



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Evan Rodrigues expected to draw into Sabres' lineup with Conor Sheary out

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

October 9, 2019

Evan Rodrigues did not expect to be sitting in the press box during the Buffalo Sabres' first three games of the season.

The 26-year-old forward played in all but eight games for the Sabres last season, registering career highs in goals (nine), assists (20) and points (29). Rodrigues' progress and versatility earned him a one-year, \$2 million contract with the Sabres in July.

Rodrigues called himself a "valuable NHL player" during training camp and did not appear to struggle during the preseason. Yet, he was a healthy scratch for the season opener, and coach Ralph Krueger opted to keep the same lineup following the Sabres' back-to-back wins against Pittsburgh and New Jersey.

With winger Conor Sheary listed as "day to day" with an upper-body injury, Rodrigues is expected to draw into the Sabres' lineup Wednesday night against the Montreal Canadiens in KeyBank Center.

"Yeah, definitely," Rodrigues said when asked if he was "shocked" by not playing the first three games. "That was obviously not a situation I thought I'd be in. It happened and now you just keep working."

Rodrigues skated with Jimmy Vesey and Casey Mittelstadt on a line during practice Tuesday. Rather than making wholesale changes, Krueger opted to simply replace Sheary with Rodrigues. That group struggled during its limited ice time Monday in Columbus.

Mittelstadt and Vesey played only 10:27 and 10:46, respectively, and the former failed to register a shot on goal. Rodrigues can play center or right wing, which should allow him to provide support for Mittelstadt, who has experienced growing pains in a new system. Like many young centers in the National Hockey League, Mittelstadt has struggled with consistency in the defensive zone.

Krueger expected Mittelstadt's offensive game to take a step back during the transition. However, the hope is that the Sabres will receive more production from that line against the Canadiens.

"Evan's been outstanding," Krueger said. "I mean, he's the one that said to me, 'Somebody's going to be in this spot all season long.' He took it really well. He's stayed active, he's been working really hard and his opportunity now comes tomorrow. He's excited to get back in the lineup. He's been nothing but supportive to his teammates and to the process."

Sheary, who scored two goals in the season-opening win in Pittsburgh, did not register a shot on goal in 12:05 of ice time against Columbus. He recorded a secondary assist on Marcus Johansson's power-play goal in the second period.

Preparing for the Canadiens

The Sabres recognize they didn't play well enough Monday night in Columbus, but they earned one point during their first bout with adversity. Following a self-evaluation Tuesday morning, Krueger explained to the media that his players failed to respond to the Blue Jackets' aggressive style of play.

Though he and his staff don't expect perfection only three games into the season, they want the Sabres to be quicker to adjust to the different types of teams they'll face. For example, Montreal (1-0-1) relies more on speed and skill than Columbus, which pressures the puck in all three zones.

"We didn't play the way we need to when a team comes at us like they did," Krueger explained. "We took a while to find our feet. ... We do learn about puck management in those games. We do learn about the competition here in the league every night and that all the teams have different personalities. We'll see a different one against Montreal tomorrow. Being able to adjust to those personalities but staying true to our game is part of the growth we're going through right now."

Injury updates

In addition to Sheary, the Sabres' injury report included defenseman Brandon Montour (hand), goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (hip) and Zach Bogosian (hip). Montour is expected to miss three more weeks, while Luukkonen and Bogosian are out "indefinitely."

Defenseman John Gilmour is expected to be a healthy scratch for a fourth consecutive game, and the Sabres likely will face the Canadiens without a healthy extra forward. Aside from Rodrigues drawing into the lineup, Krueger did not make any changes to his forward lines or defense pairings during practice.

Krueger isn't expected to name a starting goalie until Wednesday morning following the team's meeting.

Granato recovering

Sabres assistant coach Don Granato is expected to be hospitalized with severe pneumonia for "a while" but has made progress, his brother, Tony, told the Wisconsin State Journal.

Tony, who serves as head coach for the University of Wisconsin's men's hockey program, was away from his team for a week to be with his brother and family.

"I needed to be there," Tony told the newspaper. "He had a real bad health scare. He is improving; he's still going to be in the hospital for a while. But I felt comfortable leaving that he was in a good place that he's going to be OK. Ten days ago, I didn't know if he was going to be OK."

Rochester coach Chris Taylor is working as an interim assistant coach in Buffalo during Don Granato's absence.

Morning skates

The Sabres will not hold morning skates on game days at KeyBank Center this season. Instead, the team will meet with a media availability to follow.

New line, new coach, better Jeff Skinner? Sabres' winger thinks his play is 'going up'

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
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The overtime goal that clinched the Buffalo Sabres' 10-game win streak last November illustrated the impact Jeff Skinner can have on offense. The two-time All-Star corralled the loose puck, used his edge work and stickhandling to fool San Jose goalie Martin Jones, and sent the sold-out KeyBank Center crowd into a frenzy with a back-handed shot into the net.

That was the apex of the Sabres' season, yet Skinner's offensive ability shined during the months that followed. His career-high 40 goals, and the workout regimen that helped him miss only three of a possible 328 games over a four-season span, earned him an eight-year, \$72 million contract with Buffalo in June.

However, Columbus defenseman Ryan Murray learned Monday night that Skinner's game goes beyond the highlight-reel goals. Skinner, a 27-year-old winger and two-time All-Star, used his stick to strip the puck from Murray near the Blue Jackets net and score the tying goal seconds later with a shot from the slot in the second period.

The sequence showed how Skinner has continued to evolve on the ice, and provided further evidence that he and his new linemates could solve one of the Sabres' weaknesses from last season.

"I think so," Skinner said when asked if he's a better player now than he was a year ago. "That's the goal every year, to go back and sort of work on some things you can improve on, while at the same time maintain your strengths. I think another year of experience helps. The more you know the league, the more you know the guys you're playing with. The more situations you have been in, the easier you can draw off of experience and use that to your advantage. I'd like to think I'm still going up, so hopefully I can keep it going."

The long-term contract has created immense expectations for Skinner, and he has delivered with two goals among three points in the Sabres' first three games. He isn't playing with Jack Eichel, either. With the Sabres in need of balanced scoring, new coach Ralph Krueger has Skinner skating with Marcus Johansson and Vladimir Sobotka.

Johansson is still adjusting to playing center, a position he hasn't played full time since 2011-12. Sobotka, meanwhile, scored five goals among 13 points in 69 games last season. Yet the line has scored a goal in each of the past two games.

Skinner's first goal of the season came on a cross-ice pass from Johansson during a 7-2 win over New Jersey last Saturday.

Skinner said he didn't expect to play with Eichel at the start of the season. After all, the Sabres have a new coach and their roster features three prominent additions: Johansson, Jimmy Vesey and Victor Olofsson, who played six games with the team late last season. But Skinner expressed excitement for skating alongside with Johansson, whom he said is "easy to play with."

"He's such an unbelievable skater, first of all," Johansson said of Skinner. "I think you saw last night the ways he can skate and strip that puck and score a goal. He has that nose for the net, too. It's a special talent that he's got. It's fun to watch."

Since entering the league at the start of the 2010-11 season, Skinner ranks fifth in even-strength goals, trailing only Alex Ovechkin, John Tavares, Patrick Kane and Steven Stamkos. Skinner has scored at least 20 goals in seven of his nine NHL seasons and ranks 10th in that category since the start of the 2015-16 season, scoring more in the regular season during that span than Edmonton's Connor McDavid, Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin and Stamkos, among others.

Skinner, like his teammates, endured a difficult stretch during his first season in Buffalo. He scored one goal during a 22-game span from Feb. 17 through March 31. However, Skinner was still generating scoring chances

and fell victim to bad puck luck. According to NaturalStatTrick.com, Skinner ranked 18th in the NHL in high-danger scoring chances (26) during that span.

