



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

October 7, 2019

Columbus Blue Jackets host the Buffalo Sabres

Associated Press

October 7, 2019

Buffalo Sabres (2-0-0, second in the Atlantic Division) vs. Columbus Blue Jackets (0-2-0, eighth in the Metropolitan Division)

Columbus, Ohio; Monday, 7 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: The Buffalo Sabres travel to face the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Columbus finished 47-31-4 overall and 31-19-2 in Eastern Conference action during the 2018-19 season. The Blue Jackets scored 256 total goals last season while collecting 415 assists.

Buffalo went 19-25-8 in Eastern Conference games and 12-24-5 on the road during the 2018-19 season. The Sabres scored 221 total goals last season, 46 on power plays and three shorthanded.

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

Blue Jackets Injuries: None listed.

Sabres Injuries: None listed.

Olofsson scores 2 in Sabres home-opening 7-2 win over Devils

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — It didn't take long for Jack Eichel's concerns to subside over whether a lengthy pregame ceremony celebrating the Sabres' home-opening start to their 50th season would sap the team's energy.

Rookie Victor Olofsson opened the scoring three minutes in, and the Sabres drew upon the energy of a raucous crowd in rolling to a 7-2 victory over the New Jersey Devils on Saturday night.

"I think we were all getting a little antsy, and wanted to make sure we were keeping the crowd in it," Eichel said of a ceremony honoring the team's past led to the start of the game being delayed by nearly 20 minutes after the Zambonis were forced to resurface the ice.

"It was good that we came out and had a good start," he added. "It sparked the crowd and I think they were tremendous from there. I thought we used them to our advantage."

On a night Eichel began by standing in a circle alongside 15 past Buffalo captains, he and the Sabres provided a hint of a more promising future for a team attempting to shed the weight of an eight-year playoff drought — the NHL's longest active streak.

Olofsson and Sam Reinhart each scored twice, while Eichel and Jeff Skinner had a goal and assist each. Carter Hutton stopped 18 shots.

The Sabres, under new coach Ralph Krueger, built off the momentum of an efficient 3-1 season-opening win at Pittsburgh by getting off to their first 2-0 start since the 2012-13 lockout-shortened season.

Krueger became Buffalo's fourth coach — and first since Jim Roberts in 1981 — to win his first two games.

"What a wonderful day for the fans, who got to see for the first time the heartbeat we have," Krueger said. "What an opportunity for the guys to step up with game like this."

The Devils were a step behind from the start, and a night after a monumental season-opening collapse in which they blew a 4-0 second-period lead in a 5-4 shootout loss to the Winnipeg Jets.

Their two goals came from Kyle Palmieri, in the opening minute of the second period, and Travis Zajac, in the opening minute of the third.

New Jersey otherwise was unable to withstand the Sabres' fast-paced attacking style in a game Buffalo converted its first three power-play opportunities. Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 29 of 36 shots, a night after allowing two goals on nine shots in relief of starter Cory Schneider.

"A little too much watching, I think, right now and waiting for someone else to maybe do the work," Zajac said.

Coach John Hynes was a little more blunt in assessing his team's performance.

"We're playing soft and light and we're playing like we want to have an easy game," Hynes said.

The game turned after Palmieri cut the Sabres lead to 2-1 by scoring from the right circle 37 seconds into the second period.

Okposo regained Buffalo's two-goal edge by deflecting in Rasmus Dahlin's point shot 2:12 later. The Sabres scored twice more over the next 11 minutes. The run was capped by Olofsson's second goal, in which he flubbed a pass into the crease only to have the puck come directly back to him before he snapped it into the open right side.

Everything was tilting the Sabres way even their mistakes were going in.

"I made quite a bad pass and I got it right back on my tape. I was a little surprised," Olofsson said. "I felt like we just kind of kept our cool and played the same way throughout."

The five-goal margin of victory was the largest in Buffalo's home-opener and the seven goals scored were the most since a 9-5 win over Boston in 1974.

"Definitely growing as a team, but we've got a long way to go," cautioned Okposo. "It's Game 2. We've got 80 left. Let's not plan the parade right now."

NOTES: Among the former Sabres captains on hand were Gilbert Perreault and 84-year-old Floyd Smith, the first to wear the C in Buffalo. ... The game featured a matchup of the past three players drafted first overall in Devils rookie Jack Hughes and Nico Hischier (2017) and Sabres second-year defenseman Rasmus Dahlin. ... Hischier registered his 100th career assist on Palmieri's goal. ... Schneider served as the backup in being cleared to play after cramps led him to being unable to finish the game against Winnipeg.

UP NEXT

Devils: At Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday.

Sabres: At Columbus Blue Jackets on Monday.

Former Sabres captains help kick off franchise's 50th season

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Floyd Smith still vividly remembers the ceremonial faceoff he took against Montreal Canadiens captain Jean Beliveau before the Buffalo Sabres' first home game in franchise history.

"(Beliveau) let me win it," Smith said with a laugh.

At 35, Smith was lured out of retirement to serve as the Sabres first captain in 1970.

Some 50 years later, the 84-year-old Smith was back in Buffalo on Saturday night. Amid chants of "Let's Go Buffalo!" Smith dropped the puck for a ceremonial faceoff and to kick off the Sabres' golden anniversary season before their home opener against the New Jersey Devils.

"Ah, that was neat," Smith said, reflecting back to the one-plus season he spent in Buffalo before retiring. "You don't think as much about it then as you do now, how important it was."

Smith, who eventually went on to coach the Sabres, was among 15 former team captains on hand for the team's home opener. The group included Gilbert Perreault, Mike Foligno, Michael Peca and Brian Gionta.

The Sabres distributed commemorative T-shirts to each fan, and celebrated their past with a lengthy video montage featuring numerous on- and off-ice highlights broadcast on the video scoreboard.

The former captains walked the red carpet in front of fans outside the arena before the game, and were each then introduced on the ice during a pre-game ceremony.

They wore the Sabres' specially designed 50th anniversary jerseys featuring a gold-embazoned buffalo and two crossed swords on the chest.

Perreault joked about how tight-fitting his No. 11 jersey was by saying it's been a while since he was at his playing weight.

Perreault, who still holds most every offensive franchise record, including 512 goals and 1,326 goals, said it was a privilege to spend his entire 16-plus season career with one team.

He recalled Buffalo's first home game, a 3-0 loss to Montreal, as being special because he was from Quebec and played his junior hockey in Montreal.

"I thought I was going to play against my idol, Jean Beliveau that night," Perreault said. "But I didn't have a chance to play one shift against him."

The Sabres and Vancouver Canucks were part of the NHL's second wave of expansion by entering the league together in 1970.

Buffalo won the spin of a wheel to earn the right to draft Perreault with the No. 1 pick ahead of Vancouver, and went on to reach the Stanley Cup Final in 1975. The Sabres, coached by Smith, lost in six games to Philadelphia.

The 50th anniversary comes at a time the Sabres are in the midst of their toughest stretch in team history. They're eight-year playoff drought is a franchise worst and ranks as the NHL's longest active streak. And Buffalo has not won a playoff series since reaching the Eastern Conference finals in 2007.

Under new coach Ralph Krueger, the Sabres are coming off a season-opening 3-1 win at Pittsburgh.

"They had a good start with a win, so I'm hoping it's going to be a great year," Perreault said.

Sam Reinhart in the thick of the action in Sabres' fast start

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 6, 2019

The primary assist on Rasmus Dahlin's highlight-reel goal in the season opener. Two goals in the home opener, one a classic snipe and the other a nifty deke on a breakaway. A hound with the puck on a dominant power play. An average ice time of 20:07 per game.

All those points show how Sam Reinhart has been in the thick of the action in the Buffalo Sabres' 2-0 start, and is setting an early tone for what he hopes will be his biggest season yet.

Reinhart had 42 points as a rookie in 2015-16 and his total has increased every year since, from 47 to 50 to last season's career-high 65. Reinhart hasn't missed a game due to injury the last two years and another big jump in scoring to push near point-a-game status could result in a hefty payday this summer.

He is in the final season of a two-year deal that carries a cap hit of \$3.65 million. If he produces and gets paid, it probably means the team benefited quite a bit, too.

"If we're playing the way we're capable in our system, the points are going to come regardless," Reinhart said Sunday after off-ice workouts in KeyBank Center. "I'm just trying to keep playing that same way, really the way everyone has played early on. Those wins will come and those points will come."

The Sabres play Monday night in Columbus looking for their first 3-0 start since they won the first four games of the 2008-09 season, which ended with them missing the playoffs. It will be interesting to see how long they can maintain the dominance they showed in their wins against Pittsburgh and New Jersey.

The Sabres have outshot their first two opponents, 77-49, and out-attempted them, 126-98. The power play is 4 for 6 while the penalty kill is 6 for 7. It's been a complete effort.

Coach Ralph Krueger said the Sabres want to have 50 shot attempts a night and he feels that 30 on goal will almost always give his team a chance to win.

"The emphasis has been that almost all of that has grown out of how we're playing defensively," Krueger said. "The buy-in there from the players has been tremendous. Teams can pre-scout us all they want but you have to match the work ethic of this group right now, which we're proud of and which we'll be attempting to repeat night in and night out. That defensive play then allows us to have the kind of offense we need and want with room and space."

"We've kind of learned as a group about the opportunities when you're doing the little things like tracking the puck and playing without it," Reinhart said. "You're a lot more successful in converting that way than just hanging back and hoping for a lucky bounce over a guy's stick or getting a mini-break."

The Sabres' strong power play Saturday was reflected not only by their three goals, but in the way they freely entered the New Jersey zone and maintained control of the puck. Even when the Devils got it out, Buffalo was often quickly able to grab it in the neutral zone and get right back into an attack mode.

"It's reading off one another and always supporting each other out there," Reinhart said. "A combination of both of those things leads to more puck possession."

The Sabres are also avoiding their common trap of becoming too static on the power play. Reinhart, who has mostly been a net-front player, is taking turns out high at the start of some possessions before creeping in toward the goal.

"It's harder to defend when everyone is moving and adding a little more dynamic to it," he said. "It makes the other team think a little bit more."

Reinhart's first goal Saturday was a blistering snap shot that cranked off the post and beat Devils goalie Mackenzie Blackwood. His second was an unassisted breakaway tally after he stripped New Jersey defenseman P.K. Subban at the Buffalo blueline and skated in alone on Blackwood.

Reinhart deked to the backhand and burned the New Jersey goalie high for the final goal of the game. Blackwood had stopped a Jack Eichel breakaway in the second period with a glove save after Eichel chose to shoot. Reinhart had the luxury of being able to ponder his move.

"It's a combination of having that time and having a great angle of Jack's breakaway earlier," Reinhart said. "Kind of seeing what 'Blackie' was reading in that situation helped as well."

