



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

November 21, 2019

Buffalo visits Marchand and the Bruins

Associated Press

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Buffalo Sabres (10-8-3, fourth in the Atlantic Division) vs. Boston Bruins (13-3-5, first in the Atlantic Division)

Boston; Thursday, 7 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: Brad Marchand leads Boston into a matchup against Buffalo. He's fourth in the NHL with 35 points, scoring 13 goals and recording 22 assists.

The Bruins are 3-2-3 in division play. Boston ranks eighth in the NHL recording 9.2 points per game, averaging 3.6 goals and 5.6 assists.

The Sabres are 4-2-0 in division matchups. Buffalo has converted on 20.6% of power-play opportunities, scoring 14 power-play goals.

The matchup Thursday is the first meeting this season between the two teams.

TOP PERFORMERS: David Pastrnak leads the Bruins with 19 goals and has totaled 34 points. David Krejci has recorded 10 assists over the last 10 games for Boston.

Jack Eichel leads the Sabres with 13 goals and has recorded 25 points. Sam Reinhart has recorded 9 points over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

LAST 10 GAMES: Sabres: 2-6-2, averaging two goals, 3.1 assists, 3.8 penalties and 9.5 penalty minutes while giving up 3.1 goals per game with a .903 save percentage.

Bruins: 5-2-3, averaging 3.9 goals, 5.7 assists, 3.9 penalties and 11 penalty minutes while giving up 2.6 goals per game with a .917 save percentage.

Bruins Injuries: None listed.

Sabres Injuries: Kyle Okposo: out indefinitely (upper body).

As Sabres shuffle the deck, Jimmy Vesey gets big chance to finally notch first goal

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 20, 2019

Jimmy Vesey totaled 50 goals over the last three years with the New York Rangers, including 43 at even strength. Heading into a contract year, it was a reasonable leap of faith for the Buffalo Sabres to pencil in Vesey for his normal 16-17 goals, and maybe that first season over 20.

Hasn't remotely happened. Vesey has played 18 games and has a big donut in the goal column. Zilch. Zip. Nada. Zippo.

So when Sabres coach Ralph Krueger reworked his lines in practice Wednesday, where was Vesey? At left wing on the top line along with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. Krueger might be going mad scientist here, playing a hunch that the Boston native's return home with fellow Bostonian Eichel to play the Bruins on Thursday night in TD Garden could spark him out of his doldrums.

"More than anything, we have a feeling that his work has been strong and a goal will explode him into a stronger secondary scoring position," Krueger said of Vesey. "There is some Boston energy in the group right now permutating through the whole team."

(Yes, Krueger said "permutating").

"It's a good feeling," Vesey said. "I said a little bit in training camp that getting put up there gives you a shot in the arm, a little bit of a boost. I'm excited, especially going home, to try to have a good game."

Vesey has been giving the Sabres some activity up front in recent games. He hit a post Sunday in Chicago and had a couple near-misses Tuesday against Minnesota. And there's no denying he's been good on the penalty kill, even as the Sabres have struggled as a unit.

"It seems like I've hit the goalie in the knob of the stick a bunch of times," Vesey said. "It's out of my control. What's in the past is in the past and we've still got a good chunk of the season left so every day I come to the rink I'm looking to get better and contribute to the team."

Vesey has only 24 shots on goal for the season but has been driving play better of late. He had four shots in the second game in Sweden against Tampa Bay and was working hard down low in Saturday's win over Ottawa.

And Vesey is far from downcast about his situation.

"It's a good lesson. Not only in hockey but in life," he said. "Things aren't going your way, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to quit or are you pick yourself back up, show up the next day and get better? That's my mindset now."

"It's an 82-game season and you're gonna have ups and downs. Unfortunately for me it's been to start the season with a new team. I don't think anyone, myself included, thought this is the way we would have drawn it up. I'm going to get out of this. I've been able to score and contribute at every level and I've done it at this level so it's just a matter of time right now."

For now at least, Vesey is replacing Victor Olofsson on the Eichel line. Olofsson is moving down to play with Rasmus Asplund and Casey Mittelstadt. Asplund was Olofsson's exclusive center last year in Rochester and Mittelstadt is getting a chance to temporarily lessen his load by moving from center to wing.

"We know each other really good and played a full season together last year so have good chemistry," Olofsson said of Asplund. "So it's going to be a lot of fun to play with him. It obviously helps on the ice to know where we have each other and our relationship became very strong last year. We're both very excited and looking forward to having a lot of fun."

Krueger continues to espouse balance on his lines, which is the reason he has yet to pair Jeff Skinner with Eichel, a duo that was together much of the time last year as Skinner scored 40 goals.

"We just thought that Victor brought us a strong two-way game and we don't want to burden 'Skins' with too much of that," Krueger said. "He's doing a really good job without the puck but needs to be able to create when he has opportunity.

"They have seen the best ice time together, and that's on the power play. There's no space where you play more together than on power play and so I disagree he's not playing with Eichel. He's playing with Eichel and has the privilege predominantly to play there on the PP. The 5-on-5 game is a tight one in the National Hockey League and you need a balanced lineup to sustain success is what I'm saying to that."

Sabres assistant coach Don Granato returns to practice after serious illness

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 20, 2019

In the midst of a disheartening slump, the Buffalo Sabres got uplifting news at practice Wednesday with the return of first-year assistant coach Don Granato.

Granato, 52, has been away from the team since the final week of September after being hospitalized with severe pneumonia and then developing undisclosed complications.

"That was a real-life story," coach Ralph Krueger said. "It's amazing that was Sept. 28 when that all began. The whole team got a lift today with having Don join us. He needed to be 100% clear before this was going to occur, and he has been cleared 100% health-wise."

Granato's condition was serious enough for his brother, former NHL player and current University of Wisconsin coach Tony Granato, to come to Buffalo to be at his side for more than a week. Few details have been provided about his illness, and Granato was not available for comment Wednesday.

"I needed to be there," Tony Granato told the Wisconsin State Journal last month. "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 and that he's going to be OK. Ten days ago, I didn't know if he was going to be OK."

Don Granato has been coming to KeyBank Center for a couple of weeks to pick up video and has been home breaking down game tapes.

"He's been able to watch for a while so it's a fresh perspective now coming into the coaches' room," Krueger said. "His experience will definitely help us in this situation."

Don Granato joined the team for its flight to Boston and will initially be coaching from the press box, starting with Thursday's game against the Bruins in TD Garden. Rochester head coach Chris Taylor has been on the bench in his place and will stay there on this trip, but he is expected to return to his post with the Amerks soon. Gord Dineen has been the Amerks' interim coach.

"We'll take the transition for Chris Taylor day to day," Krueger said.

Injury updates

An update on the Sabres' injury front:

- Center Johan Larsson returned to practice and is expected to play in Boston after missing the last three games with an upper-body injury. Larsson was injured in last Thursday's overtime loss to Carolina, a game that saw him score the tying goal on a deflection with 40.4 seconds left in regulation. "I feel good now," Larsson said. "It happened before the goal. I was battling through it and overnight it got worse."
- Center Marcus Johansson (upper body) will stay home so he can continue to skate Thursday and Friday, as the Sabres will not take the ice Thursday morning in Boston and have a day off Friday in Fort Lauderdale. Johansson has had three concussions in his career, but Krueger indicated that's not an issue with this ailment. Krueger said it's likely Johansson, who has missed four games, will then fly south to join the team for either Sunday's game against the Florida Panthers or Monday's contest at Tampa Bay.
- Defenseman Zach Bogosian will make the trip. He is listed as day to day and could make his season debut after hip surgery at any time.
- There is nothing new on winger Kyle Okposo, who suffered his fourth concussion in the last three years Saturday against Ottawa. "For sure, you worry," said Larsson, Okposo's center. "It's not fun to see. I'm hoping the best for him."

Bruins update

The Bruins (13-3-5) are coming off Tuesday's 5-1 win in New Jersey, a big bounce back after going 1-2-3 in their previous six games. They will be getting back center and four-time Selke Award winner Patrice Bergeron, who has missed the last two games with a lower-body injury. He has eight goals and 11 assists in 19 games.

"I'm feeling better. It's progressing well. Today was a pretty good skate, so I'm feeling good," Bergeron told Boston reporters Wednesday. "It's a minor issue, but we want to make sure it doesn't linger for too long. So we're being cautious and making sure it's 100 percent before I get back out there."

Defenseman Torey Krug (upper body) will miss his second consecutive game. Tuukka Rask will start in goal.

In Sabres' line shuffle, Ralph Krueger keeps Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel apart

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 20, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres are 21st in the NHL in goals at 2.81 per game. They're in a 1-6-2 slump over their last nine, scoring only 18 goals in that span. Jack Eichel is the only forward with a goal in the last three games. Jeff Skinner has one goal in the last eight.

So why won't coach Ralph Krueger put Skinner and Eichel together to perhaps have more of the success that led to Skinner's 40-goal season — and his \$72 million contract extension?

Asked by The Buffalo News about the topic after practice Wednesday, Krueger stayed with the same mantra he's offered since training camp: He wants to keep his lines balanced, with offensive and defensive players on each group.

Victor Olofsson has spent the most time on Eichel's left wing with Sam Reinhart, though Jimmy Vesey took over that role in practice Wednesday.

"The combinations we look at every day are that we want to spread out our scoring and want a certain mix of offense and defense on every unit," Krueger said. "We just thought that Victor brought us a strong two-way game, and we don't want to burden 'Skins' with too much of that. He's doing a really good job without the puck but needs to be able to create when he has opportunity.

"They have seen the best ice time together, and that's on the power play. There's no space where you play more together than on power play, and so I disagree he's not playing with Eichel. He's playing with Eichel and has the privilege predominantly to play there on the PP. The 5-on-5 game is a tight one in the National Hockey League, and you need a balanced lineup to sustain success, is what I'm saying to that."

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There are oddities to Krueger's answer. Skinner has no power-play goals this year and all eight of his goals are at even strength. Last year, he scored 32 at even and eight on the power play. And Olofsson, cited as a strong two-way player, often saw his ice time cut in the third period last month when the Sabres were protecting leads.

Krueger said the lines he used Wednesday aren't guaranteed to be the alignment for Thursday's game, but what he has shown in practice this season is generally what takes the ice for games the next day.

Vesey — still looking for his first goal of the season — is joining Eichel on the top line with Reinhart. Meanwhile, Olofsson is sliding down to join his former Rochester center, Rasmus Asplund, and moved-to-the-wing Casey Mittelstadt.

Skinner remained with center Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary, a tough assignment given Rodrigues has no goals this season and Sheary has none in his last 13 games. Johan Larsson is back from an upper-body injury and centering Zemgus Girgensons and Curtis Lazar.

Marcus Johansson, also upper body, remains out. Krueger said Johansson will stay in Buffalo to skate at the start of the trip and is likely to head to Florida to play in either Sunday's game against the Panthers or Monday's game in Tampa Bay.

Sabres assistant coach Don Granato is back

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 20, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Assistant coach Don Granato returned to the ice for Sabres' practice on Wednesday.

On Sept. 28, Granato was diagnosed with severe pneumonia. Granato's brother Tony was quoted as saying that there was a time early on that they didn't know if he'd pull through. Ralph Krueger said everybody was happy to see him, "The whole team really got a lift today with having Don join us.

"He needed to be 100% cleared before this was going to occur, and he has been cleared 100% health wise and can fully participate in the coaching of the team."

Chris Taylor has been filling in, but he isn't immediately going back to Rochester. Krueger said, "Donnie's going on the trip and then we're going to take the transition for Chris Taylor day-to-day here, but right now he's coming on the trip and we're just going to see how things go."

For right now, Taylor will remain behind the bench with the forwards.

Granato has been watching the games for a while, and according to Krueger will bring a fresh perspective to the coaches.

Johan Larsson practiced on Wednesday, but Marcus Johansson didn't. Krueger said, "It looks like Johansson will be staying behind, and Larsson will be making the trip, but still no firm decisions on if he's playing. We'll make that decision tomorrow morning."

The reason Johansson is staying behind is the team will not have a morning skate on Thursday and is off on Friday. They want Johansson to get some good practice time, so he'll stay behind with Dennis Miller. Krueger said they will fly Johansson to Florida and he may play one of those games on Sunday or Monday.

The lines were shuffled on Wednesday, which means Victor Olofsson is playing with Rasmus Asplund and Casey Mittelstadt. Olofsson and Asplund, along with Danny O'Regan, formed the hottest line down the stretch in the AHL last season. Krueger said, "The history with Victor and Rasmus Asplund, they played every single minute together last season in Rochester, so those are things that we're considering."

Jimmy Vesey was on the wing with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. Krueger tried that a few games ago and it didn't work at all. Krueger wants to give it another look, "We have a feeling that his work has been strong and that a goal will explode him into a stronger secondary scoring position.

Boston is also home for Vesey and Eichel, and Krueger said that is a factor, "There's some Boston energy in the group right now that is going through the whole team, and I think Jimmy has been giving us an honest effort. He's been trying really hard on the penalty kill, but we believe we need to get his confidence up."

Jeff Skinner has hardly played at all on Eichel's line. The question is why hasn't that happened?

"The combinations that we look at every day are we want to spread out our scoring. We want a certain mix of offense and defense on every unit, and we just thought that Victor brought us a strong two-way game and we don't want to burden [Skinner] with too much of that. He's doing a really good job without the puck, but he needs to be able to create when he has opportunities."

Krueger also thinks that it's wrong to say that they don't play together, "They have seen the best ice-time together and that's on the power play. There's no space where you play more together than on the power play, so I disagree that he's not playing with Eichel. He's playing with Eichel and has the privilege predominantly to play there on the PP."

Zach Bogosian is making the trip with the Sabres. Jason Botterill said on Tuesday that there's a possibility to defenseman could play on the weekend.

Krueger: 'We feel there's an upside to the group'

WGR 550

November 20, 2019

Despite snapping a six-game losing streak this weekend against the Ottawa Senators, the Buffalo Sabres are still on a downward trend since the calendar turned to November.

After a 9-2-2 record to start the season in October, the Sabres have significantly cooled off with a 1-6-1 record in eight games in November.

The most recent loss came at the hands of the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday night at KeyBank Center, who entered the night as the NHL's worst team with 16 points in the standings. Buffalo never got anything going offensively until it was already too late in a 4-1 loss.

Up next for the Sabres, the schedule does not get any easier as the team will embark on a three-game road trip, starting on Thursday night against the Boston Bruins at TD Garden. Buffalo will then head to the Sunshine State over the weekend to take on the Florida Panthers late Sunday afternoon, and then have another meeting with the Tampa Bay Lightning on Monday night.

If the Sabres want to avoid falling down the standings any more than they already have, they will need to get as many points as possible before returning home for a matchup with the Calgary Flames, followed by a home-and-home series with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger joined Howard and Jeremy on Wednesday morning for his weekly appearance on WGR. Krueger spoke of the team's recent struggles, as well as how the team is trying to get back on track, some injury updates, and much more.

Here is some of what he had to say:

Krueger on the team's recent struggles:

"There's always multiple things you can look at. When he had the winning streak going, there were things we were working on that we weren't happy with and we tried to change. Now, the things we're not happy with and we're working on and trying to change are magnified. It comes down to details. There's little moments in games where we're giving up what we were good at, slight changes on the way we're forechecking and defending, and especially in the offense we're frustrated right now on the power play, which has gone quite cold. We're just not creating the offense that we did. We knew it was a project. We know we had a lot of details to work on to make them into habits, but we're at a frustrating point right now, but no body has their heads down. The guys have their heads up, they're working hard, and we believe we'll find a way out of this."

Krueger on the message the Sabres' organization is trying to send:

"It's about developing the best possible version of the Sabres this season. We feel there's a lot of good things happening. We feel there's an upside to the group. We're going to get some bodies back here in the next few days. Some key injuries that are not an excuse, but it will be good to get them back and help solidify the game we need to play again. Right now, we're working on today with what needs to be improved to get better for Boston tomorrow and that's it."

"The only way you can make things better now is by taking care of things that are manageable and what's in your control... We need to turn this on our own. We need to work on. What I know what to do in this situation is to work hard and stay focused. The language from outside, any noise that's trying to distract us from this, we need to leave it outside, and inside the room we need to focus on the things that we can control and change. That's our next challenge, which is Boston.

Krueger on his conversations with general manager Jason Botterill about the team:

"We're speaking every single day since I've signed, which is an excellent process. Jason and I are strongly connected. In the end, it doesn't affect what I do when I go to the rink, and that's work with the players that are

healthy, work with the players that are there, and work with the lineup we have and do the best with this group. The big picture is being run by Jason and his management team. I've got a coaching staff dealing on the day-to-day, but we are strongly connected. Through training camp all the way through the season, every day we're speaking about where this organization wants to go and how we can get there, and which players can do it for us. He's dealing with that, and I'm dealing with getting players ready every day."

Krueger on the injury statuses of Marcus Johansson and Johan Larsson:

"Johansson and Larsson are both day-to-day and are both possible for Boston. We're doing evaluation this morning, and we'll decide as the day progresses whether they join us in Boston or whether they enter in Florida. But we're expecting both of them back quite soon."

Sabres' misery continues

By Mike Schopp

WGR 550

November 20, 2019

I've been staring at the screen for more than an hour. I'm overdue to write a column and given the Sabres' recent play -- last two weeks or last 10 years, you define recent -- they really need to be my subject.

Most thoughts I have are forced. When something out of your control bothers you in your life, what do you do about it? Do you dwell on how frustrated it makes you? I find that unhealthy and try to avoid it, instead making whatever effort is necessary to not think about it all. I woke up three hours ago and got my children started prepping for school. I asked them if they think it will be possible for me to make a mushroom dish for Thanksgiving that their cousins will eat. My son said it will be impossible. My daughter says yes, but only if it's mushroom ice cream. Life is short.

Of course, this amazing job I have requires me to ponder the Buffalo Sabres. I know how that reads. I'm embarrassed to put it that way. But at this point, if I'm being honest, that's how it feels. It feels like a requirement. So do the occasional "rants" on the air, e.g., "At some point we're going to have to talk about this". It can feel good in the moment to go off like that. But when it's over I often feel badly about it. These are people with families and their own struggles, and I tend to think more about the human side of it when I leave the office. Jeremy White this morning said how when he gets home he and his wife will talk about the Sabres. When I get home that never happens. There was a game Tuesday night but my son had a band concert and I went to that, making it just in time. I sat next to a friend who asked me how work was. "I'm spiraling," I told her. She laughed.

So what's new to say? Several bad players from last year's team were brought back. I have been unable to think of any defense for it. Buyouts, trades, waivers ... it was seemingly a given that in some combination it all would happen, because that's what sports teams almost always do. Especially considering it was in the wake of the colossal embarrassment that was watching castoff Ryan O'Reilly win the -- window-cracking level of emphasis added -- Conn Smythe Trophy. Instead -- now more muted, think Hannibal Lecter -- none of it happened. The only player traded since the middle of last summer (2018) has been Nathan Beaulieu (h/t @ntrider825). Jeremy tweeted Wednesday about how at one point last spring, the Sabres had lost 17-of-20 games, yet the only player from the last of those games that they've moved off the roster since is Alexander Nylander.

Why? How?

It all seems like a sick joke. A nightmare, a Twilight Zone episode where you're stuck somewhere and can't find your way out. The keys to the car that is this roster apparently have been lost. Is there really any other explanation? You just walk around and around, looking for some clue that you've escaped, and then there's an image in the distance and you get excited that maybe you're in a new place but step closer and realize it's Rasmus Ristolainen wiring a puck around the boards for eternity.

On Twitter and devoid of an entry point to this article that I liked, I thought of this search: "@schopptalk Sabres help". One entry I found was my saying this from April 2014:

2014 was the season before the Sabres drafted Sam Reinhart, which is the season before they drafted Jack Eichel, which is three seasons before the one in which they drafted Rasmus Dahlin. By virtue of no accomplishment other than being so terrible, the Sabres were gifted three excellent players. And yet, somehow, we're watching them lose nine of 11 games in what would be a ninth consecutive non-playoff season in a league where more than half the teams every year make it.

What's left to say? Nothing. What's left to do? I don't know. Walk?

The aforementioned Beaulieu joined O'Reilly by mentioning, in a recent interview, how miserable he was playing in Buffalo. What are we supposed to make of that? Sure, the losing, but lots of teams lose and their players don't walk around saying **publicly** that they were miserable there. Is it my fault? Is it all of ours? The arena for games is often dead, and it's also old. Is that our fault too? Beaulieu is a decent player that often was made to sit

and watch while the likes of Ristolainen continue, apparently forever, leading the outfit in minutes. Beaulieu and O'Reilly think they were miserable? Do they know what tickets cost?

One of my favorite sports metaphors is "the punch Ali didn't throw Foreman". This is from 1974's "Rumble in the Jungle", a fight in which Muhammad Ali upset George Foreman with a knockout in the eighth round. Ali has Foreman tumbling to the canvas and has his arm cocked to throw one final, fatal blow. But even amidst the fury he recognizes that Foreman is falling anyway, and he refrains.

Criticism of the Sabres feels like that punch Ali didn't throw -- but in this case Foreman isn't beginning his fall, he's already lying dead on the canvas. It's exhausted and boring, unnecessary and often gratuitous. What isn't those things is a compliment, so here goes that: I really like the 50th season jerseys. I'd like them more if it were the actual 50th season, but never mind.

'I've got to step up': Casey Mittelstadt takes ownership of his role in Sabres' recent struggles

By John Vogl

The Athletic

November 20, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Casey Mittelstadt knows. As the losses pile up, as the pointless nights grow in number, the Sabres forward is aware he's not doing his part.

"I'm pretty hard on myself, so it hasn't been the brightest of days," Mittelstadt said Wednesday. "I've got to step up my game, for sure."

While he's hardly alone – anyone not named Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Jeff Skinner needs to contribute more offensively – Mittelstadt's numbers are staggeringly low. In the last 30 periods, he has four shots on goal. That's one shot every 2½ games for someone regarded as a top offensive prospect.

Mittelstadt has no points in the last 11 games and no goals in 12. He's stuck on three goals and four assists through 21 outings.

"Like I said, it's time for someone to step up," Mittelstadt said. "We can sit here and talk about it as much as we want, but we've got to go do it. Other guys are going to have to step up. Us young guys are going to have to step up, and we know that."

Mittelstadt certainly is a young guy – he turns 21 on Friday – but he's in his second season. The Sabres hoped some of last year's growing pains would be gone. Instead, he's faltering.

"He's just got so much skill and there's just so much going on in his learning curve right now," coach Ralph Krueger said. "You can see he's trying very hard defensively. He's trying to get in on the forecheck, trying to come back. He tracks as hard as anybody on this team."

"So he's doing a lot of good things and he's just got to bring it together and still be able to play the offense that he wants to."

Krueger may try to jump-start Mittelstadt with a position switch. He could shift from center to wing starting with Thursday's game in Boston. It would lessen Mittelstadt's defensive duties with the idea that his offensive instincts could take over.

"Obviously, you've got to keep the puck out of your net first, especially after last year," said Mittelstadt, who was pushed to focus on his own zone by former coach Phil Housley. "Coming in here, there was such a big emphasis on getting better defensively and things like that for me, so I've been trying to clean that up first."

"Offense has always come. As hard as it's been on the offensive side, I'm not too worried about it. It should come here."

The Sabres drafted him eighth overall in 2017 following a successful split season. Mittelstadt put up 21 goals and 64 points in 25 games in Minnesota's high school system and racked up 13 goals and 30 points in 24 games in the United States Hockey League.

But since leaving the University of Minnesota following his freshman year, Mittelstadt has just 16 goals and 21 assists in 104 games with the Sabres. He was overmatched physically for much of last season and has just been invisible in the offensive zone this year.

So far, the Sabres have resisted sending him down to Rochester for grooming and a confidence boost. But a decision on his future could be coming soon. With centers Marcus Johansson and Johan Larsson hurt, Rasmus Asplund has impressed during a recall. In Asplund's three games, he has doubled Mittelstadt's shot total (4-2) and zipped past him in average ice time (14:02 to 10:54).

Larsson is returning Thursday and Johansson could be back Sunday in Florida, so it's possible someone will head to Rochester. While the Sabres have never hinted Mittelstadt should go down, he's playing like it would help.

"Casey's one of those, 'Keep doing what you're doing,' where a lot of our fundamentals and our concepts that we're working on ... since the beginning of training camp are not cemented as habits yet," Krueger said. "And that's why some of these results are drifting."

All of Mittelstadt's points came during the opening 11 games. He had 17 shots in that time, not outstanding but eighth on the team and way better than the rut he's in now. Since his drought started Oct. 25, only five players in the NHL have skated in as many games and taken fewer shots. And none of them have the offensive expectations that accompany Mittelstadt.

In addition to the four shots on net in 10 games, he's missed the net only five times – which equates to fewer than one shot attempt per game.

The ineffectiveness would probably stand out more if Mittelstadt wasn't surrounded by struggling players. During the Sabres' past dozen games (which includes the current 2-7-2 slide), Eichel, Reinhart and Skinner have scored 17 of Buffalo's 26 goals. Only four other forwards have found the net.

It's easy to find reasons why the Sabres are losing.

"It hasn't been fun," Mittelstadt said, "but I don't know. We've been through it, right? We went through it last year and we know what we did last year. We're not going to fall into that same trap."

"It's obviously been hard, but it's better to face it at the beginning of the year and learn how to get through times like this. Obviously, we've got a new coaching staff with a lot of new guys in the room. We'll figure out how to get through it together, and I think we'll be fine."

Though the Sabres certainly don't look confident on the ice, they were unwavering after practice.

"I'm going to get out of this," said forward Jimmy Vesey, who hasn't scored in any of his 18 games in a Buffalo uniform. "I've been able to score and contribute at every level and I've done it at this level, so it's just a matter of time right now."

The time actually is right now. The struggling forwards know it.

"Like I said, it's obviously not fun, but it's not a time to panic," Mittelstadt said. "There's 60 games left, so just go out and play and try to have fun here."

"I'm pretty lucky. I'm 20 years old and I'm playing NHL hockey. I understand I'm pretty lucky, but like I said, I've got to play my game. I've got to step up."

Hasek on today's goalies: 'They are better than Martin Brodeur or Patrick Roy or Dominik Hasek'

By Craig Custance

The Athletic

November 20, 2019

DETROIT – Dominik Hasek stepped into a stairwell at Little Caesars Arena to find somewhere quiet to chat. Before starting the conversation, he leaned over the railing to look outside, straining forward to get closer to the window.

Something outside caught his attention. It was intermission of Tuesday night's game between the Senators and Red Wings – two of the three NHL teams in which he starred during his Hall of Fame career.

He seemed a bit in awe of the new development in Detroit that replaced Joe Louis Arena, where he won two Stanley Cups with the Red Wings.

"I'm just looking at the big screen TV," he said, staring at a large screen in a courtyard outside the arena.

This rink is nothing like the one he left, but he's still the same guy. Fit. Witty. Happy to talk goaltending. And still beloved by the fans. Walking through the concourses in Detroit, he couldn't make it a few steps without fans stopping for a photo or giving him a shout.

"Dominator!"

"Love you, Dom!"

And if there was any mistaking who he was, the doubt was erased by the blazer he wore personalized with the 100 patch, recognizing him as one of the 100 greatest players ever to play the game, an honor he earned during All-Star festivities in 2017 in Los Angeles. Because, why wouldn't you wear that any chance you could?

I love that you're wearing the 100 jacket. Do you break that out often?

When I'm in hockey, I do hockey interview or I'll go somewhere, is it about hockey? Actually, I have two (jackets). I have 100 years and Hockey Hall of Fame. So I'm sort of switching it. This one fits me a little bit better, the Hockey Hall of Fame makes me a little bit wider, so I like this one more. (laughs)

What are your impressions of this rink? A little different than where you played.

Fantastic. It's probably the best, I don't know if it's the best, I can't say that because I don't know all the rinks. But fantastic. It's hard to describe it. The show in the beginning (of the game). I love that everything is made in the red and white colors. So powerful. So fascinating.

This game is featuring two teams in which you played. I'm curious, what's going through your mind now when watching the Senators and the Red Wings play?

It's definitely two organizations that were the biggest part of my life, and of course, the Buffalo Sabres. The Red Wings, I won two Cups and played with so many great players and this is something I will remember. Ottawa was just a short stop. Sabres ... I follow them, how they do.

I'm always curious. Your style was so unique as an NHL goalie. When you watch goalies now, I don't want to say they're robotic, but more structured. What do you think when you watch them?

They are more structured. The sliding, the style, it's a little bit for every goalie is a little bit similar. I have to say, they are great. They improve what we've done. Hockey is faster. The goalies are, I would say, I think they cover better. Especially the lower part of the net, they cover it unbelievable. Everything is improving. They are better than Martin Brodeur or Patrick Roy or Dominik Hasek.

You really think so?

I think you cannot compare. We were better at our time, in 90s and 2000. We were better than the goalies in the 80s. Now they are better. Every generation the goalies do different styles. It doesn't look to me like they're as acrobatic, but the way they play, they cover the net so well. I'm sure they have coaches and lots of video, and they know what they're doing.

You had a goalie coach in Mitch Korn in Buffalo who has gone on to have an influential career in Nashville, Washington and now with the Islanders. Where did he make the biggest impact for you?

Oh, Mitch Korn was a very important person in my hockey life. I never had a goalie coach in the Czech Republic. I didn't have a goalie coach in Chicago. I came to Buffalo and he start to work with me on an everyday basis. What was the best for me was he was very smart. He didn't try to change me. But, we worked together, we talked how I can use my flexibility and all my advantages and make it even better. We were working on the angles, on the skating. I improved and became an NHL star. Without him I would probably be good goalie, even without him, but not NHL star. Because really special first two, three years, he really helped me.

Which goalies do you like watching most in today's game?

I'll be honest. I'm not following on an everyday basis, hockey. I've seen some goalies but I cannot say, I don't like to say who is best because I don't follow on everyday basis. With six hours difference, I'm not awake at night when the NHL is playing. In the morning when I wake up, I watch on my phone, the highlights from the NHL. At 7 o'clock (in the) morning, when I wake up, I like to watch the highlights. Even in the bed still.

There's a pretty good argument to be made that you are the best goalie to ever play. What do you think when you hear people make that case?

It makes me proud. I don't want to argue. There were some great goalies from my generation. Most of the games I played against there were three of them – Martin Brodeur, Patrick Roy and Eddie Belfour, they were unbelievable goalies. To compete against them, it made me better. I tried to be better than Martin or Eddie or whatever. This competition made me an even better goalie.

Reeling Sabres' reshuffling lands Jimmy Vesey spot on top line

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 20, 2019

BUFFALO – When the Sabres acquired Jimmy Vesey in the summer, it seemed like he could earn an opportunity to play with top center Jack Eichel.

Of course, no one thought that chance would materialize after scoring zero goals in his first 18 outings. But right now, Vesey is the reeling Sabres' No. 1 left winger.

"Getting put up there kind of gives you a shot in the arm and a little bit of a boost," Vesey said of his promotion beside Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

Having lost eight of their last nine games, the Sabres desperately need a boost for Thursday's contest against the Boston Bruins, the start of a three-game road trip versus Atlantic Division opponents.

That's why Sabres coach Ralph Krueger mixed up his lines for Wednesday's practice, promoting Vesey and moving Victor Olofsson, Eichel's left winger most of the season, beside center Rasmus Asplund and Casey Mittelstadt.

Krueger wouldn't commit to using the new trios Thursday. Still, considering the Sabres won't hold a morning skate in Boston, it seems likely he will try them.

The game's location probably factored in Vesey's promotion. He and Eichel are Boston natives who played college hockey at home.

"There is some Boston energy in the group right now that is permutating right through the whole team," Krueger said inside KeyBank Center.

Perhaps playing at home on the No. 1 line can help ignite Vesey, who said he's "a little bit of a homebody."

"There's probably no better night for me to have a big game," he said.

Vesey scored 50 goals over his first three seasons, including 43 at even strength. In a contract year on a new team, it felt like he could surpass the 20-goal mark.

"I'm going to get out of this," Vesey said. "I've been able to score, contribute at every level, and I've done it at this level. So (it's) just a matter of time right now."

A goal or two from Vesey or one of his struggling teammates might've gone a long way in recent weeks.

The Sabres' offense, like the rest of their game, has completely flatlined. Their collapse over the past three or four weeks has been downright stunning.

On Oct. 22, the Sabres' 4-3 overtime win against the San Jose Sharks improved their record to 8-1-1, giving them an NHL-best 17 points.

Their power play was lethal over that stretch, converting 12 of 39 opportunities (30.8%).

In their last 11 games, the Sabres have mustered a league-low six points, going 2-7-2. In that span, they've scored the league's fewest goals (22) and the league's fewest power-play goals (two on 29 attempts, just 6.9%).

"We just got to stay patient," said Sabres winger Victor Olofsson, who has scored six of his seven goals on the man advantage. "I mean, it was really good in the beginning of the year. I think we got to get back to that and keep it kind of simple.

"We don't have to make the perfect play every time. Just get pucks to the net, get some greasy ones."

The power play has become the only place Eichel and Jeff Skinner, one of the league's top center-wing duos last season, play together. But Skinner has mostly skated on the second line with centers Marcus Johansson or Evan Rodrigues.

Remember, when Skinner signed an eight-year, \$72 million contract after scoring a career-high 40 goals in 2018-19, it seemed like he would be Eichel's personal left winger for years.

So why has Krueger kept them apart?

"We want to spread out our scoring, we want a certain mix of offense and defense on every unit," he said.

Olofsson, Krueger said, offered Eichel's line a two-way style early this season.

"We don't want to burden Skins with too much of that," Krueger said. "He's doing a really good job without the puck ... but he needs to create when he has (the) opportunity."

Krueger liked the way Skinner, Rodrigues and Conor Sheary performed in Tuesday's ugly 4-1 home loss to the Minnesota Wild, so he kept the line intact Wednesday.

To Krueger, Eichel and Skinner playing on the power play is their "best ice time together."

"There's no space where you play more together than (the) power play, so I disagree that he's not playing with Eichel," he said. "He's playing with Eichel and has the privilege, predominantly, to play there on the PP. The five-on-five game is a tight one in the National Hockey League, and you need a balanced lineup to sustain success."

Part of that balance includes shifting Mittelstadt, a center, to right wing. Mittelstadt, 20, has an 11-game point drought in which he has recorded only five shots.

"He's trying to get in on the forecheck, trying to come back," Krueger said. "He tracks as hard anybody on this team. So he's doing a lot of good things, and he's just got to bring it together and still be able to play the offense that he wants to.

"I think maybe freeing him up on the wing for a few games will be a solution."

Olofsson and Asplund spent all of last season as linemates with Danny O'Regan on the Rochester Americans.

"It's going to be a great line," Asplund said.

Center Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons and Curtis Lazar and comprised the Sabres' other line Wednesday.

Don Granato returns to Sabres; Jimmy Vesey promoted to top line

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 20, 2019

BUFFALO – Finally, some good news for the struggling Sabres.

Assistant coach Don Granato, who took a leave of absence Oct. 1 after being hospitalized with severe pneumonia, returned to the Sabres today.

Granato, 52, was on the ice for practice inside KeyBank Center and accompanied the Sabres on their three-game road trip, which begins Thursday in Boston.

"That was a real-life story," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "It's amazing that was Sept. 28 when that began. The whole team, everybody got a lift today with having Don join us.

"I mean, he needed to be 100% clear before this was going to occur. He has been cleared 100% health-wise and can fully participate again in coaching the team."

Sabres winger Jimmy Vesey said of Granato's return: "Everyone was pumped up."

Granato will start off watching games in the press box with assistant Mike Bales. For now, interim assistant Chris Taylor, the Rochester Americans' head coach, will remain on the bench.

Krueger said a transition for Taylor is day-to-day.

"We're just going to see how things go," said Krueger, who hired Granato in June.

Gord Dineen has been subbing for Taylor in Rochester.

Krueger said Granato, someone he has called a "hockey lifer," has been picking up video to review. Today was the first time he interacted with the team.

"He's been able to really watch for a while, so it's a fresh perspective coming into now to the coaches' room," Krueger said. "His experience will definitely help us this situation."

Right now, having lost eight of the last nine games, the Sabres' situation is bad.

Fresh off Tuesday's ugly 4-1 home loss to the Minnesota Wild, Krueger changed up his lines today, moving Vesey, who has scored zero goals, to left wing on the top trio beside center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

"More than anything, we have a feeling that his work has been strong and a goal will explode him into a stronger secondary scoring position," Krueger said of Vesey.

Vesey and Eichel, of course, are both from Boston, meaning that could go into Krueger's thinking.

"There is some Boston energy in the group right now that is permutating right through the whole team," Krueger said.

Vesey, a Harvard graduate, said he's "a little bit of a homebody."

"I don't know if I've had my best games at the Boston Garden, even in college, but there's probably no better night for me to have a big game than tomorrow," he said.

Krueger wouldn't commit to his new lines, but given the Sabres won't skate Thursday morning in Boston, it seems likely he will utilize them.

He moved Victor Olofsson, Eichel's winger most of the season, beside center Rasmus Asplund and Casey Mittelstadt, who normally pivots a line.

Meanwhile, Johan Larsson, out the last three games with an upper-body injury, centered Zemgus Girgensons and Curtis Lazar in his return to practice.

Krueger kept the trio of center Evan Rodrigues, Jeff Skinner and Conor Sheary intact.

In other news, Krueger said center Marcus Johansson, out the last four games with an upper-body injury, could join the team on its trip.

After playing the Bruins, the Sabres face the Florida Panthers and Tampa Bay Lightning. The Sabres, who have Friday off, want Johansson to have ice so he can skate in Buffalo.

Sabres may try some different looks at forward on road trip

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

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As the Buffalo Sabres look for offense up and down the lineup, head coach Ralph Krueger may try some different line combinations during the team's three-game road trip that starts tomorrow night in Boston.

During Wednesday's practice at KeyBank Center, Jimmy Vesey worked on a line with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. Victor Olofsson skated with Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Asplund, his old linemate in Rochester. Johan Larsson was back at practice and centered a combination with Zemgus Girgensons and Curtis Lazar. Jeff Skinner, meanwhile played left wing with center Evan Rodrigues and winger Conor Sheary.

All of that, however, could change by the time the Sabres take the ice for their game against the Bruins on Thursday (6:30 pregame on MSG; 7 p.m. faceoff on MSG and WGR 550).

Larsson has missed the past three games with an upper-body injury, but is expected to make the trip that includes games against the Bruins, Panthers and Lightning. He's one of five forwards on the injury report, including Marcus Johansson, who could be back with the team this week.

"Still, no firm decisions [have been made]. You saw it in practice today, we haven't confirmed the lineup yet for tomorrow or the lines or if he's going to be a green light," Krueger said. "We're going to make that decision tomorrow."

Johansson could remain behind for the game in Boston and join the team for their games in Florida.

If Vesey ends up on playing in a game with Eichel and Reinhart in his hometown on Thursday, he's ready for the opportunity.

"It's a good feeling. I said this a little bit in training camp, but getting put up there, it gives you a shot in the arm and a little bit of a boost," he said. "I'm excited, especially going home and trying to have a good game in Boston."

He's still looking for his first goal of the season, but has been relied upon in different situations, including on the penalty kill. Krueger is confident that Vesey's hard work will eventually pay off with some goals.

"More than anything, we have a feeling that his work has been strong and a goal will explode him into a stronger secondary scoring position. Whether that will be the line tomorrow or not, we'll see, but it's just an option we have," he said. "There is some Boston energy in the group right now that is permutating right through the whole team. Jimmy has been giving us an honest effort.

"He's been trying really hard also on the penalty kill and we believe we need to get his confidence up. We believe we need to get four lines scoring again. Also, the history of potentially Victor with Rasmus Asplund, they played every single minute together of last season in Rochester so those are things we're considering on the way to the Boston game."

On defense, there are decisions to be made as well. Nine defensemen skated at practice and all are expected to make the trip to Boston, including Zach Bogosian. Thursday night, general manager Jason Botterill said that the team was optimistic that the D-man would be able to play at some point during the road trip. Bogosian is working his way back from offseason hip surgery.

The team's depth has been tested over the past week. During Thursday's game, the Sabres played with 11 forwards and seven defensemen, with John Gilmour filling in on a line with Asplund and Girgensons.

Larsson is eager to get back in the lineup and face a Boston team that has been on a good run. The Bruins are on a five-game point streak and are 7-0-4 at home this season.

"We want to get back to what we're good at and we know we can play. Just come back to basics. We know we're a good team and we'll start with Boston," Larsson said.

"It's a tough team. They come out hard and you've got to be ready from the start and be ready to battle in a heavy game. They're a tough to beat there."

Granato returns to practice

The Sabres welcomed back assistant coach Don Granato at practice. It was announced on Oct. 1 that Granato had been hospitalized with severe pneumonia and would be taking a medical leave from the team.

As he recovered, he slowly worked his way back into the fold. He's been helping the coaching staff break down video, but hadn't had any real interaction with the players until today's practice. Granato was one of the first ones on the ice at KeyBank Center on Wednesday.

"The whole team, everybody got a real lift today with having Don join us," Krueger said.

"...He's been watching all the games lately and we wanted to get him 100 percent, not 90, not 80, not 70 - he had to be 100. He's been really able to watch for a while so it's a fresh perspective coming in now to the coach's room and his experience will definitely help us in this situation."

Granato will begin to transition back into his role over the next few games. Amerks head coach Chris Taylor has been filling in as a Sabres assistant coach on an interim basis.