



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Washington hosts Buffalo following overtime win

Associated Press

November 1, 2019

Buffalo Sabres (9-2-2, second in the Atlantic Division) vs. Washington Capitals (9-2-3, first in the Metropolitan Division)

Washington; Friday, 7 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: The Buffalo Sabres visit Washington after the Capitals beat Toronto 4-3 in overtime.

The Capitals are 4-0-1 against Eastern Conference opponents. Washington is fourth in the league recording 9.9 points per game, averaging 3.8 goals and 6.1 assists.

The Sabres are 5-1-1 in Eastern Conference play. Buffalo has allowed eight power-play goals, killing 79.5% of opponent opportunities.

The teams match up Friday for the first time this season.

TOP PERFORMERS: John Carlson leads the Capitals with 23 points, scoring seven goals and adding 16 assists. Alex Ovechkin has 10 goals and six assists over the last 10 games for Washington.

Jack Eichel has collected 17 total points while scoring seven goals and totaling 10 assists for the Sabres. Jeff Skinner has five goals and two assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

LAST 10 GAMES: Sabres: 7-2-1, averaging three goals, 5.2 assists, 3.4 penalties and 6.8 penalty minutes while giving up 2.4 goals per game with a .930 save percentage.

Capitals: 7-2-1, averaging 4.3 goals, 6.7 assists, five penalties and 11.9 penalty minutes while giving up 3.5 goals per game with a .894 save percentage.

Capitals Injuries: Evgeny Kuznetsov: day to day (undisclosed), Nic Dowd: day to day (lower body).

Sabres Injuries: Jimmy Vesey: day to day (upper body), Marco Scandella: day to day (lower body).

Brandon Montour's return is imminent but his defense partner remains unclear

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 31, 2019

Defenseman Brandon Montour continues on pace to make his season debut with the Buffalo Sabres Friday night in Washington, but whom he plays with seems uncertain.

Paired with Rasmus Dahlin in practice Wednesday, Montour joined Colin Miller on Thursday while Dahlin returned to his most recent spot alongside Henri Jokiharju. Jake McCabe and Rasmus Ristolainen continue to play together while John Gilmour rotated in during drills.

"The practices with seven D, we're spreading out guys playing with other partners just to get through the drills equally," coach Ralph Krueger insisted. "There's no science to the pairs so far, but we feel comfortable moving our pairs around, changing them depending on the opposition. ... We've got a lot of permutations and combinations."

Krueger said he's happy with Montour's progress from his hand injury suffered in the second preseason game Sept. 17 in Columbus. The Sabres said Wednesday it's doubtful Montour would play both games this weekend. The club hosts the New York Islanders on Saturday night in KeyBank Center.

"Brandon is improving daily. His curve is definitely upwards," Krueger said. "We're happy with the puck skills that are showing up again and his mobility is increasing. I'm going to really get to know him now."

"It's a different animal than the preseason and we're excited for his hunger to be a gap-eating defenseman, to be an aggressive, on-his-toes defenseman without the puck, adding to the offense on the rush and jumping into the opportunities and transition we can create with our defense."

Forward Jimmy Vesey made a surprise return to practice and said he's hoping to return to the lineup for the game against the Islanders.

Vesey was listed as week-to-week with an upper-body injury when the Sabres issued their injury report on Monday but was a full participant Thursday. He even weaved into a couple of runs with linemates Casey Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary during drills.

Vesey, who said he's been skating with injured defenseman Zach Bogosian, was injured during last Thursday's loss to the New York Rangers after a collision with former teammate Brady Skjei. Coincidentally, Skjei was among the players Vesey had gone to dinner with the night before the game.

"It was pretty innocent, actually. One of my buddies was the one who hit me," Vesey said Thursday. "I knew he was coming. ... He just caught me in the perfect spot and a little discomfort."

Vesey is still looking for his first goal with the Sabres after 11 games. He has two assists.

The Sabres are working hard to not look past these two games, with Sunday's flight to Stockholm and next week's two games against Tampa Bay overseas looming on the schedule.

"Guys are excited about it but we do have four points to get here, which is the most important thing right now," said captain Jack Eichel. "They're going to be four hard points, two tough opponents and it's a great chance to show our maturity right now. Take care of business first. We're so excited about our trip and looking forward to going overseas, but we have to take care of this first."

Road teams went 17-3 this year during the NBA Finals, Stanley Cup final and World Series, capped by the Nationals-Astros series that was the first set in U.S. major pro sports in which the road team won all seven games. Putting on his sports psychology hat, how does Krueger explain this?

"All athletes are so much stronger mentally now," Krueger said. "The road atmospheres are becoming places where teams feed off and I also think on the road it's easier to stick to fundamentals and to play a team game, vs. at home there is a certain pressure that evolves in tight games. Probably like the World Series yesterday, guys start trying too hard when the team is not functioning. They fall back to individual skill vs. team power. On the road, it's easier to keep guys in a team mindframe for a longer time."

The Sabres haven't fallen victim to this trend yet. They're 5-0-1 at home, and join Boston and Vancouver as the only NHL teams without a regulation home loss this season.

"All sports we're seeing an evolution where at times there's almost a home disadvantage for teams," Krueger said. "It's interesting but we'll continue to work on our strength at home. In the KeyBank Center, we feel powerful, we feel strong and excited and we're going to do everything to maintain the strong home presence."

Caps rooted for Nats as World Series buzz surrounds Sabres' trip to D.C.

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 31, 2019

A trip to meet the Washington Capitals is hard enough on a normal game night.

The fans "Rock the Red" in Capital One Arena, the term used for everyone being dressed in the team color. "The Horn Guy" sits near the press box blowing away to get fans into the "Let's Go Caps" chant. There's a buzz from the opening faceoff that never stops and it's been like that for many years, heightened even more by the team's 2018 Stanley Cup championship.

But what the Buffalo Sabres might find Friday night will be far above a normal regular-season visit. The Washington Nationals, who were hugely behind the Caps during the Cup run, are the talk of the town now after their stunning World Series win in Game 7 Wednesday night in Houston.

The Caps watched Game 7 at their team Halloween party and Alex Ovechkin went live on Instagram for the final out, showing the Caps' celebratory champagne sprays after Nats reliever Daniel Hudson struck out Houston's Michael Brantley to wrap up the first title in franchise history.

Forward T.J. Oshie then took to Twitter, pointing the Nationals to the locales of the Georgetown fountains in which the Caps famously cavorted, much to the delight of iPhone-toting fans when they returned home from their Cup clincher in Las Vegas 16 months ago.

Washington is planning the Nats' victory parade for Saturday morning. There's probably going to be Nats players in the house for the Sabres' visit. They might have the World Series trophy with them. The crowd will be in an uproar. And Caps players will certainly be stoked by the success of the baseball team, many of whom have become their friends.

"We were just talking about that in here, that it's definitely not going to make the environment any easier to play in in what's always a tough place to go play," a smiling Sabres center Jack Eichel said after practice Thursday in LECOM Harborcenter. "I saw the video of the Caps partying after. Hopefully they carried it into today and will be a little hung over for the game and we can get a little bit of an advantage."

There's definitely a #OneBuffalo kind of feel with the Caps and Nats, even though they are not co-owned like the Pegula family owns the Sabres and Bills. The Caps, remember, played Chicago in the 2015 Winter Classic at Nationals Park. Nats pitcher Max Scherzer and infielder Ryan Zimmerman came to the arena to lead the "Let's Go Caps" chant prior to Game 4 of the '18 Cup final while wearing full hockey gear.

The Caps brought the Stanley Cup to the ballpark after their win and Ovechkin embraced Zimmerman after throwing a ceremonial first pitch during the Nats' playoff run over the last month.

"Wow, it's going to be pretty loud in there I'm sure," said Sabres center Marcus Johansson, who played with the Caps from 2010-2017. "I think that whole city is pumping pretty well right now, so it's going to be fun for me to see."

The game figures to be one of the best of the weekend across the NHL. The Caps (9-2-3) are atop the NHL's overall standing with 21 points and lead the NHL in scoring at 3.86 goals per game. Meanwhile, the Sabres (9-2-2) are just one point back and are hoping to regain their sharpness after a day off and two strong practices.

Ovechkin is again red-hot, with 11 goals and 18 points in 14 games. Defenseman John Carlson has become a massive weapon as he leads all blueliners and is third overall in scoring with 23 points (7-16-23). Ovechkin's longtime center, Nicklas Backstrom, has 10 assists and 12 points.

"Backstrom is so good with the puck. He can slow the game down and buy time for his linemates," Johansson said. "The way he can make plays and see the ice, there's not many people in the world who can do it that way. And with 'Ovi,' the way he shoots and the puck and the so many different ways he can score make him one of a kind. They're a pretty good combo for sure."

The Sabres are coming off Monday's 3-2 shootout loss to Arizona and are looking to avoid their first two-game skid of the season.

"A World Series championship city will have a buzz to it and we're going to feed off that, too," said Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger. "We're looking forward to it after our first three-day lull since the start of the season. I felt a renewed surge of energy in the group today in practice. There was a lot of speed there.

"We know what's coming at us. We know we're going to have to play our best hockey here to have a chance. That's all we want to do: Give ourselves a chance in Washington in that atmosphere, in the spirit of the World Series. Let's feed on that and participate in a great game."

Sabres' Vesey getting close to an early return

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 31, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Jimmy Vesey has only missed two games and was back on the ice for practice on Thursday.

Vesey did not accompany the team to Washington after practice, but he is hoping he plays before the team heads to Sweden, "I'm hoping to try to get in Saturday, depending on how I feel. I've got to see the doctor to get cleared, but I'm hoping Saturday and if not, definitely Sweden."

On Thursday, Vesey worked in on his old line with Casey Mittelstadt, Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues. He said it was nice to be out there, "It felt good. I don't think any of us likes to be missing time and watching the games, so it felt good to be out there with the team.

"I had been skating, just me and [Zach Bogosian] the last three or four days, so it definitely felt good."

Vesey got hurt playing against his old team, the Rangers. He said the play didn't amount to much, "It was pretty innocent actually, and one of my buddies [Brady Skjei] was the one that hit me. I knew he was coming, but I didn't have him in my sight, so I didn't know when the hit was coming and I think he just caught me in the perfect spot."

On Wednesday, New Jersey lost in overtime to Tampa Bay, 7-6. During the game, the fans booed the Devils on the power play and at other parts during the games. Taylor Hall was very upset about it and told reporters that were there, "We're kind of battling our own fans right now. We were 1-for-3 on the power play and we are getting booed. It's a tie game, we are getting booed. That's a tough environment to play in sometimes, especially when you are at home. I know that when we're playing somewhere and their fans start booing, it's a fun environment for the away team to play in."

New Jersey is tied for the cellar in the Eastern Conference with just seven points. In addition, Hall only has one goal in the 10 games played.

Sabres forward Marcus Johansson played almost two full seasons in New Jersey. He said the fans treated him well, "When I was there, it was good. The first year we made the playoffs and people were excited, but it's frustrating for everyone when it's not going the way you want it to.

"I feel like they have a good team this year and it just hasn't clicked for them, and I'm sure they're not happy in the room either and they're trying to find solutions."

Johansson was Hall's teammate when the former Oiler won league MVP honors. Johansson said, "He's such an unbelievable hockey player. He was so dominant throughout that whole year and it was really impressive to watch, but it happens. It's not going right for the team and you're gripping your stick tighter and everyone cares, and sometimes I think you almost care too much and then it almost gets harder and harder."

How the elimination of game day morning skates has impacted the Sabres' routine

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

October 31, 2019

One of the many adjustments Ralph Krueger has made since taking over as the head coach of the Sabres has been one that most fans may not even be aware of.

While he's not the first NHL coach to do away with morning skates on game days — John Tortorella recently got rid of the practice in Columbus — Krueger has followed suit based on observations made while he was chairman of Southampton football in England.

"I just think it's all about energy and understanding the different ways we can gather energy and or making sure the quality of our execution stays high," Krueger said recently. "What I find tends to happen is if you're practicing with a team that's tired mentally or physically, your execution principles fall away and it's better to go off ice and do something really intense together.

"That was probably one of the few things that comes also out of the Premier League, watching the way they gather and/or use energy on game days. You don't see any game day warm-ups or activities there at all. We were playing a lot at 8 at night or 8:30 at night and so it got me thinking. Speaking with sports science there and here, it has brought me to the conclusion that pregame skates are often an expenditure of energy we don't need."

A morning skate usually runs about 30 minutes on a game day. Over the course of 82 games, teams that conduct a morning skate might do so 60 or so times in a season. Afternoon games and the second game of a back-to-back usually wouldn't have a skate as it is, but routines change on those days regardless.

Still, that's an accumulated 30-or-more hours saved in a season on the ice. Coaches and players alike value practice time more than anything. A half-hour breeze through lines and occasional power play and penalty kill work on a game day is a lot of energy burned when that energy will be needed later during the game.

The change in policy has been welcomed by the Sabres players.

"Oh my god, I'm so happy," Kyle Okposo said finding it hard to contain his excitement and relief.

"It changes what you have to do in the morning to be able to be ready for puck drop. You have to find what works for you," Sam Reinhart said. "There's a little bit of testing it out and feeling it out but I've kind of found what's worked for me so far. Ultimately I really agree with it — you're that much fresher."

Jack Eichel agrees.

"If you know you're not going to be morning skating most of the year, it's good to be able to get into a routine early and mess with your routine and find what works best for you," Eichel said. "For one, you can sleep in a little bit more which is nice, you save a lot of energy. It's a lot of time when you think about it. You're on the ice when you're morning skating every game. That's a lot. It's good that you're able to conserve your energy. I just think it helps you."

It's hard to argue with the results at home so far. The Sabres are 5-0-1 and have scored 24 goals at KeyBank Center and have allowed 13. Overall, they're 8-1-1 in games they've scored the first goal. That they've only started off three games by trailing is telling, but the logic of saving energy for when it counts is common sense. Keeping the mind and body fresh is something the players are taking full advantage of.

"The whole mental side of it — you're that much more relaxed in the mornings I'm finding," Reinhart said. "You maybe lay in bed for another 20, 30 minutes. Breakfast, whether it's at home or at the rink, is that much more relaxed. Coming to the rink, you know you maybe don't have to be as mentally sharp to get on the ice, but if we have a meeting you're ready for that and you're able to be relaxed through our team workout or stretch or whatever it may be and do what you need after that."

Perhaps more helpful still, it allows players to get an energy baseline going into each game day. Hockey players are creatures of habit already and finding ways to adjust to a new schedule can make life easier.

"You know exactly how you're going to feel," Okposo said. "I eat something similar the night before the game, same thing in the morning, come in and do the same exact routine in the morning. It's nice that you're not wasting energy in morning skate. I find that there's a bit of a variable if you do morning skate if you're going to feel tired off of that or if you're going to have jump right off the bat, I find there's a bit of inconsistency there, but when you're not skating, for the most part, if you're taking care of yourself and kind of follow the same routine you're going to pretty much feel the same way every night."

Okposo comes at this from a different perspective because during his final couple seasons with the New York Islanders, then head coach Jack Capuano mostly did away with the game day tradition. Being able to free up mornings also allows the players to be a bit more human.

"I really enjoy that you have time to kick back and relax and be a person and be normal and not have to be at the rink, skate, get off, don't skate," Okposo said. "I find that you have time for other things and then you come to the game at night and you're really excited to play and you're excited to skate."

In Okposo's case, free time means more time with the family.

"I made it a point to be home when I'm home," he said. "Once I get to the rink it's all about the rink and you do what you have to do. If I have to stay late, I've got to stay late, but it's nice in the morning being able to drive my daughter to school and pick the kids up sometimes so it's been good."

Game days are still work days and that means staying in the mindset to get ready to play later in the day. The extra time means finding other ways to prepare and in the case of the coaches, it lets them get a step on future games.

"The skate itself usually is not very constructive for coaches," Krueger said. "It's usually a routine wake-up call that you don't do anything tactically in anyways, so it gives us time to really prepare. Sometimes — because of our schedule — you're already preparing for the next day which, as much as we don't let the players go there, we as coaches with our schedule need to be ahead of the curve and we're watching teams three, four games out. I'm able to use that time together with the coaching staff constructively to initiate processes that are possibly beyond the day. Then when we come back later in the afternoon, it's only about the day."

Sabres' Rasmus Ristolainen happy with Ralph Krueger: 'I like whatever he does'

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 31, 2019

BUFFALO – Instead of offering a short reply, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen kept talking, going into detail why he enjoys playing for Ralph Krueger, his fifth coach in seven years.

By his standards, Ristolainen, a man of few words, was gushing.

"I like whatever he does," Ristolainen said Thursday inside KeyBank Center. "I like how he communicates with us. I like the way he talks. He talks really powerfully and everyone listens. He's kind of the leader, everyone follows him. He brought a lot of confidence to us.

"I like the system and the style we play and the way we practice, the way we handle (practice) days, days off, game days – everything."

Ristolainen, 25, seems refreshed and happy. The Sabres just finished a stunning October, morphing into the NHL's biggest surprise.

"Risto's definitely everything that I expected him to be, a very passionate person who needs communication open and on the table and direct," Krueger said.

The Sabres are 9-2-2 entering Friday's road game against the Washington Capitals.

Ristolainen can probably count the successful months he has enjoyed during his 437-game career on his thumbs.

It wasn't long ago the Sabres' constant losing – zero playoff appearances and three last-place finishes over Ristolainen's tenure – frustrated him so much he sounded like a guy yearning for a fresh start.

While no one would acknowledge it, the Finn almost certainly requested a trade.

Winning can cure what ails you, and Ristolainen, one of three players left from the Sabres' two tank teams, is having fun again.

"It's more fun when you win," Ristolainen said. "You don't need to worry about too much. When you come in every day, you don't need to watch video for two hours, (talk about) what went wrong, or talk about all the things that happened and why it didn't happen (correctly). It's good."

Following a wretched season in which he compiled a ghastly, NHL-worst minus-41 rating, Ristolainen has looked sturdier and more comfortable defensively.

Before the season, general manager Jason Botterill said the Sabres wanted to put Ristolainen in better situations to succeed. Krueger's system, which Ristolainen said "fits us really well," has helped accomplish that.

Ristolainen's defensive awareness can be suspect. But the Sabres have been playing cohesively, meaning the five skaters help each other. Krueger also doesn't overload his players with information, allowing them to utilize their instincts.

"There's not a million things we focus (on)," said Ristolainen, who has zero goals, five assists and an even rating this season. "There are certain things we focus (on), and then the other (stuff) comes from skill we have. You got to read the game as well, too. ...

"Maybe in the past we had like a lot of things we needed to focus (on). Sometimes it's too much, especially (with) a lot of young guys here. ...

"(The) defensive style, we have a few things we need to know, we need to be on the same page. The rest comes."

Krueger's predecessors, Dan Bylsma and Phil Housley, wanted to trim Ristolainen's ice time. Casting him in a different role could lighten his load and give him better matchups.

But they needed Ristolainen so badly he kept playing big minutes. Last season, Housley shaved nearly two minutes off (26:30 to 24:38), the first time Ristolainen had skated under 25 minutes a game since 2014-15.

Still, Ristolainen led the Sabres in ice time. This year, Ristolainen, who has played with Jake McCabe all season, is seven seconds under his 2018-19 total. He still faces the opposition's best.

Krueger has no problem awarding him all the ice time he deserves.

"There's never been a defined ice time for the players," Krueger said. "(It's) what we feel is best for the team on a nightly basis. There's no feelings in those kind of decisions. It's about excellence on the day.

"The minutes will fall into place according to performance. So Risto has earned every minute he's had. There's not a strategy to that."

Ristolainen understands what the Sabres accomplished in October will mean very little if they fall apart again. A year ago, they imploded following their 10-game winning streak in November.

"We need to understand it's like a marathon," Ristolainen said of the 82-game season. "We have a lot of games left. If you (screw) up the next two weeks or take a couple days off, it's going to turn around real quick."

Sabres' Jimmy Vesey practices, hopes to return Saturday

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 31, 2019

BUFFALO – So much for Jimmy Vesey being week-to-week. The Sabres winger practiced this morning inside LECOM HarborCenter and would like to return from his upper-body injury Saturday against the New York Islanders.

"I got to see the doctor to get cleared," Vesey said inside KeyBank Center. "If not Saturday, hopefully soon."

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Vesey is now day-to-day.

Vesey was injured in last Thursday's 6-2 loss, his first game in New York since the Rangers traded him to the Sabres on July 1.

The American practiced today with center Casey Mittelstadt and Conor Sheary, his regular linemates. Evan Rodrigues, who has subbed for Vesey the last two games, also took reps.

Vesey said an innocent-looking hit from Rangers defenseman Brady Skjei hurt him.

"He just caught me in the perfect spot and a little discomfort," he said.

If Vesey can't play Saturday, he would likely be available next week during the Sabres' two-game trip to Sweden.

In other news, defenseman Brandon Montour practiced today beside Colin Miller. Montour, out since suffering a left hand injury Sept. 17, is expected to return this weekend.

The Sabres play a road game against the Washington Capitals on Friday.

"Brandon is improving daily," Krueger said. "His curve is definitely upwards."

Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, who practiced with Montour on Wednesday, went back beside Henri Jokiharju.

Sabres look to capitalize on electric energy in DC

By Mary Margaret Johnson

WIVB

October 31, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The Buffalo Sabres are on the eve of heading to Washington DC to play the Capitals on Friday night, and coming off of the World Series win by the Nationals on Wednesday, the energy and atmosphere surrounding DC is sure to be electric. The Sabres are hoping to use that electric atmosphere to their advantage.

"The whole city is going to be buzzing," goalie Carter Hutton said. "You saw what happened when the Capitals won, then the Nationals came back down 3-2 and win two games on the road, so it's amazing. It'll be buzzing, we're really fortunate to be there at a time like this."

"I mean the World Series championship city will have a buzz to it, and we're going to feed off that, we're looking forward to it," Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said.

"After our first three day lull of the season, I felt a renewed surge of energy today in practice, there's a lot of speed there. We're excited, we know what's coming at us, we know we're going to have to play our best hockey here to have a chance."

"That's two championships for them in the past couple years, they have passionate fans and are feeling good about their team right now," Jimmy Vesey said. "I think that arena is always a tough place to play, so we got our work cut out for us, they've got a lot of talent on their team, so it should be a good test for us."

Puck drop is set for 7 pm on Friday night in DC, and it's going to be a quick turnaround for the Sabres as they come back to Key Bank Center on Saturday to host the Islanders.

Sabres heading into highly charged atmosphere in D.C.

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

October 31, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Its always a raucous atmosphere when the Sabres played the Caps in Washington. It will be crazier than usual when the teams face off Friday night in the Capital One Arena. That's because the Washington Nationals won the first World Series championship in franchise history on Wednesday night in Houston, upsetting the Astros.

Two Caps players told Washington Post reporter Samantha Pell that seeing the Nationals win the World Series is inspiration for them to win another Stanley Cup.

For the first time ever in a playoff series the road team won all seven games. That's never happened before in MLB, the NHL or the NBA.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said, "I think on the road it's easier to stick to fundamentals and to play a team game vs. at home there is a certain pressure that evolves in tight games. Probably like the World Series yesterday, where guys start trying too hard and when the team's not functioning they fall back to individual skill vs. team power, and I think on the road its easier to keep guys in the team main frame."

Forward Jimmy Vesey, who Krueger said earlier this week was "week to week," practiced with the team Thursday at the LECOM Harborcenter. Vesey said he's hoping to play Saturday night against the Islanders but needs to be cleared by the doctor first. He was injured in the Sabres 6-2 loss to the Rangers last Thursday at Madison Square Garden.

Defenseman Brandon Montour is also skating with the team. He is expected to return this weekend after suffering a hand injury in September. Krueger said, "Brandon is improving daily. His curve is definitely upwards."

When you play the Capitals you always have to be aware of Alexander Ovechkin. Sabres captain Jack Eichel said, "it's not fun when he's taking a couple of steps and heading in your direction, or he's winding up and you're in his lane. But he's somebody I had posters of on my wall growing up as a kid and I just grew up watching him. Obviously a fan, so its pretty cool to play against him. It's always fun but we have to we're aware of when he's on the ice, and just try and take his time and space away. Get in his shooting lane."

The Sabres are at Washington Friday night and home Saturday night against the New York Islanders.

Vesey Returns to Practice, Uncertain of Return to Game Action

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

October 31, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Jimmy Vesey returned to Sabres practice Thursday after a week off the ice. An upper-body injury kept him contained to noncontact drills, and Ralph Krueger expects him to miss Friday's game in Washington. After Thursday's session, Vesey still sounded pleased with his progress.

"It felt good," he says. "I don't think any of us like missing time, no one likes watching the games. It felt good to be out there with the team. Just skating. It felt good."

Vesey suffered the injury last week against his former team, the New York Rangers. The initial prognosis was he would be out week-to-week, putting his recovery ahead of schedule.

"Little quicker than [the medical staff] expected," he says. "10-14 days is what they said. Saturday will be nine, but credit to the training staff and strength staff for getting me ready."

On the defensive side, Brandon Montour logged his third straight practice, and it looks like he'll make his season debut this weekend after recovering from a hand injury. His defensive partner Thursday was Colin Miller, one day after practicing with Rasmus Dahlin. Krueger is still figuring out who Montour will skate with.

"There was no science to the pairs so far, but we feel comfortable moving our pairs around," says the first-year coach. "Changing them, depending on the opposition. Some teams in the NHL are really top-heavy like tomorrow [against the Washington Capitals], with two extremely powerful lines."

Of course that includes Alexander Ovechkin, the NHL's active leader in goals. Ovechkin's 669 goals rank 12th all-time.

NHL goalies embracing switch to composite sticks

By Kevin Woodley

NHL.com

November 1, 2019

Goalies are keeping wood sticks alive in the NHL, but perhaps not for long.

Composite sticks have been popular for a while among forwards and defensemen, who have embraced the lighter weight and stiffer shaft to increase the power on shots. After years of resisting the trend, goalies are switching from wooden and foam-core sticks at a rapid rate.

Roughly half the NHL was using the old technology in 2016. Today, five NHL goalies still use a wooden stick.

"Once you switch, it's amazing to hold a wood stick and wonder how you played with it," Buffalo Sabres goalie Carter Hutton said. "I switched two summers ago mainly because lots of guys were, so I knew I needed to get up to date. It's a huge difference, I think."

Hutton said weight is the biggest difference between a composite stick and traditional blends of wood, fiberglass and foam. New composite sticks weigh less than 1.4 pounds compared to the old wood models that averaged closer to 1.9 pounds. That may not sound like much, but even in the hands of a well-conditioned pro, it's hard not to notice the difference.

"The stick is unreal how light it is," said Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers, who switched to a CCM composite this offseason after running into supply problems with wooden sticks last season.

The difference in the number of goalies using composite the past two seasons is also significant.

When Henrik Lundqvist of the New York Rangers switched from a foam-core to a composite stick last season, it marked the end of the use of Bauer's wooden models in the NHL. The disappearance is not surprising considering Bauer led the way with the composite goal sticks used in the League as far back as 2007. Twenty-four NHL goalies currently use their composite sticks.

Marc-Andre Fleury of the Vegas Golden Knights is the last NHL goalie using a CCM wood stick. The change for CCM began in 2014, when it offered its first composite stick and 20 percent of their NHL roster switched. By 2016, it was close to 50 percent of the goalies that used CCM. It is an 80-percent adoption rate for 2018-19.

When Warrior first offered its composite sticks to NHL goalies for the 2017-18 season, 11 switched and 17 stayed with a wood stick. Last season, there were 21 NHL goalies using composite and 11 remaining with wood. This season, 24 are using composite sticks. The remaining four still using a foam-core wooden stick this season are using a Warrior Swagger.

The Los Angeles Kings' Jonathan Quick and Jack Campbell, Alex Stalock of the Minnesota Wild, and Brian Elliott of the Philadelphia Flyers are the holdouts.

"I've tried a few composites since they first came out, and every year they've gotten better and better," Elliott said. "It's light, but when I go back to my foam-core stick, it's night and day how much more comfortable I am. I just like how you can feel and direct pucks a little better with old-school sticks. You can absorb it a little better and control it. So I'm like, why switch?"

Some said they felt like they didn't have much of a choice.

Bobrovsky used a Warrior foam core last season but ran out of inventory after the company stopped working with the Canada-based manufacturer that made them. It opened the door for him to try something new during the offseason.

"I got a bunch of stuff to test just to be on top of things because the technology has developed a lot," Bobrovsky said. "I liked how on low shots, just put a little angle on the stick and the puck goes up into the net, and I like stick-handling, but definitely the biggest point is the lightness."

Carey Price of the Montreal Canadiens and recently retired goalie Roberto Luongo each played more than a decade using foam-core sticks but switched after injuries gave them a chance to try a composite.

Edmonton Oilers goalie Mike Smith switched in part because of inconsistencies in the supply of foam-core wood sticks, which is part of the challenge when working with natural materials.

"A big part if it is not having to worry about one being different from the other," Smith said.

Though Elliott prefers the softer feel and flex of a foam-core stick, the composite sticks have progressed significantly in that area. The different blends of carbon fiber and other impact- and vibration-dampening materials are designed to mimic the feel of wood. Durability has increased as well, with newer materials, including those used on the front wings of Formula One race cars, incorporated into the composition of the sticks.

As the newer sticks grow in popularity, so do their variety. Various models within brands offer different flex profiles, including ones that bend more in the shaft to make it easier to shoot the puck. As puck-handling becomes more refined for goalies, there are conversations about creating custom kick points like the ones used by forwards and defensemen to personalize their sticks to accentuate their shooting styles.

Despite the benefits, Elliott doesn't plan on switching anytime soon. When he learned in the offseason that Warrior was planning to close the factory in Finland, where his current model was made, Elliott got the Flyers equipment staff to stock up for the season.

Beyond that?

"Maybe I'll just have to go to Canadian Tire and see what they still got left," he said.

Sabres ready for tough test vs. league-leading Capitals

Yahoo! Sports

October 31, 2019

The surprising Buffalo Sabres will face the toughest challenge of the season when they visit the first-place Washington Capitals on Friday.

The Capitals and Sabres are separated by just one point in the standings, with Washington's 21 points leading the NHL. While the Capitals are no strangers to Presidents' Trophy territory, Buffalo's hot start has increased hope that the team can reach the playoffs for the first time in nine seasons.

The Sabres were successful despite a crowded schedule that saw them play their first 13 games over a 26-day stretch. After Monday's 3-2 shootout loss to the Arizona Coyotes, the Sabres enjoyed their first three-day break of the season leading up to their date in Washington.

According to Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger, the Sabres spent the time "improving on the foundation that we've laid down," a plan that will continue throughout more regular off days in November.

"Each week there's one day where we can do a little bit more work maybe, a little bit more grinding than we've been able to do for the last (26) days," Krueger said.

Monday's game was Buffalo's first home loss of the season, and Krueger felt his team "kind of drifted" after taking an early two-goal lead.

"I thought we got a little bit softer on our defensive game after the quick lead against Arizona," Krueger said. "We let a little bit loose. We found our way back in again and then a little bit loose at the end of the game again, the last four or five minutes. Then in overtime, we were strong again."

The Capitals are returning to their home ice after a 4-0-1 road trip that included a 4-3 overtime win over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday. Despite the challenges of the travel-heavy early schedule, the Capitals have an outstanding 7-1-1 record in away games.

"We've (won) in different ways every game it seems, so it's great, it shows that we're confident in all those situations," Washington goalie Braden Holtby said. "We've had success, and the even better part is we know we could've played better in every single one of those games, so there's ... even more room to grow."

Holtby is likely to be back between the pipes on Friday. The veteran goalie is 4-0-1 with a .916 save percentage over his last five appearances.

Tuesday's victory saw Alex Ovechkin score the overtime winner as part of a four-point (two goals, two assists) night. Ovechkin now has 669 career goals, moving him ahead of Hall of Famer Luc Robitaille for 12th place on the NHL's all-time scoring list.

John Carlson also scored twice against Toronto. With 23 points in October, Carlson set a new Capitals record for most points in a month by a defenseman.

Washington forward Nic Dowd is day-to-day after suffering a lower-body injury on Tuesday.

Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour participated in full practices this week and will travel with the team to Washington. Montour has yet to play this season after suffering a hand injury during training camp, but seems on pace to play either against the Capitals or on Saturday when the Sabres host the Islanders.

The Capitals are 11-3-0 against the Sabres dating back to March 2015. Buffalo is 0-5-2 in its last seven trips to Washington.

Vesey returns to practice with Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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Jimmy Vesey was back at practice with the Sabres inside LECOM Harborcenter on Thursday and could return to game action this weekend.

The Sabres play back-to-back games on Friday and Saturday, on the road against the Washington Capitals then at home against the New York Islanders. Coach Ralph Krueger said the forward is not anticipated to be in the lineup Friday, though the next game remains a possibility.

"He's still day-to-day," Krueger said. "We're just going to assess how he handled the session on his own and then he joined us for some non-contact skating afterwards. But he's not planned on the roster for tomorrow."

Vesey sustained his upper-body injury during the second period of his return to Madison Square Garden on Oct. 24. It was caused by a hit from New York Rangers defenseman Brady Skjei, one of his close friends on his former team.

"It was pretty innocent, actually one of my buddies was the one that hit me," Vesey said. "I knew he was coming. I just didn't have it in my sights, so I wasn't sure when the hit was coming. I think he just caught me in the perfect spot."

Vesey has skated with recovering defenseman Zach Bogosian in the week since the injury. Though he still needs doctor's approval, he said he has Saturday in his sights for a return to the lineup. After that, the team heads to Sweden for two games against Tampa Bay.

"I'm hoping to try to get in Saturday, depending on how I feel," he said. "I've got to see the doctor to get cleared. But I'm hoping Saturday. If not, definitely Sweden."

Off to Washington

If a peek at the standings wasn't reason enough for the crowd in Capital One Arena to be amped on Friday, the success of their baseball team should add incentive.

The game will be played less than 48 hours after the Washington Nationals earned their first World Series title in franchise history with a Game 7 win over the Houston Astros on Wednesday. That excitement should boil over into fans' support of the Capitals, who lead the Sabres by one point atop the NHL standings.

"I mean, a World Series championship city will have a buzz to it and we're going to feed off it," Krueger said. "We're looking forward to it after our first three-day lull since the start of the season. I felt a renewed surge of energy in the group today in practice. There was a lot of speed there."

"We're excited. We know what's coming at us. We know we're going to need to play our best hockey to have a chance and that's all we want to do, is give ourselves a chance in that atmosphere. The World Series, let's feed on that and participate in a great game."

Lines at practice

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Vladimir Sobotka

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 71 Evan Rodrigues / 13 Jimmy Vesey

Defensemen: 10 Henri Jokiharju, 19 Jake McCabe, 26 Rasmus Dahlin, 33 Colin Miller, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 58 John Gilmour, 62 Brandon Montour

40 Carter Hutton

35 Linus Ullmark