Krueger joins elite group

Saturday's win made Krueger just the fourth Sabres coach to win his first two games, joining Marcel Pronovost (1977), Scotty Bowman (1979) and Jim Roberts (1981). None of the previous three won their third game, with Pronovost and Bowman losing it and Roberts' club tying Quebec.

Dahlin, Eichel pick up assists

The NHL made a scoring change on Victor Olofsson's second goal of Saturday's game, changing the call from unassisted to assists from Dahlin and Eichel. That meant Dahlin posted the first three-assist game of his career while Eichel also had a three-point night (1-2-3).

Goalie choice uncertain

Krueger said his goaltending decision Monday could be a game-time call but has no qualms about either choice, whether it's inserting Linus Ullmark to make his season debut or keeping Carter Hutton in the net for the third consecutive game.

Hutton has stopped 46 of 49 shots thus far for a .939 save percentage and has a 1.50 goals-against average.

Columbus is 0-2 and has been outscored, 11-3, in those games by Toronto and Pittsburgh. The Blue Jackets followed the Sabres into PPG Paints Arena and got blown out by the Penguins, 7-2, Saturday night after Buffalo posted a 3-1 win there in Thursday's season opener.

Jack Eichel joins circle of Sabres captains, delivers signature performance in win

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 5, 2019

With 15 former Buffalo Sabres captains standing in a circle at center ice in KeyBank Center, play-by-play announcer Rick Jeanneret introduced the latest cornerstone of the franchise.

Jack Eichel emerged from the tunnel to a raucous ovation, raised his stick in the air to salute the sold-out crowd of 19,070 and stood next to Gilbert Perreault for the pregame ceremony to celebrate the Sabres' 50th year in the National Hockey League.

"A moment I'll never forget, going out there with some of those guys," Eichel beamed afterward. "Being able to stand in the same circle as them was a tremendous honor."

Eichel proceeded to have a performance that surely made his fellow captains proud. The 22-year-old finished with three points, including the Sabres' second goal, during a resounding 7-2 win over the New Jersey Devils on Saturday night. Four other Sabres scored at least one goal and Carter Hutton made 18 saves, giving Buffalo back-to-back wins to start the season for the first time since 2013.

Eichel led a power play that converted on each of its first three opportunities and was the catalyst to what new coach Ralph Krueger has called a new brand of Sabres hockey.

"I think we wanted to come out and show the fans what it's going to be like this year and the type of product we want to put on the ice," Eichel said. "Get them excited for the season, and I think we did a pretty good job of that tonight. It's all about consistency in this league. We just want to keep doing it every night and make this a hard place to try to come in and play."

The start of the game was delayed until 7:22 p.m., because two zambonis were forced to resurface the ice following pregame festivities. However, the Sabres said the wait only seemed to fuel their excitement. Eichel drew a holding penalty at 1:35 into the game and didn't take long to help them take the lead.

Eichel collected the puck from Rasmus Dahlin near the opposing blue line, skated toward the bottom of the right-wing circle and sent a cross-ice pass to Victor Olofsson, who scored the first of his two power-play goals with a wrist shot at 2:56 into the game.

Eichel pushed the lead to 2-0 at 17:26 into the first period, when a successful forecheck by Olofsson and a heads-up poke check by Jeff Skinner sent the puck to the slot without a Devils defender nearby. Eichel shot it into the net to beat goalie Mackenzie Blackwood.

"I knew Jack was going to have a good night tonight, that's for sure," defenseman Jake McCabe said of Eichel. "He takes a ton of pride wearing that C. He's our leader on this team. We had a good start and fed off the crowd all night."

Eichel also contributed on Olofsson's second goal, which pushed the lead to 5-1 in the second period, by signaling the rookie winger to skate toward the net on the power play and sending another tape-to-tape pass across the ice. Olofsson then attempted a pass that was broken up by a Devils defender, but he collected the puck and shot the puck between Blackwood's legs at 13:33.

"I feel like he's probably one of the better passers in this league," Olofsson said of Eichel. "I just try to find the open ice and he found me a lot of times."

Eichel's 19:47 of ice time ranked second among all Sabres forwards behind Sam Reinhart. Their second-year captain also won 8 of 16 faceoffs and had three shots on goal among six attempts. He was even credited with two blocked shots for Buffalo, which has outscored its first two opponents, 10-3, and outshot the Devils, 36-20.

Reinhart scored two goals, Skinner had his first of the season and Kyle Okposo's goal at 2:49 into the second period pushed the Sabres' lead back to two. Eichel has set the tone in each of the first two games. His play away from the puck has shown remarkable improvement under Krueger, and his skills are as tantalizing as ever.

Eichel wasn't pleased with his play the second half of the last season, despite him finishing with career highs in goals (28), assists (54) and points (82). He wants to shoot the puck more this season, his fifth since being drafted second overall by the Sabres, and to prove he's among the best scorers in the NHL. Eichel's play exemplifies how Krueger wants the Sabres to perform: fast and furious.

"I thought that our leaders right through the game with their entire actions, whether it was on the bench or on the ice, they were all in on sticking with what we're trying to do here," Krueger said. "Jack, of course, is a leader and the way he's executing on the ice helps in the process tremendously, but we really had a full team performance today."

Eichel also skated on a special-teams unit that killed two Devils power plays and Buffalo had a 5-on-5 shot differential of 51.72 percent. He and his teammates were quick to remind the media that this was only the second game of the season. Okposo said, "Let's not plan the parade right now."

However, it's also important to note the Sabres went almost four months last season without winning consecutive games. They haven't pieced together back-to-back impressive defensive performance like this in quite some time, and their speed has overwhelmed the Devils and Pittsburgh Penguins.

Devils center Jack Hughes, who was drafted first overall in June, was held to two shots on goal and a minus-2 rating. Three of New Jersey's four forward lines were mostly ineffective. Though the Sabres' chaotic October schedule continues Monday, they left KeyBank Center on Saturday with confidence that an identity has been forged under Krueger's leadership, led by their captain.

"It was great to see them react the way they did and the amount of energy that was in the building tonight was tremendous," Eichel said of the crowd. "We felt it on the bench. We were talking about it. It's a special place to play. ... Try to recreate that as much as possible this season."

The Wraparound: Sabres 7, Devils 2

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 5, 2019

Ralph Krueger has only been in Buffalo for four months, yet the Sabres' coach received a raucous ovation when he was introduced to the KeyBank Center crowd by Rick Jeanneret during pregame festivities Saturday.

Krueger's popularity likely grew significantly among Sabres fans over the 60 minutes of hockey that followed. His new-look Sabres, buoyed by a rookie winger and four significant offseason additions, proceeded to show they're ahead of schedule in their quest to be a more dangerous team in 2019-20.

Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart scored twice, and Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner each added their first goals of the season, in a 7-2 win over the New Jersey Devils to open the Sabres' home schedule. Buffalo is 2-0 to start the season for the first time since the lockout-shortened 2012-13 and winning back-to-back games is a feat in and of itself.

The Sabres went almost four months last season without winning consecutive games.

Goal of the season: Olofsson formed instant chemistry with Eichel upon being recalled from Rochester last March. That has continued at the start of the season, as illustrated by the Sabres' first goal of their home schedule.

During an impressive power play in the first period, Eichel sent a cross-ice pass to Olofsson, whose wrist shot from the left circle went over goalie Mackenzie Blackwood's glove for a 1-0 lead at 2:56 into the first period. The goal was Olofsson's first of the season.

Captain Jack: Eichel pushed the lead to 2-0 when he quickly shot a loose puck into the net at 17:26 into the game. However, Olofsson made the goal possible by preventing New Jersey defenseman Damon Severson from reaching a loose puck behind the net.

The puck hit the boards and ricocheted back towards the net, where Jeff Skinner managed to direct it to Eichel in the slot. The goal was Eichel's first of the season.

Fast first period: The Sabres out-shot the Devils, 14-4, during the first period by preventing clean breakout passes and playing sound defensively in the neutral zone. Jack Hughes had only one shot on goal, and New Jersey's only quality scoring chance came at 6:54 when Carter Hutton knocked down Jesper Boqvist's wrist shot from the slot.

The Devils gave up six consecutive goals dating back to their 5-4 shootout loss to Winnipeg on Friday night.

Quick answer: New Jersey needed only 37 seconds to score in the second period. Taylor Hall's center pass was one-timed into the top-right corner of the net by Kyle Palmieri to cut the Sabres' lead to 2-1.

Close call: Kyle Okposo had another strong game for the Sabres and scored his first goal of the season with a backhanded tip off Rasmus Dahlin's shot at 2:49 into the second period for a 3-1 lead.

Hutton stands tall: Carter Hutton received a second consecutive start in goal and withstood an impressive Devils power play in the second period. Hutton made a toe save on Wayne Simmonds and managed to stay in front of a puck redirected by Palmieri.

New linemates: Skinner didn't have to wait long for his first goal of the season. The recent recipient of an eight-year contract received a cross-ice pass from Marcus Johansson and beat Blackwood with a high wrist shot for a 4-1 lead at 8:57 into the second period.

Powerful power play: The Sabres scored on three of their four power-play opportunities against the Devils, capped by Olofsson's second goal of the game. The 24-year-old winger received a pass from Eichel and collected his own rebound before beating Blackwood with a shot between the legs for a 5-1 lead.

Retaliation: Simmonds took exception to Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe's body check on Hall, who immediately left the ice to be examined by the Devils' training staff. Simmonds and McCabe tangled between the two teams' benches for several seconds before they were separated by the officials.

Simmonds received a double-minor for roughing and McCabe was penalized two minutes for roughing. Additionally, Okposo and P.K. Subban were both assessed 10-minute misconduct penalties.

Quick goal: Travis Zajac scored 58 seconds into the third period on a wrist shot over Hutton's blocker.

Bar down: Reinhart scored his first of the season at 3:56 with a high shot that went over Blackwood's head and into the net for a 6-2 lead. Reinhart added a second goal on a breakaway with 3:41 remaining in regulation.

Lineup decisions: Forward Evan Rodrigues and defenseman John Gilmour were healthy scratches for a second consecutive game.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to practice Sunday and will travel to Columbus, where they play the Blue Jackets on Monday night in Nationwide Arena.

Everything old and new was golden for Sabres in home opener

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 5, 2019

Mike Harrington

We walk by the picture every night when we exit the elevator to enter the press box. A classic old black and white that's an iconic moment in Sabres history.

It's the first ceremonial faceoff at Memorial Auditorium, from Oct. 15, 1970. Seymour Knox III in the middle dropping the puck between Floyd Smith and Montreal legend Jean Beliveau. A young Rick Azar watching from behind while serving as the night's emcee.

Smith is 84 now, still living in the Southtowns. Still proudly reflecting on his time in the Sabres' infant years to their ascendancy when he was the coach of the 1975 Stanley Cup finalists. And still smiling when he's asked about that one moment in time with Beliveau.

What does he remember about that faceoff?

"I won it," a beaming Smith said as reporters laughed a couple of hours before Saturday night's home opener in KeyBank Center. "He let me win it. It was neat. You don't think as much about it then as you do now, how important it was. Mr. Knox and Norty Knox were there too. It was something."

The iconic Floyd Smith-Jean Beliveau picture that hangs in the Sabres press box from the home opener in 1970.

Saturday night was something from start to finish. This entire season is going to be about connecting the Sabres' often-glorious and often-tumultuous past to its present. And they hit it out of the park in every way in the home opener.

The 7-2 destruction of the New Jersey Devils was preceded by a Blue and Gold carpet ceremony outside featuring 15 of the team's former captains. The legends came inside to be introduced before the game -- and Smith got to drop the puck for the faceoff this time, between Jack Eichel and New Jersey defenseman Andy Greene.

Sabres Blue and Gold Party in the Plaza

If you're old enough to remember Memorial Auditorium, you remember what the roar sounded like on so many nights when we were all down the street. And most of you remember the roar in this building from 2006 and 2007.

Old sure met new Saturday night. It was 5-1 through two periods and this baby was history. The Sabres had three power-play goals. They have 10 goals and 77 shots on goal while starting 2-0 for the first time since 2013. This isn't the French Connection or the Scary Goods but there were times they made you wonder.

Brian Campbell was in the building as part of the pregame ceremony. Where was R.J. Umberger? It was shades of 2006 on one shift in the second period as Rasmus Ristolainen leveled Miles Wood and then defense partner Jake McCabe absolutely destroyed Taylor Hall a few seconds later.

New Jersey winger Wayne Simmonds then decided to play tough guy and go after McCabe. Whatever. By then, the building was up for grabs and the crowd was roaring like it did during that double-overtime thriller over the Philadelphia Flyers 13 1/2 years ago.

"He was coming to hit me so I was bracing for that and trying to do a little 'Risto' like he did right before that," McCabe said. "Playing with a lot of energy and a lot of passion, we were having a blast out there. Line after line, play after play."

Did McCabe notice the crowd at that point? How could he not?

"Yeah man, you just get goosebumps. That's all I can really say to describe the feeling," he said. "You get goosebumps, you're smiling, you're happy – that's what hockey's all about right there. That's why we play the game."

Now, the appropriate disclaimer: This feels different for sure but don't christen anything yet. We all saw how things went last season after November. The last time the Sabres started a season 2-0, Lindy Ruff got fired less than a month later.

"We've got a long way to go. It's game two. We've got 80 left," cautioned Kyle Okposo. "Let's not plan the parade right now. We're just going to keep continuing to grow as a team."

Still, perhaps other than being asked to pay the shameful price of \$8.75 for one slice of pizza at the concession stands, I can't imagine a fan having one iota of complaint about what they saw downtown Saturday night.

Sabres have blowout win over Devils in home opener

Sabretooth rappelled from the roof to start the pregame festivities, just like he used to do. Rick Jeanneret opened his 49th season at home by getting a standing ovation when he was introduced to start narrating the ceremony.

"Now you know why I love my job," intoned Jeanneret, still as popular as ever as he nears 80.

Fifteen captains on hand were greeted warmly. There were chants of "Luuuuuuuce" for Don Luce and "Stuuuuuu" for Stu Barnes. Jason Pominville got a huge roar and Gilbert Perreault got the biggest ovation of all, as he should nearly 32 years after his retirement.

Every former captain was invited. Some, like Ruff and Chris Drury, are working and were unavailable. Mike Ramsey was bummed at FanFest when he told us he had a wedding to attend and could not make it. Alexander Mogilny sent regards from Russia. And for the many of you asking, deposed team president Pat LaFontaine was invited.

I'm told LaFontaine quickly and politely declined. It's worth noting one of the beautiful giant banners hanging in the pavilion is a shot of LaFontaine scoring the goal that closed Memorial Auditorium. And during a timeout in the third period, there was a video with comments from Jay McKee and Brad May about their former captain. That should end the narrative the organization is going to ignore him this year.

(An aside here: Danny Gare's pregame imitation of Jeanneret in the radio booth spreading his arms and telling everyone to be quiet while he started the "La-La-La-La-LaFontaine" call was hilarious.)

The team's snazzy Golden Season anniversary jerseys were worn by the captains and the 50 season ticket-holders brought on the ice for them to walk through. The current players love the look, including the white gloves.

The "Earl of Bud" was brought back to dance like it was the 90s at the Aud and Pilot Field. The pregame video compilation was wonderful and most timeouts stuck to hockey too instead of getting lost in sponsored silliness.

The current team played a golden game too. Relentless on the attack. Overpowering on the power play. Physical. The clutch goaltending needed in a couple spots from Carter Hutton. So far, it's a lovefest: In Ralph Krueger They Trust.

The fans counted for more goals like they were still in the Aud. By the third period, they were starting the "Let's Go Buffalo" that's part of the Bills "Shout" song.

It was quite a night. How happy everyone will be if the alumni get to see many more like it this season.

Sabres game day: First overall draft pick Jack Hughes returning to Buffalo

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 5, 2019

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (1-0) vs. New Jersey Devils (0-0-1)

Where: KeyBank Center

When: 7 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

Hughes return: Jack Hughes was the star attraction when the scouting combine was held in LECOM Harborcenter back in May. The 18-year-old center was drafted first overall by the Devils in June, returned to Buffalo for the Prospects Challenge and had a strong preseason.

Hughes finally made his regular-season debut Thursday against the Winnipeg Jets and recorded one shot on goal in 15:12 of ice time. He wasn't the Devils' only prominent offseason addition, either. They acquired defenseman P.K. Subban and winger Nikita Gusev in trades, and signed winger Wayne Simmonds.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger has history with Devils star winger Taylor Hall. Krueger coached Hall for three seasons in Edmonton (2010-13) and, according to former Oilers, had a strong impact on the team's young core. According to Sabres assistant coach Steve Smith, who was also on the staff in Edmonton, players such as Hall and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins had their development slow because of Krueger's firing.

"I really felt that team was on the right track at that point," Smith said of the 2012-13 Oilers. "We were in it until the last four or five games of the season, which wasn't expected. I thought some of those young players that had difficult starts to their careers – Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and these kids – were really starting to come at that point in time. I think after Ralph left they lost a little bit of traction. He was really good for them. They've obviously built great careers since then, but it took them a little longer than it might have had he been able to stay."

Sabres' lineup: Krueger does not plan to hold morning skates at KeyBank Center this season. Instead, the Sabres met as a team and had availability for the media. Krueger would not say if his lineup will be the same, but he did not make any changes during practice Friday:

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

New system: The Sabres played one of their better defensive games in recent memory Thursday in Pittsburgh. Sidney Crosby was held to one shot on goal. Jake Guentzel had zero. The Penguins seemed overwhelmed by Buffalo's pressure on the puck and couldn't find enough space to create scoring chances.

The Sabres didn't appear to be chasing the puck. There was structure and any mistake by a defenseman was cleaned up by a teammate. Additionally, forwards did not allow the Penguins' defensemen to step up in the offensive zone. Krueger would not provide any details about the system he implemented, though his players have mentioned there are more zone concepts as opposed to man-to-man.

Sure, it's the regular season, but the progress is notable. The Sabres seem to be grasping, and embracing, a new system. Even Rasmus Ristolainen had one of his best defensive games in some time. They'll face a difficult test against New Jersey, which scored four goals in 33:52. The Jets scored four consecutive goals to tie the score and won, 5-4, in a shootout.

Krueger and his staff planned to study the "nuances" of the Devils' game but the focus is on having the Sabres continue to execute their defensive-zone structure.

"We have some nuances in there that we'll keep secret but the general concept has to do with pressure and taking away that space and that time they'd like to have," Krueger said. "How we get there we'll keep to ourselves, but more than anything it's about that. They just couldn't find a way to open our defensive structure, which is the core, really, of our game and our offense grows out of that."

Devils' lineup: The Devils will not hold a morning skate in Buffalo since this is their second game of a back-to-back. Goalie Mackenzie Blackwood is expected to start against the Sabres after he replaced Cory Schneider in the third period Friday night. Schneider left the game because of cramps but will be available to play tonight.

Here is how the Devils lined up against the Jets on Friday:

Sabres' Krueger says he does not number lines

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 6, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Back probably, at least, 10 years ago, coaches would number their lines one through four. In those days, your top center would play with your No. 1 left winger and so on. Those days are long gone as coaches don't number lines anymore.

This is a concept that most fans and some media members just can't get a grasp of. Ralph Krueger said, "I generally think there's the Larsson line, there's the Eichel line, there's the Johansson line and there's the Mittelstadt line and really there's different roles at different times.

"If you look at when we were closing the game out in Pittsburgh, that line (Larsson's line) was playing as one of two lines left in the last five minutes, so we won't be a numerical kind of team and 5-on-5 we were able to even up the ice-time yesterday through the four units."

When asked who his first line was, Krueger said, "There is no first line. It's quite clear that Jack is our captain on the ice and our captain in regards to creating offense or running the power play, but my brain doesn't really work that way trying to make sure that everybody understands that they're important.

"I just find the respect for the depth that teams need to be successful and the role players that we need and I've always been one as a coach to avoid any type of ranking within the group because I think we're all very, very important and it doesn't matter the minutes we play to the overall team success, so that's just been a core philosophy I've had as a coach."

Before the team left for Columbus on Sunday, they did a lot of off-ice work, but did not practice as a team.

Krueger wouldn't say if Carter Hutton would be in net on Monday against the Blue Jackets, a team that's 0-2 and last lost 7-2 in Pittsburgh.

Sabres put on a show for the home fans

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 5, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres came to play in a big way in the home opener. Buffalo scored on its first three power plays and skated circles around the bewildered Devils, winning 7-2.

The fans started blowing the roof off the place just 2:56 in when Victor Olofsson found the back of the net. By the end of the night, they were chanting, "We want eight!"

Just like Thursday, the speed and tenacity never stopped. Watching the power play, I'd be hard pressed to find one battle that they lost. Last year, they couldn't even get the puck in the zone.

The Sabres did all of this in front of many of their former captains, including Gilbert Perreault. The first player ever drafted by the Buffalo Sabres was back for the captains' celebration. The team is honoring its 50th anniversary this year, and Perreault is a huge part of the history. He said, "It's great, 50 years in Buffalo and the first few years the fans were great, they've always been great here."

Perreault played his hockey for 17 years in the Aud. He loved games in that building, "Every game we played at the Aud was amazing, the fans were very involved."

These days very few players play their whole career in one place. Perreault said he's thankful he could, "I was lucky, but it means a lot, 17 years in Buffalo was great. I was the first pick and I was hoping to spend all of my career in Buffalo and it was very important to me to finish here."

Perreault told me at the airport before the team flew to their game that night that he would not be the next captain of the Sabres. When the team took the ice, he was wearing the "C". Perreault said it took a lot of convincing from Scotty Bowman, "Yes he did talk a long time to me about it, we had a long meeting and you know, I always had a little problem with my language, but everybody on the team accepted that."

If you're a Sabre, you're probably going to be recognized when you're out and about. Perreault said even in the early years, that was true, "The early years were crazy. The fans were a great part of the team, everywhere you go everybody was recognizing you in the restaurants and even today, I was in a restaurant today and people were coming up after 33 years."

Many hockey experts think it's unbelievable that the Sabres never won the Stanley Cup back then. They had the French Connection, Danny Gare and many other great players. Perreault thought for sure they'd win one. "In '75 we went to the final and I really thought after that for the next five years, I thought we had a pretty good chance to win the Cup."

Perreault's first game was in Pittsburgh, but his first home game in the Aud was against the Montreal Canadiens. It's a night he remembers well, "We were playing against the Montreal Canadiens. I thought I was going to play against my idol Jean Beliveau that night, but I didn't get a chance to play one shift against him, but it was a great challenge playing against the Montreal Canadiens."

The Sabres wore their white golden anniversary sweaters and the fans loved every minute of it. It's been a while since this building was that alive.

Sabres begin 50th anniversary home season against New Jersey

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 5, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - John Tortorella pretty much never has his team on the ice for a morning skate and Ralph Krueger is doing the same.

As the Sabres prepare for the home opener, Krueger had his team come to the arena for off-ice work and meetings, but no skate. The head coach said, "Don't expect us to pre-game skate, we're outstanding in our activation off-ice. I love how the guys have come in strong to every practice since the beginning of training camp, so we activate immediately on the ice." Krueger added, "I don't find that hitting the ice on game days is the norm anymore and for us it definitely will not be."

When Krueger was hired, he talked about being with the sports science staff to figure out how to reduce injuries. Krueger said this is all part of it, "What they're doing off the ice is getting their bodies ready, our soft tissue injuries have been extremely low because of the work that the guys are able to do and how they understand how to get themselves ready."

The Sabres had a very good game in their opener winning in Pittsburgh 3-1. It was a complete game by the blue and goal with Conor Sheary netting two goals.

I think you would've been hard pressed to say that any of the six defensemen dressed in that game had a bad game. Krueger said, "It was their involvement, not only in our defense and giving us good structure and being quick, but also the way they jumped up into the play. I think all six defensemen showed up in multiple clips and we really like that contribution in the offense."

The Sabres will use the same lineup as they did in Pittsburgh, which means Evan Rodrigues and John Gilmour will not play.

After a fine game against the Penguins, Carter Hutton will again be in goal.

Saturday will be the Sabres' 49th home opener. They are 21-20-7 and haven't won a home opener since 2013.

New Jersey had a horrible shootout loss in their home opener on Friday. The Devils blew a 4-0 lead and lost to Winnipeg 5-4. Blake Coleman scored two goals in the loss.

The Devils have a whole new team with the additions of Jack Hughes, P.K. Subban, Nikita Gusev and Wayne Simmonds.

Taylor Hall is also back after playing only 33 games last season due to injury. That was after a 39-goal, 93-point season the year before that won him the Hart Trophy as league MVP.

The Devils announced that Corey Schneider, who left Friday's game in the third period with cramping, made the trip here and will be available for the game. Schneider gave up two goals in almost 43 minutes of work, while Mackenzie Blackwell allowed two goals in 22 minutes.

Many former captains will be in attendance for the game including Gerry Meehan, Gilbert Perreault, Danny Gare, Stu Barnes, Brian Gionta, Michael Peca, Mike Foligno, Floyd Smith, Jason Pominville and Craig Rivet.

Join us for the pre-game to the home opener Saturday at 6:00 when Brian Koziol will be joined by Krueger, Conor Sheary and Casey Mittelstadt.

Vogl: After clobbering the Devils in their home opener, the Sabres want to find ways to keep the ‘good energy’

By John Vogl

The Athletic

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Ask anyone wearing a Sabres or Bills jersey about their fandom, they’ll describe it as a blessing and a curse.

Everyone knows why it’s a curse. There’s no reason to dive into Wide Right, No Goal or the million other things that make outsiders laugh and wonder why anyone would put up with it.

But it’s just as easy to explain why it’s a blessing. As hokey as it sounds, the fans will make you part of their family simply for showing up.

It was on display Saturday. The Sabres kicked off their 50th anniversary in Buffalo with a night that knocked the cobwebs off KeyBank Center. It was more than just the 7-2 shellacking of New Jersey.

Let’s start with Rick Jeanneret. The Hall of Fame announcer served as emcee for the golden anniversary ceremony. His job was to introduce the 15 former captains who returned to celebrate.

But the 77-year-old had to wait ... and wait ... and wait. When Jeanneret entered the spotlight at center ice, the fans rose to their feet with applause that grew exponentially by the second. He’s been the city’s hockey soundtrack for 49 years and the fans showed him what that means.

“I just about lost it,” Jeanneret quietly confided during the second intermission, a look of sincere gratitude coming across his face. “They just kept going and going. I was thinking, ‘Come on, I don’t even play.’ It’s really appreciated.”

Gilbert Perreault will second that. The Sabres’ first draft pick in 1970 and the organization’s greatest skater was feted during a “blue carpet” ceremony one day after being approached for handshakes at dinner.

“I’ve been retired for 33 years,” said Perreault, marveling at lingering in their hearts. “The fans were great here. They’ve always been great.”

In all honesty, not many players on the Sabres roster could back that up. There’s been apathy and downright disdain from the fan base during the past eight seasons, none of which featured playoffs, hard work or the bond that had been built over four decades. It seemed all the fans had was each other since effort was a one-way street.

But for the second of Buffalo’s two games this season, the Sabres looked like they cared. After rolling over the Penguins during Thursday’s opener in Pittsburgh, they crushed the Devils.

And the fans embraced the game in a way that hadn’t been seen or felt in years. There was a standing ovation when the Sabres entered the first intermission with a 2-0 lead. The fans rose to their feet with ear-splitting roars during the second period when Rasmus Ristolainen and Jake McCabe formed the hardest-hitting tag team since Hulk Hogan and Randy “Macho Man” Savage.

“Oh man, that was a blast,” McCabe said. “Risto has a big hit. I have a big hit right after. You can hear the crowd, it’s just a really fun atmosphere.”

“Yeah man, you just get goosebumps. That’s all I can really say to describe the feeling. You get goosebumps, you’re smiling, you’re happy – that’s what hockey’s all about right there.”

The players said they fed off the fans, but it went the other way, too. Once the Sabres got to four goals, the crowd began its long-held tradition.

“One, two, three, four ... We want five!”

Then they did it for six.

Then seven.

Then eight.

"They obviously want to see hard work and compete and all those little cliché things that everybody says all the time – but we did it," right wing Kyle Okposo said. "We played a pretty blue-collar game and just ran 'em out of town."

With seven goals, the Sabres finished with their second-highest goal total in a home opener. They won 9-5 over Boston to start the 1974-75 season.

The Sabres went to the Stanley Cup final that year.

"We've got a long way to go," Okposo said. "It's Game 2. We've got 80 left. Let's not plan the parade right now."

But, Kyle, you understand why fans want to plan the parade, right?

"Yeah, for sure," he said. "Fans are excited, as they should be. I think the fans should get excited."

"It's very similar to what the Bills got going on over there (with a 3-1 record). Fans are excited about their team. Their defense is playing awesome. The city has a buzz around them. We're just going to continue to keep jelling together and keep growing in our system, keep growing with our coaching staff. It's just a lot of good energy around here."

New coach Ralph Krueger — who literally has "motivational speaker" on his resume — deserves much of the credit. He's designed an aggressive game plan using phrases such as "express yourself" and "play with personality." The Sabres, who haven't had a personality in a decade, are bringing Krueger's words to life with an offense that creates chances and a defense that smothers puck-carriers.

"The way that he gets his message across in a clear, concise, demanding yet nonconfrontational way is unlike anybody that I've really ever seen," Okposo said.

The coach feels he's coming in at the right time, leading a team that has seen — too often — what doesn't work.

"Their mindset is open for what we are now trying to bring in as principles," Krueger said. "I'm excited about the buy-in, for sure."

The fans sure got excited in the opener. In addition to the goal countdown, they brought in familiar chants from Bills games. There was even one guy in the upper deck saying the 1970s anthem, "Ooooh, ahhhh, Sabres on the war path!"

It felt like everyone in the building was one big family again.

"We wanted to come out and show the fans what it's going to be like this year and the type of product we want to put on the ice, just get them excited for the season," captain Jack Eichel said. "I think we did a pretty good job of that."

Indeed, it was an unreal night in an arena that hasn't had many lately. Of course, Sabres fans know better than anyone that it could disappear next week. The goal-scoring, hard-hitting fun could easily make way for malaise and incompetence.

But Buffalonians showed Saturday that they desperately want to believe. The Sabres have a chance to make them.

"We really want to make this building that tough to play in every single night," McCabe said. "It hasn't been that over the years. We want to make that a staple in our game this year.

"We keep stringing good games together here, they're going to keep coming out."

Veteran Kyle Okposo thriving on Sabres' 'fourth line'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 6, 2019

BUFFALO – Throughout his career, Ralph Krueger has refused to number lines. The Sabres coach said it's one of his core philosophies.

Krueger believes everyone, no matter how small the role, contributes to a team's success. Ranking forward trios or defense pairs would take away from that.

"I just (have) the respect for the depth that teams need to be successful and the role players that I need," Krueger said after the 2-0 Sabres prepared for Monday's road game against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

So on Sunday, Krueger replied to a question about the "fourth line" by asking, "Which one is the 'fourth line?'"

Krueger, of course, was joking a bit. Still, at least publicly, he won't label lines.

"There is no first line," he said inside KeyBank Center.

Really? The top line isn't, say, comprised of leading scorer and captain Jack Eichel, Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart?

In Saturday's 7-2 home shellacking of New Jersey, the trio combined for five goals and seven points.

"Jack is our captain on the ice and our captain in regard to creating offense or running the power play," Krueger said. "But my brain just doesn't really work that way. (I'm) trying to make sure that everybody understands they're important.

"And if you've killed four minutes and somebody else has played eight in the power play, those might be equal minutes as far as the work and the sacrifice and the investment of energy that you have."

When Krueger rattled off his lines, he mentioned the so-called fourth line – center Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo – first.

Through two games, the trio has quickly become the Sabres' biggest surprise, contributing at both ends of the rink.

