



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Strome Scores Twice as Rangers Down Sabres 6-2

By Allan Kreda

Associated Press

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK (AP) — The Rangers were especially eager to earn a home victory against the high-flying Buffalo Sabres to stem a series of subpar results. Three first-period goals and a through effort sparked the home team and a solid win ensued.

Ryan Strome scored his first two goals this season and Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves as New York snapped a five-game losing streak with a 6-2 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night.

"That was obviously a good game," said Strome, who had 18 goals for the Rangers last season after joining them in a trade from Edmonton. "Regardless of who produced, we needed that one as a team. It feels good right now. We worked hard for that one."

The Rangers have been struggling since opening the season with two wins, followed by five defeats — the most recent in overtime to the Arizona Coyotes on Tuesday. Against the resurgent Sabres, who had eight wins in their first 10 games, the Rangers came out with pace and received goals from Artemi Panarin, Brett Howden and Strome in the opening period.

Panarin, who signed a seven-year \$81.5 million free agent contract last July, started the scoring with an unassisted goal at 11:41. Panarin corralled a loose puck along the right boards before swooping in and beating Sabres goaltender Carter Hutton for his fifth goal of the season. Panarin has points in last three games and five of the team's eight contests this season.

Howden made it 2-0 when he tapped the puck past Hutton at 14:32 for his second goal this season. Assists went to Brady Skjei and Jesper Fast.

Strome added to the lead with a tip-in at 19:22 with assists to Skjei and Tony DeAngelo. Strome's goal represented the 200th point of his NHL career.

"There was a lot of communication out there," Howden said. "We were really helping each other."

The Rangers held a 10-7 shots advantage after the first period but the Sabres had the better of play in the second, outshooting the home team 15-4.

Defenseman Marco Scandella put Buffalo on the board with an unassisted goal at 4:17 of the second before DeAngelo restored the three-goal lead with his third goal in two games at 13:20. Skjei and Pavel Buchnevich assisted on DeAngelo's fourth goal of the season.

Buffalo's Vladimir Sobotka narrowed the deficit to 4-2 when he scored at 19:11 of the second, beating Lundqvist for his first goal this season. Kyle Okposo and Marcus Johansson registered assists.

The teams traded chances in the third until Strome extended the lead to 5-2 with this second goal of the night, completing a two-on-one with Howden at 7:57 as the teams skated four-on-four.

"Most important is that guys know their identity and it worked out tonight," added the 26-year-old Strome, who has points in five of the last six games. "It was a good statement game that we had it in us to beat a team that's 8-1-1."

Chris Kreider completed the scoring with his first of the season at 18:44 of the third. Rookie defenseman Adam Fox had an assist - his first NHL point - and Fast added his second assist of the contest.

"We didn't show the Rangers enough respect and they punished us for it," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "There were so many moments where we felt like we were getting back into it. We just couldn't recover from the hole we dug ourselves into."

Rangers coach David Quinn continued reshuffling lines in search of new combinations as the season evolves. Against the Sabres, Quinn had Panarin alongside Strome and Buchnevich while heralded rookie right wing Kaapo Kakko was on a line with center Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider.

"It was a good step in the right direction. I give our leaders a ton of credit," Quinn said. "It wasn't just the lines. A lot of guys came here with purpose tonight."

The loss was the first for Hutton after six wins and starts this season as the Sabres fell to 1-5-2 in their last eight meetings with the Rangers.

With his 451st career win, Lundqvist moved to within three victories of Curtis Joseph for fifth place on the all-time list. The 37-year-old Swedish netminder also made his 862nd career appearance, passing Jean Ratelle for sixth-most appearances as a Ranger.

"We were patient. We played hard, waited for breakdowns and we took advantage," Lundqvist said. "It was great to see. It's important to understand how you win games in this league."

NOTES: The Rangers are 16-4-0 against Buffalo since Apr. 19, 2013 . The teams will meet Feb. 7 in New York and March 22 in Buffalo . The Rangers scratched forward Micheal Haley . The Sabres scratched forward Evan Rodrigues and defenseman John Gilmour ... The contest marked the 1,999th regular season game played by the Rangers at the current Madison Square Garden, which opened in 1968. ... The game marked the return of forward Jimmy Vesey, who was traded to the Sabres last summer after three seasons with the Rangers.

Up Next:

Rangers: Host Boston Bruins on Sunday night.

Sabres: Visit Detroit Red Wings on Friday night.

Sabres glad to escape from New York after a dud of a night

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK -- Start spreadin' the news: Duds happen to every NHL team over the course of an 82-game season. Did you forget that in the midst of the joyride that was the Buffalo Sabres' 8-1-1 start?

The Sabres took some cold water to the face Thursday night in a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden. It wasn't a standard blowout by any means as Buffalo outshot the Rangers, 33-24, and had 27 more shot attempts in the game.

But the Sabres made some big mistakes with the puck that turned into goals and couldn't convert on many good chances. The Rangers took the ice with a 2-4-1 record and on a five-game losing streak, but they took it to a Buffalo team that entered the night atop the NHL's overall standing. It was 3-0 after one period and the Sabres never caught up.

"It was a very strange game," said coach Ralph Krueger. "First of all, we put ourselves in the hole for sure with the puck management or lack of. But there were so many moments where you felt you were getting back into it."

It was a particularly tough night for Rasmus Dahlin, who was on the ice for four New York goals and posted a minus-3 rating for just the third time in his 93-game career over the last two seasons.

Dahlin got pickpocketed in the neutral zone by Artemi Panarin in the first period and the Rangers' big-ticket free agent evaded a Carter Hutton pokecheck and calmly slid the puck into an empty net to give New York a 1-0 lead it would not relinquish. On New York's second goal, Dahlin couldn't block a pass across the crease to Brett Howden, who got an easy tap-in on Hutton.

"I got the puck a little far from my body and I should just play it easy," Dahlin said of the Panarin goal. "I tried to make a pass, but it didn't work and they scored. That's a learning (thing) for me."

"I thought he was going to have a little more pressure so I got aggressive with a pokecheck and Panarin made me look pretty silly on that one," Hutton said. "But that's what good players do. They take advantage of mistakes."

As a 33-year-old veteran, Hutton could only smile sheepishly when asked about Panarin's poise with the puck. Hutton isn't the first goalie to get toasted by the \$81.5 million player nicknamed "The Bread Man."

"I think my stick is a lot slower than an NHL defenseman's and he walks around and makes me look pretty silly," Hutton said. "It's one of those ones you live and die by it. I live by my reads and he made me pay."

Dahlin has 10 points in 11 games but is now minus-2 on the season. His sophomore year has seen more prominent struggles with the puck in the defensive zone at times than during his rookie season.

So Dahlin said he was quite happy the Sabres have a game Friday in Detroit, rather than having to sit on this effort for a few days.

"Obviously I didn't have my best game today but I have to refocus for tomorrow too," he said. "Stuff happens on the ice and you can't think about it too much. ... I'm learning every day. I've got a lot to improve in the D-zone. I'm working on it, so hopefully it can get better for tomorrow."

Dahlin, of course, was hardly the only player to endure a faux pas in this one.

Casey Mittelstadt didn't tie up Ryan Strome's stick and the Rangers center deflected home a point shot with 38 seconds left in the first period for New York's third goal. And Jack Eichel's blind back pass at the New York line was intercepted and Strome scored on the ensuing 2-on-1 to put the Rangers ahead, 5-2, midway through the third.

"I don't think it was a 6-2 game," Hutton said. "Quite a few breaks and bounces but we gave up a lot of East-West plays and they made us pay."

"The growth process doesn't change depending on a score of a game," Krueger said. "We are still making mistakes. We made mistakes in past games and we were able to find ways to win. Today, we just couldn't recover from the hole we dug ourselves into."

The Wraparound: Rangers 6, Sabres 2

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK – A terrible first period proved ruinous for the Buffalo Sabres Thursday night as they gave up three goals and never caught up in a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden.

The Sabres fell to 8-2-1 as they endured the end of their second three-game winning streak of the season. The Rangers (3-4-1) snapped a five-game losing streak.

New York took a 3-0 lead through 20 minutes in a rare offensive outburst. The Rangers had scored just five goals in the first period in their first seven games -- and had not scored more than twice in any of their previous five games as they went 0-4-1.

Injury report: The Sabres lost defenseman Marco Scandella and forward Jimmy Vesey to injury in the second period and only Scandella returned for the third -- but he did not take a shift. Vesey, playing his return game against his old team, appeared to take a slash to the hand or midsection from teammate Brady Skeji. Scandella limped off but it wasn't clear where his injury occurred.

Thievery: The Rangers took a 1-0 lead as Artemi Panarin pickpocketed Rasmus Dahlin and then deked around Carter Hutton to drop the puck into an empty net at 11:41 of the first period. It ended a stretch of 7 minutes, 38 seconds without a faceoff.

Trouble: Brett Howden made it 2-0 on a tap-in at 14:32 and Ryan Strome deflected home a Skeji shot in front of Casey Mittelstadt for his first of the year with 38 seconds left in the period to make it 3-0.

Much better second: The Sabres outshot the Rangers, 15-4, in the middle period and got goals from Scandella at 4:17 and Vladimir Sobotka at 19:11. But they were sandwiched around a Tony DeAngelo goal at 13:20 and the Rangers emerged from the period with a 4-2 lead.

Coup de grace: The Sabres had some heavy pressure going in the third period but Strome put the game away on a 2-on-1 with 12:03 left. It was a tap-in off a Howden pass after a giveaway by Jack Eichel at the Rangers' blue line. Chris Kreider had a puck bounce off him into the net for the final goal with 1:15 to play.

Scoring first: The Sabres have netted the opening goal eight times in 11 games but have given it up the last two. This was just the second time this season this season they have trailed after 40 minutes.

Net shift: The Sabres had alternated starting goaltenders for the last nine games but broke the pattern by using Hutton for a second straight game. Hutton, who entered the game second in the NHL in both goals-against average (1.65) and save percentage (.943), made just 19 saves on 25 shots but didn't appear to have much chance on any of the goals.

"It's just never marrying a process in the lineup the same all the time," coach Ralph Krueger said a couple hours prior to faceoff. "We just felt it was a good one to mix it up. Of course, you do look a little bit at history but it was not the deciding factor here today. It was just a gut feel that we thought this was a good one for Carter."

The history, however, was real. Hutton entered the game 4-1, 1.48/.953 against New York in his career while Linus Ullmark was 0-2, 4.04/.846.

History books: The game was the 2,000th all-time regular-season NHL contest at the current Garden, which opened in 1968. That was 1,999 home games for the Rangers and one game for the Philadelphia Flyers against the Oakland Seals on March 3, 1968, due to wind damage to the roof at the Spectrum. The Rangers play No. 2,000 for them and 2,001 for the building here Sunday against Boston.

The Sabres fell to 33-38-5 with 15 ties here since they were born in 1970 and that includes one of the more emotional games in Garden annals. Buffalo suffered a 5-4 overtime loss on Oct. 7, 2001, in the first Rangers

regular-season game after the 9/11 attacks. For the only time in their history, the Sabres wore red and black jerseys that said "New York" down the front as a tribute to the stricken city and its fallen first responders.

Next: The Sabres flew to Detroit immediately after the game and will meet the reeling Red Wings for the first time this season Friday night at 7:30 in Little Caesars Arena. The Wings are 3-7 and have lost six straight, including Wednesday's 5-2 decision in Ottawa.

Vesey's return to New York comes as he finds comfort in Buffalo

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK -- Jimmy Vesey has spent the last two days back in the Big Apple. The Sabres winger is comfortable here after playing the last three seasons for the New York Rangers and is getting more comfortable with his new team, even though he entered Thursday without a goal in the first 10 games.

"Even for the last 4-5 games, I've felt better and better," Vesey said prior to the game in Madison Square Garden. "It feels like our line is starting to click. It seems like in California and on Tuesday (at home against San Jose), we're in the offensive zone every time we're out there. It's good for me to hold on to some pucks and make some plays. I feel like I'm knocking on the door to get one to go in for me."

As Vesey said, he had assists in two of the three games out West, had three shots on goal in the opener at Anaheim and also had three in Tuesday's game.

Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger gave it up to Vesey by putting him on the ice for the opening faceoff Thursday against his old team with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. Vesey had an uneventful 37-second shift and then returned to his normal line with Casey Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary.

"We know Jimmy would like to be producing more but we're not upset with him in any way, shape or form," Krueger said. "We like the way he's come in here, taken on his role and become an important penalty killer for us. ... He's working hard in both directions and we like the way he's embraced that style of play and the offense is going to come."

Vesey went to dinner in Manhattan on Wednesday with his former Rangers center, Ryan Strome, and New York defensemen Brady Skeji and Tony DeAngelo.

"He's a good buddy of ours and it was good to see him last night," Strome said. "He's happy. the team is doing really well. He's very optimistic and having a good time. I've been traded twice and I know how it feels. It can be strange but it was good to see him doing well."

"It was good to see those guys. I was close with them and obviously we're all excited for this game," Vesey said. "It's all a little weird. I've never entered the building this way. Couldn't find where the sticks were. Everything is a little different but it's always good to be back in New York. You have to look at it as just another game once you get past the first couple of shifts."

Vesey said he's noted how Mittelstadt has kicked some offense into his game in recent starts and hopes he can follow the same plan. Krueger said putting a player on a special teams role even when he's not producing offensively is a way a coach can kick-start some confidence.

"It's good for the mindset," Krueger said. "He's definitely somebody that can help our power play too if need be. We had him there a lot in preseason and know what we can do."

"It's a lot of fun," Vesey said of his PK work. "I got a chance to be on it last year and this year I'm getting more time. It's a real challenge that's fun and a big part of today's game. (Vladimir Sobotka) and I are still figuring out reads off each other since we're not together 5-on-5 but we've been good so far."

Rangers winger Kaapo Kakko, the No. 2 overall pick in the June draft, got a chance on his team's top line for the first time this season Thursday night playing with Chris Kreider and center Mika Zibanejad.

Kakko entered the game with just one goal and one assist and told a Finnish reporter here Sunday he's disturbed by his start. He's averaging just over 14 1/2 minutes per game and played only 9:31 on Tuesday in an overtime loss to Arizona.

"Hockey isn't very much fun for me right now," Kakko told Eastside Media. "Things haven't been working out, and sometimes I feel like I could be on the ice a bit more. It would be cool to get a chance on the first line at some point. I understand that it hasn't been realistic so far, since I haven't really showed much."

Kakko doubled down on that interview in English with reporters here Wednesday.

"I'm playing bad hockey. Of course [it's not fun] because we are not winning the games right now," he said. "But, hopefully it's getting better. Like, next game, maybe I feel better."

What's it like for the Rangers coach David Quinn to see his former Boston University star Jack Eichel continue on the road to stardom with the Sabres? "I won't like it tonight," said a smiling Quinn. "Listen, I'm not surprised. This is a guy who's got world-class talent and a world-class work ethic. He's off to an incredible start."

Sabres game day: Rangers are reeling heading into Buffalo's MSG visit

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK – The Buffalo Sabres are 8-1-1 and a major surprise atop the NHL's overall standing with 17 points. Now comes another new challenge: Just 10 games into the Ralph Krueger regime, they've hit a quick road trip with two games against brutally struggling teams. By all rights, the Sabres should collect four points on this trip. But how will they handle prosperity?

The Sabres play the New York Rangers tonight in Madison Square Garden and the Blueshirts (2-4-1) are 30th overall and have lost five straight (0-4-1). Friday night's game in Detroit is against a reeling 29th-place club that is 3-7 and has dropped six in a row.

The Sabres, meanwhile, have won three straight for the second time this season and have matched the second-best start through 10 games in their history, surpassed only by the 10-0 run to open the 2006-07 campaign.

As is now their custom most of the time on the day of a game, the Sabres will not have a morning skate today and Krueger will hold his daily briefing in the late afternoon. The Rangers skated at Madison Square Garden, where their home losing streak hit three games with Tuesday's 3-2 overtime loss to Arizona.

This year's records aside, this one figures to be far from easy for the Sabres. They are just 1-4-2 in their last seven games against the Rangers – and 4-13-2 in the last 19 meetings overall. Things have been equally tough on the road, as Buffalo is only 2-7-1 in its last 10 trips to the Garden and has lost its last three visits.

History at the World's Most Famous Arena: Tonight's game is the 2,000th all-time regular-season NHL game at the current Garden, which opened in 1968 (1,999 home games for the Rangers, and one home game for Philadelphia against the Oakland Seals on March 3, 1968, due to wind damage to the roof at the Spectrum).

The Sabres are 33-37-5 with 15 ties here since they were born in 1970 and that includes one of the more emotional games in the building's history. The Sabres suffered a 5-4 overtime loss on Oct. 7, 2001, in the first Rangers regular-season game after the 9/11 attacks. For the only time in their history, the Sabres wore red and black jerseys that said "New York" down the front as a tribute to the stricken city and its fallen first responders.

In the net: If the Sabres follow their pattern of alternating netminders that has stretched for nine straight games, it will be an all-Swedish matchup in goal as Buffalo's Linus Ullmark would face longtime Rangers stalwart Henrik Lundqvist.

It will be interesting, however, to see if the Sabres have cause to break their pattern and instead play Ullmark tomorrow in Detroit because of career numbers against the Rangers. That's because Carter Hutton is 4-1, 1.48/.953 against New York in his career while Ullmark is 0-2, 4.04/.846.

Lundqvist (1-3-0, 3.57/.906) is expected to make his 862nd career appearance as a Ranger tonight, passing Jean Ratelle for the sixth-most appearances as a Ranger (skater or goalie) in franchise history. In his last 13 games against the Sabres, Lundqvist's is 9-3-0, 2.10/.930.

Hutton is now second in the NHL by a whisker in goals-against average (1.65), save percentage (.943) and wins (6). The respective leaders are Minnesota's Alex Stalock (1.64), Boston's Tuukka Rask and Arizona's Darcy Kuemper (.944) and Vegas' Marc-Andre Fleury (7)

Not much firepower: Mika Zibanejad and premier free agent signee Artemi Panarin have four goals apiece – and all other Rangers forward combined have just five so far. Four-time 20-goal man Chris Kreider, who equaled his career high with 28 goals last year has yet to score. Finnish winger Kaapo Kakko, the No. 2 overall pick in the June draft, has one goal and one assist with a minus-6 rating.

Kakko is averaging just over 14 1/2 minutes per game and played only 9:31 on Tuesday. He told a Finnish reporter on Sunday he's disturbed by his start.

"Hockey isn't very much fun for me right now," Kakko told Eastside Media. "Things haven't been working out, and sometimes I feel like I could be on the ice a bit more. It would be cool to get a chance on the first line at some point. I understand that it hasn't been realistic so far, since I haven't really showed much."

Kakko doubled down on that interview in English with reporters here Wednesday.

"I'm playing bad hockey. Of course [it's not fun] because we are not winning the games right now," he said. "But, hopefully it's getting better. Like, next game, maybe I feel better."

Kakko will be getting the chance he wants tonight because he skated on the top line in practice Wednesday with Zibanejad and Kreider and will stay with them for the game.

"You see Mika Zibanejad as your center, you automatically get a new level of confidence," Rangers coach David Quinn said Wednesday. "It beats playing with me. He's in a much better position mentally if he sees that Mika Zibanejad is his center and Chris Kreider is his left winger."

Panarin has been on Zibanejad's wing all season but will likely move down a rung tonight to play with Pavel Buchnevich on the right and Ryan Strome as the No. 2 center.

Vesey returns: Sabres winger Jimmy Vesey will be playing his first game against his former teammates after spending three years with the Rangers. Vesey has just two assists in 10 games but had perhaps his strongest overall game for Buffalo Tuesday against San Jose, including quality time on the penalty kill.

Vesey has been playing on the fourth line with Casey Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary and that line's impact has been on the rise. Mittelstadt has three goals and two assists in the last three games and earned plenty of praise Wednesday from NHL Network analyst Kevin Weekes.

"He's a good buddy of ours and it was good to see him at dinner last night," Rangers center Ryan Strome, one of Vesey's most prominent linemates last season, said today. "He's happy. The team is doing really well. He's very optimistic and having a good time. I've been traded twice and I know how it feels but it was good to see him doing well. It's a bit of a desperate game for us. As much as I want him to do well, we have to take care of our own business tonight."

Don't mess with a good thing: Barring a surprise injury or illness, the Sabres don't need to fix what isn't broken and should have the same lineup. That means Evan Rodrigues and John Gilmour remain healthy scratches.

Quinn on Eichel: What's it like for the Rangers coach to see his former Boston University star Jack Eichel continue on the road to stardom? "I won't like it tonight," said a smiling Quinn. "Listen, I'm not surprised. This is a guy who's got world-class talent and a world-class work ethic. He's off to an incredible start."

Pine time: Former Sabres draft pick Brendan Lemieux, who has no goals and one assist in six games, got only one shift over the final 14:20 of Tuesday's game for the Rangers.

"I thought Lemieux had a tough night," said Quinn. "We ended up taking a penalty because Lemieux turned it over. But [Lemieux] has played well for us. I just thought it was one of those nights he didn't have it."

Lemieux was taken 31st overall by the Sabres with the first pick of the second round in the 2014 draft but was dealt to Winnipeg eight months later in the Evander Kane trade, in part because he told the Sabres he wouldn't sign with them and wanted a trade.

The Sabres get outworked in a 6-2 loss to the Rangers

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 24, 2019

CATEGORIES: Sabres News Our Opinions

(WGR 550) - The Sabres got sloppy on Thursday against the Rangers allowing New York to break its five-game losing streak.

Buffalo had a lot of good chances on Henrik Lundqvist, but continually shot wide until the goaltender made great saves in the third.

I can't tell you how many times the Sabres had outnumbered situations and shot wide.

Jeff Skinner seemed to lose his composure in the third period. He took one penalty and then had an obvious high sticking penalty and then started arguing. About what? Taking six minutes in penalties when you're down two goals to start a period is not ideal and very selfish, especially when you're Buffalo's best pure goal scorer.

Things got goofy for the Sabres when it came to handling the puck. Midway through the first period Rasmus Dahlin got the yips and Artemi Panarin took it from him and walked in to score on Carter Hutton.

Just 2:51 later, Colin Miller went into the corner with no support and two Rangers bearing down on him. New York came out with the puck and Brett Howden scored on a layup.

It was 3-0 before the period ended as Casey Mittelstadt covered Ryan Strome in front, but was on the wrong side of him and Strome tipped it in.

As I look through my notes the Sabres had Marco Scandella hit the crossbar, Sam Reinhart was stopped twice in tight and then Skinner was wide open and missed the net on a power play, Jack Eichel made a nice move on a 3-on-2, but missed the net, Jimmy Vesey was robbed by Lundqvist on a 2-on-1, Jake McCabe shot wide on a shorthanded 2-on-1, Rasmus Dahlin had a slick drag move in front, but Lundqvist made the save, Marcus Johansson shot wide on a 2-on-1 and Conor Sheary missed two Grade-A chances in the third period.

Carter Hutton came into the game allowing just ten goals in six games, but all six were scored on him. It was also Hutton's first loss of the season after going 5-0-0.

The Sabres had very little support for each other in their own end and made poor decisions with the puck.

At the other end they did force Lundqvist into 31 saves. The future Hall-of-Famer is now 22-13-2 against the Sabres in his career.

Buffalo has already lost to a slumping team in this road trip and lace them up again Friday in Detroit. The Red Wings have lost six straight.

Sabres upended by the Rangers, 6-2

WGR 550

October 24, 2019

Three first period goals for the New York Rangers helped pace the team to a 6-2 win over the Sabres on Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

Buffalo was whistled for a too-many men on the ice penalty less than two minutes into the contest. However, the team did not allow a shot on goal during the penalty kill. The closest chance the Blueshirts came to a shot on goal was a slap shot that was re-directed by Jake McCabe over the glass and out of play.

Artemi Panarin collected his fifth goal of the season after picking up the puck just inside of the Sabres' blue line and beating Carter Hutton. Panarin slid the puck into an open net after Hutton's poke check did not knock the puck away from the forward's stick. The goal that made it 1-0 New York was unassisted.

New York added to their lead over five minutes later after they were able to collect a loose puck and convert on a rebound chance. Brett Howden was on the receiving end of a puck that was kept in the Sabres' zone and sent to the front of the net. Howden scored on his second chance after nearly missing the first time, making it 2-0. The goal was assisted by Jesper Fast and Brendan Lemieux.

Buffalo's first power play of the night came courtesy of a Chris Kreider hooking minor. The Sabres failed to score on their chance, remaining down a pair of goals. But the Rangers added to their lead with less than a minute to go in the first period, making it 3-0. Brady Skjei took a shot from the point that was tipped by Ryan Strome for his first goal of the season. Skjei and Tony DeAngelo assisted on the third goal of the frame.

The Sabres failed to convert on an odd-man rush early in the middle frame, but moments later got on the scoreboard thanks to traffic by the net. Marco Scandella's wrist shot from inside the blue line brought Buffalo within 3-1, after Henrik Lundqvist did not see the puck on its way to the net. Scandella's second goal of the year was unassisted.

New York regained their three-goal lead later in the second period on DeAngelo's second point of the night. The rear guard scored his fourth goal of the season to cap a period of sustained pressure by the Blueshirts. Pavel Buchnevich and Skjei assisted on the goal that made it 4-1 Rangers.

Vladimir Sobotka was able to score thanks to a bounce that went the blue and gold's way to bring the team back within two goals before the end of the middle stanza. A New York defenseman tried to block Sobotka's shot, but instead changed the direction of the shot that bounced its way into the back of the goal. The goal that made it 4-2 in favor of New York was assisted by Kyle Okposo and Marcus Johansson.

Jeff Skinner was whistled for tripping just over a minute into the third period to give New York their second power play chance of the night. Buffalo killed off that minor penalty, however his next shift he was penalized for high sticking and unsportsmanlike conduct.

Strome cashed in his second goal of the game after a Sabres' turnover in the offensive zone. Strome and Howden used a two-on-one chance to create the goal that made it 5-2 in favor of New York. The score also came while the two teams were skating four-on-four thanks to minor penalties by each team. A bounce off of Zemgus Girgensons in front of the Sabres' net went in added to the Rangers lead, 6-2. Kreider was credited with the final goal of the game, while Adam Fox and Libor Hajek assisted.

GAME SUMMARY

Scoring Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

NYR: 11:41- Artemi Panarin (5) (Unassisted); 14:32 - Brett Howden (2) (Jesper Fast, Brendan Lemieux); 19:22 - Ryan Strome (1) (Brady Skjei, Tony DeAngelo)

Second Period:

BUF: 4:17 - Marco Scandella (2) (Unassisted); 19:11 - Vladimir Sobotka (1) (Kyle Okposo, Marcus Johansson)
NYR: 13:20 - Tony DeAngelo (4) (Pavel Buchnevich, Brady Skjei)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

NYR: 7:57 - Ryan Strome (2) (Brett Howden); 18:44 - Chris Kreider (1) (Adam Fox, Libor Hajek)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 1:54 - Bench minor (Too many men on the ice - 2 min.)

NYR: 15:33 - Chris Kreider (Hooking - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

NYR: 14:42 - Lias Andersson (High sticking - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 1:06 - Jeff Skinner (Tripping - 2 min.); 5:00 - Jeff Skinner (High sticking - 2 min.); 5:00 - Jeff Skinner (Unsportsmanlike conduct - 2 min.)

NYR: 6:08 - Chris Kreider (Goaltender interference - 2 min.); 15:51 - Tony DeAngelo (Slashing - 2 min.)

Shots

BUF: 33 (7, 15, 11)

NYR: 24 (10, 4, 10)

Goalies

BUF: Carter Hutton - 18 saves

NYR: Henrik Lundqvist - 31 saves

Power Plays

BUF: 0 for 3 (0%)

NYR: 0 for 4 (0%)

Three Stars:

Ryan Strome (NYR)

Brett Howden (NYR)

Tony DeAngelo (NYR)

What's Next

The Sabres will finish up their quick two-game road trip on Friday night against the Detroit Red Wings at Little Caesars Arena. The puck drops at 7:30 p.m. on WGR with the Paul William Beltz Pre-Game Show starting at 6:30 p.m. with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog.

Friedman: Scandella trade something Sabres "may have to do"

WGR 550

October 24, 2019

After another disappointing finish in 2018-19, it seemed like a foregone conclusion that Sabres' defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen would be traded out of Buffalo at some point during the offseason. But, after a summer in which he wasn't moved, and with the Sabres atop of the standings in the National Hockey League thanks to an 8-1-1 start, it appears that the 24-year-old blueliner is going to stick around for a while.

While having Ristolainen back in the long-term plans is a positive, it still doesn't solve the issue with the Sabres' defense corps, in fact, it adds to it. Buffalo simply has too many NHL defensemen on their roster.

20-year-old Henri Jokiharju has proven he's NHL-ready through the first 10 games this season and has solidified his spot among the starting six defenseman. Along with Jokiharju and Ristolainen, newcomer Colin Miller, alternate captain Jake McCabe, and franchise cornerstone Rasmus Dahlin are expected to be in the lineup every night, barring injuries. Brandon Montour is expected to return from a hand injury in the coming weeks, and will certainly be an every day starter once he's fully healthy. Lawrence Pilut also recently returned from a shoulder injury and has skated in three games with the Rochester Americans as of Thursday, October 24. Buffalo may not be in too big of a hurry to bring Pilut back up from the AHL, but he's still a young player who is assumed to be in the fold moving forward.

Zach Bogosian, who just recently started skating for the first time in six months after recovering from offseason hip surgery, is also expected to be in the mix and play at some point this season.

That leaves Marco Scandella as the odd man out of the group. The 29-year-old's solid play through the first 10 games this season has been refreshing, especially after having what some would call a dreadful 2018-19 campaign. Regardless, Scandella is in the last year of his contract, which holds an annual cap hit of \$4 million, and will be an unrestricted free agent come July 1, 2020, making him a prime candidate to be traded before the deadline on February 24, 2020.

Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman mentioned the idea of trading Scandella on his '31 Thoughts' podcast on Wednesday, adding that Ristolainen's happiness in Buffalo now makes the Montreal native more expendable. Friedman made his weekly appearance with The Instigators on WGR on Thursday morning to talk more about the Sabres and a possible Scandella trade.

Here's some of what he had to say:

Friedman on Scandella's play drawing interest:

"The reason there's interest in him is because he's played very well. Scandella, he came from Minnesota, he was a guy who was seen as a good NHL defenseman. And like a lot of players in Buffalo the last couple of years, it wasn't going as well. But, he's played really well at the start of this year."

Friedman on Sabres' need to clear cap space:

"[The Sabres] are going to have to clear up cap space when Montour comes back, and eventually when Bogosian comes back. Everybody was talking about Ristolainen at the beginning. [The Sabres] ask for Ristolainen was very high. I think there's a recognition that [Scandella] could go somewhere else and thrive, and the Sabres want to ensure that doesn't happen. Or if it does, they look good. He's an [unrestricted free agent] at the end of the year. I don't know if [the Sabres] are going to be able to sign him. He absolutely could go to a place where he could get an opportunity to play very well and showcase himself. I don't necessarily think it's something the Sabres are going to want to do. But I think it's something they may have to do."

Friedman on where Scandella would be a fit/teams interested in him:

"We've talked about Anaheim, but [Scandella] is kind of the wrong side [shot] for them. They're looking for a righty, as opposed to a lefty. That could be a little bit of a problem. The one team that is definitely looking for a left-shot [defenseman], but I don't know if [the Sabres] would want to help them, would be Montreal."

Sabres' Vesey looking forward to playing his old team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 24, 2019

(WGR 550) - After five straight games against the Western Conference where the Sabres went 4-1-0, Buffalo goes back to the road for games against the Rangers and Red Wings.

Buffalo visits Madison Square Garden tonight which means Jimmy Vesey returns for the first time. Vesey played three seasons with the Rangers before being traded to the Sabres and he's curious to what it's going to be like, "I was saying the other day I've never played against a former team before, so I'm excited for it, it'll be good to see some familiar faces not only players but trainers and staff, so I'm looking forward to it."

Being a college player, Vesey had never been traded until now. He said, "It'll be a little weird playing against some old friends." That isn't going to matter because the Rangers didn't want him any more and he of course wants to score against them, "I'll definitely come out hot I think, but after the first couple of shifts it's just another game."

Casey Mittelstadt has three goals and two assists for five points in his last three games, but it was a backcheck in overtime against San Jose that got him national attention. Kevin Weekes of the NHL Network was so impressed with how Mittelstadt got back to break up a 2-on-1, he highlighted it on his show. Vesey has been impressed lately with his center, "He's done a really good job since our line has gotten going, he's really shown what he can do."

Vesey has two assists in those three games while Conor Sheary has a goal.

Ralph Krueger said Vesey has done everything the coaching staff has asked of him without complaint. Krueger feels Vesey is the ultimate team first player. Vesey said, "I can be used in all situations and so far this year I've been on the PK and in more of a defensive role and whenever I'm on the ice, I'm going to take pride in that, so I thought it was a little bit of a slow start to the year, but I've liked the way I've come along in the past week in a half or so."

Vesey went pointless in his first seven games with the Sabres and didn't even have a scoring chance. That seemed weird for a guy the scored 50 goals in three seasons with the Rangers. In Los Angeles that seemed to change. Vesey likes how the opportunities are starting to come, "Our ice-time has gone up and that's because we've generated more and for me, I've had a lot of good looks and this is my fourth year and I've come to learn that sometimes it just doesn't go your way, but I'm going to keep at it as our lines stayed patient in the beginning and now it's coming to us."

At 8-1-1 the Sabres enter the game with the most points in the NHL with 17. Their points percentage of .850 is also No. 1.

Buffalo averages 3.70 goals per game which ranks fourth in the league while their 2.40 goals against is sixth.

The power play has settled in at fourth overall clicking at a 30.8% clip.

Jack Eichel has six goals and eight assists for 14 points. He's fifth in the NHL and six points behind scoring lead John Carlson, a defenseman from Washington.

Rasmus Dahlin has nine assists which is sixth overall in the league.

Jeff Skinner has taken 49 shots this season, which is one shot behind the league's leader Alex Ovechkin.

Henri Jokiharju has points in two straight games picking up three assists.

Carter Hutton's .943 save percentage is fourth in the NHL while his goals against of 1.65 is third.

Not many were expecting the Rangers to be sitting at a points percentage of .357 which is 27th overall. They won their first two games against Winnipeg and Ottawa and are 0-4-1 since.

They got the prized free agent in Artemi Panarin, but he only has four goals and six points in seven games. The Sabres will need to watch out for Panarin as he has 11 points in 10 career games against them.

New Jersey took Jack Hughes first overall in last June's draft and New York grabbed Kaapo Kakko with the next selection. Both have only scored one goal so far this season.

When healthy Mika Zibanejad has been by far the Rangers best player. He has 11 points in seven games and his 1.57 points per game is ranked fifth in the NHL.

Another big acquisition for the Rangers was signing defenseman Jacob Trouba away from Winnipeg. This reminded a little of the Kevin Shattenkirk signing. They have two totally different styles, but New York way overpaid for both.

Trouba is a very good defenseman, but is not worth near \$8 million per season. The nice thing is he's only 25-years-old, so there likely won't be wasted years at the end of the seven-year deal.

Henrik Lundqvist has struggled going 1-3-0 with a 3.57 goals against and .906 save percentage.

The Rangers have the fourth worst goals against in the league as a team.

Join Schopp and the Bulldog for the Pregame starting at 6:00 when they'll be joined by Ralph Krueger, Jimmy Vesey and Vladimir Sobotka.

5 Observations: Rangers top Sabres 6-2

By Matt Bove

WKBW

October 24, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — For only the second time this season the Buffalo Sabres lost in regulation, falling to the New York Rangers 6-2 on Thursday night. With the loss, the Sabres slip to 8-2-1 on the season.

5 Observations from Thursday's game:

Burn the tape

In an 82-game season, you're bound to lay an egg every once in a while. With the start the Sabres have had this game was probably overdue. But one bad game is no reason to slam on the panic button. There are certainly reasons to be concerned -- but the Sabres won't have to wait long for a chance to rebound.

A dreadful night for Dahlin

Rasmus Dahlin had one of his worst games as a member of the Buffalo Sabres. In the first period, he mishandled a puck, allowing an easy goal for Rangers forward Artemi Panarin, who went in all alone.

Minutes later Dahlin and partner Colin Miller once again got pinned in their own end and this time it was Brett Howden who scored for the Rangers.

In the second period, after a nice start for the Sabres, Dahlin and his teammates once again got pinned in their own end. As we saw him do so many times on Thursday, Dahlin hit the ice to try and take away a passing lane. Instead, Pavel Buchnevich waited for an extra second and was able to find a wide-open Tony DeAngelo.

Besides the first-goal, Dahlin doesn't deserve all the blame on either of the other aforementioned goals. But it just wasn't a very good outing for the youngster. That'll happen, especially with a player who is still so raw -- no need to panic.

Finally falling

Carter Hutton has been exceptional for the Sabres this season. On Thursday against the Rangers, he was just average and it ultimately resulted in his first loss of the season. Nobody should be blaming the goaltending for this loss -- it's just a reminder than Hutton and Ullmark are destined to come back down to earth at some point.

Time for a change?

It's easier for a coach to shake things up after a loss than after a win. Perhaps Ralph Krueger will now have a chance to move some guys up and down the lineup and see if it helps create a spark.

On defense, in particular, It might be a good time to separate Dahlin and Miller. While the other combinations have thrived, this duo had a rough game in Manhattan and has been inconsistent, at least compared to the other pairs. What's the worse thing that can happen?

Banged Up

For the most part, the Sabres have been pretty healthy so far this season. That changed on Thursday as they saw both Marco Scandella and Jimmy Vesey head to the locker room in the second period.

The good news for the Sabres is that Scandella was able to return in the final period. Vesey, however, did not. If his injury prohibits him from playing in Detroit, Evan Rodrigues will return to the lineup for his fifth game of the 2019-2020 season.

Sabres struggle in 6-2 loss to Rangers

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

October 24, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – The New York Rangers entered Thursday night's game against the Sabres last in the NHL in scoring with a mere 19 goals.

The Blue shirts pushed around the Blue & Gold, took advantage of several defensive lapses and turnovers en route to a 6-2 win at Madison Square Garden.

With the loss, Buffalo dips to 8-2-1 overall.

Scoreless past the midway point of the first period, second year defenseman Rasmus Dahlin struggled to handle the puck and gave it away to Artemi Panarin, who skated in a slid the first goal of the game past Carter Hutton to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead.

It would be all downhill for the Sabres from there as they would trail 3-0 after the first period.

Buffalo would receive tallies from Marco Scandella and Vladimir Sobotka in the second period, however the Sabres would still trail 4-2 heading into the third.

Still a two goal game with 12 minutes to play in regulation, Jack Eichel blindly flipped a backhand pass right to Brett Howden near the blueline.

He then skated up the ice along with Ryan Strome, who finished off the 2-on-1 opportunity for his second goal of the game.

Kris Kreider would add a sixth tally in the final minutes for New York.

The Sabres are back in action Friday night against the Detroit Red Wings.

Strome scores twice, Rangers top Sabres to end five-game losing streak

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK -- Ryan Strome scored his first two goals of the season, and the New York Rangers ended a five-game losing streak, defeating the Buffalo Sabres 6-2 at Madison Square Garden on Thursday.

"Sometimes it's a game like this that can get you out of a little bit of a rut," Strome said. "Hopefully we can get going."

Tony DeAngelo and Brett Howden each had a goal and an assist, Artemi Panarin and Chris Kreider scored, and Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves for the Rangers (3-4-1), who were 0-4-1 in their past five games.

The Rangers credited the team meetings they held and their practice Wednesday as the reason they were able to get their first win since Oct. 5.

"I give our leaders a ton of credit, they took the bull by the horns," coach David Quinn said. "There certainly were some heated discussions [Wednesday]. They all looked in the mirror and realized what we needed to do.

"You can have all the meetings you want, you've got to apply it. I thought the practice was as good of a practice as we had in a while. There was a great mental and physical purpose to the practice. It was only for a half-hour, but I think when that practice ended they felt good. They felt good about the things we had worked on and it carried over."

Marco Scandella and Vladimir Sobotka scored for the Sabres (8-2-1), who had their three-game winning streak end. Carter Hutton made 18 saves and his six-game winning streak to start the season also ended.

Scandella and Jimmy Vesey left the game in the second period. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said they were still being evaluated postgame and for now they are listed as day to day.

"Nothing looks long-term there but they're still being appraised," Krueger said.

Panarin stole the puck from Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin in the neutral zone, took it in alone through the right circle, avoided Hutton's poke check and scored his fifth goal of the season to make it 1-0 at 11:41 of the first period.

"I got the puck a little far from my body and I should just place it," said Dahlin, who finished minus-3. "I tried to make a pass but it didn't work and they scored. That's one to learn from for me."

The Rangers felt they gained energy from Panarin's goal. They allowed the first goal in their previous three games.

"Where we were at mentally it was a big deal to get the first goal," Quinn said.

Another Sabres turnover led to Howden's goal from the slot that made it 2-0 at 14:32.

Strome, who had 18 goals in 63 games with the Rangers last season, scored his first on a tip of Brady Skjei's shot from the left point at 19:22 to make it 3-0. It was his 200th career NHL point.

"We put ourselves in the hole for sure with the puck management, or lack of," Krueger said.

Scandella cut it to 3-1 at 4:17 of the second period, scoring with a shot from the top of the left circle off a defensive-zone turnover by Kaapo Kakko.

DeAngelo scored his third goal in the past two games at 13:20 to give the Rangers a 4-1 lead before Sobotka made it 4-2 at 19:11.

Strome scored off a 2-on-1 rush with Howden to extend the lead to 5-2 at 7:57 of the third. Kreider scored with 1:16 remaining to make it 6-2.

"You can look at the goals, the nice plays, but I think it was the little things," Strome said. "We worked hard for each other. It's the things that the coaches have been preaching and we did it. It'll be nice to do video next practice with some good clips instead of some bad ones."

They said it

"The growth process doesn't change depending on the score of a game. We are still making mistakes. We made mistakes in past games and we were able to find ways to win. Today, we just couldn't recover from the hole that we dug ourselves into. This is not a big problem." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger

"I thought tonight right from the drop of the puck everybody was ready to go. We were all on our toes. There was lots of energy on the bench, on the ice. Lots of communication. Everybody was really helping each other out. It felt like a really good team win." -- Rangers forward Brett Howden

Need to know

Lundqvist got his 451st NHL win. He is three away from tying Curtis Joseph for fifth all-time. He also appeared in his 862nd game with the Rangers, moving past Hall of Famer Jean Ratelle for sixth on their all-time list. ... Rangers rookie defenseman Adam Fox got an assist on Kreider's goal for his first NHL point.

What's next

Sabres: At the Detroit Red Wings on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET; FS-D, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Rangers: Host the Boston Bruins on Sunday (7 p.m. ET; NHLN, MSG, NESN, NHL.TV)

Sabres at Rangers preview

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

October 24, 2019

SABRES (8-1-1) at RANGERS (2-4-1)

7 p.m. ET; ESPN+, MSG, MSG-B, NHL.TV

The Game

The Buffalo Sabres will try to for their fourth consecutive win and ninth in 11 games to start the season when they play the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Thursday.

The Sabres won 4-3 in overtime against the San Jose Sharks on Tuesday to match their second-best record through the first 10 games of a season (8-1 with one tie, 1975-76; and 2009-10). They were 10-0-0 to begin the 2006-07 season.

Forward Jimmy Vesey will play his first game for Buffalo against the Rangers; he played three seasons for New York before being acquired by the Sabres in a trade July 1.

The Rangers are looking to avoid their sixth straight loss; they are 0-4-1 in their past five games and have been outscored 20-9.

Players to watch

Sabres forward Jeff Skinner, who has scored a goal in consecutive games, is second in the NHL with 49 shots on goal, one behind Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin.

Rangers forward Kaapo Kakko, who got his first NHL assist in a 3-2 loss to the Arizona Coyotes on Tuesday, will play on the first line against Buffalo, along with center Mika Zibanejad and forward Chris Kreider.

They said it

"Pretty well everything that's happening here on the positive offensively 5-on-5 or 3-on-3 or 4-on-4 is coming from excellent defensive work and decisions that the guys are making. That gets lost in the general analysis of a game. The tracking, the way the [defensemen] are gapping up, all of that is causing the opposition stress in that we're attacking them when they're quite weak." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger

"We want to put [Kakko] in a position to have the best success possible. He works hard and puts a lot of pressure on himself, so I think when you show up at the rink and you have Mika Zibanejad as your center, you're going to feel a little bit better." -- Rangers coach David Quinn

Sabres projected lineup

Victor Olofsson -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart
Jeff Skinner -- Marcus Johansson -- Vladimir Sobotka
Jimmy Vesey -- Casey Mittelstadt -- Conor Sheary
Zemgus Girgensons -- Johan Larsson -- Kyle Okposo

Rasmus Dahlin -- Colin Miller
Jake McCabe -- Rasmus Ristolainen
Marco Scandella -- Henri Jokiharju

Linus Ullmark
Carter Hutton

Scratched: John Gilmour, Evan Rodrigues

Injured: Brandon Montour (hand), Zach Bogosian (hip), Matt Hunwick (neck)

Rangers projected lineup

Chris Kreider -- Mika Zibanejad -- Kaapo Kakko
Artemi Panarin -- Ryan Strome -- Pavel Buchnevich
Brendan Lemieux -- Brett Howden -- Jesper Fast
Greg McKegg -- Lias Andersson -- Brendan Smith

Libor Hajek -- Jacob Trouba
Marc Staal -- Adam Fox
Brady Skjei -- Tony DeAngelo

Henrik Lundqvist
Alexandar Georgiev

Scratched: Micheal Haley

Injured: Yegor Rykov (ankle)

Status report

Quinn said he wasn't sure if Haley would be scratched or if it would be someone else. ... The Sabres did not hold a morning skate.

Stat pack

The Sabres have scored the first goal in eight of their 10 games and are 7-1-0 in those games. ... Mittelstadt has five points (three goals, two assists) during a three-game point streak. ... The Rangers have 12 minor penalties, have been outscored 9-5 and outshot 95-62 in the first period this season.

Carlson, Hutton can ride hot start with Capitals, Sabres, statistics show

By Rob Reese

NHL.com

October 24, 2019

Carlson points

John Carlson leads the NHL with 20 points (five goals, 15 assists) in 11 games. His average of 4.26 points per 60 minutes leads NHL defensemen and is second behind Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid (4.75) among skaters to play a minimum of 10 games.

Carlson's points-per-60 metric is even more impressive considering he leads the NHL with 25:37 in average ice time per game (minimum 10 games) because the more minutes a player is on the ice, the more difficult it is to sustain per-60 production.

Though Carlson's high usage should lead to continued production, it's unlikely he can sustain his current points-per-game pace (1.82) because his shooting percentage is 21.7 percent, more than three times higher than his NHL career average (6.1). He's on pace for 37 goals in an 82-game season, but if his shooting percentage reverts closer to his NHL career average and he continues to average 2.09 shots per game, he'll likely score nine more goals, giving him 14 for the season. His NHL career-high is 15 goals in 2017-18.

Carlson is on pace for 111 assists in 82 games, which would be the most in a season by an NHL player since Wayne Gretzky had 122 with the Los Angeles Kings in 1990-91. Carlson is tied with Oilers forward Leon Draisaitl for the NHL lead with nine primary assists this season. He is on pace for 67 primary assists, which would be nine more than McDavid had last season. It would be a stretch to predict a defenseman leading the NHL in primary assists, but because Carlson had 35 last season, it's plausible he will at least surpass Brent Burns of the San Jose Sharks, who led NHL defensemen last season with 39. It also doesn't hurt his case that he's the point man on the Capitals top power play, feeding one-timer passes to left wing Alex Ovechkin.

Carlson, who led the Capitals with 33 power-play points (three goals, 30 assists) last season when they had the 12th-best man-advantage in the NHL (20.8 percent), has six this season, putting him on pace to finish with 44; Washington is tied for eighth with the Toronto Maple Leafs and Vegas Golden Knights on the power play (25.0 percent). To put that in perspective, consider that Burns led NHL defensemen with 83 points (16 goals, 67 assists) in 82 games last season but had 28 on the power play.

So although Carlson likely won't have Gretzky-like numbers this season, it's realistic to expect him to finish with at least 14 goals, 40 primary assists and 70 total assists and end up with close to 85 points, which would top his NHL career high of 70 set in 2018-19.

Hutton wins

Carter Hutton is 6-0-0 with a .943 save percentage and two shutouts in six games. His save percentage is second-best among goalies to play at least six games, behind Darcy Kuemper of the Arizona Coyotes (.944), and his two shutouts lead the NHL. Hutton was 12-6-1 with a .920 save percentage through his first 19 games last season, but Buffalo's defensemen are much different with the additions of Henri Jokiharju, Colin Miller and Brandon Montour, who is out with a hand injury. Jokiharju has the second-best SAT (plus-12) among Sabres defensemen behind Marco Scandella (plus-27).

The Sabres are 24th with a minus-23 SAT. Though there isn't a direct correlation between SAT and save percentage, it will be harder for Hutton to maintain a save percentage above .940 if Buffalo has a negative SAT. He has a save percentage of .914 for his NHL career.

The Sabres have the second-highest 5-on-5 save percentage in the NHL (.959) behind the Coyotes (.966). Hutton's .951 save percentage at even strength is second-best behind Pekka Rinne (.955) of the Nashville Predators, and his goals-against average (1.65) is the lowest among goalies to play a minimum of six games. Hutton's win total also has been padded by the Sabres' 5-on-5 shooting percentage of 9.5, which is fifth in the NHL; they were tied with the Carolina Hurricanes for 27th last season (7.2). Their goal support is helping Hutton earn wins compared to last season, when they were tied with the New York Rangers for 23rd in goals (221), compared to fourth this season (37).

Buffalo ranks second in the NHL in shooting plus save percentage at 1054, behind the Colorado Avalanche (1059). Nine of the top 10 teams in that category made the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season. That bodes well as long as the Sabres' 5-on-5 play improves. It's realistic to project Hutton, who had 18 wins in 50 games last season, reaching 30 wins for the first time this season.

TRAIKOS: NHL-best Sabres playing looser under new coach Ralph Krueger

By Michael Traikos

The Buffalo News

October 24, 2019

BUFFALO — It's game day in Buffalo, but you wouldn't know it based on how Ralph Krueger is spending it.

The head coach of the Sabres is not on the ice for the morning skate. Nor is he in the dressing room going over video of that night's opponent. Instead, he's busy giving a tour of the arena to a Swiss reporter and a camera crew. Moments later, he's being interviewed by a newspaper reporter from Germany, followed by another from Canada.

They all want to talk to the coach of the hottest team in the NHL. And Krueger, who has waited six years since being fired by the Edmonton Oilers for his comeback opportunity, is more than happy to oblige – in between stops to say hello to members of the visiting team that day.

"I'm all over the place," said the affable 60-year-old from Winnipeg, who spends his summers living in the same Swiss chalet town as San Jose Sharks centre Joe Thornton. "We just had our third hug of the day. I love him."

Welcome to the International Ralph Krueger Road Show.

The constant media requests are not why Krueger decided to do away with morning skates this year. But with an NHL-best 8-1-1 record heading into Thursday night's game, the decision seems to be working. Every decision he's made so far seems to be.

It's only three weeks into the season, but Krueger's impact has been instantaneous. It's not that the Sabres are winning. It's how they're winning.

The team is playing looser, more relaxed and confident than they had been under previous coaches such as Phil Housley or Dan Bylsma. There's no quit to their game. No one is slumping their shoulders or blaming the hockey gods for their mistakes. It's early and the losses are sure to come, but the team is already forming an identity that seems to mirror Krueger's bottomless well of positivity and enthusiasm for the game.

The players like their coach. More than that, they trust him.

"He's way different than any other coach I've had," said veteran forward Kyle Okposo, who is on his third coach in four years. "His ability to communicate is better than anybody I've seen in coaching. He's demanding and firm yet non-confrontational. It's unlike anybody I've ever seen."

What exactly is different?

"It's his delivery. It's his message. It's the energy he brings to the rink everyday," said Sabres captain Jack Eichel. "He's just such a positive person. When you're around that enough, for one he makes you want to play better for him. And he does a really good job of bringing out the best in you."

Sabres captain Jack Eichel (9) celebrates his goal with his teammates against the Ducks during first period NHL action at the Honda Center in Anaheim, Calif., on Oct. 16, 2019. Harry How / Getty Images
Positivity is something that has been in short supply with the Sabres. We bemoan the length of time it's taken for Edmonton to rebuild and get its act together, but at least the Oilers made the playoffs in 2017 and went on to win a round. For Buffalo, it's been eight years of pain.

The team finished last overall in three of those years and ranked in the bottom-five in two others.

That atmosphere of frustration is what Kruger walked into when he accepted the Sabres job this summer. He had other offers. There was further interest in the Premier League, where he had spent the past five years working in soccer as the chairman of Southampton's Football Club, and there was the opportunity to accept a role as president of an NHL team. But the lure of returning behind the bench proved too strong.

"I kind of had crazy options," said Krueger. "It was really weird. This quickly crystallized. Going into a small market, an underdog, interested me a lot."

This is Krueger's second stint in the NHL. His last one ended after just 48 games in the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season. But he said getting fired by the Oilers – over a Skype call, no less – after going 19-22-7 didn't motivate his decision to come back and show what he could do.

"People say, 'Oh, do you want to prove something to them?' That's never played a factor at all in making a decision to come back to the NHL," he said. "People forget that we were in a playoff spot with like seven or eight games to go. At the 40-game mark, we were actually in eighth place and then we dropped away. We just ran out of gas with the way we were playing in that short season."

"But I'm not here because of Edmonton at all. This just felt right for me."

So far, it feels right for the players too. It didn't take long for Krueger to get them on the same page, believing in one another and of a system that demands them to simply outwork and outskate their opponent. After all, he's got plenty of experience in that department.

Three years ago, he was tasked with coaching Team Europe at the World Cup of Hockey. It was a challenge to say the least. While Krueger had an international roster of all-stars at his disposal – including Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl, Boston's Zdeno Chara and Slovenia's Anze Kopitar – he also had 23 players representing nine different countries.

None of them really wanted to play on a team together. None of them even wanted to be in the same dressing room.

Somehow, Krueger got them to care.

"The emotional connection was the biggest thing, creating that atmosphere where we were going to have fun," he said. "That was more important than hockey. But the way we wanted to play really solidified things for me here, because that's how we want to play."

Team Europe went on to reach the final, where it lost to Canada, by playing aggressively. They didn't sit back. They hounded the puck for 60 minutes. It was a simple, yet effective style for a bunch of strangers to play in a two-week tournament. And it's one that seems to suit the Sabres, who just might be young enough and fast enough to carry it through for an entire season.

Sabres forward Kyle Okposo (21) has the puck knocked away by Kings defenceman Drew Doughty (8) during first period NHL action at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, on Oct. 17, 2019. Harry How / Getty Images
"I think from some of the teams we've played, they've said it seems like we have a lot of guys on the ice," said Okposo. "We're everywhere."

Now comes the challenge: making sure this system lasts longer than just a couple of weeks. It's a challenge that Housley was unable to overcome last year when the team won 10 straight games in November before bottoming out. But this year feels different, said Eichel.

For one, the team is winning. More than that, Krueger is making it fun.

"I think it's enjoyable to come to the rink every day with the environment that's been created," said Eichel. "Winning takes care of a lot of stuff. There's no way to sugar coat that. It's a lot easier to practice when you're doing well and having success. But I think the overall environment has been a good one. Guys feel a little bit more relaxed. It's not as high-strung. I think the early success has something to do with it."

"He's a pretty positive guy. He just brings a good energy to the rink."

Sabres approach hasn't changed, says Krueger

It's natural to look at the start to the Buffalo Sabres' season with an air of skepticism.

After all, it was at this time a year ago when the team catapulted into first place in the Eastern Conference after winning 10 games in a row. What happened next is something that Sabres' fans are more than used to. Buffalo lost five straight and finished the season with just five wins in their final 26 games.

So what's different about this year? According to new head coach Ralph Krueger, nothing really.

A good start is just that: it's a start. If you want to know what this team is made of, he suggests you check back at the end of the season.

"A good start is important in any sports endeavour. We all know that," said Krueger. "What's happening is that we're only looking at a small picture ... we've got some wins, which is nice. But it's just nice. It's not anything until April 4th. So we don't care about the standings until then. Lets' see where this takes us."

Still, there are plenty of signs that the Sabres could be for real this time.

For one, they are one year older. Jack Eichel, who is tied for fifth in the league with 14 points in his first 10 games, is in his fifth NHL season. Rasmus Dahlin, who is tied for fourth amongst defencemen with 10 points, is in his second year. The same goes for No. 2 centre Casey Mittelstadt, who has three goals and seven points.

"Over the course of 82 games you're going to have adversity," said GM Jason Botterill. "I think our younger players are more prepared for it because of what they went through."

They are also getting better goaltending – Carter Hutton has a .943 save percentage compared to the .908 save percentage he had a year ago – are clicking more on the power play (30.8% compared to 19.5% last year) and have shown an early resiliency for not quitting when it gets tough.

"You look at the L.A. game where it wasn't going the way we wanted it but we found a way to win the game," said Botterill. "You look at San Jose and the excitement of grabbing a 3-2 lead and them coming back and scoring to make it 3-3, but then there's not panic in our game. There's a calmness of this is what we have to do to have success here."

Is it going to last? We'll see. But three weeks in, the players are believing that this year could be different.

"It's a process," said Eichel. "It's not one that's going to be done tomorrow or next month. Just try to continue to evolve all year."

31 Thoughts: Pressure mounting on the Toronto Maple Leafs

By Elliotte Friedman

Sportsnet

October 23, 2019

Moments after Jack Eichel scored in overtime to give Buffalo a 4-3 win over San Jose on Tuesday night, the Sabres walked back into their dressing room as the No. 1 team in the NHL. Their 17 points is one up on Washington, two on Colorado and Edmonton.

So, how crazy was it in there?

"Actually, it was pretty casual," answered winning goaltender Carter Hutton. "We learned our lesson last year, after our 10-game winning streak. We got too comfortable playing with fire. (Head coach Ralph Krueger) has us focussed on the process, sticking with what we do right. If we give up good chances, we're going to pay."

Down 2-0 after one to the Sharks, the group emphasized staying true to the plan.

"We have a lot of trust in the system," Sam Reinhart told reporters post-game.

"Maybe the younger Jack gets frustrated," Hutton said. "Now, we always talk about the grind of it, how you have to stick with things instead of getting down. But guys feed off him. If he stays right, we follow."

Four Eichel points later, the Sabres won. This hasn't been the only example in 2019-20. Two nights after his giveaway led to the winner in an overtime loss to Columbus, the captain had another four-point game in a win over Montreal. They blew a 2-0 lead in Anaheim to start their West Coast swing, but recovered to shutout Los Angeles and beat the Sharks in an absolute roller-coaster ride in San Jose.

On a 31 Thoughts podcast, Eichel said Krueger won him over during their first dinner together — at last year's World Championships. Hutton said a similar thing happened when the coach invited him for dinner with teammates Zach Bogosian and Kyle Okposo. Hockey only came up at the end, after Krueger made sure to know about them and their families.

He's made other changes. Hutton says he doesn't think the Sabres have used their video room once. Meetings are in the dressing room, "short and sweet." Smaller groups, not necessarily everyone.

"We've got a lot of younger players, and it is not as easy for a 19-year-old to speak up in front of everyone. They think they are stepping on toes." This makes it more comfortable for them, as does the arrival of 600-game veteran Marcus Johansson — especially for the Sabres' Swedes. "He is their voice breaking that ice. (Rasmus Ristolainen) is not as outgoing, he just likes to focus on playing. Plus, he's a Finn. Marcus has become the leader of that group. He's been huge for us."

When I ran into Hutton last season, he said he learned things about being a No. 1 goalie that he hoped to put into place for this year. San Jose's first goal ended a career-long personal shutout string that reached 134 minutes. He didn't change the way he prepared in the summer, but did alter his mental approach.

"You have to manage the highs and lows. It is very hard to be so emotionally attached to 50 games a year. You're going to burn out, it's hard to play with that fire. You have to stay even-keeled. I'm also managing my output in practice."

What about games? What has changed in front of you?

"Predictability," he replies, and refers to a 4-0 shutout of Dallas last Monday. "I only had to make two or three solid saves. We're doing a good job of allowing the chances we want to give."

You can't win the Stanley Cup in October. But you sure can lose it then. It's early, but the Sabres seem better prepared to handle it. They have to be.

"We're not fooling anyone anymore," Hutton says. "We're getting everyone's best."

1. With Artem Anisimov and Colin White down to injury, Ottawa is trying hard to add a forward.
2. It's not a trade that will get a ton of attention, but Tuesday's Ian McCoshen/Alexi Saarela deal between Chicago and Florida is notable for one reason: it features two players who wanted a change; two prospects of whom much was once expected.

The Panthers, who believed their defensive play needed big-time improvement, lost faith in McCoshen's ability to provide that. The first pick of the second round in 2013 was at AHL Springfield after playing just 19 games in Florida last year. He wanted a new start and gets it, at AHL Rockford to begin. Saarela is a fascinating case study. A third-round selection by the Rangers in 2015, he went to the Hurricanes in the Eric Staal trade, to the Blackhawks with Calvin de Haan and now to the Panthers just four months later.

There is no doubting his talent — one former teammate said he has an absolute bomb of a shot, but "there's a reason he's been traded so many times." He blasted Carolina on his way out, with the organization responding that he didn't do the work expected of him and didn't care to change that. He was not playing much at Rockford and didn't like it. This is probably his final North American stop. Two guys with something to prove, two teams willing to gamble.

3. It is tense in Toronto. You could see the organization was curious how things would transpire without an injured John Tavares and his calming influence. They are 1-1-1, but it simply doesn't look right. In last year's playoff, during the three games in Toronto, Patrice Bergeron had 35 even-strength minutes and saw Tavares for 31 of them. Coach Mike Babcock gave us something fun last Saturday at home against the Bruins — a solid taste of the Mitch Marner/Auston Matthews combo, the second-most ice-time of Matthews' career, and 11:24 against Bergeron at even-strength (in the re-match Tuesday in Boston, Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy showed he wasn't afraid of keeping it that way).

I loved that Babcock made the challenge, but you can see he's not ready to trust this full-time — especially when riddled with the kinds of mistakes that came Monday at home against Columbus. As of Wednesday, Matthews has taken just 17 defensive-zone draws (winning 29 per cent of them), one of which led directly to a Blue Jackets goal on Monday night. The improving Frederik Gauthier has taken 66, Nick Shore 62 — and both are over 60 per cent.

You can understand why Babcock is doing it this way, he's got to win games in a much tighter division, and he believes prime time is earned, not given. That's not wrong, but I wonder if these times call for something different. In Winnipeg, Patrik Laine clamoured for more responsibility, and the Jets made him a deal: "Fine, but we will take it away if you don't compete hard enough to make it work." Laine got the message, and the early season difference is noticeable. In Edmonton, the ice time for Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid is probably unsustainable, but the two have accepted a challenge and it is a big reason the start of their season feels so much more promising.

Toronto's cap situation means their top players have to be the drivers, as both Babcock and Matthews indicated after the Boston loss. Is it time to fully unleash them and challenge them to make the necessary improvements without sheltering?

4. As the pressure mounts, there will be plenty of talk about Babcock's future. One thing everyone should remember: he takes a lot of the heat. A lot of it. What I respect about him is that he recognizes it as part of the job. Where does it go if he's gone?
5. Kind of a weird thing, but heading into the Columbus game, Frederik Andersen allowed eight goals (38 per cent of his total) through the five-hole. According to Sportlogiq, the league average for goalies was 11 per cent at the time. Boston was looking for it. So were the Blue Jackets. Andersen made some nice saves on those attempts, so he's working on it.
6. This may interest only me, but I thought it was interesting to watch referee Tom Chmielewski Monday in Toronto. In the first period, watch him making the call on Ryan Murray. He thinks about a penalty shot, hesitates a bit, but doesn't call one.

Then, in the overtime, he makes the call. I know some people didn't like it, but the goal is to promote offence and entertainment.

7. Detroit tried to move Jonathan Ericsson before waiving him on Tuesday. If this is the end of his NHL career — and life has a funny way of making things turn out like no one expects — respect to a last-overall draft choice who played 662 games. That is beating the odds.

8. With Buffalo tight to the ceiling and Ristolainen seeming very happy, the talk has turned to Marco Scandella. He's in the final season of his contract, playing 17:51 per night. Cap hit is \$4 million.

9. Two wins in a row for Minnesota after Jason Zucker's outburst in Montreal. While it made a ton of noise because Zucker mentioned Bruce Boudreau by name, it sure sounds internally that everyone recognized what the player was trying to do. Boudreau himself wasn't fuming, especially since Zucker went to him on the plane that night to apologize. (I would bet that if he ever does it again, he'll leave the coach out of it.) As a media member, the only thing I hate about stories like this is we can't stand cliches, then we rip people for being honest. They were losing and he was frustrated.

10. One thing about the Wild other teams are noticing: they really show that frustration on the ice against each other. Whether it is for holding the puck too long on the power play, or passes not on the tape or dumb penalties, there are some obvious (and heated) conversations. Winning cures everything.

11. GM Bill Guerin does not see the need for a quick fix. "I'm getting calls," he said last weekend, "but I'm not going to do anything just for the sake of it, or because things are emotional. Still evaluating."

12. Philadelphia is going to be interesting. The Joel Farabee call-up was sooner than expected, but it indicates how important getting back into the playoffs is for this franchise. They sent down Carsen Twarynski, but there is certainly a feeling he was the pick because they could send him down, not because they wanted to send him down. They liked how he played and he doesn't need waivers. The young guys are pushing the veterans.

13. The Flyers, by the way, may have found another one. There are good reviews for WHL Calgary defenceman Egor Zamula, who they signed last season as a free agent.

14. It looks like Edmonton is going to dip its toe into the Darnell Nurse contract waters in the near future. He and Oscar Klefbom are taking big-time blue line responsibility. Nurse's contract is up, he's two years away from unrestricted free agency. Here's another important part of the conversation: You can see his passion for the team, his want for it to do well. It's not easy for the Oilers to attract players, you've got one who likes it there.

15. Chris Johnston reported that other clubs are assuming Konstantin Okulov of KHL CSKA Moscow is picking between Montreal and Toronto. The Canadiens, in particular, lusted after him a year ago.

16. I do not doubt Braden Holtby, who's won three straight after getting pulled against Colorado and watching Ilya Samsonov receive a prime-time test against Toronto. He's proven many times he can handle ups and downs, especially when he didn't begin the 2018 Stanley Cup championship run as the Capitals' starter. But, uncertainty can cloud the strongest minds, so I asked GM Brian MacLellan if not having a contract was affecting Holtby.

"I don't think so," he replied. "We spoke at the beginning of the year, so we could communicate about contract, about team situation, about cap situation. It might be affecting him, but my interpretation is it is not. He goes through some periods where he gets a little off. He's trying to improve his game and he's trying certain things, maybe they don't work as quick as possible. He always seems to be able to recover and we anticipate him playing at a high level soon." Looks like he's getting there.

17. One of the reasons for his struggles was Washington's new system. The Capitals are trying to be more aggressive, similar to what Carolina does. It got them trapped down-ice a few times against Colorado and Toronto, leading to some ridiculous highlight-reel goals against.

They look like they are sorting it out. MacLellan had an interesting comment about the Capitals from last year to this year: "Part of it, I think we labelled as fatigue, ran out of gas," he said, referring to the 2018-19 team. "And probably another part of it is the hunger. The hunger to go through it all again. It's a long grind and I would not

say that we had 20 guys with the will to win it the second time, and consequently we made some choices and some changes in our lineup." This is not a group satisfied with one Cup.

18. Early-season sensation John Carlson is averaging 1.82 points per game, something no defenceman has ever done over the course of a full season. Bobby Orr holds the record of .1.78 in 1970-71; only he and Paul Coffey have reached 1.5. If you watch Carlson, it's so impressive to see the little things he does so well. See how he quickly glances to find Alexander Ovechkin as the puck is coming to him in Chicago. That's not a slow-moving puck, either. Seconds later: goal.

Against Toronto, watch how he looks off the super-smart Tavares, opening up the lane for a lethal one-timer. The last one is just obscene, with Ovechkin leaving the zone, gaining speed to set up his own blast, only to set up Carlson at the last second. Seriously, what's a goalie supposed to do with that?

The only bad thing about Carlson winning the Norris is that it would make David Amber right. He'll be impossible to deal with.

19. One scout who has seen Dallas a few times: "The way they grind you, they are built for the playoffs. That's why they gave St. Louis so much trouble. The problem is, you have to get there. The regular season is not like that."

20. Jack Hughes is going to be a great player, but he took a unique route to the top of the draft: right from the Under-18 US National Development team to the NHL. Go through the history — from Auston Matthews to Matthew Tkachuk to everyone in between, there was another stop between there and the big league. That was big-time culture shock for Hughes. He dominated the puck at that level, but is learning that's not going to be so easy now. I counted 17 games against universities last season and 18 this year, but will Hughes be the last one to go this way?

21. Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno was rolling in his pre-game scrum Monday in Toronto. The team knows that it has to be more careful defensively in the post-Bobrovsky era. The Blue Jackets still grind you when structured, but used to take a lot more chances. Some players — like Seth Jones and Zach Werenski — still have that green light, others need to be more aware.

"The difference now is that before, all of us would go up ice, see the puck go the other way, and say, 'Good luck, Bob. We sold the farm,'" Foligno laughed. "Now, we know we have to do a better job." Joonas Korpi was very good that night against Toronto.

22. Head coach John Tortorella said he spent a lot of time in the summer reminding himself that this was going to be a very different group, and he had to be more patient. I asked Foligno if this was happening, and he got this big smile on his face. "There have been moments this season I thought it was coming, and it didn't," he said. Tortorella loves an underdog. And this is one.

23. Waiting outside the Columbus dressing room that morning was Michael Lawrence. Lawrence, from Ontario, is the goalie coach at HC Lugano in Switzerland. His prized pupil of recent seasons was Elvis Merzlikins, now in the NHL. The Jackets have high hopes here. He lost his first game 7-2 to Pittsburgh and his second 3-2 to Chicago in overtime on a fluke bounce. Interestingly, Tortorella said he didn't want to pull the rookie against the Penguins, because a) he didn't want to embarrass him and b) he thinks Merzlikins is competitive and wanted to fight through it.

Lawrence sent a text to the young goalie after that game, saying, "Do you want to be remembered for this, or for your career? Pick up your lip and get moving." He agreed that Merzlikins is a competitor. "He will be fine. He's in good hands here." What's his best attribute? "His feet. He has elite feet."

24. Speaking of good goalies, a scouting buddy was raving last week about Florida first-rounder Spencer Knight: "His team may not be that good, but he is."

25. Kirby Dach has not played organized hockey with his brother, Colton, who is now with the WHL Saskatoon Blades as a 16-year-old. If Kirby gets sent back, it would be special for the family. But, after watching him against Vegas, I don't know that I'm betting on it.

26. Your ECHL champion Newfoundland Growlers held their ring ceremony last Friday and added a nice touch. The homegrown players/staff had their rings presented to them by their families. It's a small thing, but a big thing. It was very emotional and a source of pride for that crowd and that province to see it.

27. The NHL is fixing an issue with its stats system that was uncovered by the smart @evolvingwild Twitter account. Individual shot locations were off, creating mayhem of expected goal calculations. (An expected goal tries to determine the likelihood that someone scores on a particular attempt. It's an interesting idea.) As you may know, the league will be adopting puck tracking at some point this season, and a new computer system is part of that. The screens are larger than they used to be, and the scale was off. So shots were being "recorded" farther than they really were. A "fix" was in place last Wednesday and all previous games are being corrected.

28. Craig MacTavish was fired after just eight games (3-5) into KHL Lokomotiv's season. His replacement, Alexander Ardashev, won five of 10, but decided to return to his job as the manager. Now running the bench is Mike Pelino, a true survivor of that league's coaching rollercoaster. Pelino, who was leading Brock University back when I covered post-secondary hockey in 1989, lost his first game, 2-1 to Traktor Chelyabinsk. This is his seventh straight season in the KHL.

29. Sadly, I missed one of my favourite nights on the calendar Monday night. Working Columbus/Toronto prevented me from attending the NHL Alumni Awards Gala Celebration. It is always emotional, always classy, always full of great speeches and stories.

Ray Bourque was named the Keith Magnuson Man of the Year; Laila Anderson received the Keith McCreary 7th Teammate Award; Cliff Koroll the Outstanding Alumni Award; Captain Charles Scot-Brown — credited with firing the first shots in the D-Day Invasion — was named an honorary member. Chris Joseph, whose son, Jaxon, died in the Humboldt bus crash, received the Ace Bailey Award of Courage. I heard his speech was so beautiful, I asked for a copy of it.

"I can't give it to you, because I ad-libbed it," he said in a phone call. "The only time I've ever written a speech was the funeral, I was so worried I'd never get through it. (Monday night), Ray was sitting next to me, and I was joking with him that his notes were even worse than mine. He had five things in chicken scratch on his paper. I guess doing interviews in hockey trains you."

At the microphone, Joseph apologized to Bourque for cheering for the Blues to win the Stanley Cup. His family is very tight with the Paraykos as Colton's oldest sister, Kendra, babysat the Joseph children.

"You ever see those families, they raise their kids and you say, 'That's just how it should be done?' They're the model. All their kids are fantastic, the parents are fantastic." Then he adds, "Actually, I felt bad for Louie DeBrusk, too. He and I are close."

30. Joseph said he and the other parents "chat with each other all the time, although we're obviously closer to the St. Albert families. We're a strong group, and we kind of do group counselling...pick up the phone, bitch to each other and we vent. If you are having one of those days, we will unconditionally support you. We just listen, we're here for you."

He is coaching a midget double-A team and loves it. Asked if he reminds himself of any of his coaches, he thinks for a few minutes, then names Terry Crisp and Wayne Cashman. "Passionate, fun and loud, although Wayne wasn't as loud as Terry. Hockey is one big family, it does feel that way for me. Since (the crash), we have received so much love and support. Hall of Famers, players I never played with texting and calling. Kelly Chase organized the 'Country Thunder' benefit concert. Forty alumni showed up. Shea Weber, Paul Coffey, Joe Sakic. Sakic sat with eight or nine Broncos boys, telling them about the 1986 Swift Current bus crash. A guy I grew up with, a pure and classy guy, spending that moment with the boys, little things like that."

Joseph continues to push for mandatory entry-level training for Class 1 truck drivers. Some provinces (Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan) are very good, but others aren't. Joseph recently met with Alberta's Minister of Transportation after there were discussions of a rollback on the requirements due to a backlog. But what he really wants is this to become a federally mandated issue.

"You have to police 10 provinces and three territories, there should be a national standard for Class 1. Even if you're based in Alberta, you have to go to Saskatchewan. There's a big difference between driving through flat areas in the summer and the Rockies in the winter. Air, rail, marine travel in Canada is national, this should be too. What we are asking for isn't extreme, isn't contentious, the only people who don't want this care about money first. This is also about abusing new Canadian workers, and we don't want that. It is a big immigrant workforce, they should be trained well, not pressured to be driving a truck they don't want to drive."

I hope people are listening.

31. I had someone along the way, I can't remember if it was a teacher or a University professor, but someone who ran a classroom. And he banned the phrase 'unskilled labour.' He would say to us "If you think it's so unskilled, I would like to see you try it." I loved that philosophy. I was reminded of this when I saw that Donald Brashear story about working in Tim Hortons. Life is a challenge. It's supposed to be fun, but it's a grind. All we try to do is make it better for ourselves and our families. Nobody should be made fun of for that.

The Sabres will (maybe, possibly, probably not) win the Stanley Cup in 2020, just like we predicted

By Ken Campbell
The Hockey News
October 24, 2019

Back in our 2014 Draft Preview, we boldly predicted that the Buffalo Sabres would win the Stanley Cup in 2020. Well, sort of. We also projected Leon Draisaitl as the fourth-best prospect in that draft, Dylan Larkin at 14, David Pastrnak (gulp) at No. 23 and Brayden Point (double gulp) at 42.

First, so sue us. Second, we had Draisaitl right where he was chosen and Larkin, Pastrnak and Point all ranked higher than they were selected. So we weren't the only ones.

In any event, we didn't come right out and say the Sabres would win the Stanley Cup in 2020, but we did a few months later when the story that appeared in that issue appeared on our website with the headline: 'Why the Buffalo Sabres will be Stanley Cup champions in 2020'. It really doesn't get much more definitive than that. And with an 8-1-1 record, which gives them the most points and the best winning percentage in the NHL, the Sabres are making us look pretty good at the moment.

Of course, based on the way they were accumulating an embarrassment of riches in their system, we predicted a couple of years back that the Winnipeg Jets would win the Stanley Cup in 2019 and we all know how that turned out. And we should also note that the Buffalo Sabres had a 10-game winning streak at one point and were first overall in the NHL on Nov. 27 last season, only to skate directly into a massive tire fire and pull a reverse St. Louis Blues. So there's that.

But let's not think about that right now. Let's focus on the fact that we picked the Sabres to win the Cup this season. And while we're conveniently forgetting things, please do not click this link that will take you back to the original story. Hey, we said a lot of stuff in that piece, talking about how GM Tim Murray would bring the Sabres back into contention with his keen eye for young talent, how the Sabres would parlay all their picks into NHL talent that would serve them well in the future and how Nikita Zadorov would figure heavily into their future success. He was, of course, part of the trade that gave the Sabres Ryan O'Reilly, who actually represented a rather significant nadir in the franchise history, both with the team's performance when he was there and the underwhelming return they received when they traded him to the St. Louis Blues. The only vestige left of that deal on the roster is Vladimir Sobotka, who has overcome a disastrous season in 2018-19 and is providing some spadework on the roster this season. Tage Thompson is a point-a-game player for the Sabres' AHL team and he's only 21, so we'll see where it goes with him.

As far as the draft is concerned, the Sabres actually don't have a lot of volume to show for all their picks. In that 2014 draft, they picked up Sam Reinhart second, followed by Jack Eichel at No. 2 in 2015, Casey Mittelstadt at No. 8 in 2017 and Rasmus Dahlin No. 1 in 2018. The only late-round gem they mined was one that took five years to appear on the roster, seventh-round pick Victor Olofsson, who has all six of his goals and seven of his nine points on the power play.

So what we actually have here is a team that is much better than it was five years ago, for two reasons. First and most importantly, this is how it's actually supposed to work. What we didn't project five years ago was that the Sabres were going to continue to be terrible and that they'd use their high, high picks to take players who would be franchise cornerstones. It's far too early to say that Eichel is actually a better player than Auston Matthews, the player taken No. 1 in the draft one year after Eichel was selected second overall, but it's indisputable that right here and right now, Eichel is having a far bigger positive effect on his team than Matthews is on the Toronto Maple Leafs. After some stops and starts, Reinhart is finding his way as an elite player and Dahlin looks every bit the future Norris Trophy winner he was projected to be. As we said, that's the way the reverse meritocracy of the draft is supposed to work.

Second, we did not see Ralph Krueger coming. Months after he was hired as GM of the Sabres, Murray fired Ted Nolan and replaced him with Dan Bylsma. Didn't work. When Jason Botterill became GM of the Sabres, he fired Bylsma and replaced him with Phil Housley. Really didn't work. The funny thing is that both hirings seemed like pretty good ideas at the time.

Botterill appears to have hit on his second selection in Krueger. Brian Burke once said the most important task for any GM is to find the right coach for his team and Botterill, who went off the board with an appointment that was questioned in a lot of circles, appears to have made the right choice.

And all of that might, just might, put the Sabres on the path to winning the Stanley Cup in 2020. (Probably not, but humor us here.) Just like we predicted.

Early returns: Seven summer additions that are already paying dividends

By Jared Clinton
The Hockey News
October 24, 2019

The Chicago Blackhawks have six points this season, and while Robin Lehner hasn't single-handedly secured a victory for his new teammates in the Windy City, the veteran netminder has absolutely stolen the show every night he's been in the crease.

Landing in Chicago on a one-year, \$5-million deal in the off-season, Lehner has been nothing short of stunning in his three appearances with the Blackhawks. It began with a 30-save performance against the Winnipeg Jets in mid-October, an outing that was good enough to earn Chicago a single point in an overtime defeat. His next time out, Lehner again stood on his head, this time stopping 37 shots in order to guide the Blackhawks to another overtime, this time with Chicago emerging victorious. And in his most recent outing, Lehner was again the backbone of the Blackhawks. Tested by the Vegas Golden Knights 34 times, Lehner cracked just once throughout regulation and overtime before he took the 'L' in a shootout.

The result of Lehner's three-game tenure in Chicago is that the keeper now boasts some of the league's best numbers as we head towards the final week of the season's opening month. Of all netminders, Lehner's .943 save percentage ranks fourth, his 1.93 goals-against average puts him eighth and he has some excellent underlying numbers. At 5-on-5, Lehner's .963 SP is tied for second in the NHL among all netminders, his .875 high-danger SP ranks 16th and his 1.52 goals saved above average per 60 minutes ranks second. And he's managed those numbers despite making a whopping 34.1 saves per hour at five-a-side, the sixth-most in the league.

Undeniably, Lehner's performance has been across a small sample. He's only played 139 minutes at five-a-side and 186 overall. That puts him in the bottom-third of the NHL. And that's the very reason you won't find him below as one of the five off-season who've had the greatest impact on their respective clubs. Simply put, he hasn't played enough to crack the top five – not yet, at least.

But if Lehner doesn't make the cut, who does? Here are the seven summer additions who've made the most noise early:

Marcus Johansson, Buffalo Sabres

Johansson, 29, was one of the summer's more sought after second-tier free agents this off-season, but he was patient when it came to making his decision. Once the dust settled from the early flurry of signings, he inked a two-year, \$9-million deal with the Sabres on July 6. The hope was that he could come into Buffalo and provide secondary scoring, and he's done exactly that, posting four goals and seven points through his first 10 games with the Sabres, which puts him on pace to match his previous career high of 58 points.

More than score, though, Johansson has been something of a steadying presence in the middle of the lineup. He ranks fifth among Sabres forwards in average ice time and Johansson has been utilized both on the wing and at center. He's even done work on the second power play unit, which has helped Buffalo leap out to a 30.8 percent success rate with the extra man early.

Erik Haula, Carolina Hurricanes

It was no secret that the Vegas Golden Knights were going to have to trim some salary in the off-season, so when Haula, 28, was shipped off to the Hurricanes, few were surprised. There was some hope that the addition could be a beneficial one for Carolina, too, but the concern was that spending almost an entire campaign on the sidelines would result in Haula, who had followed up a breakout 29-goal, 55-point campaign by missing all but 15 games last season, taking a step back.

Consider those concerns all but put to rest.

In his first nine games in Carolina, Haula has been on fire offensively. He's shooting the lights out with seven goals, has racked up eight points and is skating nearly 17 minutes per outing, which puts him behind only Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen and Jordan Staal in terms of ice time among forwards. Best yet, though, it

doesn't appear Haula has missed a step. The speedster is still giving opposing defenders headaches with his quickness. Chalk it up as another savvy addition by the Hurricanes.

Andre Burakovsky, Colorado Avalanche

There was a point where Burakovsky appeared on the brink of a breakout with the Washington Capitals. As a 20-year-old, he had registered 38 points as a bottom-six winger, and when he followed it up with a 35-point season, it felt as though he was a top-six fixture in the making. But that didn't materialize for Burakovsky in Washington, and with the 24-year-old in need of a new deal, the Capitals decided to cut ties and shipped him to the Avalanche. And that swap has been a boon for Colorado.

Not only has Burakovsky managed to earn an increased role with the Avalanche, his ice time is up to more than 14 minutes per game from last season's 11-minute average, but he's clicked with his new teammates and worked perfectly in Colorado's up-tempo system. In nine games, he has four goals and eight points, all the while he's carved out a consistent spot on the second power play unit. Add to it the injury to Mikko Rantanen and there's new opportunity for Burakovsky, who could potentially slot in on the top line.

James Neal, Edmonton Oilers

Surely Neal's presence among this group of seven is the least shocking. Acquired by the Oilers in an off-season swap that sent Milan Lucic to the Calgary Flames, Edmontonians have been able to use the deal to mock their provincial rivals through the early part of the season. Given a far greater opportunity to produce and with an increase in ice time of roughly two and a half minutes per game through the first 10 outings of the season, Neal is an early candidate for the bounce back player of the season. Heck, he may have the honor wrapped up already.

After his seven-goal, 19-point performance in 2018-19, Neal, 32, has already slotted home nine goals and 10 points, which not only puts him on pace to absolutely obliterate last season's point total but could have him in line to break the 50-point plateau for the first time since the 2015-16 season. Neal has benefitted from playing alongside greater talent in Edmonton thus far, spending the majority of his even-strength minutes with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and power play time on Connor McDavid's unit.

Matt Duchene, Nashville Predators

That Duchene wanted to sign with the Predators this off-season was maybe one of the worst kept free-agent secrets in all of hockey. It had long seemed that there was one place, and one place only, that the 28-year-old wanted to land. So, when he inked a seven-year, \$56-million pact with Nashville, few were surprised. And the early returns on the deal have been excellent for the Predators, who seem to have found the exact offensive piece for which they were searching.

In his first nine games with Nashville, Duchene has already compiled two goals and 11 points, and his offensive output has arguably made the Predators' attack as lethal as it has been in recent memory. No longer is it a one-line team with a by-committee approach to offense. Instead, Nashville has a legitimate top-six that can score at a moment's notice. Duchene's addition has also seemingly cured some of the power play's ills. After a dreadful 12.9 percent conversion rate last season, the Predators' man advantage is clicking at 20 percent, putting it middle of the pack in the NHL.

Kevin Shattenkirk, Tampa Bay Lightning

He took a discount to sign with the New York Rangers, but a mere 25 months after putting pen to paper on a four-year, \$26.6-million pact with the Blueshirts, Shattenkirk had the final two seasons of his deal bought out. But the buyout gave Shattenkirk the opportunity to take a discount elsewhere, and he seemingly found the perfect landing spot in Tampa Bay, with whom he has already found his offensive touch and posted four goals and seven points in nine games.

Granted, it's hardly surprising to see an offensive blueliner put up big numbers with the Bolts, but he has also slid into a role more befitting his style of play in Tampa Bay. Through his nine games, Shattenkirk is behind only Victor Hedman and Ryan McDonagh in average ice time among Lightning defensemen. If he keeps this up, Shattenkirk, 30, could be one of the most sought after offensive defensemen once again next summer. Teams might approach with more caution, but it still puts him in line for a nice pay day.

J.T. Miller, Vancouver Canucks

As you may have noticed, the players listed above are ordered alphabetically by team, so Miller, 26, ends up in the bottom spot by virtue of playing in Vancouver. But if we were to rank these players on impact, Miller would land atop the list. Sure, he doesn't have the second-most goals in the NHL or a share of the lead for most power-play goals like Neal, but Miller has been all over the ice and an integral part of the Canucks' early success.

Skating 18:39 per outing, the second-most of all forwards in Vancouver, Miller has fit right into the top-six of the Canucks' lineup and he's been as impactful offensively as he's ever been in his career. Through nine games, his four goals and 10 points put him on pace to smash his previous career-best marks – he scored 23 goals and 58 points in 2017-18 – and more than one-fifth of the way to matching his 13-goal, 47-point total from last season. He's been the perfect addition through the early part of the season and bolstered the top six better than anyone could have hoped.

Panarin helps Rangers end skid; Sabres suffer rare loss

By James O'Brien

NBC Sports

October 24, 2019

The Sabres (soaring high) and Rangers (stumbling and bumbling) were heading in very different directions heading into Thursday's game, so maybe a special moment like Artemi Panarin's opening goal was necessary.

While Rasmus Dahlin is wet-behind-the-ears as a 19-year-old NHL sophomore, it still felt like a rare moment to see Panarin snag a puck from him and score an absolute beauty, with Carter Hutton's pokecheck attempt being rendered feeble. (You can watch that sweet play in the video above this post's headline.)

When you consider the final score being 6-2 in the Rangers' favor, you'd think that Panarin carried over that fabulous individual effort into a dominant night. He certainly was useful, finishing Thursday with a +4 rating, but the Rangers won thanks to a group effort.

Ryan Strome scored two goals, Brett Howden netted a goal and an assist, and Tony DeAngelo managed a goal and an assist of his own. Between DeAngelo and Adam Fox, the Rangers seem to have potential options on the right side beyond big-money addition Jacob Trouba:

Here are a few other observations from that game:

- Again, this was big for the Rangers, and maybe a learning opportunity for the surging Sabres. New York won for the first time since beginning the season with two victories, ending a five-game losing streak to end the night with a 3-4-1 record. The Sabres suffered just their third loss (and only their second in regulation), putting a three-game winning streak to an end, and slipping to 8-2-1 in 2019-20.
- One of the only bummers for the Rangers was that Kaapo Kakko didn't have the greatest night in his look on the first line with Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad. That line didn't have promising possession numbers via Natural Stat Trick's linemate summaries, and that checks out in simpler terms with Kakko ending Thursday with a -2 rating.
- That said, the Rangers could be pretty dangerous if Zibanejad and Panarin can both carry their own dangerous lines, particularly if Strome and other depth guys can pitch in often enough.
- This marked Kakko's eighth game. Should the Rangers at least consider not burning a year off of his entry-level contract? There are greater sins than not yet being ready for Broadway production at 18, particularly when you remember that Kakko is likely still adjusting to North American ice and the culture shock of going from Finland to New York City.
- The Sabres had the edge in puck possession and shots on goal (33-24), but the Rangers managed an 8-5 edge in high-danger chances at 5-on-5, according to Natural Stat Trick. You can see the concentration of goals in the hard-to-reach places in front of Buffalo's net in this Heat Map:

The Rangers face a serious challenge in living up to a splashy season of offseason moves. It remains to be seen if they can pull that off, but chances are, they will be very entertaining on a lot of nights. For the Sabres, it's crucial to shake this one off.

Red Wings aim to end slide vs. Sabres

Yahoo! Sports

October 25, 2019

The Detroit Red Wings haven't won a game in more than two weeks. Facing a first-place team won't make it any easier to end their slide.

Detroit will carry a six-game losing streak into its home game against the Atlantic Division-leading Buffalo Sabres on Friday.

The Red Wings lost on back-to-back nights this week by identical 5-2 scores to the Vancouver Canucks and Ottawa Senators.

Special teams played a major role in their latest losses. Vancouver was held scoreless until it scored two power-play goals early in the third period.

Ottawa took the lead for keeps on a second-period short-handed goal.

"It makes it really difficult," Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill said. "You ask me about how many goals we've given up, a lot of those goals have been on the penalty kill. We've gone through games where we've played pretty good defensively and all the sudden you give up goals on the penalty kill and it melts you a little bit.

"(Wednesday), it's 2-2 and we give up a short-handed goal. If you do that, you better find a way to come back and score."

The short-handed goal was the first they've allowed this season, but they haven't scored any. Opponents have a 9-4 advantage in power-play goals through the first 10 games.

Detroit has allowed five goals each in five of the six defeats since it defeated the Montreal Canadiens 4-2 on Oct. 10.

"We're not a team that can give up four or five goals on a nightly basis and win," left wing Justin Abdelkader said to NHL.com. "The best defense is playing in the offensive zone. I think we can be a great offensive-zone team.

"We showed that over stretches throughout the season so far. But when we get in the D-zone, we get a chance to make a play, make a play," he added. "Otherwise, we have to get pucks out. ... The turnovers are the plays that kill you and then you're in the zone for longer."

Wings center Luke Glendening suffered an upper-body injury at Ottawa and won't play on Friday.

Buffalo won last season's four-game series 3-1-0. The Sabres will be looking to bounce back from their second loss of the season, a 6-2 thumping by the New York Rangers on Thursday.

The Sabres have tallied 12 power play goals. Jack Eichel, Victor Olofsson and Jeff Skinner have scored six goals apiece during the hot start.

Until the loss at Madison Square Garden, Buffalo's forwards had also done a superior job protecting their zone.

"Across all four lines, we've tracked back well," left wing Jimmy Vesey said to NHL.com. "It's tough to play against that when you're the other team, when our D are staying up and the forwards are coming back. It's never fun."

It's a lot of fun for the Sabres players when their efforts to create opportunities comes to fruition.

"I think we've just been creating turnovers and turning it into offense," left wing Conor Sheary said to NHL.com.

Goaltender Carter Hutton suffered his first defeat of the season Thursday after winning his first six starts.

After loss to Rangers, Sabres turn attention to Friday's game in Detroit

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK - "Keeping the picture small" has been one of Ralph Krueger's mantras early this season.

The Buffalo Sabres coach has stressed time and again that there's a long season ahead and there are going to be many challenges to overcome.

Thursday night, the Sabres were unable to overcome an early deficit in their 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

The Rangers piled on early, going up 3-0 in the first period. Artemi Panarin, Brett Howden and Ryan Strome contributed to that early lead, helping to snap their five-game losing streak. Buffalo responded right out of the gate in the second when Marco Scandella scored on a wrist shot from the point 4:17 in.

Vladimir Sobotka was Buffalo's other goal scorer. Carter Hutton made 18 saves on the night.

Overall, the Sabres are now 8-2-1 on the season and despite the mistakes, they know they're trending in the right direction.

"The growth process doesn't change depending on the score of a game. We are still making mistakes. We made mistakes in past games that we were able to find ways to win," Krueger said. "And today, we just couldn't recover from the hole that we dug ourselves into. This is not a big problem. These guys are trying and sometimes it's because they're trying a little too hard that the mistakes are happening. We need to get that balance better.

"We're not OK with the puck management we had today. None of us are," he continued. "We didn't show the Rangers enough respect and they punished us for it. We will learn from that. We're not OK with that.

"Again, we have to find that balance and we're working on it. We want to play on our toes. We want to play hockey that pushes us forward. We still need to work on some things to get that right."

The Rangers made it 3-0 with 37.8 seconds remaining in the opening period when Ryan Strome scored his first of two goals. Buffalo responded in the second period when Scandella's wrist shot from the point beat Henrik Lundqvist.

The game could've gotten out of hand right after Buffalo got on the board if not for the heroics of Hutton.

The Sabres netminder stopped a point-blank chance on Brett Howden and then made this stop on Jesper Fast moments later:

With 6:50 left, the Rangers hit the crossbar and then Tony DeAngelo capitalized 10 seconds later to make it 4-1.

"They were moving the puck pretty well, especially in the last half of the game," Marcus Johansson said. "They started getting confidence and we've got to fall back to what we've been talking about and not chasing it. We went out of position and they played better than us tonight and that's just the way it is."

Vladimir Sobotka had a low shot go past Lundqvist with 48.9 seconds remaining in the second to put Buffalo back within two. The Sabres had a good push toward the end of the period, but couldn't muster any more offense.

New York scored another pair of goals in the third period to close out the scoring. Lundqvist finished the game with 31 saves.

From the players' standpoint, they're already looking ahead to Friday night's game in Detroit.

"We just have to move on. Truthfully, it's just one loss, whether we lost 10-1 or 2-1. It doesn't matter. It's just one loss," Hutton said. "We have a lot of experience and maturity in this room and Ralph as a head coach is going to keep the boys focused."

Injury updates

The Sabres were down two men for most of the game as forward Jimmy Vesey went to the dressing room 7:25 into the second period and then Scandella ended his last shift nine seconds later due to a lower-body injury.

Krueger is hopeful that neither injury is long-term, but both players will be reassessed before Friday's game in Detroit.

Up next

And move on, they shall.

It'll be a 7:30 p.m. faceoff from Detroit on Friday. The Buick Game Night pregame show will start at 7 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will be on the call.

Buffalo is back home on Monday when they'll take on the Arizona Coyotes at 7 p.m. at KeyBank Center. Tickets for that game are on sale now.

At the Horn: Sabres 2 - Rangers 6

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 24, 2019

The Sabres fell behind by three goals in the first period and never climbed all the way back in a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Thursday.

Marco Scandella and Vladimir Sobotka scored goals for the Sabres, who saw a three-game winning streak come to an end. Carter Hutton, who entered the game undefeated at 6-0, made 18 saves.

Ryan Strome scored twice for the Rangers, who also received goals from Artemi Panarin, Brett Howden, Tony DeAngelo, and Chris Kreider. Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves.

The Sabres played the last period and a half without forward Jimmy Vesey, who left the game with an injury.

What happened

The Rangers jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period, the first two of which were products of giveaways by the Sabres.

Panarin stole the puck in the neutral zone and opened the scoring at 11:41 of the period. Howden capitalized on a misplay down low less than three minutes later, and Strome redirected a shot from Brady Skjei to add to the lead with just 37.8 seconds left in the period.

Each time the Sabres inched back, the Rangers responded. Scandella put the Sabres on the board at 4:17 of the second, but DeAngelo answered later in the period at the end of a long shift in the Buffalo zone.

Sobotka put the Sabres back within striking distance with his first goal of the season, scored with 48.9 seconds remaining in the period. They ran into penalty trouble early in the third, however, and Strome scored his second goal to restore the Rangers' three-goal lead at the 7:57 mark.

Kreider capped the scoring with 1:16 remaining.

What it means

The Sabres fall to 8-2-1 this season. As was the case with their last loss, in Anaheim on Oct. 17, they have less than 24 hours to think about it with another road game awaiting them in Detroit on Friday. Last time, they responded with a 3-0 win the next night in Los Angeles.

Vesey's status will be monitored in the meantime. The Sabres are traveling with a 13th forward in Evan Rodrigues, who has appeared in four games this season.

Roll the highlight film

Sobotka's first goal of the season began with a stretch pass from Rasmus Dahlin to Marcus Johansson, who kicked off a tic-tac-toe passing play on the rush.

Up next

The Sabres are back at it tomorrow night in Detroit. Coverage on MSG begins at 7 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7:30.

Vesey returns to New York as Sabres face Rangers

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 24, 2019

NEW YORK - Jimmy Vesey will make his return to Madison Square Garden tonight when the Buffalo Sabres take on the New York Rangers.

Vesey was traded to Buffalo on July 1 after three seasons in New York. Last year, he posted a career-high 35 points (17+18).

"Just a little weird playing against some old friends," he said after practice on Wednesday. "I was saying the other day, I've never played against a former team before so I'm excited for it. It will be good to see some familiar faces, not only players but trainers and staff and stuff like that. I'm looking forward to it."

In 10 games this season, Vesey has two assists, and has mainly been playing with center Casey Mittelstadt and right wing Conor Sheary. But head coach Ralph Krueger has found Vesey to be valuable in other aspects of play, particularly as a reliable player on the penalty kill.

"We know Jimmy would like to be producing more, but we're not upset with him in any way, shape or form. He's come in here and he has taken on his role," Krueger said.

"He's become an important penalty killer for us and has done a lot of important things within the Mittelstadt-Sheary line to make that possible, what's happening there. He's working hard in both directions. We like the way he's embraced our style of play. The offense is going to come for sure if he holds onto this line."

The Buick Game Night pregame show starts at 6:30 p.m. on MSG. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will have the call of the action at 7 on MSG and WGR 550.

Back to Hutton

Carter Hutton will start in net for Buffalo. Hutton started the first two game of the season, and up until night, he's traded starts with Linus Ullmark.

Hutton is 4-1-0 with a 1.48 goals-against average and a .953 save percentage in his career against the Rangers, but Krueger said naming a starter for tonight's game wasn't really about past success.

"We just felt it was a good one to mix it up," Krueger said. "Of course you do look a little bit at history, but it's not the deciding factor here today. It was just a gut feel that we thought this was a good one for Carter."

In six starts this season, Hutton is 6-0-0. He's posted a 1.65 GAA and a .943 save percentage, and was the NHL's Third Star last week.

Krueger said there would be no changes to the lineup from Tuesday's overtime win over San Jose with the exception of the starting goaltender.

Here's the projected lineup (Buffalo did not hold a morning skate on Thursday):

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo
13 Jimmy Vesey - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 43 Conor Sheary

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

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

Sharpen Up: All the Sabres news you need to know on October 24, 2019

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 24, 2019

It's a game day in New York City.

The Sabres play the first of back-to-back road games tonight against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden, then head to Detroit for a meeting with the Red Wings tomorrow.

They'll be looking to keep their hot start going. At 8-1-1, the Sabres have matched their second-best record through 10 games in franchise history, joining the 1975-76 and 2009-10 teams. They're coming off a 4-3 overtime win against the San Jose Sharks at home on Tuesday.

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. The puck drops at 7.

Here's what you need to know.

Tonight's matchup

It will be the first return to Madison Square Garden for former Ranger Jimmy Vesey, who spent his first three NHL seasons in New York. He was asked about his expectations for the game after practice at KeyBank Center on Wednesday.

"Just a little weird playing against some old friends," he said. "I was saying the other day, I've never played against a former team before so I'm excited for it. It will be good to see some familiar faces, not only players but trainers and staff and stuff like that. I'm looking forward to it."

The trio of Vesey, Casey Mittelstadt, and Conor Sheary have gotten going as of late in terms of offensive production. But since the start of the season, Vesey has impressed coach Ralph Krueger with his willingness to accept any role that's asked of him.

So far, that's meant more of a defensive role than he was used to in New York. He's been elevated to a line with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart late in games when the Sabres are trying to hold a lead and has been a consistent presence on the penalty kill.

"I've been used in all situations and so far this year I've been on the PK and I guess more of a defensive role," he said. "Whenever I'm on the ice, I'm going to take pride in that."

Vesey's former team enters the contest having lost its last five games, coming off a 3-2 overtime loss to Arizona at home on Tuesday. The Rangers have allowed an average of 3.57 goals per game, the fourth-highest mark in the NHL.

Mika Zibanejad leads the Rangers with 11 points (4+7) in seven contests. Offseason acquisitions Artemi Panarin (4+2) and Jacob Trouba (1+5) are tied for second with six points each. Kaapo Kakko, the second-overall pick in this year's draft, has one goal and one assist.

As for the Sabres, here are tonight's top notes:

- Carter Hutton is 4-1-0 in his career against New York, boasting a .953 save percentage and a 1.48 goals-against average in those games.
- Hutton entered play Wednesday ranked in the top three in the NHL in save percentage (.943), goals-against average (1.65), shutouts (2) and wins (6).
- Kyle Okposo has totaled 20 points (5+15) in his last 20 games against the Rangers.

- The Sabres have scored the first goal in eight of their 10 games so far this season, going 7-1-0 in those contests. Entering play Wednesday, only the Washington Capitals had scored first in as many games as Buffalo.

Looking back to Mittelstadt's OT effort

The two-way effort by Mittelstadt that preceded Eichel's overtime goal on Tuesday got some attention from NHL Network analyst Kevin Weekes, who dropped the name of a Hall of Fame defenseman in his breakdown of the play:

"One of my buddies sent me that clip last night," Mittelstadt said. "They were just making fun of me the whole time. It's pretty good. It's pretty funny."

Mittelstadt downplayed the sequence, but Ralph Krueger said the play was a primary point of focus when the team met Wednesday morning. We broke down why in yesterday's Ice Level Practice Report, which you can read [here](#).

How did he do it?

Eichel, meanwhile, flipped a switch and took over the game beginning in the second period against the Sharks. We asked his teammates how he did it in yesterday's Sabres in :50.

70s Night is right around the corner

Believe us, you won't want to miss it.