Among the forwards who generated 25 or more chances, only two scored fewer than four goals: Skinner and Detroit winger Tyler Bertuzzi. Skinner's shooting percentage (1.4%) in those 22 games was the lowest by a wide margin and paled in comparison to the career-high 16.7% he registered for the season.

"That was a pure Jeff Skinner goal," Krueger said of Skinner's play against Murray. "We enjoy seeing the way he works in the slot and the way he hunts pucks down. Just in general, his defensive game is improving day to day here since the beginning of camp. He's really working hard to participate in the game without the puck and battle the way we need him to. But that offensive touch was good to see and we hope to see a lot of it."

Skinner works with a number of skill coaches and trainers every offseason, all of whom he credits with his continued progress. But stripping pucks is among the skills Skinner can't always practice over the summer. He credits experience – including 664 games in the NHL – with giving him the awareness to trail Murray on the play Monday in Columbus and having the instincts to use a burst of speed to rip the puck away.

Skinner ranked 18th among all NHL forwards in takeaways (53) last season and only four of those players committed fewer turnovers than Skinner (34).

"I think it's something that sort of gets better with experience," Skinner said of his ability to strip the puck from an opponent. "It's one of those things you try to focus on. Obviously, I'm not sort of going to overpower a lot of guys defensively, so sometimes you have to find other ways to get the puck. For me, try to use my stick to separate their stick from the puck is sort of a strategy I have to take."

Johansson explained to the assembled media following practice Tuesday that although he's encouraged by the line's play in the latter portion of the loss Monday, the group has not possessed the puck enough in the offensive zone because it has focused too much on keeping the puck out of the Sabres' net.

Johansson seemed to place the blame on himself, particularly his adjustment to playing center again. Yet, Krueger said the line has the potential to provide the Sabres with the balanced scoring necessary.

"It's very important for us to develop two lines that have a regular offensive punch," Krueger said. "The opportunity to have them on power play, which has been functioning well, to put the players that are most productive offensively and specialize in that skill set, that's always there. But we see with Marcus Johansson with Jeff, a real synergy that's growing and developing. They really are finding each other and feeding off each other."

Sabres' Rodrigues was shocked he wasn't playing

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

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Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Many were surprised when Evan Rodrigues was one of the healthy scratches for the first three games. An upper-body injury to Conor Sheary is going to give Rodrigues a chance to play Wednesday against Montreal. The forward said he was shocked he wasn't playing, "Yes, definitely. It's not a situation I thought I'd be in, but it happened, so now I just put my head down and keep working."

Rodrigues, of course, wasn't happy to be sitting, but Ralph Krueger said he handled it like a pro. "Evan's been outstanding, he's the one that said to me, somebody is going to be in this spot all season long, but he took it really well, he stayed active, he's been working hard, but he's been nothing but supportive to his teammates and to the process."

The 26-year-old has been around long enough to know that he can't go out against the Canadiens and try to do too much. He said, "I'll just bring the same work ethic and effort that I always do and just play my game. I'm confident in my ability."

Rodrigues has never played a NHL game with Jimmy Vesey, but he knows him very well because they work together in the summer. Rodrigues thinks they can get an immediate chemistry, "I think so, I skated with him all summer in Boston and he has a real good shot, so I'm just going to try to find him in an open area."

From Vesey's point of view he said, "I think he's a very skilled player. He has a lot of poise when he has the puck and I thought we had a good practice, so I hope that carries over into the game.

"I think he can bring a lot to our lineup and I'm looking forward to playing with him."

Vesey acknowledged that they have never played together in Buffalo, but he thinks there can still be an immediate chemistry, "We have some familiarity, we know each other pretty well, not only getting to know each other in the summer, but playing against each other in college for three years."

Vesey played at Harvard, while Rodrigues was at Boston University.

Rodrigues already has a chemistry with Casey Mittelstadt because they played together a lot last year. Mittelstadt is looking forward to it, "He plays well with the puck and can make plays all over the rink, so he brings a lot, I've played with him quite a bit and we'll try to pick up where we left off."

Mittelstadt got to know Rodrigues the minute he walked in the door. He said, "It's huge, even back to when I first got here a couple years ago, those six games I played with him, so he's probably the guy I'm most familiar with along with Shears and Okie, so I'm excited, it's going to be good to have him."

Whether it's Rodrigues or Conor Sheary on the wing, Mittelstadt still feel his line needs to be better, "I think overall as a line, we've got to be a little harder on pucks and get pucks into their end and play in their end.

"We're all pretty good at hunting the puck, so once we have it, we have to try to hang on to it and make plays and we should be fine."

Tuesday's lines:

Olofsson - Eichel - Reinhart

Girgensons - Larsson - Okposo

Vesey - Mittelstadt - Rodrigues

Skinner - Johansson - Sobotka

McCabe - Ristolainen

Dahlin - Miller

Scandella - Jokiharju

Gilmour

50 for 50: The Buffalo Sabres are celebrating their golden anniversary

By John Vogl

The Athletic

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Most stories need a flashy introduction. This isn't one of them.

The dynamic numbers, hair-raising videos and catchy songs will tell the tale.

The Buffalo Sabres are celebrating their golden anniversary, so let's go 1 to 50 with the facts, figures and personalities that have made the half-century so memorable.

1 — Number of feet in the crease

The most infamous play in Sabres history was June 19, 1999, when Dallas' Brett Hull scored the Stanley Cup-winning goal in Buffalo. Or did he? It depends on who you ask.

Buffalo says no. Hull's foot was in the goal crease — a strict no-no at the time — but the NHL counted the overtime goal and handed the Stars the Cup as the Sabres raged. Bryan Lewis, who was the league's director of officiating, still steadfastly maintains it was legit. People in Dallas think it's funny, mocking the Sabres with Prince's party song, "1999," whenever Buffalo comes to town.

But it still stings in Sabreland.

2 — Appearances in the Cup final

The Sabres lost to the Flyers in 1974-75 and the Stars following the 1998-99 season.

3 — Times drafting first overall

A lucky spin of the wheel in 1970 gave Buffalo the No. 1 selection over expansion brethren Vancouver, which meant the arrival of future Hockey Hall of Famer Gilbert Perreault. The Sabres drafted Pierre Turgeon at the top in 1987 and won the draft lottery to land Rasmus Dahlin in 2018.

4 — Wholesale makeovers of the uniform

The original blue and gold became black and red in 1996. The "slug" arrived in 2007. The Sabres sent in the navy (blue) in 2010. We named four "all-uniform teams" this summer, picking 48 players who represented each sweater the best.

5 — Mike Ramsey

The best all-around defenseman in Sabres history, a rock on the blue line from 1980 to 1993. He was so intense he even leveled Wayne Gretzky during an All-Star Game.

6 — Phil Housley

The best offensive defenseman in Sabres history, Housley averaged 22 goals per season and finished his eight-year stay in Buffalo with 558 points in 608 games. His two-year coaching stint wasn't as dazzling.

7 — Retired numbers

The Sabres have seven numbers hanging in the rafters, retiring Nos. 2 (Tim Horton), 7 (Rick Martin), 11 (Perreault), 14 (Rene Robert), 16 (Pat LaFontaine), 18 (Danny Gare) and 39 (Dominik Hasek).

8 — Years in a row without the playoffs

It's a dubious streak. From 1970 through 2011, the longest the Sabres had gone without playing in the postseason was three years, something that happened just once. Last season's miss made it eight in a row.

"It's been a tough go here for a little bit," center Jack Eichel said this month, "but we're so desperate to get back to playing meaningful games and building that atmosphere around the arena."

9 — Round in which Donald Audette was drafted

One of the top steals in team history, Audette ranks 15th in goals (166) and 11th in goals per game (0.39).

10 — Craig Ramsay and Dale Hawerchuk

Ramsay is second in games played for Buffalo (1,070) and fourth in points (672). He was also the organization's first Selke Trophy winner (1985) as best defensive forward in the NHL. Hawerchuk played just five seasons in Buffalo, but his 155 assists from 1991-93 are the highest two-season total in team history.

11 — Gilbert Perreault

The Original Sabre is the only player who will ever wear No. 11 in Buffalo. He holds the team records for games (1,191), goals (512), assists (814), points (1,326), game-winning goals (81), power-play points (432) and number of times making an owner cry at an introductory news conference (one).

12 — Years since last playoff series win

The Sabres lost in the first round during their last two postseason appearances (2010, 2011) and haven't won a series since dropping the Rangers in the Eastern Conference semifinals in 2007.

13 — Yuri Khmylev

The Russian import scored at least 20 goals during his first two seasons and became a key member of the scouting department.

14 — Rene Robert

One-third of The French Connection, his likeness is immortalized as a statue in front of the Sabres' arena along with Perreault and Martin. His overtime goal finished the famous Fog Game during the 1975 Cup final.

15 — Players who appeared in one regular-season game

The dream of being a Sabre came true (very briefly) for Francois Lacombe, Dean Sylvester, Sean Malone, Reed Larson, Sean McMorrow, Francois Guay, Jeff Eatough, Trent Kaese, Brian Perry, Joel Armia, David Moravec, Jason Kasdorf, Peter Skudra, Adam Wilcox and Andrey Makarov.

16 — Pat LaFontaine

The center electrified fans and turned out the lights. In 1992-93, he set single-season records with 95 assists and 148 points. In 1996, he was the last Sabres player to skate a lap around Memorial Auditorium, waving to the crowd and putting a puck in the net as the lights dimmed and Buffalo said goodbye to its original arena.

17 — Mike Foligno

It's not a leap to say Foligno was one of the most popular Sabres of the 1980s. The captain is seventh on the all-time goals list (247), ninth in points (511) and tied for 11th in games played (664). Foligno fed Perreault for his 500th goal and famously hoisted him on his shoulder. His son Marcus played six seasons for the Sabres.

18 — Danny Gare

Just 18 seconds into his first NHL game, No. 18 scored. He and Martin are the only two Sabres with two 50-goal seasons.

19 — Coaches

The Sabres started with Hockey Hall of Famer Punch Imlach behind the bench and followed with Joe Crozier, Floyd Smith, Marcel Pronovost, Billy Inglis, Roger Neilson, Scotty Bowman, Jim Roberts, Jim Schoenfeld, Ramsay, Ted Sator, Rick Dudley, John Muckler, Ted Nolan, Lindy Ruff, Ron Rolston, Dan Bylsma, Housley and Ralph Krueger.

20 — Shootout goals for Thomas Vanek

He leads the Sabres in the category with help from his "around the world" move.

21 — Hat tricks for Rick Martin

The late winger leads the Sabres in three-goal games, putting up three more than Perreault. Martin is second on the all-time goal list to Perreault with 382 tallies.

22 — Hockey Hall of Famers

From players to broadcasters to equipment mangers, the Sabres have ties to 22 people honored by the Hockey Hall of Fame.

23 — Chris Drury

Co-captain of the only Sabres team to win the Presidents' Trophy (2006-07), Drury was the competitive conscience who requested a photo of the Cup be placed in the dressing room so players would see their objective every day. He was also the recipient of a late hit that started the most fiery brawl in team history.

24 — Percent success on power plays

The three best power-play percentages came in 2016-17 (24.5), 1979-80 (24.4) and 1984-85 (24.1).

25 — Years spent in Buffalo for Lindy Ruff

He played 10 years for the Sabres but became a Buffalo legend by coaching the team for 15 more. His 25-year run as a player/coach will never be matched — and neither will his pranks. Once, while sitting out a practice, he dug out all his teammates' car keys, slipped them off the key rings and put them back on different rings. Once players went to their cars and discovered they had the wrong key, they had to keep trading with teammates until they found the right one.

26 — Thomas Vanek

The left winger ranks fifth in goals with 254, including a 43-goal season in 2006-07.

27 — Michael Peca

As captain of the "hardest working team in hockey," Peca helped guide the Sabres to the '99 finals against Dallas. He joined Ramsay as the only Selke winners in team history, taking home the trophy in 1997.

28 — Power-play goals for Dave Andreychuk in 1991-92

The big winger set the single-season record during his 10th of 12 seasons with the organization. He also holds the Sabres' career mark with 161 power-play goals and ranks third overall with 368 goals.

29 — Jason Pominville

The former captain ranks eighth on the Sabres' career list in points (521) and assists (304). Pominville is 10th with 217 goals and scored another dozen in the playoffs, including the short-handed, series-winning goal in Ottawa in 2006.

30 — Ryan Miller

No goalie has more wins (284) or appearances (540) than the longtime face of the franchise. In 2010, he won the Vezina Trophy as best goaltender and the NHL Foundation Award, which is given to the player who "applies the core values of hockey — commitment, perseverance and teamwork — to enrich the lives of people in his community."

31 — Steve Shields

He wasn't the best goalie to wear the number (Grant Fuhr or Daren Puppa), but Shields is part of Sabres lore for his willingness to fight in big moments.

32 — Rob Ray

The shirt-shedding pugilist is the Sabres' king of jabs — physical and verbal. His career mark of 3,189 penalty minutes is more than double second-ranked Mike Foligno (1,448).

33 — Percent of Travis Turnbull's shots that went in

The center played just three career games in March 2012 and took only three shots, but his shooting percentage of 33.3 percent is best in Sabres history. Peter McNab (20.4 percent) is tops among players who skated in at least 100 games. He had 49 goals on 240 shots in 154 outings.

34 — Playoff games for Brian Campbell

In Campbell's postseason debut on April 22, 2006, the mild-mannered defenseman delivered the biggest hit in Sabres history.

35 — Ryan Vinz

When the Sabres traded Miller before hosting San Jose on Feb. 28, 2014, they had just one goalie on the roster. Enter the 5-foot-7, 154-pound Vinz, who worked across the street from the arena. He signed a one-day contract as an emergency backup and became the feel-good story of a forgettable season.

36 — Matthew Barnaby and Patrick Kaleta

It's fitting that two of the most pestilent, mouthiest and, yes, dirtiest players in team history wore the same number. Buffalo (usually) loved them and opponents (always) hated them.

37 — All-Stars

38 — Nathan Paetsch

With just one game of NHL experience, Paetsch was 10th on the Sabres' defense depth chart for the 2006 playoffs. His second career outing was Game 7 of the Eastern Conference final, which the injury-decimated Sabres lost to Carolina. The Hurricanes won the Cup. The Sabres insist they would have won it if not for an unreal set of circumstances.

39 — Dominik Hasek

The goalie with a Slinky for a spine almost single-handedly carried the Sabres from 1993 to 2001. During that highlight-reel run, Hasek won two Hart Trophies as NHL MVP (1997, 1998) and six Vezinas as best goalie (1994, '95, '97, '98, '99, 2001).

40 — Years old, playing age reached by three Sabres

Defensemen Horton, Teppo Numminen and James Patrick were the only players to skate in Buffalo after turning 40. Horton played in 124 games after hitting the milestone, followed by Numminen (57) and Patrick (55).

41 — Stu Barnes

The captain rode the Sabres' greatest roller coaster, scoring during the 1999 Stanley Cup final and getting sold off in 2003 as the bankrupt team watched disgraced owner John Rigas get ready for prison.

42 — Members of the Sabres Hall of Fame

43 — Martin Biron

The most talkative player in team history has fittingly transitioned from goaltender to announcer.