"The focus is always on the ones that get the points and the goals and the assists, but if I look at what Larsson, Girgensons and Okposo have been doing here in the first two games, they lead the way in really playing simple, hard forechecking," Krueger said. "They're getting the pucks in deep, they're having some strong offensive shifts."

On Saturday, Okposo's second-period goal restored the Sabres' two-goal lead shortly after the Devils scored.

Krueger said the line generated five scoring chances and allowed just one Saturday.

In Thursday's 3-1 road win against the Pittsburgh Penguins, Krueger shortened his bench and used Larsson, Girgensons and Okposo to close out the game.

"That line, as an example, was playing as one of only two lines left in the last five minutes," Krueger said.

Okposo said: "(Girgensons and Larsson) open up a lot of space for me. They're good with the puck, too. So I just think we're trying to play the system and we're reading off each other pretty well."

Okposo's ability to adapt and make the most of his limited ice time – so far, he has played only 18 minutes, 45 seconds – has been critical. He spent most of his first 11 seasons skating on scoring lines.

But following a 14-goal campaign in which he often looked a step behind, Krueger shifted Okposo, 31, to a checking line in training camp.

"I'm focusing on what I can do to be the best and that's it," Okposo said. "There's no external pressure, there's no external factors that are entering into my brain. It doesn't matter if I play five minutes or 20 minutes."

Right away, Krueger said Okposo embraced his new challenge.

"From Day One, in every practice since the 13th of September, he has been attempting what we're asking in every drill on the ice and understanding that what we need from him is possibly different from the past," he said.

Krueger said Okposo's positive "attitude through this is what's carrying him."

"If it's 10 minutes or it's going to be 18, we're convinced that he put in the work this summer to have the foundation to be able to do that," he said.

While Krueger has lauded Okposo, he took away the 'A' the veteran had worn for years before the season started. Instead of Okposo and defenseman Zach Bogosian, center Marcus Johansson and defenseman Jake McCabe are now alternate captains.

Okposo called the honor "a tremendous opportunity for Jake and Marcus to step up."

"Marcus has been in the league for a long time," Okposo said. "Him coming in this year, he's going to be a big piece of our team moving forward. Jake's the kind of guy that does everything right. He's been here a long time, he's put his dues in, he's getting more vocal. He just has a big presence.

"I couldn't be happier for those guys."

Notes: Krueger wouldn't reveal Monday's starting goalie. Carter Hutton played the first two games. ... Instead of skating Sunday, the Sabres held off-ice workouts. ... The Blue Jackets are 0-2 and have been outscored 11-3 following Saturday's 7-2 loss to the Penguins.

Sabres honor past captains, annihilate Devils before raucous crowd

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 5, 2019

BUFFALO – One by one Rick Jeanneret introduced them, 15 in all, including some of the greatest names in Sabres history.

Gilbert Perreault, the most iconic name, received a rousing standing ovation from the capacity crowd of 19,070. The fans roared for Danny Gare and Jason Pominville, two of the most popular players in franchise history.

Before the Sabres started Saturday's 7-2 annihilation of the New Jersey Devils, they kicked off the home portion of their 50th anniversary season by honoring captains from their past.

For a team that has ranked among the NHL's laughingstocks for a long time, it served as a stark reminder the Sabres have a rich history.

KeyBank Center has ranked among the league's quietest venues for years. An eight-year playoff drought, the longest active streak, will do that.

But on Saturday, it rocked from the moment Jeanneret walked on the ice until the final buzzer.

"The pregame ceremony was tremendous," said Sabres captain Jack Eichel, who joined the others who wore the 'C' at the end of the ceremony. "Just a moment that I'll never forget, going out there with some of those guys and being able to stand in the same circle as them was just a tremendous honor and an amazing moment.

"I think we were all pretty amped up to get the game going."

The Sabres gave their fans plenty to cheer about, jumping on the Devils and never letting up.

"We played a pretty blue-collar game, just ran them out of town," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo, who scored early in the second period.

Sabres rookie Victor Olofsson scored the first of his two power-play goals 2:56 into the contest. Eichel followed with another power-play goal at 17:26.

After New Jersey scored 37 seconds into the second period, Okposo, who has looked terrific so far in his fourth-line role, restored the two-goal lead.

"The goal from Okie was critical at that point in the game," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said.

Eichel said: "Okie's goal was a huge point in the game. No panic on the bench."

As the goals piled up, the raucous crowd started counting them and demanding another.

"It was great to see them react the way they did," Eichel said. "The amount of energy that was in the building tonight was tremendous. We felt it on the bench. We were talking about it. It's a special place to play when we're playing like that and the crowds into it."

The Devils, meanwhile, melted down and started taking runs at the Sabres.

"Everybody will remember the goals, but I thought the physicality and the way we stood up and the way worked for each other was team sacrificial-like," Krueger said. "We can build on that. Overall, the noise was loud and the building had a lot of fun."

There are, of course, 80 games left, but this edition of the Sabres has looked darn impressive. The Sabres are 2-0 for the first time since 2012-13.

Fresh off Thursday's 3-1 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins, they played another complete game.

"I feel like we just kind of kept our cool and played the same way throughout the 60 minutes," Olofsson said.

Sabres at 50: Danny Gare stole spotlight from Rick Martin to reach 50 goals

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 5, 2019

BUFFALO – More than 43 years later, Sabres legend Danny Gare still sounds surprised he hit the prestigious 50-goal mark in the grandest of fashions.

That night, after all, was supposed to be about Rick Martin's pursuit of the milestone. The sniper needed to score just once to reach 50 goals for the third consecutive season.

Gare, meanwhile, had scored 47 times entering the season finale on April 4, 1976 against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Memorial Auditorium.

"I was close, but I never thought I'd get it, you know?" said Gare, one of 15 former captains the Sabres honored as part of their 50th anniversary celebration before Saturday's home opener against the New Jersey Devils.

All the attention, Gare said, was focused on Martin.

"As deservedly it should've been," Gare told the Times Herald. "He ... was a 50-goal man."

Gare wasn't yet. Sure, the diminutive winger was within striking distance. Yes, he had recorded two hat tricks earlier in his second NHL campaign.

But would Gare really score three times that night?

Few probably expected someone could score 50 times on a checking line. But the trio of Gare, Don Luce and Craig Ramsay produced an incredible amount of offense while shadowing the opponent's best every night.

"We did a lot more scoring than any checking line," said Luce, who scored 33 goals in 1974-75.

Luce and Ramsay's defensive skills combined with Gare's scoring prowess made them as lethal as almost any No. 1 line.

"We tried to play in the other end," Gare said. "It's kind of funny. That's normally what the top lines would do."

Gare hadn't thought much about scoring 50 goals until Fred Stanfield approached him before the game. Having played beside Boston Bruins legends Johnny Bucyk and Phil Esposito, the veteran knew all about the special number.

"He goes, 'You know, you could get 50 tonight,'" Gare said. "He says to me, 'Don't think you can't, you know? I know Rico's going to get it and you got a shot at it, too.'"

Stanfield's encouragement made Gare start believing he had a chance.

Then, according to Gare, everything changed prior to the opening faceoff. His trio lined up against Darryl Sittler, Lanny McDonald and tough guy Dave "Tiger" Williams.

"(That was) the turning point in all this," Gare said.

Gare knew Williams – "He's a pain in the (butt)," he said – from their junior days in the Western Hockey League.

Williams told Gare he wouldn't "get a sniff tonight at 50."

"So I got (ticked) off," Gare said. "To hell with you, Tiger."

The Aud buzzed all night in anticipation of something special happening.

"Every time Rick was on the ice or I was on the ice you could feel the excitement," Gare said.

Stanfield assisted on Gare's 48th goal in the second period. After that, Gare said Sabres coach Floyd Smith finally put him on the power play.

Incredibly, Gare only scored eight power-play goals in 1975-76.

Gare deflected Martin's shot in for his 49th in the third period, a goal many thought Martin had scored.

As the game progressed, Smith started putting Gare and Martin out with top center Gilbert Perreault.

Perreault had no idea what to do.

"He said, 'Just stand there, Danny. I don't know who to give the puck to,'" Gare said.

Ironically, Gare buried a rebound from Martin's shot on the power play for his 50th, the final goal in a 5-2 win.

"I was was like, 'Wow,' I just couldn't fathom it," Gare said. "It was just bizarre."

After Gare's teammates mobbed him on the ice, he skated by Toronto's bench and flipped the puck in the air as he passed Williams.

"He was upset," Gare said, "let's put it that way."

Gare said Martin, who didn't score, was gracious after he joined an exclusive club. Only four Sabres – Gare, Martin, Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny – have scored fifty goals. Gare, who scored 56 goals in 1979-80, and Martin both did it twice.

Growing up in Nelson, British Columbia, Gare watched Rocket Richard and Boom Boom Geoffrion score 50 goals for the Montreal Canadiens.

"Those guys are like iconic to me," Gare said. "To be named amongst them in the 50-goal club, you're grateful."

–

Perreault, the most iconic of Sabres, said facing the Montreal Canadiens and the legendary Jean Beliveau in Buffalo's first home game on October 15, 1970 is his most vivid memory of the team's first season.

"I thought I was going to play against my idol Jean Beliveau that night, but I didn't have a chance to play one shift against him," Perreault said inside KeyBank Center. "But it was a great challenge playing against the Montreal Canadiens. Being from Quebec, Montreal was are our team, and I was looking for that game."

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The Sabres used Thursday's lineup that beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 3-1, meaning defenseman John Gilmour and forward Evan Rodrigues sat out as healthy scratches.

Sabres goalie Carter Hutton to start; Evan Rodrigues to sit again

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO – As promised, the Sabres held a team meeting this morning and skipped the pregame skate before their 50th anniversary home opener against the New Jersey Devils.

Except that to be the Sabres' new routine. New coach Ralph Krueger believes his players do enough off-ice work to get their bodies ready.

In lineup news, Krueger said goalie Carter Hutton, fresh a strong 28-save outing in Thursday's 3-1 win in Pittsburgh, will start tonight's contest at KeyBank Center.

Hutton is 3-3-0 with a 2.48 goals-against average and an .894 save percentage in six career games against New Jersey.

The Sabres will utilize the same lineup as the season opener, meaning forward Evan Rodrigues will be scratched again.

New Jersey, meanwhile, imploded in its opener Friday, blowing a 4-0 second period lead and losing 5-4 shootout to Winnipeg.

"For 35 minutes, you definitely saw the danger of that group and how potent they are offensively," Krueger said.

Slick Devils center Jack Hughes, the first overall pick in June, had zero points and registered one shot on goal in his NHL debut Friday.

Sabres top Devils 7-2, start season 2-0 for first time since 2012-2013

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — For the first time since the 2012-2013 season the Buffalo Sabres are 2-0 to start the season. The Sabres topped the New Jersey Devils 7-2 on Saturday night in the team's home opener.

Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart scored twice while three others also notched their first goals of the season. The Sabres will be back in action on Monday, October 7th when they travel to Columbus. Continue reading for some observations from tonight's game.

Success on the power play and the penalty kill

The first two goals came on the first two power play opportunities with four different players on that top unit getting points. Another PP goal games on the third opportunity later on in the game which at that time, gave them a 100% success rate. Between the team's first two games of the season, they're 4-of-6 on the PP which is a heck of a way to start the season. To go along with that stat the Sabres are just as good, if not better, on the penalty kill. Through their first two games they've allowed just one goal on seven opportunities. I know we haven't even begun to dip our toes into the season but you've really got to like those numbers this early on.

Opponent strikes... Sabres respond... Repeat

How many times last season did we see the Sabres give up a goal and then just crumble? In Thursday's game, with a 1-0 lead, the Penguins responded to tie it all up but it didn't take long for the Sabres to respond and take the lead for good. On Saturday we saw the same. The Sabres had a 2-0 lead heading into the second period when the Devils struck within the first minute of play. It took just a few minutes for the Sabres to respond and extend that lead back to two. In the third period, the Devils once again struck early and quick yet three minutes later, the Sabres had ANOTHER response. When a team cuts into your deficit, it's all about how you respond and the Sabres are doing just that and doing it well.

Different game, same aggressiveness

One of the biggest things we saw when the Sabres opened up the season a few nights ago was their energy all game long. Saturday brought a different game and different opponent but that energy was nearly the exact same. From the get-go the Sabres were putting pressure on the Devils and they weren't wasting any time once they had control of the puck. Once regaining control off a turnover, they immediately skated the opposite way showing no hesitation. They weren't afraid to get pucks to the net, outshooting the Devils 36-20. New head coach Ralph Krueger has gotten these players to buy in and it hasn't taken long for the fans to as well.

An atmosphere we haven't seen in a long time.. and it's a sight to see

Speaking of fans, KeyBank Center was alive and it was so good to see. Six periods later and the fans, whether they be at home or at KBC, have yet to boo the team off the ice. On Saturday we saw standing ovations and fans chanting their desire for another goal. The atmosphere was incredible to say the least and if this team continues to play with the same grit and physicality we've seen them show so far, the arena is going to be a desired place to be on game nights. What a time to be alive.

Sabres shutdown Devils in 7-2 win in home opener

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – As Floyd Smith, the first captain in franchise history, dropped the ceremonial face-off ahead of Saturday night's home opener against the New Jersey Devils, the buzz inside of Keybank Center quickly grew into a roar, energizing the Sabres every step of the way as they skated to a 7-2 win.

"Everybody will remember the goals, but the physicality, the way we stood up for each other in that respect, was really team, sacrificial like," head coach Ralph Krueger said. "The noise was loud and the building had a lot of fun and we're going to work hard to get this in here very often this year."

Victor Olofsson opened the scoring, burying a beautiful feed from Jack Eichel on the power play to give the Blue & Gold a 1-0 lead.

Eichel added his first goal of the season, also on the man-advantage, pounding home a loose front in the front of the net later in the period to give Buffalo a 2-0 lead.

The scoring and the success on the power play would continue as Buffalo built a 4-1 lead on goals from Kyle Okposo and Jeff Skinner.

"Three, four, we want five!" fans shouted from the 300 levels.

Eichel and Olofsson followed through, teaming up to give Buffalo a 5-1 advantage.

"We were lucky enough to hear (those cheers) last year with a couple of our wins and hopefully we hear them a few more times this year," Eichel said.

The roars reached fever pitch late in the second period as the the intensity on the ice increased.

After Kyle Palmeiri backed into netminder Carter Hutton, Rasmus Ristolainen followed up with a crushing hit to Miles Woods, who's helmet was sent flying across the ice — drawing cheers from the capacity crowd inside KBC.

New Jersey's Taylor Hall then took a run at fellow blueliner Jake McCabe, who lowered his shoulder and leveled hall. Wayne Simmonds took exception and tussled with McCabe — capping off a sequence that drew the loudest cheers in recent memory.

"I think whenever you get up a couple of goals, they're trying to get themselves back in the game and regain momentum whether it's through physical play or fighting, it's important for our group to stick together, manage it and keep trying to play our game," Eichel said.

After a strong performance in the season opener against Pittsburgh Thursday night, Saturday featured another 60-minute effort from the Sabres. And, while it is only two games into the regular season, it's clear Krueger has already helped change the culture in the locker room and on the ice.

There were moments where the Devils looked to seize momentum, scoring within the first minute of the second and third periods. In year's past, the Sabres would have played on their heels and would have struggled the rest of the way. But, the Blue & Gold answered back, scoring shortly after New Jersey to regain their edge and the momentum.

"Mistakes are going to happen but we're learning to cover for one another and be on the right side of it," said Sam Reinhart, who also scored twice in the win. "It's kind of the way we're looking to play no matter what and it's always sweeter when you can get the crowd going like that."

The boys are back in town; Fans celebrate 50 years of hockey in the Queen City

By Sarah Minkewicz

WIVB

October 5, 2019

Hockey in the Queen City is back, and so are the fans that come out for it. Ahead of the Sabres home opener fans were celebrating at the annual Party in the Plaza.

"I'm excited. The team looks a lot better than it has in the last couple of years," said Sabres fan William Perry. "I'm looking forward to a great season."

One fan News 4 talked to traveled eight hours to cheer on the Sabres as they play the New Jersey Devils.

"I hope that my team will win tonight. I came from Quebec City and I hope that they will make the playoffs," said Sabres fan Gosuha Raymond Gagmon.

The fans are not only celebrating the home opener, they're also celebrating a milestone for the team.

"It's hard to believe they've been around for 50 years," Perry said.

Several team captains of years past made a special appearance during the home opener to join in on the celebration and reminisce.

"When I first came here we went to the finals," former Sabres captain Danny Gare. "Scoring my first goal on my first shift and my first shot and I really got to know what these fans are like. The energy, the electricity was always there every time we skated on the ice."

"Well it's great, you know, 50 years in Buffalo it's unbelievable and the first few years you know the fans were great. For a new franchise people we're really alive in the building."

Fans we're alive Saturday night proving that after 50 years, some things never change.

4 Observations: Sabres beat Devils 7-2

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y (WIVB) – The Buffalo Sabres snapped another dubious streak in Saturday night's 7-2 win over the New Jersey Devils.

After winning their season opener for the first time since 2012 Thursday night in Pittsburgh, the Sabres were victorious in their home opener for the first time since 2013.

Here are four observations from their win.

These Guys are Good...Scary Good

Ok, that might be a stretch considering the Blue & Gold have only played two games. However, this year's Sabres squad is a far cry from the teams that have skated around aimlessly the last few seasons...and it's not by accident they're playing well.

Considering how the Sabres have struggled to manage their emotions — by their own admission they would get too low after losses and too high after wins — it was impressive to see a team not be overwhelmed by the emotions of a celebratory night in franchise history.

The Sabres have also been known to play down to their competition, and get outplayed in all facets by opposing teams that are hitting the ice for the second game of a back-to-back.

After losing in a shootout to the Jets on Friday night, the Devils were absolutely dominated by the Sabres in the first 20 minutes of action.

While New Jersey had a small push early in the second and third periods, the Blue & Gold answered the call and put this game away.

Who Are These Guys?

So often times over the last few seasons, the Sabres have lacked any sort of fight. After the Devils pulled within 2-1 of the Blue & Gold with a tally in the first minute of the second period, Buffalo answered back within two minutes courtesy of Kyle Okposo and ultimately opened up a 5-1 lead.

New Jersey would once again strike early in the third, only to have Sam Reinhart collect his first of the season and end any hopes of a comeback.

Previous Sabres teams would have folded up shop at the first sign of adversity and allowed the Devils to rally and ultimately earn two points. That doesn't appear to be the case with Ralph Krueger behind the bench.

Along with that, you'd be hard-pressed to find moments over the last few seasons where players were willing to stickup for one another.

That's no longer the case, either.

After Kyle Palmieri bumped Carter Hutton with his backside — it was game on.

Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen sent a clear message as he squared up and hammered winger Miles Wood hard enough to knock his helmet off.

Shortly thereafter, Devils winger Taylor Hall took a run at Jake McCabe who lowered his shoulder and leveled Hall in the corner.

McCabe would then tussle with Wayne Simmonds near the benches before order was restored.

For the first time in a long time, this looks like a team willing to play and fight for each other.

Mr. Permanently Dangerous

Ok, we know Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner can score with ease, which they did in Saturday's home opener. Victor Olofsson is officially a threat to score every time his stick touches the puck.

After sending his first shot of the night high above New Jersey netminder Mackenzie Blackwood, Olofsson made good on his next opportunity a few minutes later on the power play, burying a beautiful cross-ice feed from Eichel to give the Sabres a 1-0 lead.

Late in the second period, Eichel and Olofsson would team up again. As the Captain motioned the rookie winger to move higher in the slot, he once again slid the puck to the man with the rocket-shot the puck. Olofsson looked to pass the opportunity to the front of the net for Reinhart, but the puck skipped back out to Olofsson who ripped home his second tally of the night.

Hutton Holds Down The Crease

Carter Hutton was sensational in Buffalo's season opening win over the Penguins.

He followed that up with another strong effort between the pipes — with a highlight reel effort early in the second period.

On the penalty kill and with the Devils threatening, Hutton turned away New Jersey twice with his outstretched leg across the crease and then capped off the sequence by outstretching his blocker to turn away an attempt from Hall.

Next up, the Sabres travel to Columbus Monday night.

Sabres honor former captains as part of Golden Season celebrations

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

October 5, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — It was night of celebration for the Buffalo Sabres Saturday. The team celebrating its "Golden Season", the fifty year anniversary of the franchise.

On opening night the way they celebrated was by bringing back former team captains. There were 15 of them in attendance at the game to watch their former team whip the New Jersey Devils, 7-2.

The former captains all discussed their days with the Sabres and it was obvious each and every one of them had a great experience with the Sabres.

Current captain Jack Eichel helped the celebration by adding a goal and an assist on the night.

Sabres score seven, defeat Devils in home opener

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

October 6, 2019

BUFFALO -- Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart each scored two goals for the Buffalo Sabres in their home opener, a 7-2 win against the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

Jack Eichel had three points (one goal, two assists) and Jeff Skinner had a goal and an assist, and Rasmus Dahlin had three assists for the Sabres, who won their first two games of the season for the first time since 2012-13. Carter Hutton made 18 saves.

"We wanted to come out and show the fans what it's going to be like this year and the type of product we want to put on the ice, just get them excited for the season," Eichel said. "I think we did a pretty good job of that tonight. It's all about consistency, and we just want to keep doing it every night and make this place a hard place to come in and try to play."

Buffalo went 3-for-3 on the power play after going 1-for-2 in a 3-1 win at the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday.

"We know that those are huge opportunities in the League the way it is today and how tight these games are," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "Our penalty kill, again, has been outstanding. But more than anything, the way we're moving the puck, the way we're staying in motion. We're not stuck anywhere in one spot, and the way everyone's filling the lanes, we're lethal there right now."

Kyle Palmieri and Travis Zajac scored for New Jersey, which lost 5-4 in a shootout to the Winnipeg Jets in its season opener Friday. Mackenzie Blackwood allowed seven goals on 36 shots.

"We're playing soft and light, and we're playing like we want to have an easy game," Devils coach John Hynes said. "We can talk about it nine different ways; that's the reality of where we're at right now, so we've got to fix it."

Olofsson scored on the power play from the top of the left face-off circle at 2:56 of the first period to make it 1-0.

Eichel gave Buffalo a 2-0 lead on the power play at 17:26. Blackwood thought he covered the puck coming from behind the net, but Skinner poked it to Eichel in front.

Palmieri made it 2-1 when he scored from the right circle 37 seconds into the second.

Kyle Okposo got his stick on a Dahlin point shot at 2:49 to make it 3-1.

"We just did a good job of sticking with our game plan," Eichel said. "Nobody panicked on the bench. It wasn't a big deal or anything. I think we just went out and did a really good job of putting pressure on them. We had a few good shifts in their end, we rolled them over, and [Okposo] gets a big goal.

"I think we were able to regain momentum from there and just throughout the game we were able to do that. It's important to do that."

Skinner made it 4-1 at 8:57 when he scored with a high wrist shot off a circle-to-circle pass from Marcus Johansson.

Olofsson scored his second of the night with a wrist shot from below the right face-off dot on the power play at 13:33 to put the Sabres ahead 5-1.

Zajac made it 5-2 with a quick shot from the left circle 58 seconds into the third period.

Reinhart scored at 3:56 to make it 6-2 and on a breakaway at 16:16 for the 7-2 final.

"Defensively, we haven't been hard enough in any plays, and we're allowing teams too much time and space," Zajac said. "We know what we have to do and what's our identity and what's expected of us as a team, and we just haven't been able to get to our identity."

They said it

"A little too much watching, I think, right now and waiting for someone else to maybe do the work. We've got to get a little grittier at both ends of the ice, I think. We're just more reliant on our talent at this point. We're not giving ourselves a chance to use it because we haven't been hard enough (on the puck)." -- Devils forward Travis Zajac

"The pregame ceremony was tremendous. Just a moment that I'll never forget, going out there with some of those guys and being able to stand in the same circle as them was just a tremendous honor and an amazing moment. I think we were all pretty amped up to get the game going." -- Sabres captain Jack Eichel on Buffalo's Golden Season celebration

Need to know

Dahlin tied his NHL career high point total set at the Washington Capitals (one goal, two assists) on Dec. 15, 2018. ... Krueger is the fourth coach to win his first two games with the Sabres, joining Marcel Pronovost (Oct. 13-15, 1977), Scotty Bowman (Oct. 11-13, 1979) and Jim Roberts (Dec. 9-12, 1981). ... Devils center Nico Hischier's assist on Palmieri's goal was his 100th NHL point.

What's next

Devils: At the Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday (7:30 p.m. ET; NBCSN, TVAS)

Sabres: At the Columbus Blue Jackets on Monday (7 p.m. ET; ESPN+, FS-O, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Sabres welcome back 15 former captains to celebrate opening night

By Pat Pickens

NHL.com

October 6, 2019

What's the best way to celebrate your 50th anniversary? Bring back some of your all-time greats.

The Buffalo Sabres honored 15 former captains to participate in the ceremonial puck drop before their home opener against the New Jersey Devils.

The Sabres welcomed back Gerry Meehan, Don Luce, Danny Gare, Gilbert Perreault, Mike Foligno, Michael Peca, Donald Audette, Stu Barnes, Jochen Hecht, Toni Lydman, Brian Campbell, Craig Rivet, Jason Pominville and Brian Gionta.

The captains then watched as Floyd Smith, Buffalo's initial captain in 1970, dropped the puck during a special ceremony.

"It's great," Perreault told MSG before the game. "It's always great to see the boys and guys you played with for so many years in the early years of the franchise, and it's always nice to see them."

Jack Eichel, the Sabres' current captain, capped Captains Night by scoring his first goal of the season in their 7-2 win against New Jersey.

Devils at Sabres preview

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

October 5, 2019

DEVILS (0-0-1) at SABRES (1-0-0)

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

The Game

The Buffalo Sabres will try to win their first two games of the season for the first time since 2012-13 when they host the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

It's the first home game of the season for the Sabres, who defeated the Pittsburgh Penguins 3-1 in coach Ralph Krueger's debut Thursday.

The Devils are looking to bounce back after a 5-4 shootout loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Friday. New Jersey led 4-0 with 11 seconds left in the second period before allowing four unanswered goals ahead of the shootout. P.K. Subban and Wayne Simmonds each had an assist in their first game with the Devils.

Players to watch

Devils forward Blake Coleman, who scored twice against the Jets, has two goals in five games against the Sabres.

Sabres forward Conor Sheary had two goals against the Penguins, and has six points (two goals, four assists) in 14 games against the Devils.

They said it

"The best part about it is you don't have a lot of time to think about it. We go right back at it [Saturday] and I think it's a great opportunity. In this league back to backs, we just saw [the Jets] on a back to back come back from 4-0. So, there's no excuses in this locker room. We're a fast team, we've got a lot of energy, we're in great shape after training camp, I can tell you that. We'll be ready to go." -- Devils defenseman P.K. Subban

"It's going to be full, it's going to be our new jerseys, it's going to be a new team, some new stars out there, too. ... I can't wait to get everything going at KeyBank [Center]." -- Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin on the home opener

Devils projected lineup

Taylor Hall -- Nico Hischier -- Kyle Palmieri
Nikita Gusev -- Jack Hughes -- Jesper Bratt
Blake Coleman -- Travis Zajac -- Wayne Simmonds
Miles Wood -- Pavel Zacha -- John Hayden

Andy Greene -- P.K. Subban
Will Butcher -- Sami Vatanen
Mirco Mueller -- Damon Severson

Mackenzie Blackwood
Cory Schneider

Scratched: Connor Carrick, Jesper Boqvist, Kevin Rooney

Injured: None

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

Carter Hutton
Linus Ullmark

Scratched: Evan Rodrigues, John Gilmour

Injured: Brandon Montour (hand), Zach Bogosian (hip)

Status report

Schneider, who left the game Friday with cramping at 2:41 of the third period, traveled with the Devils to Buffalo and is available to play. ... Hutton will start for the second straight game for the Sabres.

Stat pack

Skinner is two assists away from 200 in the NHL. ... Hischier needs one point for 100. ... The Devils are 9-2-1 against the Sabres since the start of the 2015-16 season.

Sabres have received contributions from throughout lineup in opening wins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 6, 2019

Ralph Krueger was asked about the effectiveness of his fourth line on Sunday, and his response offered some insight into his coaching philosophy.

"Which one is the fourth line?" he retorted.

Krueger was being playful, but his point stood. The line in question was that of Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson, and Kyle Okposo, and the coach went on to explain why he doesn't view that trio - or any others - in terms of rank.

"I generally don't think [that way]," Krueger said. "There's the Eichel line, there's the Larsson line, there's the Johansson line, and we've got the Mittelstadt line right now. Really, there's different roles at different times.

"If you look at when we were closing a game out in Pittsburgh, that line, as an example, was one of only two lines left in the last five minutes."

Krueger leaned heavily on Larsson and Girgensons when the Sabres were looking to close their victory over the Penguins last Thursday. The two forwards played 11 and 10 shifts in the third period, respectively, and played key roles on three penalty kills.

Meanwhile, Casey Mittelstadt - who had earned two assists already in that game - only saw one shift after the 5:00 mark of the third. Krueger has emphasized the importance of that role acceptance in the early going, with players being ready based on situational needs.

"I'm trying to make sure that everybody understands they're important," Krueger said. "If you've killed four minutes and somebody else has played power play [for] eight, those might be equal minutes as far as the work and the sacrifice and the investment of energy you have.

"I think that gets lost a lot in the game today, how valuable the players are who play those defensively physical and punishing minutes for us."

Though the Larsson line can generally be counted on for its defensive commitment and offensive simplicity, the trio has shown an ability to contribute on the score sheet so far as well. Girgensons and Okposo both had breakaway chances in Pittsburgh. A heavy forecheck led to a crucial goal from Okposo against New Jersey on Saturday.

Against the Devils, in 8:28 with the three forwards on the ice at five-on-five, shots attempts were in Buffalo's favor by a margin of 8-2. It was the highest shot attempt share of any of the Sabres' four lines.

"They lead the way in really playing simple," Krueger said. "Hard forechecking, they're getting the pucks in deep, they're getting on it, they're having some strong offensive shifts."

Look no further than Okposo for an example of role acceptance. He skated just 10:05 Thursday but still managed to make a vital impact at a time when the Sabres' deficit had just been cut to one. Krueger views the veteran as an option to jump up in the lineup and on the power play when the situation calls for it.

"I think Kyle has completely from day one, in every practice since the 13th of September, has been attempting to do exactly what we're asking in every drill on the ice and understanding what we need from him is possibly different from in the past," Krueger said. "The ability, though, to inject him in any power play at any time is of course an asset.

"We need depth in everything we do. But his attitude through this is what's carrying him. If it's 10 minutes or it's going to be 18, we're convinced that he put in the work this summer to have the foundation to be able to do that."

Okposo said he enters each day with the same mindset, regardless of his role or ice time.

"Go out there and be the best player that I can be," he said. "I'm focusing on what I can do to be the best and that's it. There's not external pressure, there's no external factors that are entering into my brain. It doesn't matter if I play five minutes or 20 minutes.

"I'm going to go out there and be the best I can in that shift and that's all I can control. That's what I'm focused on."

Getting better

Another question Sunday that brought a smirk out of Krueger - does he plan on matching his Buffalo Bills counterpart, Sean McDermott, in leading his team to a 3-0 start?

"It is a serious question with a smile, but I think that we need to look at what's best for the Sabres every day," Krueger said. "Today's just another day where we're trying to find some growth and some learners and make the team better tomorrow night. If we're talking that language, we're going to continue to be competitive here."

Daily improvement has been a mantra of Krueger's since the outset of training camp. Okposo explained how the Sabres can find opportunities to get better on a day like Sunday, when the team stayed off the ice.

"There's tons of stuff you can do," Okposo said. "You can get a little workout, you can recover, you can get in the cold tub, you can go shoot pucks, you can stick handle. There are so many things that [the media doesn't] see that gets done on a daily basis if we're not skating and even if we are.

"I think that's something that, since I've been here, this year has been exponentially better with the group becoming professionals and it's great to see everybody kind of taking that next step. You see guys really behind the scenes doing the little things. I think that's only going to continue to get better and continue to help our team."

Off to Columbus

The Sabres departed for Columbus Sunday afternoon, where they'll meet the 0-2 Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Monday. The two teams split a pair of contests in the preseason, albeit with very different rosters.

The Blue Jackets dropped their home opener against Toronto, then lost 7-2 in Pittsburgh on Saturday.

"We're expecting a strong resistance in Columbus," Krueger said. "The coaching staff is very strong there and they will come hard in that game and fight for their first win. We need to be a smart team and stick to our plan and make it about us and about continuing to play the way we are.

"We played them twice in the preseason, which gave us opportunity on really both sides, for them and for us, to get to know each other better. I'm sure strategically it will be a tight game. I'm expecting a real tight one-goal game tomorrow."

'It gives you goosebumps': Current players, alums react to memorable win

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 6, 2019

Jack Eichel waited anxiously on the bench as the Zamboni made its way across the KeyBank Center ice early Saturday evening. It was a three-minute wait between the ceremonial and actual puck drop that must have felt like an eternity, given the performance Eichel and his Sabres teammates had in store for their hometown fans.

In the 48 hours between the team's season-opening victory in Pittsburgh and their home opener against New Jersey, Eichel had spoken at length regarding his excitement towards introducing the new brand of Sabres hockey to the KeyBank Center crowd.

The 15 fellow Sabres captains in attendance simply added to that anticipation.

"We take a lot of pride in our alumni here," alternate captain Jake McCabe said. "I knew Jack was going to have a good night, that's for sure. He takes a ton of pride wearing that 'C.'"

Dressed for the first time in their commemorative white and gold uniforms, Eichel and the Sabres opened the home portion of their Golden Season with a thrilling 7-2 win that inspired an atmosphere reminiscent of the team's 10-game winning streak from a season ago.

The night began with an extended standing ovation for Hall of Fame broadcaster Rick Jeanneret, who had to quiet the crowd before he could begin introducing the former captains in attendance. It ended with a raucous salute for the current team, and with McCabe on the microphone thanking what he deemed as "the best crowd in the NHL."

McCabe continued his ode to the fans in the dressing room.

"You just get goosebumps," McCabe said. "That's all I can really say to describe the feeling. You get goosebumps. You're smiling, you're happy. That's what hockey's all about, right there."

Ralph Krueger said at the outset of training camp that it was his mission to make it so that those who watch the team can feel an identity that they could easily recognize as "Sabres hockey." That brand was clear to the former captains observing from the suite level on Saturday.

At one point, Michael Peca turned to another alum and echoed a point that current players made throughout training camp: It looked like the players were thinking less.

"As fans, I think we see the difference in this team," Peca said. "I think Ralph's got them playing more instinctual type hockey. They're not overthinking the game.

"You can see the difference. These guys, they grow up developing and honing instincts in this game. It's so fast that you can't overthink it. It's just great to see them playing the way they are."

Peca recalled having a sense of freedom during his own time with the Sabres, an era when systems were less complicated compared to how they've become today. Sure, there was strategy - Ted Nolan preferred the left-wing lock; Lindy Ruff ran the trap - but the core of the game was instinctual.

Jochen Hecht played for the Sabres later in Ruff's tenure. Though he smiled sheepishly when discussing the amount of freedom allowed under the fiery head coach, he endorsed Peca's assessment.

"You've got your freedom," Jochen Hecht said. "You've got a little bit of a system, but the best you can be on the ice is when you don't have to think. That's when you use your instincts. When you get a bunch of guys on the ice together who have the same instincts, that will work out great. You'll be dominating in the league."

While Peca identified with the instinctual nature of Krueger's system, others noted the aggressive, pressure-based game plan. The Sabres once again closed their gaps, tightened up the blue line, and controlled the play for virtually the full 60 minutes. The final shot tally was 36-20 in favor of Buffalo.

"They're pressuring the puck a lot," Don Luce said. "They're using their speed to pressure the puck, create turnovers. I think that's the style Ralph wants them to play they're doing it. They're forcing the other team to make mistakes."

"He's got them working as a team, trying to eliminate people all over the ice," Floyd Smith added. "It's what good teams try to do."

Smith lauded the spirit he saw in the current group, a sentiment you can bet the crowd of 19,070 shared as they waved their commemorative T-shirts in reaction to McCabe's devastating hit on Taylor Hall or marveled at the skill on Victor Olofsson's two goals.

They never took their foot off the pedal, either. When Travis Zajac scored to make it 5-2 in the opening minute of the third period, the Sabres reacted with a ferocity fitting for a one-goal game. Sam Reinhart answered with a goal less than three minutes later, then buried a breakaway with 3:44 left in the contest.

"[The fans] obviously want to see hard work and compete and all those little cliché things that everybody says all the time," Okposo said. "But we did it tonight. I thought we played a pretty blue-collar game. Just ran them out a town. It was pretty fun to be a part of."

"... I just feel like we're kind of suffocating the two teams that we played so far. More nights like this, sign me up."

More nights like Saturday is the top item on everyone's wish list, fans and players alike. McCabe said players spoke in the dressing room about making that sort of an atmosphere a nightly staple of their game.

Eichel, meanwhile, began the night sharing a circle with the likes of Peca, Mike Foligno, Danny Gare, and Gilbert Perreault, a moment he said he'll never forget. He sounded every bit the part of a captain as he put the team's hot start in perspective afterward.

"I think we wanted to come out and show the fans what it's going to be like this year and the type of product we want to put on the ice and just get them excited for the season," he said. "I think we did a pretty good job of that tonight."

"It's all about consistency in this league. We want to just keep doing it every night, make this place a tough place to come in and try and play."

At the Horn: Devils 2 - Sabres 7

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 5, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres turned in a dominating performance in front of a raucous home crowd Saturday night.

A sold-out KeyBank Center watched the Sabres control play from start to finish in a 7-2 victory over the New Jersey Devils in their home opener.

Victor Olofsson scored twice on the power play, Sam Reinhart added a pair as well, while Jack Eichel, Kyle Okposo and Jeff Skinner also tallied.

What happened

The Sabres power play was hot all night, finishing 3-for-4. Olofsson opened the scoring 2:56 into the game and Eichel made it 2-0 late in the first, also with the man advantage.

Buffalo added three goals in the second period and got the home crowd on its feet, particularly when Rasmus Ristolainen and Jake McCabe delivered back-to-back bone-crushing hits in the defensive zone.

Tonight's seven-goal output is the second-highest goal total ever recorded by the Sabres in a home-opener, trailing only the team's 9-5 win on Oct. 10, 1974 against the Boston Bruins, according to @SabresPR.

What it means

The Sabres are off to a 2-0-0 start.

And overall, it's a great beginning to the Golden Season.

Fifteen former captains participated in a pregame ceremony, including a walk down the Blue and Gold Carpet to greet fans. The captains were involved in the game throughout the night, including T-shirt tosses and broadcast interviews.

We have tons of content from the captains that you can find here on Sabres.com.

Also, with tonight's win, Ralph Krueger became the fourth Sabres head coach ever to earn wins in both of his first two games as the team's head coach, joining Marcel Pronovost (Oct. 13-15, 1977), Scotty Bowman (Oct. 11-13, 1979) and Jim Roberts (Dec. 9-12, 1981). Stick tap to @SabresPR for that stat too.

Roll the highlight film

Not sure where to start with this one, so let's start before the game. Here's the full pregame ceremony with Rick Jeanneret welcoming 50 fans, 15 former captains and the current team onto the ice:

What's next

Buffalo will practice on Sunday and LECOM Harborcenter before heading out to Columbus, where they'll play the Blue Jackets on Monday. Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. from Nationwide Arena with the Buick Game Night pregame show starting at 6:30 on MSG.

Sabres aim to introduce new brand of hockey to hometown crowd

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 5, 2019

Ralph Krueger re-watched the Sabres' victory in Pittsburgh on Thursday and was pleased more than anything by the consistency his team showed for three periods. There were few deviations from the aggressive, connected game plan he and his staff instilled throughout the month of September.

The next step is to establish that consistency from game to game. The Sabres will look to introduce their new brand of hockey to the hometown fans when they open their home schedule against the New Jersey Devils tonight at KeyBank Center.

"The results need to be byproducts," Krueger said. "We want to feel a consistency in our game, whether we're on the road or at home. The 'Sabres hockey' should be present. It's going to be a grind and a while until we have it as habits all the time.

"We're expecting to have bumps and bruises along the way, but we're quite confident going into the game tonight because of the commitment the players have been showing and we expect that to continue."

The setting should make for a raucous atmosphere. Fifteen former captains will be welcomed to the ice as part of a pregame ceremony to kick off the organization's celebration of its Golden Season. The Sabres will also be debuting their commemorative 50th season jerseys.

Once the puck drops, the focus shifts to replicating the assertive style that led them to a win in Pittsburgh. The Sabres outshot the Penguins, 41-29, and held a 28-12 advantage in even-strength scoring chances, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

"We're trying to play the same way no matter what building we're in," Sam Reinhart said. "With that being said, we want this to be a tough place to come into and play, with the crowd and the atmosphere they create and at the same time, secondly, the way we want to play, kind of in your face and aggressive."

Pregame coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m., with puck drop set for 7. Rick Jeanneret and Rob Ray will have the call.

Scouting the Devils

The Devils are coming off a 5-4 shootout loss to Winnipeg on Friday night, their first game with a new-look lineup that features No. 1 overall pick Jack Hughes at center and P.K. Subban on defense.

New Jersey held a 4-0 lead in that game before giving way to a Winnipeg comeback. Krueger and his coaching staff were following carefully, more focused on what the Devils did well than what they didn't.

"We need to see what they're trying to do when they play their A-game and we need to expect their A-game for 60 minutes," Krueger said. "So that's what we're doing, is we're picking the best of what they did. The score is actually irrelevant.

"We saw when they were on, they're dangerous and they're very effective in what they do. We have a lot of respect for the way they're being coached there and I'm sure they're coming in here grumpier than if they had won the game so that makes it all that much more challenging for us."

Projected lineup

Krueger said the bodies will remain the same as in Thursday's win, although the lines and defense pairs will not be revealed until warmups. Carter Hutton will make his second straight start in net.

Here's how the Sabres lined up in Pittsburgh:

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka

13 Jimmy Vesey - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 43 Conor Sheary
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

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

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark