirk Tuesday afternoon. "Everyone wants to win, especially guys who have been here long. It hasn't been like this yet, so I'm excited. Everyone's excited. It's nicer to come to the rink when we're playing really well and that's how we've won games. It hasn't been luck. We've played well."

Ristolainen is tempering that excitement, though. His six previous seasons in Buffalo have prepared him for the arduous road ahead. He and the Sabres won 10 consecutive games last November, only to endure a second-half collapse that resulted in an eighth straight season without postseason hockey.

While Ristolainen expressed confidence in his teammates and the new man behind their bench – he said Ralph Krueger "might be the best coach" he's had as a professional – the past has taught him to focus on the present.

"Yes, I'm happy," Ristolainen said ahead of the Sabres' matchup Wednesday against the Anaheim Ducks. "You want more and more. This means nothing if we [mess] up next game. It's the past now. We're on a good pace right now and we just have to keep doing it. Last year, we played one month well but who [cares] about that month anymore? Right now it's good but I've been here a long time. I know how many games we have left. Last year, the biggest games start in January and February. They're huge. The closer we get to the playoffs, that's where you want to play your best hockey. ... We have to get better every day."

That's the competitor in Ristolainen. He wants to win. That's been the case well before the Sabres drafted him eighth overall overall in 2013. His demeanor and outlook have changed drastically over the past six months, though.

Ristolainen would not commit to returning for 2019-20 when asked about his future at locker cleanout in April. He didn't crack a smile or speak glowingly about the Sabres' progress in Phil Housley's final season. Instead, Ristolainen told reporters that players needed to hold themselves to a higher standard, there needed to be more accountability inside the dressing room. Those comments led to him being the subject of trade rumors throughout the summer, and his conversations with a Finnish reporter in August seemed to indicate he preferred a change of scenery.

Upon arriving in Buffalo for training camp last month, Ristolainen would not commit to being with the Sabres beyond that day, let alone the rest of the season, and though he was optimistic about Krueger, the two had yet to work together.

There haven't been any signs of possible bitterness during the past six weeks. Ristolainen has continued to communicate with teammates on the ice and often smiles during practice drills. He treasures the way Krueger is able to relate to players and how the coach has adjusted the Sabres' practices to accommodate a chaotic October schedule.

"He's a great human being," Ristolainen said. "A really good talker. The speeches he's giving us, I think that gives everyone energy and keeps everyone motivated. The style we play, I think everyone bought into it and everyone knows their roles. It's [translating to success] on the ice."

In addition to team success, Ristolainen seems to be at the top of his game, and his role hasn't changed under Krueger. Ristolainen is averaging a team-high 24:21 of ice time per game – a decrease of only 17 seconds from last season – and has two assists with an even plus-minus rating through six games.

Ristolainen finished last season with an NHL-worst rating of minus-41, which isn't necessarily an accurate representation of his overall performance, but is the second-worst mark by any player since the 2004-05 lockout and tied for the worst in franchise history.

Under Krueger, Ristolainen has contributed on the power play and penalty kill, and he reunited with Jake McCabe on the Sabres' top defense pairing. Their physicality has frustrated opponents in the defensive zone, and Ristolainen's talent with the puck has continued to tantalize.

Previous Sabres coaches spoke of wanting to decrease Ristolainen's ice time to better position him for success. Krueger, though, doesn't see the need to limit Ristolainen, who has been trusted to close out tight games and still is playing against an opponent's top players.

"It's not that we really sit and have a target," Krueger said of Ristolainen's ice time. "We're trying to definitely have maximums that we want to hit and avoid. But with him, because he's playing multiple roles and matched up often with top lines of the other team, plus the PK and power play time he gets, [that] will get him these minutes. It's more important that he keeps that quality high, which he has been. The aggressive side of him is very helpful too, without the puck. ... Just a very complete player."

Ristolainen appears more comfortable and confident in the defensive zone, which he attributes to "all five guys are playing for the same system and are on the same page." He explained how the 10-game win streak last November made the second-half struggles even more difficult. Ristolainen finally experienced a run of success in Buffalo, yet, the end result was the same.

Ristolainen has played 430 regular-season games without appearing in the Stanley Cup playoffs. He isn't able to watch much of the postseason, either, since the games typically don't start until the middle of the night in Finland. However, Ristolainen has spoken to former teammates who have played beyond the regular season.

Those conversations fuel Ristolainen. Although he acknowledged progress has been made and didn't hide his excitement for the Sabres' hot start, his goal is to finally experience prolonged success.

"I know what it's about," Ristolainen said of playoff hockey. "Players I've played with here in the past, they've told me everything about it. That's why I play hockey: I want to win. That's what we're aiming to do."

Montour and Guhle not expected to face former teams

By Louie Dibiase

WGR 550

October 16, 2019

Two defenseman part of a 2018 trade between the Sabres and Anaheim Ducks likely will not be on the ice tonight in Orange County to take on their former team.

Sabres D Brandon Montour has missed the first six regular season games for Buffalo dealing with a hand injury, while former Sabres defenseman Brendan Guhle has been out the last two games for Anaheim with a lower-body injury.

A 2nd round pick in 2015, Guhle spent four seasons with Buffalo and Rochester before getting dealt last February, along with a 1st round pick for Montour.

Guhle appeared in just six games with the Ducks last year, finishing with one point.

Like his new team, Guhle has started fast in 2019 with two points in the first four games before his injury.

The lower-body injury kept Guhle out of team practices this week, putting his status in doubt for tonight.

As for Montour, the 25-year old could return from his hand injury within the next two weeks but there isn't the same possibility that he returns to the ice against the Ducks tonight.

Both teams have invested a good amount of belief and compensation for the two young defenseman.

Their returns should only add to the hot starts of the Sabres and Ducks, who are a combined 9-2-1 in the regular season.

Sabres' Sheary returns to practice

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 15, 2019

(WGR 550) - The Sabres practiced in Anaheim on Tuesday. Sabres.com reported that Conor Sheary was back at practice. Instead of being week-to-week he was updated to day-to-day. The Sabres say Sheary was an extra on the line rushes.

The Sabres also reported that Ralph Krueger updated the status of assistant coach Don Granato who has been battling a severe case of pneumonia. Krueger told reporters, "Don is doing much better. We're just taking our time on that. We're being patient. He's attached to us. He's in the coaching room with us in spirit and communicating with us in a very healthy way so we're pleased he's on the right track."

The Sabres play the Ducks on Wednesday.

Jimmy Vesey happy with Sabres, says start has been ‘good and bad’

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 15, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres winger Jimmy Vesey has quickly learned to like what his new city offers, including the easy drive to work.

Vesey, who spent three seasons with the New York Rangers, already knows he can get anywhere in about 15 or 20 minutes.

“There’s a big convenience factor, I think, in terms of commuting and everything like that,” Vesey said prior to Monday afternoon’s 4-0 win over the Dallas Stars. “I’m settling in nice.”

Vesey, 26, said he has “absolutely no complaints” about joining Sabres, who traded the Rangers a 2021 third-round pick on July 1 for him.

“Everything’s been pretty smooth,” he said of his transition. “Everyone here has welcomed me.”

On the ice, however, Vesey has struggled a bit, going pointless in his first six outings entering Wednesday’s road game against the Anaheim Ducks.

“It’s been, I guess, good and bad,” Vesey said.

The good is Vesey’s defensive play.

In addition to giving him penalty-killing duty, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger has also utilized Vesey late in games. Last week, for example, he promoted the former Hobey Baker Award winner to replace rookie Victor Olofsson on the top line in a tight contest.

“Jimmy has accepted any role,” Krueger said. “I feel confident with him anywhere in the lineup. He’s a player you like to have as a coach.”

Vesey started killing penalties again last season for the first time since his college days at Harvard.

“I guess people really wouldn’t think of me as that ... but (in) college I was killing penalties and playing late in games as well,” he said. “So I think I have it in my ability. It’s nice to get rewarded here right off the bat.”

He added: “Defensively, I’ve played a solid game. ... I feel good about that, in terms our line.”

Still, Vesey’s line – he has spent all season at left wing beside center Casey Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary or Evan Rodrigues – has been the Sabres’ weakest.

Contributions up and down the lineup have buoyed the Sabres’ sizzling 5-0-1 start. But other than Sheary’s goal opening night, the Sabres’ first of the season, the line hasn’t contributed any offense.

Sheary, who’s day-to-day with an upper-body injury, scored one even-strength goal before getting hurt. Mittelstadt has mustered just one assist five-on-five. Rodrigues has zero points in three games.

The line, Krueger said, must generate more “O-zone time, get more cycles going.”

“Shifts have been too short in that category,” Krueger said. “(They) need to take example of Larsson line.”

The combination of center Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo has outplayed Vesey’s trio, surpassing it on the depth chart.

Vesey’s line is now the fourth. He has averaged 11 minutes, 56 seconds of ice time this season, about four minutes less than last year.

Shortly after Krueger spoke Monday, Vesey's crew enjoyed its best game this season, producing a gaudy Corsi For – the percentage of shot attempts by the team while the line is on the ice five-on-five – of 80, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

Early in the second period, the line played in the Dallas zone so long the crowd inside KeyBank Center began roaring.

"We got to establish ourselves more in the offensive zone and be a little bit harder on pucks," Vesey said before the game. "That will bring more scoring chances and more goals."

Vesey has scored 17 goals, including 16 at even strength, in each of the last two seasons, so he has a history of posting solid numbers.

Two years ago, he went pointless in his first eight games before finishing strongly.

After last season's collapse, is there any reason to believe this season's Sabres are the real deal?

By Jared Clinton
The Hockey News
October 15, 2019

If the Buffalo Sabres were to approach their current run of early season success with some cautious optimism, it wouldn't be without reason. After all, the Sabres – matter of fact, many of these very same Sabres – know a thing or two about what early season success really means. Just ask them about last season.

As you'll recall, there was a time last season when Buffalo sat atop the NHL. On the heels of a solid October, the Sabres ran roughshod through their November schedule. Beginning with an overtime victory over the Montreal Canadiens, which was followed by a shootout win against the Vancouver Canucks, the Sabres proceeded to go on a 10-game winning streak that seemingly defied all logic. Not because it was Buffalo doing the winning, mind you, but because the Sabres had managed to keep the streak alive by the narrowest of margins: seven of the 10 victories came by way of extra time and all but one was won by a single goal.

But the excitement surrounding the streak – and the streak itself – belied reality in Buffalo. Sure, the Sabres were atop the NHL when they woke up on Nov. 28, 2018, but the truth was that Buffalo was a middling team riding an unsustainable numbers and a logic-defying run to unrealistic expectations. And if it wasn't clear at the time that the winning streak was something of an illusion, it most certainly became clear when the same Sabres who came out of that streak with a 17-6-2 record won only 16 of their final 57 contests.

So, again, to say the Sabres might be waking up Tuesday, glancing at their 5-0-1 record, plus-12 goal differential and place atop the Atlantic Division and tempering expectations isn't all that far-fetched. But there's also reason to be far more hopeful about what this season's early performance suggests about what we might see out of Buffalo from here on out.

During last season's winning streak, one of the biggest concerns for the Sabres was that what we were seeing in the box score wasn't necessarily reflected in the underlying numbers. Yes, Buffalo was winning on the scoreboard where it matters, but nothing about the way they were winning those games suggested the Sabres could realistically keep piling up the victories. In fact, through October last season, nearly every notable advanced statistic had Buffalo in the bottom half of the NHL. Their Corsi percentage (49.4), shots percentage (49.2), expected goals percentage (50.1), scoring chance percentage (47.4) and high-danger chance percentage (48.2) at 5-on-5 all ranked in the 16th or lower in the league. And that persisted through the winning streak. The Sabres' numbers had actually all declined to various degrees by the time they had their 10-game run snapped.

What was happening both before and during the run, however, was that Buffalo's 5-on-5 PDO, a measure of combined shooting and save percentage, was among the highest in the league. By the streak's end, only eight teams had a higher PDO than the Sabres' 101.2 mark and that allowed Buffalo to outpace what their underlying numbers said about their ability to actually control the run of play. But once the PDO began to fall back to earth – and fall back to earth it did, as Buffalo finished with a 98.7 PDO, the league's third-lowest mark – so, too, did the Sabres.

But that brings us to this season. Over the course of the summer, Buffalo went through a slight roster overhaul. Brought aboard were defensemen Colin Miller and Henri Jokiharju, versatile forwards Jimmy Vesey and Marcus Johansson and, maybe most importantly, there was a change made behind the bench. Out is coach Phil Housley, who won only 58 of 164 games across two seasons in Buffalo, and in is Ralph Krueger, who made his return to an NHL bench after a foray into the world of European club soccer. And the early results have been promising.

True, a cursory glance at NaturalStatTrick suggests some of the same good puck-luck fortune is benefitting Buffalo in the early going. Through six games, an admittedly tiny sample, the Sabres rank 13th in the NHL with a 9.8 shooting percentage at 5-on-5 and a five-a-side SP of .956, second in the league. The result is a 105.4 PDO, the third-highest mark in the NHL. But Buffalo also appears to be playing a much more possession-heavy – and defensively limiting – game.

Again, while this comes the sizeable caveat that we're less than three weeks into the new campaign, take a moment to consider the difference in the Sabres' underlying numbers this season compared to where they were

when coming out of the 10-game winning streak last season, specifically when it comes to suppression. Compared to Buffalo's per 60 minute rates at 5-on-5 as of Nov. 27 last season, this season's Sabres are allowing 5.3 fewer shot attempts against, 3.9 fewer shots against, 5.3 fewer scoring chances against and 6.3 fewer high-danger chances. The result is increases in the respective percentages ranging from 2.5 to nearly 16 percent. With that comes an increase to expected goals percentage of 3.4 percent. (Actual goals for percentage, for what it's worth, is up 17.3 percent entering Tuesday.)

The challenge for the Sabres, of course, is maintaining these rates for the long haul. As noted a few times, and it can't be stressed enough, it's still incredibly early and we shouldn't go making any declarations one way or another after anything less than 20 games. That said, if Buffalo can maintain this level of underlying performance, continue to drive play while suppressing the opposition attack, it could very well be the difference between the Sabres running their playoff drought to nine seasons or stopping it in its tracks and getting their first taste of the post-season since the 2010-11 campaign. And for the sake of Sabres fans everywhere, here's hoping that this time the early season success isn't a mirage.

Hutton, Ullmark enjoying early success under Bales

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 15, 2019

ANAHEIM - Ralph Krueger has stressed since the start of training camp that the Sabres feel confident with either of their two goalies in net. Never has that been more evident than in their past two wins.

Linus Ullmark got the nod against the Florida Panthers on Friday. He stopped 41 shots, then blanked the Panthers in the shootout to secure a 3-2 victory. It was his second performance of 40-plus saves in as many starts this season.

The Sabres turned to Carter Hutton for their next game, against the Dallas Stars on Monday afternoon. He turned away all 25 of the shots he faced for his first shutout with the organization, staying undefeated through four appearances.

With a condensed schedule resulting from the team's trip to Sweden in November, Krueger has said it's imperative that either goalie is prepared to start on any given day. So far, they have been.

"A lot of it is the fact that they both get to play then they both feel like they have a little bit of a rhythm going," assistant coach Mike Bales, who works with the goaltenders, said. "One guy's not going to sit for too long. So, they always feel game-ready because of that too. It helps a lot.

"You can practice all you want, but when you get into games it feels a little bit different. The traditional, old-school way of doing it where you have one guy play 65 games and the backup would come in and mop up once in a while, wouldn't get that many starts, was tough on backups for rhythm and feeling ready so I think having two guys going all the time helps them be ready when they do play."

Hutton and Ullmark have combined to produce a .956 save percentage at 5-on-5, second in the NHL to the Boston Bruins and one spot ahead of Buffalo's next opponent, the Anaheim Ducks.

The duo is working with a new coach in Bales, who joined the team this summer following two seasons as the goaltending coach for the Carolina Hurricanes. He previously served in the same role for the Pittsburgh Penguins, winning the Stanley Cup in 2016 and 2017.

His title in Buffalo is assistant coach rather than goalie coach, which Krueger said is more than just a name. In addition to selecting the team's order for the shootout - an area in which the Sabres are 2-0 going back to this preseason - Bales offers his perspective on other areas of the team's game from up in the press box.

"Mike is much more than a goalie coach," Krueger said. "... He's up there looking for specific things that we decide before the game and he's relaying them down during the game. Then also in our postgame analysis, he has a different perspective as we had on the bench.

"... Just a very wise, experienced coach. Although everybody has their specialty, he's much more than a goalie coach, for sure."

Though he works on technical aspects of the game with his goaltenders, Ullmark has appreciated Bales' knack for getting to know his goalies as people.

"It's different for every person that you work with and the same thing goes with goalie coaches," Ullmark said. "Some goalie coaches might not have the social skills or the mental skills that some other guys have, and some guys are way better when it comes to the technical part of the game. ... Mike kind of brings both these things together in a very easy-to-understand mindset, for me at least."

Ullmark went on to explain that Bales is as concerned with his goalies' mentality as he is their play.

"We're just trying to build on good habits when it comes to coming into the rink, leaving the rink," he said. "I've very open. Hutts is very open. We chat about everything. Sometimes, you don't need to necessarily talk about being a better goalie. It's just being a better person.

"You might have a rough day or whatever. Then it's probably not the best time to start talking technical things. ... It might be better to just talk and figure out that part first. Then tomorrow, we can talk about goaltending."

Krueger offers an update on Granato

Assistant coach Don Granato has been away from the team since being hospitalized with severe pneumonia in late September, though it hasn't stopped him from offering his input.

Krueger said he spoke recently with Granato, who has been watching games on his own and providing feedback from a distance.

"Don is doing much better," Krueger said. "We're just taking our time on that. We're being patient. He's attached to us. He's in the coaching room with us in spirit and communicating with us in a very healthy way so we're pleased he's on the right track."

Rochester Americans head coach Chris Taylor continues to serve as an assistant on the Buffalo bench in Granato's absence.

Tuesday's practice

Conor Sheary was back on the ice with the team for the first time since sustaining an upper-body injury in Columbus on Oct. 7. Krueger said the forward's status has been upgraded to day-to-day.

"Conor's feeling better," Krueger said. "We'll assess him this afternoon. He's still day-to-day but looking good and back in the group."

Curtis Lazar also skated with the team after being recalled from Rochester on Saturday. He worked in with the forwards, with the lines otherwise unchanged from the Sabres' last three wins:

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
27 Curtis Lazar - 43 Conor Sheary

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

58 John Gilmour

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

Mr. California

With the Sabres set to begin their California road trip in Anaheim on Wednesday, we surveyed the dressing room to find out which player gives off the most Cali vibes.

Spoiler: Almost all of them said Jeff Skinner.