44 — Alexei Zhitnik

Ramsey and Bill Hajt (854) are the only Buffalo defensemen who patrolled the blue line for more games than Zhitnik (712).

45 — Revolutions per minute for Donna McDaniel's "We're Gonna Win That Cup"

McDaniel, a Buffalo native, sang the song for the 1975 playoffs and later toured as a backup singer for Motley Crue, according to IMDb.

46 — Losses, a total surpassed by only two editions of the Sabres

Buffalo planned to reach rock bottom and succeeded in 2013-14 and 2014-15, finishing 21-51-10 in '13-14 and 23-51-8 the following year. The Sabres' third-most losses came during a 25-45-12 season in 2017-18. The most losses outside this decade came in 1986-87, when the organization went 28-44 with eight ties.

47 — Short-handed points for Ramsay

It's a career record that won't be broken. The two-way forward leads the Sabres in the category, putting up four points more than Don Luce and 21 more than third-place Peca. Among active players, Zemgus Girgensons is tied for 27th with eight short-handed points.

48 — Daniel Briere

Co-captain along with Drury, the smiling yet fiery French Canadian dazzled on and off the ice with slick plays and an endearing personality. In 2006-07, he joined LaFontaine, Alexander Mogilny, Perreault, Turgeon, Robert, Hawerchuk and Martin in the Sabres' 95-point club.

49 — Wins in 1974-75

The Sabres' single-season victory record stood until 2005-06, when shootouts arrived and eliminated ties. Buffalo's first Cup finalists went 49-16 with 15 ties.

50 — Goals in a season

The magic number has been reached just six times, led by Mogilny's magical season in 1992-93.

‘Never-ending nightmare’: Former NHL star Don Edwards’ three-decade battle for justice and peace

By Dan Robson

The Athletic

October 9, 2019

Editor’s note: This story contains graphic descriptions of a violent crime.

Don Edwards stood an arm’s length away from the man who murdered his mother and father. His hands shook and his voice trembled as he recounted the horror of their savage deaths nearly 30 years ago.

“Imagine,” he said. “Entering my parents’ home ... shards of glass were everywhere, bullet holes riddled the kitchen, on the floor was a large pool of curdled blood ... the very spot where my father had fought — was stabbed slowly to death and died. Down the hall a large pool of blood soaked the carpet ... where my mother had been shot twice and died.”

The killer scanned the printed victim statement on the table in front of him, at his parole hearing in August. He wore reading glasses, and slipped headphones over his short grey hair, an aid to his poor hearing. George Harding Lovie didn’t react as Edwards described the “never-ending nightmare” that has haunted him and his family.

“Imagine,” Edwards said. “Listening to a 17-minute 911 call ... listening to the panic and terror unfolding in your childhood home, hearing the last words from a father’s voice ‘Leave my family alone’ — and the murderer saying, ‘Do you like me now? How do you like me now?’”

The former All-Star NHL goalie shared the story of the lives Lovie took that March morning in 1991.

Donna Edwards was 59. Arnold Edwards was 63. Their four children sat behind Lovie in a boardroom at a minimum-security institution in Ontario’s wooded Muskoka cottage country. The convicted murderer was seeking to be released to a half-way house with daily freedom. They each read statements pleading for his request to be denied by the two-person panel.

Edward’s wife, Tannis, rubbed his back as he described his constant fight to face the psychological torment of his parents’ murder.

“I will forever battle an incurable disease,” he said.

At the parole hearing, Don Edwards was the same age as his father was when he was killed.

He has short, neatly parted sandy blonde hair. He wears a white dress shirt and a thin gold chain beneath a dark Bethpage Black golf jacket. He looks like you might imagine a retired NHL player in his 60s should. But so much of Edwards remains in the past, unable to escape the violence that took his parents’ lives and left him with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a debilitating psychological condition that causes severe stress and anxiety.

Edwards’ life is divided by a dream and a nightmare — with the terror shaping the memory of everything that came before.

He thinks of one memory often, because it’s the last happy one he holds.

It was March 15, 1991. Edwards was 35 years old and recently retired from a 10-year career with the Buffalo Sabres, Calgary Flames, and Toronto Maple Leafs. He was embarking on a promising future as a sports broadcaster.

That night, he brought his father to a Sabres game against the Chicago Blackhawks at the Auditorium in Buffalo.

Arnold had recently retired, too, after 38 years of shift work at the Dofasco steel mill in Hamilton, Ont.

Edwards was excited for the chance to spend some time with his father in the stands, where Arnold had spent so much time watching his son chase his NHL dream.

Edwards knew that his parents had dedicated much of their lives to helping him make the most of his. With the closest rink at least a half-hour away, Arnold or Donna made it to every early-morning practice and weeknight game they could, between his shifts at the steel mill and the busy life with Edwards and his three sisters, who were each pursuing dreams of their own.

They were there for his first NHL shutout, and to celebrate the Vezina Trophy that he won alongside his counterpart Bob Sauve with the Sabres in 1980. They cheered along as he helped the Sabres beat the Soviet Red Army that same year, and when he represented Team Canada in the 1981 Canada Cup.

It was all because of them, he says. Everything the couple earned went toward providing a better life for their family. There were times when Arnold would be in the stands watching his son play, with little more than 25 cents in his pocket.

"They sacrificed it all for their kids," Edwards says.

There was a snowstorm in the forecast after the game in Buffalo that evening, but Arnold and Donna decided against staying the night with their son's young family. They worried about being far from their youngest daughter because of threats made by an ex-boyfriend, George Harding Lovie, who'd been charged with sexual assault and unlawful confinement for an alleged attack on her several weeks before. He stalked her, driving around for hours outside of her apartment.

Arnold and Donna said goodbye to their three grandchildren and set out for the hour-long trip across the border to the two-bedroom home near Hamilton, Ont., that they'd built and raised their family in.

Edwards watched his parents drive into the night. It was the last time he saw them alive.

Six days later, on the morning of March 21, 1991, Lovie hid beneath the steps of Michelle Edwards' apartment with a high-powered hunting rifle and a knife with a six-inch blade.

When Michelle saw him, she fled across the street to her parents' home. Lovie followed. He shot and killed Donna Edwards through the front door window as she blocked the entrance with a love seat. Michelle called 911 pleading for help as Lovie smashed through the glass sliding door into the kitchen. Arnold Edwards confronted him. Lovie let go of the gun as they fought, and Michelle grabbed it and tried to shoot him. But Lovie had secured the safety mechanism and she couldn't fire. Lovie stabbed Arnold five times, killing him. He then grabbed Michelle by the throat, kissed her and said he was going to give her a "slow and painful" death. But he stumbled as she fought him, and she managed to escape the house.

During Lovie's trial, the Edwards family listened to the horrific 911 call capturing the gunshots, screams and pleas for help as Donna and Arnold Edwards were murdered. The family heard Lovie's sister testify that he'd shared plans in the weeks before the murders to have Don Edwards' three young children abducted from school and that he'd threatened to maim Michelle Edwards with his rifle. Lovie blamed his violence on the fact that he'd been charged with sexual assault and unlawful confinement two months before he committed the murders. He delayed the proceedings by more than two weeks by refusing to return to the stand for cross-examination, claiming that he was seeing visions of his victims.

In the end, Lovie was convicted on two counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder.

He received two life sentences to be served concurrently, with eligibility for parole after 25 years.

The eyes followed him everywhere. Edwards could feel it. He couldn't escape them.

Every time he walked into a room, everyone knew that he was there — and they knew what had happened to his family.

He could feel their gaze. "There's Don Edwards — his mom and dad were murdered."

The anxiety continued to build through the months after the trial. Lovie was in prison, but the constant reminders remained.

The threats against his children, reported in court, haunted him.

Paranoia set in.

Can he escape? What if does?

It was difficult to let his three children out of his sight. He was at the bus stop when they left for school and was waiting for them when they were dropped off. Outside of class, he and his wife rarely left their children alone.

At home, Edwards became reclusive. He avoided public events. He stayed in his house, leaving only when he absolutely had to. He isolated himself from his friends.

He stayed awake at night, afraid to fall asleep, terrified that his mind would return him to his childhood home — and to that morning; house full of police officers, the shattered glass, blood on the floor and walls, the black bags that held his parents' bodies.

But even while awake, he could hear the horror of that 911 call.

He tried to work, but he couldn't focus. Tannis found him in his office, staring at a blank computer screen. He'd been there for hours.

His broadcasting career crumbled. It seemed unlikely he could face the camera now. And even if he could, no calls came. It was unspoken, but he felt shunned. Could he handle the pressure of live TV? Could his broadcasts ever escape the gravity of what hung over him? His mom and dad were murdered.

His real estate side business fell apart, too. He couldn't find the focus it took to sell a home.

"There was no separation of the trauma we'd gone through," Edwards says. "Even while he was incarcerated."

Unable to work, he supported his family with the money he'd put away through his NHL career, more than \$400,000.

For four years, Edwards folded in, trying to hold himself together.

Edwards thought about his parents watching from the stands. He thought about how they'd been there through it all — from those early days learning how to play at the Caledonia arena, to wearing the Team Canada sweater.

The game brought them so many happy memories. Now it was the only obsession that could mute the agony.

For a few years, Edwards was among the best in the world — but he always felt that even at his peak, he could have been better. He wanted to find out how. And he wanted to find a way to show other goalies how they could be better, too.

In the office where he'd stared for hours at a blank screen, he began to tell the story of his career through a maze of charts and numbers.

Edwards watched hours of tape, every recorded moment from his playing days he could find. He analyzed every shot he faced and recorded every angle, every reaction. He immersed himself in a critique of his work, obsessing over every unnoticed clue he could cipher.

Alone in that office, shut out from the world, Edwards spent more than a year charting out his goaltender equation in a book. He avoided friends and public life — lost in the game he loved. He used the meticulous details to develop a system for analyzing a goaltender's ability, by looking deeper than goals against and save percentage.

"It was my escape," Edwards says. "To get into another world — to something that didn't consume all of my thoughts."

Four years after the murders, Edwards tried to return to the world he'd left. He sent the book to every NHL contact he had, hoping to find a way back into the game.

Few calls came. Edwards felt forgotten.

But Larry Robinson remembered. It was 1995. The legendary defenseman was about to enter the Hall of Fame — and begin his first season as head coach of the Los Angeles Kings. Robinson had worn a Team Canada sweater alongside Edwards during the 1981 Canada Cup. He was intrigued by his old teammate's meticulous goaltending analysis.

The Kings hired Edwards as an assistant coach. He was on his way back — but he'd have to leave his family behind. The kids were in high school now; their lives were in Buffalo. So Edwards went west, to L.A. — battling the anxiety that came with the separation.

Edwards kept the trauma hidden from his professional life. Robinson wasn't even aware of the murders when the Kings hired him.

"We didn't know anything," Robinson says. "The whole coaching staff was just flabbergasted that something like this could happen."

The frantic pace of life in the NHL was a distraction. But his PTSD remained. He did his best to hide the effects, quietly escaping social settings whenever the anxiety settled in. Colleagues like Robinson never noticed how deeply the constant trauma affected him.

"I worked hard to harness it," Edwards says. "But it's just there. It's something that will be part of my life."

PTSD haunted him as he sat alone in his apartment. The insomnia lingered too, sleep never quite bringing peace.

Once, Edwards fled a movie he and Tannis attended when an early murder scene set him off.

Despite those struggles, Edwards found a sense of peace and purpose for six years with the Kings.

"I was back around my friends," he says. "I was back with all those things that I wanted so dearly to be with."

After L.A., Edwards joined the Carolina Hurricanes coaching staff alongside Paul Maurice. He was with the Hurricanes when they went to the Stanley Cup final in 2002. Eventually, Edwards returned to Ontario — a log cabin on a lake in Peterborough. He ran a Tier 2 Junior hockey program in Oakville and then became general manager of the Saginaw Spirit in the OHL.

"That was my life," he says.

Lovie is now 61 years old. He spent the years since the murders making his way through the Canadian penitentiary system, building his case for his eventual release.

The Correctional Service of Canada, which administers all criminal sentences of two or more years, has a mandate to actively encourage and assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens.

As offenders move through the correctional system — according to their progress and risk assessments conducted by CSC — they are moved to institutions with lower security levels and more freedom of movement. They are gradually moved into programs and activities that reflect conditions an offender is likely to encounter when released into the community.

The Edwards family knew the time would come when Lovie would be eligible for conditional release. In 2011, he formally started the process required to seek parole when he'd become eligible five years later. The Edwards family did everything they could to keep him incarcerated.

They showed up for each of his parole hearings, armed with victim-impact statements meant to share the excruciating pain they still feel and to remind the parole board what the man had done.

They travelled across the country for the initial hearing, only to have Lovie refuse to return after the first recess.

Each time Lovie was denied, he reapplied — in 2015, 2017 and 2019. They returned for each hearing with new impact statements.

Through those years, Edwards' PTSD peaked.

"We relive the whole nightmare," he says.

The Parole Board of Canada operates independently of the Correctional Service of Canada and is responsible for making decisions on the conditional release of offenders.

"The role of the board is to really look at offenders and assess their risk to the community and make decisions about the timely reintegration of offenders," says spokeswoman Holly Knowles.

Offenders serving a life sentence, like Lovie, are under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada and subject to the conditions of the Parole Board of Canada for the rest of their lives.

That offers little comfort to victims like the Edwards family. They've remained adamant that Lovie poses a threat to them and to the public, despite an assessment by the CSC that Lovie is a low risk to be a violent re-offender.

Among several concerns, the Edwards family points to Lovie's repeated insistence that the sexual assault charges were the catalyst for his murderous rampage. (After Lovie was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and attempted murder, the sexual assault and unlawful confinement charges were stayed – so the allegations were never tested in court.)

As difficult as it is for Edwards, he can't imagine what his sister Michelle endures. During Lovie's parole hearings, she usually reads her impact statement in a separate room so she doesn't have to be near the man who killed her parents and tried to kill her.

But during the hearing at the Beaver Creek Correctional Institution in late August, Michelle sat in the small boardroom alongside her family and directly behind Lovie. She had to pause several times as she read her statement, describing the terror as Lovie killed her father and came for her.

"He gets to hear my pain, tears and cries," Michelle said. "He gets to know how successful he was at destroying my family."

"George Lovie is our life sentence," she said.

After listening to the family's impact statements, Lovie slouched forward in his chair and answered questions from the parole board.

"It's all my fault. I don't blame her," Lovie told the two-person panel. "The allegation of sexual assault. That's what set me off. I denied it then. I'll deny it tomorrow. Every time I bring up the allegation of sex assault, I get told I'm blaming the victim. ... That was my trigger. That's what set me off to commit the murders I committed."

The Edwards siblings choked back tears as he spoke, looking away and shaking their heads. Tannis Edwards, sitting directly behind Lovie, folded forward and sobbed.

"I can't justify my actions," Lovie said. "I can't defend them ... I'll never be free of what I did. It's going to torment me for the rest of my life."

The parole board deliberated for about 20 minutes. When the family returned to their seats, the board announced that Lovie would be released to a halfway house in Sudbury, Ontario — under a series of strict conditions.

Edwards left the small conference room quickly. He slammed the door of the locker that held his car keys and wallet. Members of the family asked as many questions as they could to parole board representatives, but they received no answers to satisfy their anger and frustration. Several of them broke down in tears.

“Mother of God,” Tannis said.

Lovie would leave the facility as soon as a room became available. In six months, he’d be eligible for full parole.

The Edwards family is not permitted to be involved in that process.

“How do you like me now?”

A few weeks after Lovie was granted day parole, Don Edwards repeats the words that haunt him.

He still hears them every day.

In the time since, Edwards has written letters. To the Parole Board of Canada, to Canada’s Minister of Public Safety, to the halfway house where Lovie lives — reminding them to report any infraction, because they’re watching.

He’s waged a campaign to challenge what he views as a “grossly failed system” of justice in Canada. He’s had security cameras installed at an address he won’t disclose.

Edwards continues to deal with the symptoms of his PTSD. The “flood of things” — the frustration, the anger, the fear, the memories ... the pain. The same now as ever. But, as difficult as it is, he tries to find some way to turn that constant negative into something positive.

He’s working on a book to help tell his story and outline how he believes the Canadian justice system needs to change to better protect victims. There are no more blank screens; the words are coming now. And he wants everyone to know.

Edwards shares his story as a motivational speaker at events across the continent. In rooms he once couldn’t stand to enter, he takes the podium to share the journey of his NHL career. He tells funny tales from the locker room and what it took to find success in the game.

Then Edwards shares the nightmare that followed the dream, one that very few people in the room are aware of.

He explains how hockey saved him. How he remembers those cold morning drives to practice, and the sight of his parents watching him from the stands. How even when they were gone, he found hope and solace in the game they shared — and how it gave him a second chance.

“It’s about getting up and walking again,” he says.

In the end, Edwards is often asked how it was possible, at all, to move forward in the aftermath of such violent deaths. And he’s not quite sure, to be honest. But he must.

Edwards repeats the phrase his sister Michelle shared during the hearing — a sentiment that each member of the family expressed, in some form, throughout the parole process: while the killer gets life, their sentence never ends.

Sabres sniper Jeff Skinner off to fast start on new line

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 8, 2019

BUFFALO – As defenseman Ryan Murray started carrying the puck out from behind the Blue Jackets net Monday, Sabres winger Jeff Skinner lurked close by and followed him up the slot.

Before Murray could skate past the circles, Skinner stripped the puck and took off toward the net. The 40-goal scorer then beat Columbus goalie Joonas Korpisalo, tying the game at 11:58 into the second period.

"That was a pure Jeff Skinner goal," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said following Tuesday's practice inside KeyBank Center.

Skinner's supreme abilities to hound the puck and hector opponents have become perhaps his most underrated assets.

"It's something that sort of gets better with experience," Skinner said of stripping the puck. "It's one of those things you try to focus on. Obviously, I'm not sort of going to overpower a lot of guys defensively, so sometimes you have to find other ways to get the puck.

"For me, (trying) to use my stick to separate their stick from the puck is sort of a strategy I have to take."

Sabres center Marcus Johansson said: "It's a special talent that he's got."

Fresh off a dynamic season that earned him an eight-year, \$72 million contract, Skinner, 27, has started his 10th NHL campaign strongly. The two-time NHL All-Star has scored two goals and three points entering Wednesday's home game against the Montreal Canadiens.

Meanwhile, the Sabres, who lost 4-3 in overtime Monday, are 2-0-1.

Through his first month as coach, Krueger has noticed Skinner's commitment to defense.

"His defensive game is improving day-to-day here since the beginning of camp," he said. "He's really working hard to participate in the game without the puck and battle the way we need him to."

Even after enjoying a career year, Skinner believes he can keep growing. Playing more of a two-way style consistently could buoy that.

"The more you know the league, the more you know the guys you're playing with," said Skinner, whose late-season slump cost him a chance at 50 goals. "The more situations you have been in the easier you can draw off of experience and use that to your advantage. I'd like to think I'm still going up."

Krueger's system stresses staying connected. That, according to Skinner, brings predictability when you don't have the puck.

"If everyone is on the same page and sort of knows where each other is going to be, it allows you to not worry about that part of the game," he said. "That frees you up to use your creativity."

Skinner developed terrific chemistry beside top center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart in 2018-19 under former coach Phil Housley. Still, Krueger split the line up before the season, putting Skinner with Johansson and Vladimir Sobotka.

"It's a new coach, new season, a lot of new guys," Skinner said. "I really didn't have an expectation coming in of who you're going to play with. Over the course of the year guys are going to play with everyone kinda and lines will get mixed up. I think getting off to the start of the season you want to try to find some chemistry."

Krueger said he wants to "develop two lines that have a regular offensive punch."

"We see with Marcus Johansson, with Jeff, a real synergy that's growing and developing," he said. "They really are finding each other and feeding off each other. Sobie has done a great job in supporting them in both directions and adding some good grit to that line. ...

"It's not about splitting anybody up. It's about spreading out the power of the lineup and the depth that we need to have here."

Johansson, who set up Skinner's goal Saturday, said worrying "almost too much about being in the right position defensively" has cost the line some offense.

"We've almost played better defensively than offensively," he said. "We kind of need to spend more time in the offensive zone."

Why has the defense been such a priority for the trio?

"It's new systems," said Johansson, who signed a two-year, \$9 million contract with the Sabres on July 6. "It's, for me, new teammates, new role playing center and all that. There's a lot that goes into it, but the good thing is we're focusing on defense first."

Sabres Learn From Early Season Adversity

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

October 8, 2019

Monday night, the Sabres got their first true taste of adversity when they found themselves trailing for the first time this short season. But, the group is confident in their ability to bounce back, and create scoring opportunities when they need to the most, including when they were able to force overtime against the Blue Jackets.

"We learned a lot yesterday," said Sabres forward Marcus Johansson. "Especially the character in the group. We didn't play our best, but we did what we had to do to get back in the game and we accepted that, went out and did it. That showed what we can do and it also showed that when we play the way we want to, it's a lot more effective."

"For us to find a way, being down 2-0, being down 3-2, and to get a point out of that game," added head coach Ralph Krueger. "The character of the group still found a way to give us a chance to win with the help of the goal-tending too. We're proud of that. For us, it's important sometimes to have tough nights right now because we are in a very deep leaning phase of changing the way we want to play and developing Sabres hockey here. Those setbacks are really good, especially when you take a point out of them."

"It's definitely not our best game and we still find a way to get a point and I think that's the way it's gonna be," said forward Jeff Skinner. "I think in a season you're not always going to have your best night and you've got to find a way to pick up points and try to get wins."

The Sabres host Montreal Wednesday night at 7pm. An interesting note- neither team has played a back to back so far this season, and both of Montreal's games have gone to either overtime or a shootout.

Evan Rodrigues Returns to Sabres Lineup

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

October 8, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Monday's game gave the Sabres a few firsts - they trailed for the first time all season and dropped their first game. Despite the result, players will gladly take a point in the standings after an off night in Columbus.

"No one's necessarily happy with a loss, but to get that point was big," says center Casey Mittelstadt. "Especially like you said, it was an off night for us. That point was huge. We move past it and get ready for tomorrow."

"The character of the group still found a way to give us a chance to win, with the help of the goaltending. We were proud of that," says head coach Ralph Krueger. "For us, it's important to have tough nights because we're in a very deep learning phase of changing the way we want to play and developing Sabres hockey."

The team announced Tuesday that winger Conor Sheary is day-to-day with an upper-body injury, and that he'll miss at least one game. Evan Rodrigues takes his place alongside Mittelstadt and Jimmy Vesey on the team's third line after he sitting out for three games.

"It's not the situation I thought I would be in. It happened and I'll keep working," says Rodrigues. "Just bring the same effort and work ethic I always do. Just play my game. I'm confident in my ability. I'm gonna go out there and play my game."

"He's the one who said to me 'somebody's gonna be in this spot all season long.' He took it really well," says Krueger. "He stayed active, he's been working really hard. His opportunity comes tomorrow. He's excited to get back in the lineup. He's been nothing but supportive to his teammates and the process."

"He plays well with the puck. He plays all over the rink," says Mittelstadt. "It'll be nice for me to have a center who can take draws on the other side, too. He brings a lot out of us, I've played with him quite a bit. We'll try to pick up where we left off."

Rodrigues expects to play his first game of the season Wednesday when the Sabres host Montreal.

Roth: It's Jack Eichel's team and his town, but he doesn't have to do it alone

By Leo Roth

Democrat & Chronicle

October 9, 2019

BUFFALO – In a recent conversation with Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel, I asked how he was feeling heading into his fourth NHL season.

"Fifth," he corrected me.

Five years?

Wasn't it just yesterday that the "generational" player from Boston University joined the Sabres as the No. 2 overall pick in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft?

Proof that time flies even when you're not having fun.

Buffalo has missed the playoffs a franchise-record and league-leading eight consecutive seasons, burning through two head coaches and a general manager in Eichel's time with the team.

Part of the shock in getting one's head around the fact that this is Eichel's fifth season is that he's still a baby-faced 22 years old – he doesn't turn 23 until Oct. 28. He was one of those rare players who was good enough to play with men at age 18.

Thrust, unfortunately for him, into an unfair position of having to carry the hopes of an entire region of hockey fans. Sure, that pressure comes with the territory. But we forget it's just not very realistic that one guy, no matter how talented, can turn around a franchise mired in years of dysfunction, which included a miserably neglected farm system.

As the Sabres' 50th anniversary season revs up with Game 4 Wednesday night against Montreal to begin a three-game homestand, No. 9 remains the focal point of an encouraging new era off to a 2-0-1 start under coach Ralph Krueger.

One of the big differences? Eichel doesn't have to do it alone. Yes, it's his team, his town and his time. But it's everybody's team, town and time.

Krueger hasn't just created a "free-flowing" style on the ice, off it he's created free-flowing lines of communication between not just himself and the captain, but everyone down to the stick boys. Got something to say? Say it.

Under Krueger, there is no need to express frustrations through awkward media interviews that at times in the past ate at the heart of the Sabres' locker room. Eichel, above all, was bad at hiding his vexation during all that losing. But he's older now and playing with a coach he has formed a quick bond with.

"Ralph is somebody who's very personable. You can have a conversation, joke around, laugh, and talk about something other than hockey" Eichel said. "You don't feel like you're on eggshells around him, guys can be themselves, relax and play well."

That's Krueger's goal. Create an environment where players can focus on hockey and not off-ice drama. Eichel is the captain, but leadership is everyone's responsibility, and veterans like Carter Hutton, Jake McCabe and Zach Bogosian, when healthy, are partners in this delicate process.

"I think I have to be the room's voice to Ralph and Ralph's voice to the room at times," Eichel said of the dynamic between captain and head coach. "Just having a connection with him is good, an open relationship where we can express what's going and how we're feeling. But there are a lot of guys in here who are leaders who are going to have an open relationship with Ralph, too."

Just how proud Eichel is to wear the Sabres' "C" was on display in last Saturday's home opener against New Jersey.

Fifteen former captains were invited back for the ceremonial faceoff and Eichel, who has a great appreciation for the team's history, was beaming in the presence of players like Floyd Smith, 84, the original "C," Gil Perreault, Don Luce, Danny Gare, Michael Pecca, Brian Campbell, Craig Rivet and Brian Gionta.

"Huge moment for me, I had chills going out there, just going around the circle shaking their hands," he said. "Just as a hockey fan, a little bit in awe. I was just trying to enjoy the moment as much as possible, that's something I'll never forget, a real honor."

Eichel will forever be compared to the otherworldly Connor McDavid, the No. 1 overall pick in his draft class. Each has played 289 career games, with McDavid scoring 130 goals and 377 points to Eichel's 102 goals and 262 points. Not a bad consolation prize.

After scoring a career-best 28 goals and 82 points last season, Eichel is progressing toward becoming that consistent 30-goal, 100-point player he can be surrounded by better players, which he now is. He and wingers Sam Reinhart and ex-Amerk Victor Olofsson are off to a strong start.

With greater depth, Buffalo's power play and overtime 3-on-3 units look scary good, Monday's 4-3 loss at Columbus notwithstanding. Eichel, who Krueger put back on the ice after a brief rest, coughed up the puck on the Blue Jackets' winning goal, but it's something everyone will learn from.

"If we can learn lessons while still taking a point, that's not bad," the glass-half-full Krueger said.

The Sabres were 22 points behind Columbus for the final playoff spot in the loaded Eastern Conference last season, where Montreal's 96 points left them on the outside and looking in. Eichel is a Buffalo guy now who knows how badly the area wants to cheer a winner.

"For me it's trying to put everything in perspective," he said. "You can be frustrated over not having the success you've wanted as a team, how it's not where you want to be five years in, not having a playoff game yet and that's what you play for. But you can look at it one of two ways: 'Well, you've played four years and not made the playoffs,' or 'I've been fortunate to be able to play four years and with a few injuries here and there, every year for me it's gotten a little better.' I just want to keep making strides. If I'm getting better every year, I'm doing my job. That's important to me. It's a big year, it's a big year for everybody in this room, and I know that. I take a lot of pride in getting better every season and being better than the year before."

Jack Eichel's fifth season? It's his team, his town and his time. But he doesn't have to do it alone.

Anaheim Ducks, John Gibson among the NHL's early season surprises

By Kevin Allen

USA Today

October 8, 2019

DETROIT – Anaheim Ducks coach Dallas Eakins goes strong to the net when he describes his goalie John Gibson's best attribute.

"John Gibson has a massive amount of leadership skills in him and he's the best goalie in the game," Eakins said.

What is indisputable is Gibson is at the top of the NHL goalie statistics in the first week of the NHL season and he's the primary reason why the team is off to a 3-0 start. He has stopped 98 of 101 shots for a .970 save percentage.

"I can't imagine anything better for a team," Eakins said. "That kid is so dialed in and the leadership is oozing out of him."

During the last timeout, as the Red Wings were preparing for a six-on-five attack with a pulled goalie, Gibson was the person doing the talking by the Ducks bench.

"He was reminding the guys, and we didn't have to say a word," Eakins said. "That's when you know guys are dialed in and the leadership is pouring out of them."

It's too early to draw any lasting conclusions about the Ducks, but their strong start has been one of the big surprises in the first week of the NHL season. It's not all Gibson. The Ducks, who missed the playoffs last season, are playing with more pace than they have in previous years.

Here are some other surprises of the early going, both good and bad:

Good: Buffalo Sabres (2-0-1). Nobody in Buffalo is becoming overly excited because everyone remembers the Sabres' nosedive last season after they uncorked a 10-game winning streak. However, there is reason for cautious optimism this season. Younger players are coming together. Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, 19, has five points in three games and is plus-4.

Bad: San Jose Sharks (0-4-0). They are supposed to be a contending team and they were outscored 17-5 in their first four games. The signing of Patrick Marleau should provide a small offensive spark, but he's not the answer. They need to play to their capability.

Good: Edmonton Oilers winger James Neal. Considered a reclamation project, Neal has six goals this season, including four Tuesday night. He had seven all of last season. New general manager Ken Holland is already proving his value in Edmonton.

Bad: Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins, Columbus Blue Jackets. He came out of the Swiss League with the reputation of one of the world's best goalies outside the NHL. He promptly gave up seven goals in his first NHL start. It's still possible he could end up playing as much as Joonas Korpisalo.

Good: Carolina Hurricanes (4-0-0). Everyone understands the Hurricanes are improved, but it was easy think they were riding a wave last postseason when they reached the Eastern Conference final. But their opening surge suggests the 'Canes are a legitimate contender.

Bad: Tampa Bay Lightning (1-1-1). No reason to be concerned about this talent-laden team, but they have looked very ordinary coming out the blocks. Their defensive play isn't where it should be.

Good: Center Mika Zibanejad, New York Rangers. Four goals and four assists in his first two games. How excited do you think he is having Artemi Panarin on his wing? The Rangers might be able to compete for a playoff spot if they can add another scoring center.

Bad: Center Evgeni Malkin, Pittsburgh Penguins. Malkin is out indefinitely with an undisclosed lower-body injury. He has the worst luck with injuries. He has missed 98 games over the past six seasons.

Fantasy Hockey: Stock report after the first week of the 2019-20 NHL season

By Jan Levine

Yahoo! Sports

October 8, 2019

This week's article includes the No. 1 center on Broadway, a young winger in Buffalo, a veteran blueliner making the most of his chance in the Sunshine State, Vegas losing a key member of its defense, and the chants in Home of Hockey might be "Boo!" — not "Zucc!".

First Liners (Risers)

Mika Zibanejad, C, New York Rangers

Eight points in two games warrants bold treatment even if he is likely rostered in all formats. Zibanejad has meshed ridiculously well with new addition Artemi Panarin and holdover Pavel Buchnevich — the AMP line, according to Larry Brooks — with that trio factoring into almost 11 goals New York tallied the first two games of the season. Zib notched career highs in goals (30) and assists (44) last season; each mark may be at risk of falling this year.

Victor Olofsson, LW, Buffalo Sabres

Olofsson spent most of 2018-19 in the AHL, compiling 30 goals and 63 points in 66 games. He didn't look out of place in a cup of coffee at the end of the season, notching two power-play goals and two assists in a six-game taste of NHL action. Olofsson parlayed a solid training camp into top line placement, both at even strength and on the power play, alongside Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. So far, so good, as Olofsson has three goals on the man-advantage along with an assist in the first two games of the season.

Blake Coleman, LW, New Jersey Devils

When you think of New Jersey forwards, Coleman, selected 75th overall in 2011, is not the first or even fourth name that would come to mind. But he is the one who has produced the best early in the season. Through two games, Coleman — who is skating on the second line — has two goals and an assist, building off a 2018-19 campaign where he recorded a career-high 36 points and eclipsed 20 goals (22) for the first time in his career.

Neal Pionk, D, Winnipeg Jets

Pionk showed offensive ability while a member of the Rangers, but his defensive issues landed the young blueliner in the press box. He was dealt this offseason to Winnipeg in the Jacob Trouba deal. With Trouba no longer in the fold and Dustin Byfuglien determining his future, the Jets have a huge hole on defense. Pionk is seeing almost three-and-a-half more minutes of ice time, with 2:10 of his 24:42 nightly on the man-advantage. This bodes well for his future success, albeit with a possible weak plus-minus.

Kevin Shattenkirk, D, Tampa Bay Lightning

Hell hath no fury like a scorned hockey player (yes, I am modifying William Congreve, not William Shakespeare as many have credited, but you get the idea). Shattenkirk took less money and years to sign with his hometown Rangers, but injuries and ineffective play — continuing a pattern that started his last season in St. Louis — wreaked havoc on that deal. After getting bought out on Aug. 1, Shattenkirk inked a one-year, \$1.75 million contract with Tampa Bay four days later. While he isn't seeing much power play time, the weapons around him have allowed Shattenkirk to post two goals and an assist through the first three games of the year.

John Gibson, G, Anaheim Ducks

Gibson was brilliant early last season, carrying the Ducks while receiving some Hart and Vezina Trophy consideration. He wore down due to the heavy workload and suffered an upper-body injury in February that slowed him. Anaheim could struggle this season, as Ryan Getzlaf continues to age and the team incorporates some younger players, but Gibson has been sharp early on. He allowed one goal on 36 shots in a win Saturday, improving to 2-0-0 with a 1.00 goals-against average and a .971 save percentage.

Philipp Grubauer, G, Colorado Avalanche

Grubauer moved from Washington to Colorado before last season, supplanting Semyon Varlamov as the starter during the year. He posted an 18-9-5 record, 2.64 GAA and .917 save percentage between 33 starts and 37 total games. Varlamov is now on the Island, making Grubauer the unquestioned No. 1 between the pipes for the Avalanche. He has rewarded that faith early on, winning his first two starts while allowing five goals on 61 shots.

Others include: Auston Matthews, Connor McDavid, Sean Monahan, Matt Duchene, **Jack Eichel**, Sidney Crosby, Leon Draisaitl, Mitch Marner, Johnny Gaudreau, Nikolaj Ehlers, Mikko Rantanen, Brendan Gallagher, Jonathan Huberdeau, Tyler Bertuzzi, Artemi Panarin, Sammy Blais, James Neal ("the McDavid effect"), Andrei Svechnikov, Mike Hoffman, Anthony Mantha, Jacob Trouba, **Rasmus Dahlin**, Morgan Rielly, Ryan Ellis, Cale Makar, Dougie Hamilton, Tyson Barrie Oscar Klefbom, Dmitry Orlov, **Carter Hutton**, Matt Murray, Ilya Samsonov, Marc-Andre Fleury and Frederik Andersen.

Rodrigues expected to join lineup against Montreal

By Jourdon LaBarber

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Evan Rodrigues admits he was surprised to learn he would be a healthy scratch for the Sabres on opening night. It was his response that left an impression on coach Ralph Krueger.

"He's the one that said to me, 'Somebody's going to be in this spot all season long,'" Krueger said after practice on Tuesday. "He took it really well."

Rodrigues will step into the lineup for his season debut when the Sabres host the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday. He will replace Conor Sheary, who is day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

"He's stayed active, he's been working hard, and his opportunity now comes tomorrow," Krueger said. "He's excited to get back in the lineup. He's been nothing but supportive to his teammates and to the process."

Rodrigues appeared in a career-high 74 contests with the Sabres last season, averaging 15:49 of ice time and tallying 29 points (9+20). It was the first full NHL season for the forward, who signed as an undrafted free agent in 2015 following a productive collegiate career at Boston University.

His ascension to the NHL took hard work and patience. He kept that same approach while being scratched for the first three games this season.

"That's all you can do," he said. "Go about my business and try to get back in the lineup."

Rodrigues practiced on a line with Jimmy Vesey and Casey Mittelstadt, taking the right-wing spot formerly occupied by Sheary. Krueger has stressed patience when it comes to that line and its offense, with Mittelstadt still learning the game away from the puck.

That said, a fresh body in Rodrigues could be an offensive spark. He said his mindset will remain the same as it's been since the outset of camp.

"Just bring the same work ethic and effort that I always do, just play my game," he said. "I'm confident in my ability."

Turning the page

Krueger spoke positively about the lessons the Sabres can take from their overtime loss in Columbus on Monday, a game in which they erased two deficits and salvaged a point against a desperate Blue Jackets team.

"For us, it's important sometimes to have tough nights right now because we are in a very deep learning phase of changing the way we want to play and developing Sabres hockey here," Krueger said. "Those setbacks are really, really good, especially when you take a point out of them."

"That's the way we're managing it today. We've had a lot of conversations. The players are very clear on what we've done well in the last three games and what we haven't. We're just going to continue to drive towards the well."

The Sabres will look to rebound against the 1-1 Canadiens on Wednesday. Pregame coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m.

Lines at Tuesday's practice

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka

13 Jimmy Vesey - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 71 Evan Rodrigues

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
58 John Gilmour

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark