



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*November 27, 2019*

## **Calgary visits Eichel and the Sabres**

Associated Press

November 27, 2019

Calgary Flames (11-12-4, sixth in the Pacific Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (11-10-3, sixth in the Atlantic Division)

Buffalo, New York; Wednesday, 7 p.m. EST

**BOTTOM LINE:** Jack Eichel and Buffalo square off against Calgary. Eichel is ninth in the league with 30 points, scoring 14 goals and recording 16 assists.

The Sabres have gone 6-3-2 in home games. Buffalo has converted on 19.2% of power-play opportunities, recording 15 power-play goals.

The Flames are 5-9-2 on the road. Calgary averages 9.6 penalty minutes per game, the eighth-most in the NHL. Milan Lucic leads the team serving 34 total minutes.

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

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Marco Scandella leads the Sabres with a plus-eight in 17 games played this season. Eichel has recorded seven goals and six assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

Johnny Gaudreau leads the Flames with 15 total assists and has collected 20 points. Sean Monahan has recorded three goals and four assists over the last 10 games for Calgary.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Flames: 3-5-2, averaging 1.8 goals, 3.3 assists, 4.2 penalties and 8.7 penalty minutes while giving up 3.1 goals per game with a .901 save percentage.

Sabres: 2-7-1, averaging 2.4 goals, 3.6 assists, 4.4 penalties and 11 penalty minutes while giving up 3.3 goals per game with a .890 save percentage.

**Sabres Injuries:** Johan Larsson: out (upper body).

**Flames Injuries:** None listed.

## **NHL suspends Lightning Cernak 2 games for elbowing Dahlin**

Associated Press

November 26, 2019

NEW YORK (AP) — The NHL has suspended Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Erik Cernak for two games for elbowing Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin in the face.

Cernak wasn't penalized for the hit, which occurred during a Sabres power play late in the second period of the Lightning's 5-2 win on Monday night.

Dahlin was left bloodied and sustained a concussion.

The second-year play-making defenseman drove into the left circle before making a backhanded pass. As Dahlin curled back, Cernak caught him with an elbow that knocked him to the ice.

The suspension will cost Cernak \$7,500 in pay.

## **Tampa Bay's Erik Cernak suspended two games for elbowing Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
November 26, 2019

The hit that concussed Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin in Amalie Arena on Monday night resulted in supplemental discipline from the NHL Department of Player Safety.

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Erik Cernak, who was not penalized for knocking Dahlin out of the game with an elbow to the face at 17:26 into the second period, received a two-game suspension following a hearing Tuesday. Dahlin, 19, was holding his nose while following a trainer down the tunnel shortly before the intermission. Cernak also was fined \$7,500.

Sabres winger Jimmy Vesey said Dahlin was "cut open pretty good," though most of Dahlin's teammates told reporters they did not see the hit. Following the 5-2 loss to the Lightning, coach Ralph Krueger revealed that Dahlin was diagnosed with a concussion and said the Sabres' focus was on "getting him healthy and hoping it's not a long-term injury."

Krueger deferred to the department of player safety when asked if Cernak's elbow was the type of hit that should be eliminated from the National Hockey League.

"I think it's better for me not to judge it right now," Krueger said. "I know we have vehicles that will analyze and take a look at it. Let's see what that judgment is because we're emotionally connected to the situation and as wrong as it feels, that's always from a bias viewpoint, which is ours. Let's see the neutral bodies take a look at that."

The Lightning unsuccessfully argued that Dahlin's glove drove Cernak's elbow up to cause the head contact. That judgment was handed down ahead of the Sabres' matchup against the Calgary Flames on Wednesday in KeyBank Center. That's little consolation, though. Buffalo (11-10-3) has fallen to sixth in the Atlantic Division as the result of a 2-8-1 record in November.

Now, the Sabres could be without their top offensive defenseman and quarterback of the top power-play unit. Dahlin's 15 assists rank second on the team behind Jack Eichel, and his 18:59 average ice time ranks third among their defensemen. If Dahlin misses time, the Sabres will have seven healthy defensemen on their roster: Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe, Colin Miller, Henri Jokiharju, Marco Scandella, Zach Bogosian and Brandon Montour.

The Sabres have dealt with a rash of injuries during their November swoon, having already lost Vladimir Sobotka (lower body), Marcus Johansson (upper body), Kyle Okposo (concussion), Evan Rodrigues (lower body) and Tage Thompson (upper body). That has forced them to recall Thompson, Curtis Lazar, Rasmus Asplund and Jean-Sebastien Dea from Rochester this month.

Krueger has taken somewhat of an unorthodox approach to the challenge, dressing seven defensemen and 11 forwards three times in the past four games. Johansson was expected to join the Sabres during the final two games of their most recent road trip. However, the team has taken a cautious approach with his recovery. Krueger said the hope is Johansson, a 29-year-old center, could return sometime this week.

### **Week ahead**

The Sabres are expected to hold a morning skate Wednesday, their first of three games in four days. They'll also play a home-and-home series against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday and Saturday. The schedule provides Krueger with little time to make corrections.

Entering Tuesday, the Sabres had scored the second-fewest goals (23) and allowed the fourth-most during November. Their power play is 1-for-31 over the past 11 games, while the penalty kill has allowed one goal in nine consecutive games.

"We come together on game day again and we need to find those moments of high-quality teaching," Krueger said. "We use a combination of video, board talks, group talks and it is a phase where we need to learn through

the games. We need to learn between the games where the spaces are there for us to use, and I think we've been doing a good job with it. ... Our motto is small picture and keep improving, trying to improve every day."

### **Dramatic turn**

There was one promising development to come out of the Sabres' loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning. Vesey, who Buffalo acquired in a trade with the New York Rangers on July 1, scored his first goal in 21 games this season.

The 26-year-old intercepted a pass near the Sabres' blue line and scored on a breakaway for a 2-1 lead in the second period. Buffalo's bench erupted in celebration while Vesey let out a roar.

Vesey missed the net on a breakaway Sunday in Sunrise, Fla., and had been earning more opportunities in recent games. According to NaturalStatTrick.com, Vesey is tied for fifth on the Sabres in individual scoring chances created at 5 on 5. He also nearly scored a power-play goal that would have given them a 3-1 lead over Tampa Bay.

"Breakaway [Sunday] as well and then I think the next shift on the power play I had a Grade-A [scoring chance] in front," Vesey said following the loss Monday. "I just have to keep working and capitalize on those. That power-play chance, if I score there it's 3-1 and it might be a different game. Good feeling to get that out of the way, but tough feeling overall without getting anything from tonight's game."

### **Tough time**

Carter Hutton was at a loss for words Monday night. The Sabres' goalie allowed five goals on 27 shots in his first start in more than a week, and he didn't have much of a chance against the Lightning.

Hutton was screened on two goals, allowed another on an incredible deflection and was left hung out to dry by his teammates on both shorthanded goals in the third period. The 33-year-old is 0-5-2 with a .869 save percentage over his last seven starts.

Remember, Hutton won his first six starts this season, recording a .943 save percentage during a stretch that included back-to-back shutouts.

"I just don't have the answers right now," Hutton said. "It's frustrating. I can tell you more than anybody, I put a lot into this, so it's pretty hard right now."

### **Kerfoot suspension**

Maple Leafs forward Alexander Kerfoot will not be on the ice Friday in KeyBank Center against the Sabres. Kerfoot, whom the Leafs acquired from the Colorado Avalanche this past summer, received a two-game suspension Monday as the result of his cross-check on his former teammate, defenseman Erik Johnson, last Saturday.

Kerfoot has five goals among eight points in 22 games for the Leafs this season.

## **As Sabres face Calgary, Flames probing allegations that coach used racial slur**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 26, 2019

An ongoing investigation into whether he used a racial slur a decade ago kept Calgary Flames coach Bill Peters off the ice for practice Tuesday at KeyBank Center.

Peters will not coach the Flames on Wednesday night against the Buffalo Sabres. It remains to be seen if he'll continue to be employed by the team for which he's coached for the past two-plus seasons. Akim Aliu, a forward who played for Peters with the American Hockey League's Rockford IceHogs in 2009-10, tweeted Monday night that the coach used the racial slur while expressing frustration with music being played in the dressing room.

Flames General Manager Brad Treliving told reporters Tuesday afternoon that the club will continue its investigation after learning of the allegation during a 3-2 overtime loss in Pittsburgh on Monday night. Peters did not speak to reporters following the game, and assistant coach Geoff Ward ran Calgary's practice ahead of its matchup against the Sabres. Ward will be behind the bench Wednesday night.

TSN's Frank Seravalli reported Tuesday that two former Rockford players, Simon Pepin and Peter MacArthur, independently corroborated Aliu's story.

"Since that time, obviously, I want to start by saying, allegations of this nature we take very, very seriously," Treliving said. "This is a subject matter that has no place in our organization. The magnitude and serious nature that we take this allegation is very high. ... Bill has not been relieved of his duties. We hope to have this completed quickly, but it's got to be thorough. It's got to be done correctly. I'm not about to comment on anything halfway through or give tidbits or give soundbites at this point other than to say, the serious nature of this is not lost on us. We take it with extreme seriousness and until such time that I personally can talk to the parties involved and everybody that we want to, we're not going to comment."

A tweet by Sportsnet reporting Peters had been fired was quickly deleted by the news outlet Tuesday. Aliu's comments came in response to a Toronto Sun report that revealed former Toronto Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock asked Mitch Marner, a rookie at the time, to rank players on the team from hardest working to least hardest working.

Babcock reportedly informed his players of Marner's rankings and expressed regret to Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman shortly after the Toronto Sun story was published. Peters, who counted Babcock as a mentor, was then the subject of Aliu's tweet that read: "Not very surprising the things we're hearing about Babcock. Apple doesn't fall far from the Tree, same sort of deal with his protege in YYC. Dropped the N bomb several times towards me in the dressing room in my rookie year because he didn't like my choice of music."

Aliu, now 30, was born in Nigeria, raised in Ukraine and moved to Canada at 7 years old. A former second-round draft pick of the Chicago Blackhawks, Aliu has not played professionally since he was a member of the ECHL's Orlando Solar Bears last season.

Aliu posted a second tweet Monday night detailing that he rebelled against Peters following the alleged incident and accused his former coach of writing a letter to Blackhawks president John McDonagh and General Manager Stan Bowman in an attempt to get him sent to Chicago's ECHL affiliate in Toledo.

Aliu played 13 games in the ECHL that season and bounced back and forth between the two minor leagues throughout his career. He played seven games with the Flames from 2011-13.

The Blackhawks released the following statement Tuesday: "The alleged actions by a former coach toward Akim Aliu while with the Rockford Icehogs are something we take seriously. The purported incident had not been reported or brought to our attention prior to yesterday and had no effect on any player personnel decision regarding Mr. Aliu."

After the initial report, former Hurricanes defenseman Michal Jordan accused Peters of physical abuse. Peters was head coach of the Hurricanes from 2014-18 and coached Jordan for his final two seasons with the team.

On Twitter, Jordan wrote that Peters kicked him and punched another player during a game and then acted as if nothing happened. Jordan tweeted Peters was the "worst coach ever by far" and told TSN that there were "multiple" incidents of physical abuse by Peters toward players.

The Flames (11-12-4) entered Tuesday in sixth in the Western Conference's Pacific Division and have lost seven of their last eight games. Following his three years as coach of Rockford, Peters spent three seasons as an assistant on Babcock's staff in Detroit before he became the head coach in Carolina.

Calgary missed the playoffs in Peters' first season as coach, only to lead the Western Conference with 107 points in 2018-19. The Flames were eliminated by the Colorado Avalanche in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs last spring.

## **John Gilmour embraces joining Amerks after being waived by Sabres**

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

November 26, 2019

ROCHESTER – In his first three pro seasons, Americans defenseman John Gilmour played for three awful Hartford Wolf Pack teams, never coming close to the playoffs.

In Gilmour's rookie year, the New York Rangers' affiliate finished last in the 31-team American Hockey League, winning just 24 games. Last season, the Wolf Pack won 29 games.

That's why Gilmour, who cleared waivers Friday and was assigned to the Amerks, is so excited about his new opportunity. Having started the season 12-3-1-2, the Amerks rank second in the North Division. They've won five consecutive games heading into Friday's home game against the Toronto Marlies.

For the first time in his AHL career, Gilmour is playing for a winner.

"No offense to my teams in the past, but we were at the bottom of the standings," an upbeat Gilmour, 26, said following Monday's practice in Blue Cross Arena. "It's nice to be on one that's toward the top and with such a good group of guys in there, a great leadership group. I think it's going to be a fun team to play on."

Gilmour, of course, likely will earn loads of ice time in Rochester. He enjoyed a successful AHL season in 2018-19, scoring 20 goals and 54 points in 70 games, and is coming off seven weeks with the Sabres despite only playing in four of the first 22 games.

"He jumps in the play," said coach Chris Taylor, who rejoined the Amerks on Monday after filling in for Sabres assistant Don Granato since the beginning of the season. "He's a guy, his hockey smarts are really good, but his speed, he can recover well. He joins a play offensively, he can get back defensively. He's a player that we trusted in Buffalo."

Taylor said he expects Gilmour to be brimming with confidence.

"He made the team out of training camp, and that's hard to do," he said. "Anything you do, you make an NHL team out of training camp, you've done something really good, and he did."

"He made everybody take notice of him. I thought he was great."

But Zach Bogosian's return from offseason hip surgery gave the Sabres nine healthy defensemen. Gilmour knew something could happen – "You're always looking at the numbers," he said – but tried to keep it in the back of his head.

On Thursday, Gilmour was waived for the first time in his career. Instead of worrying about being claimed, he said he tried to focus on joining the Amerks.

"Honestly, I was just more worried about my travel day, leaving from Florida, making my way to Binghamton, it was a long travel day," he said. "I was just focusing on that and then wrapping my head around playing the next night."

Gilmour played in Saturday's 4-2 road win over the Binghamton Devils, recording an assist on forward Eric Cornell's game-winning goal.

His presence gives the Amerks incredible depth.

In Gilmour, Lawrence Pilut and Zach Redmond, they possess three of the AHL's most talented offensive defensemen. Right now, they have 10 blue liners on the roster.

"It's a good problem to have," Taylor said. "It makes our internal competition that much better, pushes guys."

The Amerks hope Gilmour will make their power play much better. For a high-scoring team loaded with talent, they've been dismal on the man advantage, converting only 12.5% of their chances.

"We didn't expect that we would struggle on the power play, and we have," Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton said.

Sexton said the Amerks "expect that John can bring the mobile, transitional, puck-moving style of play that we want organizationally."

"We also think he's capable of scoring goals," he said. "He's got a great shot from the point, he's got great vision. So we're hopeful that he might be one of the sparks to ignite our power play."

### **Taylor's return**

Sexton said Taylor, who spent the first 22 games with the Sabres, "absolutely" has the qualities to be an NHL head coach someday.

"He showed firsthand that he can handle the role of an assistant coach in the National Hockey League," he said. "I really believe he's got what it takes, with some more experience and some more work, to be a very successful NHL head coach."

The Sabres promoted Taylor on an interim basis Oct. 1 after Granato was hospitalized with severe pneumonia.

During his time in Buffalo, Taylor said he would watch Amerks games and communicate with interim coach Gord Dineen every day.

Dineen was back running the defense Monday as an assistant.

"He handled it with dignity and grace," Sexton said of Dineen's job filling in for Taylor.

Sexton said Adam Mair, who took over Dineen's assistant duties, will return to his regular role as a player development coach.

"It certainly was as seamless as we ever could have hoped for on all fronts," Sexton said.

Sexton also credits the Amerks' leadership group for the team's success without Taylor.

"They did a phenomenal job making sure that there were no excuses, that there was entire focus on the task at hand," Sexton said. "When you look at the number of recalls we've had, the injuries we've had, we haven't missed a beat."

### **Randell, Smith get their chances**

Injuries up front – the Amerks have only 11 healthy forwards – have pressed tough guys Tyler Randell and Dalton Smith into regular duty.

Randell, 28, has scored in consecutive games and three of his last five appearances. Through seven outings, he has already equaled his goal total output from last season in 29 fewer games.

In Friday's 4-0 win against Hartford, Randell was one of the best players on the ice. After getting stopped on a nifty scoring chance he generated, he one-timed a bounce off the end boards in from the right circle.

"The ones that you don't expect to go in sometimes end up going in," Randell said.

The 6-foot-1, 198-pound Randell possesses some notable talent. He scored six goals during a 27-game run with the Boston Bruins in 2015-16.

"I've been tagged as a tough guy, and obviously the game's changed over the years and I've had to adjust," he said. "Every summer I'm working on the skills. ... If I can play and produce at the same time, it's a big asset."

When Randell scored Friday, the entire Amerks bench erupted.

"The whole group was really happy for him after the game," Dineen said. "He's got a lot of skill. He's shown that at different times. It's tough sometimes when you don't get a lot of rhythm out there in the game and ice time.

"With our lineup being the way it is, he's making a strong statement for himself that he wants to stay in the lineup."

Amerks goalie Andrew Hammond said: "He's got some ability that will definitely surprise people."

Sexton said the Amerks want to be patient and stick with the players they have.

"Those guys have worked very hard to get an opportunity," he said. "You look at the way that Tyler Randell is scoring and you look at the way Dalton Smith has played, you looked at the way Eric Cornel has stepped up, those guys have earned that opportunity. I don't think you can build loyalty and commitment and ask the players to do what we ask them to do on a daily basis if as soon as there's a little bit of adversity we want to run outside the organization and bring someone new in."

## **NHL suspends Erik Cernak two games for hit on Dahlin**

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

November 26, 2019

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) - Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin left Monday night's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning at Amalie Arena in the second period after taking an elbow to the head from defenseman Erik Cernak. The hit left Dahlin cut and bloodied, and after the game, Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger announced that the 19-year-old had suffered a concussion as a result of the hit.

On Tuesday, the National Hockey League's Department of Player Safety handed Cernak a two-game suspension for his elbow to the head of Dahlin.

According to the video released by the Department of Player Safety, the Lightning argued that Dahlin's glove drove Cernak's elbow upward to create the contact with his head. The league disagreed with the argument, saying that Cernak's elbow was on a trajectory where head contact was inevitable.

Cernak has never had a history of fines or suspensions in his two-year NHL career. The 22-year-old has appeared in 20 games this season for the Lightning, scoring a goal and averaging 19:25 of ice-time per-game.

As for Dahlin, he has yet to miss a game in his short NHL career after being the first overall pick in the 2018 NHL Draft. So far this season, Dahlin has struggled, at times, putting up a goal and 15 assists in 24 games, while registering 33 shots on goal and averaging 18:59 of total ice-time. The young defenseman is currently fourth on the team with 16 points, and is tied for eighth in the league for assists among defensemen.

It is not known how much time Dahlin will miss with his injury as the Sabres were off from practice on Tuesday. The team will meet on Wednesday morning before its matchup later that evening with the Calgary Flames at KeyBank Center.

Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. on WGR with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show starting at 6 p.m. with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog from (716) Food and Sport.

## **The 2010s: Introducing the Buffalo Sabres' all-decade team**

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

November 27, 2019

Since 2010, the current era of the Buffalo Sabres has been ... well, it's happened. The Sabres last made the playoffs in 2010-11. There have been a cavalcade of players, trades, signings, coaches and general managers during that time.

It would be forgettable if it wasn't so incredibly dramatic, so you can imagine the challenge in deciding who to put on a team from this era. Or is it that hard? Picking the best 20 players to hold together a lineup should be easy when sorting through all the muck.

But much like conducting a rebuild, it's never as simple as it seems. There's going to be some suffering, but mostly because of the memories of the decade that brought about the rebuild that's still rolling along. We realize that the list of all eligible players who played at least one game with the team at each position between 2010-2011 and current day will spur a few "he played here?" moments before we detail our starting lineup of 12 forwards, six defensemen, two goalies and three extras.

The keys to making the final team: Impact during those years, effectiveness, and, honestly, putting up points and playing a lot of games, as scoring was at a premium during the '10s, and putting down roots in this era has been rare. The bar is set a little lower than normal.

### **Centers**

Candidates: Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, Johan Larsson, Tyler Ennis, Cody Hodgson, Derek Roy, Nathan Gerbe, Marcus Johansson, Evan Rodrigues, Jochen Hecht, Paul Gaustad, Steve Ott, Tim Connolly, Brian Flynn, Casey Mittelstadt, Cody McCormick, Luke Adam, Rob Niedermayer, Vladimir Sobotka, Torrey Mitchell, Mikhail Grigorenko, David Legwand, Kevin Porter, Phil Varone, Cal O'Reilly, Tim Schaller, Jacob Josefson, Patrik Berglund, Paul Szczechura, Zac Dalpe, Derek Grant, Travis Turnbull, Zenon Konopka, Danny O'Regan, Kyle Criscuolo, Sean Malone, Daniel Catenacci, Rasmus Asplund

Choices: Eichel, O'Reilly, Ennis, Larsson, McCormick

Getting three no-brainer choices right off the hop sure is nice. Of all skaters who have played during this decade, Eichel is the leading scorer with 17 games remaining to pad his margin. He's got the most goals and assists and shows why the Sabres went so hard to go low to ensure they'd have a shot to get him or Connor McDavid.

O'Reilly was the Sabres' do-it-all center, taking faceoffs in all zones, playing the power play and the penalty kill, and contributing 50 to 60 points per season. With 176 points in 224 games, his shorter-than-expected Sabres career was a good one that will ultimately live in some variety of infamy because of the 2018 trade to St. Louis.

Ennis played all forward spots as a Sabres player, but it was at center where he made his most lasting impact. His 227 points in 409 games made him the second-leading scorer of the decade (for now).

When Larsson was acquired from Minnesota, the thought was he might be a middle-six center with some scoring touch. Although he hasn't exactly lit up the scoreboard, he's the 18th-highest Sabres scorer of the decade and has developed into a solid checking/energy forward so long as he's not getting 85 percent of his starts in the defensive zone. That he edges out the likes of Hecht and Gaustad, whose heydays were more in the 2000s — and Ott, who was a captain — might seem controversial, but I'm willing to argue about it further in the comments.

Since there's always need for a character player on this fictional roster, you couldn't ask for a better guy than McCormick. A blood clot issue cut his career short in 2016, but the physical center/winger racked up 293 penalty minutes in 203 games and was a good veteran for a locker room that really needed one.

### **Left wing**

Candidates: Thomas Vanek, Jeff Skinner, Matt Moulson, Evander Kane, Marcus Foligno, Zemgus Girgensons, Nicolas Deslauriers, Ville Leino, Conor Sheary, Jamie McGinn, Benoit Pouliot, Matt Ellis, William Carrier, Alexander

Nylander, C.J. Smith, Paul Byron, Jimmy Vesey, Scott Wilson, Jordan Nolan, Cory Conacher, Seth Griffith, Linus Omark, John Scott, Remi Elie, Cole Schneider, Colin Stuart, Derek Whitmore

Choices: Vanek, Skinner, Kane, Moulson, Foligno

In a strange yet obvious way, Vanek and Skinner are related. In 209 games, Vanek had 82 goals and 102 assists (184 points). He was the last Sabre to score 40 goals in a season (in 08-09) before Skinner did it in 2018-19. Vanek is the sixth-highest scorer of the decade and it's unfortunate his time in Buffalo ended when it did in fall 2013. In the five and a half seasons since he was traded for Moulson, he has 292 points. He belongs on the team of the 00s and he certainly belongs here.

Yes, Skinner has one full season as a Sabre under his belt, but it was the best goal-scoring season in 10 years in Buffalo. That he re-signed and continues to play great into his second season gives him the edge to make this team. He'll probably be a better fit for the team of the 2020s, which would be a nice turn of events.

There may not ever be another player as polarizing as Evander Kane in Buffalo. His on-ice brilliance in being a goal scorer and physical presence was something not seen in town in years. His 118 points in 196 games made him third behind Vanek and Moulson in left wing production as Sabres. That he ran into legal issues in Buffalo was disappointing (to say the absolute very least).

That Moulson was as good as he was after he was acquired for Vanek (29 points in 44 games) was encouraging, as was his return as a free agent after he was traded to Minnesota later that season. That it didn't work out in the end is unfortunate, but maybe that's emblematic of how things have gone the past 10 years. At least he's been able to recover some joy for the game in the AHL.

Foligno was a skilled, physical player who showed potential for more during his six seasons with the Sabres. He stood up for teammates and started to show a bit more of a knack for scoring goals in his final two seasons in Buffalo. His 116 points in 347 games make him the fourth-highest-scoring left wing of the decade. He hit 23 points in his final two seasons and had a career-high 13 goals in his final Sabres season in 2016-2017.

### **Right wing**

Candidates: Sam Reinhart, Jason Pominville, Drew Stafford, Kyle Okposo, Brian Gionta, Patrick Kaleta, Tage Thompson, Brad Boyes, Chris Stewart, Victor Olofsson, Mike Grier, Matt D'Agostini, Nick Baptiste, Corey Tropp, Justin Bailey, Mark Mancari, Zack Kassian, Hudson Fasching, Jerry D'Amigo, Curtis Lazar, Joel Armia, Mark Parrish

Choices: Reinhart, Pominville, Stafford, Okposo

Even though Reinhart was drafted to be a center, he's made his home on the wing and has owned the opportunity. He's the highest-scoring right winger on the team this decade. He's been Eichel's ride-or-die guy since 2015-2016 and the duo has provided hope that there is, indeed, a road back to the postseason and they'll be the ones to make it happen. He'll eclipse 100 career goals at some point this season as well.

Pominville was able to bookend his time in Buffalo during the '10s. It was his trade to Minnesota in 2013 that signaled the Sabres were going to tear the whole thing down and start over. It was his re-acquisition in the summer of 2017 that provided all the feel-good sensations you could want, but he was always productive. He had 215 points (94 goals) in 347 games during the decade and was a team captain for two seasons. He's beloved and, like Vanek, still hopes to play this season. Whether he does or not, he'll always be known as a Sabre.

Stafford's best two seasons kicked off the decade. His 31-goal, 53 point season in 2010-2011 helped land him a four-year, \$16 million deal. He followed that up with a 20-goal, 50 point season but would never reach the 50-point plateau again. His 178 points in 301 games in the decade are third-best among Sabres right wings. If there were awards for all-around nice guys to talk to, he'd be a finalist and would probably run right up against Okposo.

Although Okposo's time in Buffalo has had some terrifying moments, he's been productive — it's just not the kind of production level that was imagined when Tim Murray signed him to a seven-year, \$42 million contract in 2016. At 31, he's still got three years after this one to pile up more production, but his role is a little different now than it was when he first arrived. He's the ultimate gentleman and a fierce competitor.

## **Defense**

Candidates: Rasmus Ristolainen, Rasmus Dahlin, Mike Weber, Christian Ehrhoff, Tyler Myers, Zach Bogosian, Jordan Leopold, Jake McCabe, Andrej Sekera, Josh Gorges, Marco Scandella, Cody Franson, Mark Pysyk, Steve Montador, Casey Nelson, Jamie McBain, Nikita Zadorov, Nathan Beaulieu, Marc-Andre Gragnani, Andrej Meszaros, Alexander Sulzer, Brandon Montour, Justin Falk, Victor Antipin, Chris Butler, Andre Benoit, Henrik Tallinder, Brayden McNabb, Taylor Fedun, Robyn Regehr, Henri Jokiharju, Lawrence Pilut, Dmitry Kulikov, Shaone Morrisonn, Carlo Colaiacovo, Brendan Guhle, Tyson Strachan, Colin Miller, Adam Parry, Craig Rivet, TJ Brennan, Matt Hunwick, Chad Ruhwedel, Matt Tennyson, Zach Redmond, Joe Finley, Will Borgen, Brady Austin, Erik Burgdoerfer, John Gilmour

Choices: Ristolainen, Dahlin, Ehrhoff, Myers, Bogosian, McCabe, Weber

This is some kind of collection. Fifty defensemen have played in at least one game for the Sabres this decade. Looking at the list of them, you start to figure out why maybe things have gotten away from the team. One thing each selection has in common is that they've felt the heat from fans to be better at some point. A few of them are hearing it now, but these are the best of the bunch.

There's no denying Ristolainen has had his growing pains — which have developed into areas he needs to work on — but imagine being a young player being tasked with playing 20-plus minutes per game for some of the worst teams in franchise history. That's a hard way for any prized prospect to start off a career. Ristolainen recently hit the 200 point career mark, the highest tally of all Sabres defenders of the decade.

Picking Dahlin for this team when he'll ultimately have just a season and a half played in the decade might seem like claiming him too early. But let's be serious here, he did things in his rookie season no 18-year-old defenseman had done since Phil Housley and he did them even better than Bobby Orr. He'll wind up being on the 2020 all-decade team, too.

Ehrhoff's selection might seem silly given that he was bought out of his 10-year, \$40 million contract in 2014, but in his 192 games with the Sabres, he's their third-leading scoring defenseman in points with 87 behind Ristolainen and Myers. He was a good player with a bad contract that made it too high a risk to keep him. He left the NHL after 2016 and retired after two more seasons in Germany's DEL in 2018. The Sabres will be paying him through 2026.

It's not ironic that Myers and Bogosian make the list, but it is fitting. Forever linked by the monster deal with Winnipeg in February 2015, Myers' Sabres career saw him win the Calder in 2010, and he helped lead the Sabres to their most recent playoff appearance the following season with 37 points in 2010-2011.

Since coming to Buffalo, Bogosian's career has been hampered by all sorts of injuries including two separate hip surgeries. A heart-and-soul player that gives his all on the ice, his 62 points (and counting) in a Sabres uniform is only outdone by his 224 PIMs. His minus-49 rating is third-lowest of the decade behind Ristolainen and Weber.

McCabe is a cross between a throwback defensive defenseman with his physical play and hard edge and a hardy puck mover. No, he's not likely to lead a rush up the ice, but he can still do it in a pinch.

Speaking of Weber, no one was made the scapegoat of the tank teams more than him. He was the prototypical throwback defenseman. Points were not his forte but hits and physicality were and it was hard to find players who loved playing for the Sabres more than him. If Weber played for the Sabres in the 80s or 90s, fans would've been telling stories about him today the way they're told about the grit-n-grind tough guys during that time. Guys like Gorges or Leopold also fit the bill here, but we can't take everyone. Call it a sympathy pick if you want to, but for a No. 7 defenseman of the decade, we'll take Weber.

## **Goalie**

Candidates: Ryan Miller, Robin Lehner, Jhonas Enroth, Chad Johnson, Linus Ullmark, Carter Hutton, Anders Nilsson, Michal Neuvirth, Anders Lindback, Nathan Lieuwen, Matt Hackett, Andrey Makarov, Connor Knapp, Drew MacIntyre, Jason Kasdorf, Adam Wilcox, Patrick Lalime (Honorable mention: Ryan Vinz, Arturs Irbe, Jaroslav Halak, Scott Wedgewood, Andrew Hammond)

Choices: Miller, Lehner

This was probably the easiest position to pick from. Why wouldn't it be?

Miller was the picture of consistency in his three and a half seasons in the 2010s. His save percentages from 2010-2011 to when he was traded to St. Louis in 2014 went as such: .916, .916, .915, .923. He won 97 games in 204 starts and led the Sabres to the postseason in 2011, going 34-22-8. He could be a Hockey Hall of Famer and he should definitely be a Sabres Hall of Famer when it's all said and done. And with the way he loves Buffalo, you might want to make room in the rafters for his number, too.

To say Lehner's time in Buffalo was tumultuous would be putting it politely, but on the ice he was excellent. Although a high-ankle sprain shortened his first season with the Sabres, he still posted a .924 save percentage in 21 games. He followed that up with a .920 season in 2016-2017 but went 23-26-8 because the Sabres couldn't score goals (199). Ten of his losses (either in regulation or overtime/shootout) came when he allowed two or fewer goals. We all know how his final year in Buffalo went, but he was a very good goalie here with an unfortunate ending. That he moved on to the Islanders and was a Vezina finalist showed how good he is.

## **Lineup**

What good is putting together a team without creating the most upsetting part of it: lines!

I know you're going to do your own in the comments either with my picks or your own that you want to yell at me about. That's cool! But for the team I've put together, this is how I'm rolling them out. Try not to picture them as they are now but rather at their peaks during their Sabres tenure this decade. What's funny is that top line still has the chance (albeit pretty slim) of still happening.

Vanek — Eichel — Reinhart  
Skinner — O'Reilly — Pominville  
Kane — Ennis — Stafford  
Moulson — Larsson — Okposo

Ehrhoff — Ristolainen  
Dahlin — Myers  
McCabe — Bogosian

Miller  
Lehner

Scratched: McCormick, Foligno, Weber

## **‘You’re the guy that everyone came to see’: Jack Eichel looks back on the year that charted his path to Buffalo**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

November 27, 2019

It was the penultimate game on the Rochester Americans’ schedule, a Saturday night in April in Binghamton. Sam Reinhart had just joined the team following the end of his junior season, but he already fit right in with the rest of the squad.

Because when he and the Amerks got to the dressing room following the second period, they all wanted to know the same thing: Who won the 2015 NHL Draft Lottery?

“We were all keeping up with it, for sure, just wondering who we were going to get,” Reinhart said. “I knew it was going to have a big influence on my career.”

The hype was inescapable. Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel were the talk of the hockey world, two “generational” prospects destined to turn around the franchises that were lucky enough to draft them. Last-place Buffalo was the only team assured of landing one.

“It was awesome,” Reinhart said. “You knew you were getting either McDavid or Eichel. The biggest thing was almost the lottery at that point, making sure you get one of those picks. We’re happy with how it turned out.

“Obviously, my time with Jack both on and off the ice so far, it’s made a big impact on my life.”

The drafting of Eichel is undoubtedly the story of the decade for the Sabres. More than two years in the making, it came down to general manager Tim Murray’s four-word, two-second event on June 26, 2015.

The party continued into mid-July, when the Sabres opened their arena doors for a development camp scrimmage. More than 17,000 people showed up.

“It was mostly for Jack,” recalled defenseman Will Borgen, the fourth-round pick from the Sabres’ 2015 draft class who marveled at the size of the crowd. “That’s pretty awesome, shows a lot of the excitement here in Buffalo.”

Throughout the 2014-15 season, Sabres fans lived with every loss, suffered through each win, and argued the merits of both. The race to the bottom featured a carousel of 39 players, with just one reaching 20 goals (Tyler Ennis) and only four others topping 10 (Zemgus Girgensons with 15, Brian Gionta and Matt Moulson with 13 each and Chris Stewart with 11). Goalies Jhonas Enroth and Michal Neuvirth got traded after playing too well.

Everything the Sabres did was all about drafting a potential star. Eichel was certainly playing the part. The Boston University freshman won the Hobey Baker Award in 2015, putting up 71 points in 40 games to lead the Terriers to a runner-up finish in the NCAA Tournament.

“It was fun to watch and fun to compete against him,” said Sabres forward Jimmy Vesey, who starred at rival Harvard and was a Hobey Baker finalist that season. “Even back then, even though he was playing against older guys, his skating was always what stands out for me.”

As Eichel’s points and honors piled up, the number of eyes on him increased.

“Everyone knew the hype around him, knew he was going to be that type of player,” said BU and Sabres teammate Evan Rodrigues. “But at the time, everyone in our room just kind of enjoyed it and enjoyed the press that he brought.”

There was one person who let the hype of the NHL Draft stay in the background.

"The one thing I loved about Jack, it was all about BU hockey that year," says David Quinn, who coached Eichel and the Terriers before moving on to the New York Rangers. "He was all-in in every aspect, not only at the rink but away from the rink. He did a phenomenal job being real dialed in about the team.

"It was such a magical year until the end. It's a season I will never forget. It meant an awful lot to him."

So what did that year mean to Eichel? How did he balance life on campus with a future in the NHL? And how much pressure is on an 18-year-old pegged as a generational talent?

Eichel took a long look back with The Athletic.

***I just want to go back to your college year first. I talked to Quinn, he just repeatedly said what a phenomenal year it was. What was that year like?***

Pretty remarkable, to say the least. It was just so eventful — I think that'd be the best word to describe it — and so memorable for me. When I go home in the summer, my best friends are the guys that I played with at BU. It's a really unique bond that a lot of us have. We get together every summer and a lot of us hang out every day together.

The memories we made, the relationships, the things that we went through, it was a very, very unique and memorable season. I wouldn't have changed a thing other than losing that last game. It couldn't have gone more ideal.

***Listening to you talk about that reminded me that ERod said it was a family because you guys were with each other so much.***

It was crazy how close we were off the ice. I credit the upperclassmen. As a freshman, you hear about tough — not hazing — but tough love from the older guys and maybe not being accepted right away. When we came in, we had 10 freshmen in my freshmen class. We came in and were there in the summer, and the upperclassmen were just so welcoming. They treated us so well and wanted us to do well. I think because of the way they handled everything, the transition of us going to school, they just took care of us so well, we got so close.

College is such a cool experience where you get to do everything together. You go to practice, you eat dinner, every day you're all together. We had a very unique group of guys that meshed well together and butted heads to make us even closer. Just the overall combination of everything was tremendous.

***You had so much going on there. How much did the draft come to you? Because obviously the hockey world was talking about it.***

I tried to do a lot of the media and draft-focused stuff at the beginning of the season. Then when the season got going, it was almost on the back burner. It was just like, "Hey, you know what? Play as much as possible, as well as possible and everything else will take care of itself."

The world junior was a tough experience for me. Obviously, we didn't do well as a group. It was just a tough overall experience in Montreal at the time. There was a lot of heat going on between me and Connor and everything like that. My family wasn't treated great up there. Just overall, it wasn't a great experience for me.

It was really nice after that to go back to BU. It just felt like you were going home, you know? You were going home, but you're going back to your family and everyone cared about you there. After a hostile time in Montreal, it was really nice. Other than that, it was almost a flawless season.

***As the lottery neared, I talked to Sam about it, he was in Rochester at the time. They came in at intermission and learned they'd be getting you. Did you know so many people were paying attention to that?***

Yeah, I mean, I knew. I had some ties to Buffalo (with a college girlfriend from the area) and knew the excitement. It's 2015 at the time. Everyone has social media and everyone's on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. You obviously have it in the back of your mind. You know what's going on.

But for me, like I said, whatever happened, happened. I was just going to be happy going anywhere. I was super excited when we learned what the order was going to be. I was at home with my family. I just wanted to spend the time with them. I didn't go to the draft lottery. I just wanted to be at home with them.

It was never really official until draft day. It always felt like, "You're going to Buffalo, you're going to Buffalo," but until Tim went on stage and said my name, it was like the weight was finally lifted off your shoulders as soon as you're drafted. You always know going into it you're going to get picked, right? But until you're actually selected, you put the jersey on and go on stage, it's a pretty remarkable moment.

I'll have to credit all the build-up and everything of the draft to just how welcoming and how amazing everybody within the organization, outside the organization, in the city, everyone's been to me. You could probably credit it a little bit to all the hype that was around the draft. I'd like to think I've made an impact on the community a bit since I've been here. Obviously, as a team, we have so many things we want to do and there's so many things I want to do on the ice. But just the relationships and just getting to know the people around the city and everything, it's been great.

***Thinking back, even at the draft, you've said what you just said about, 'No, I'm not considered a Buffalo player until they pick me.' Did you really believe that or did you ...***

Listen, like, when I go to the combine, I only met with a couple of teams. I had a pretty good idea I was going to the Sabres, but there's just this feeling inside you that until they say your name on stage and you're for sure selected by them ... I was uneasy before the draft and there was probably not a whole lot of reason to be. But there's still that uneasiness and until you're selected and you go through everything. It's a special feeling. It just topped everything off.

***Do you look back at that as a good experience, the draft?***

It was a great experience. Being down in Florida, great weather, I had so many friends and family down there whether it was guys from BU or my friends from home in Chelmsford, so many family members and people there just to enjoy the whole experience with. It was a great experience. It was awesome.

You can't take anything for granted, whether it's time, experiences, whatever it is. You're a kid. You grew up dreaming about going to the NHL Draft and hoping to get selected. Then you think maybe you might get taken, you're like, "I want to be a first-rounder." And then you get to go to a great team and a great city, it's awesome.

***One thing I'd almost forgotten about, Borgen mentioned it because he was the same draft year, coming into that development camp and having so many people at the arena for a scrimmage ...***

It was tough. Honestly, if you think about it, I went to the world championships, I came home, I went maybe two weeks at home, then the combine. You go through such a whirlwind of things for like a month, and then you go to your development camp. And you haven't been training as well as you usually would and you haven't been skating. You've been traveling everywhere, there's a lot going on, you're living a hectic life. Then you go to development camp and you're like, "Uhh, am I as prepared as I could be?" Then you show up and there's 15,000 people there for a blue and gold scrimmage. I just remember feeling bad during the game, like not having my legs, not feeling like myself.

There's just that feeling of everyone is here to see you, right? Everyone's here. You just got picked. You're the guy that everyone came to see. You're supposed to be the person that's going to change the franchise, you know? That's what everyone is saying, right? So you go to the game and all of a sudden you don't play well, you feel like your world's coming down on you. You feel all that pressure right away.

As much as it sucked at the time, maybe it was a good thing because (laughing) my dad has a weird way of motivating me. We got into it after I didn't play well at development camp. He kind of let me have it and I think it prepared me better for the season. I went home kind of a man on a mission. Like, you haven't even made the team yet. You have to earn your spot on the roster. If not, you're going to have to earn your spot in the American League. It was sort of go home and work as hard as you can and prepare for the season. That's what I did.

***You mentioned "change the franchise." How does an 18-year-old kid deal with that?***

It's tough. I give the Moulsons so much credit. Not even just the Moulsons, but the team we had then. If you remember, we had a really old team my first year, a lot of vets. They were all so good to me. It was really easy for me to get my mind off the pressure, everything outside. They all took care of me so well, and the organization is incredible. I just worried about playing. Living at the Moulsons' house was so easy. I wasn't stressed about things.

But it was definitely a bit of a change. You can't go to the movie theatres without people recognizing you. Or you go to dinner and everyone is staring at you or talking. So for me, I started to get really anxious in public around people. It was a bit of a change, something I hadn't gone through before. You're living in Boston, it's such a big city and you think about the people that walk around in the streets, you're rarely going to get recognized for being a BU player in a city with four professional teams and a million different colleges.

I think when I was young it was tougher because I didn't know how to handle everyone always having their eyes on you wherever you went. It made me a little uneasy at times, but you learn to deal with it. And I've found the more you're out, people aren't as surprised when they see you. It's more normal. If you go to dinner a lot and people see you with your family and they've seen you there before, they're not going to act the same way. I just tried to integrate myself into the community as much as possible, get to know people and build relationships. It was awesome.

I think I've probably come a long way from where I was my first year in terms of the way I handle everything. I just want to try and keep getting better with it.

# **The impact of Rasmus Dahlin's concussion and four other observations from the Sabres' road trip**

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

November 26, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. —Out of what set up to be a rather important early-season road trip against divisional foes, the Sabres got an equal taste of hard work, hard luck, and hard lessons.

That the team went 1-2-0 against the Bruins, Panthers and Lightning can be chalked up as on its face as a losing trip. Yet hard work came in eight of the nine periods played on the trip. Hard luck came in a 3-2 loss to Boston. Hard lessons were learned in an injurious letdown in the third period of Monday's 5-2 loss in Tampa.

Going from a moral victory in Boston to a 'W' that counts in Sunrise gave the Sabres an idea that what they've been working to improve is getting through. After Monday's breakdown against the Lightning — one that saw Rasmus Dahlin exit with a concussion from an elbow to the head by Tampa Bay defenseman Erik Cernak and another game in which special teams failed them — the bright spots might seem a lot harder to find. That's not the case, but after so many difficult seasons, patience amongst fans is thinner than ever. Despite Ralph Krueger's best efforts to do things differently and more productively than previous coaches, the results of late feel too familiar.

So what did we learn from this road trip? Here are a few observations after a brief tour of the Atlantic Division that, to no one's surprise, looks to be quite formidable.

## **1. Let's discuss Dahlin**

All that will be remembered from this road trip regarding Dahlin is the sight of Cernak's elbow going into his head with no call being made. Let's get after this because it's the most pressing. Krueger made it a point after the game to highlight the injury and that there's concern for how long he may be out.

"So Rasmus Dahlin has a concussion," Krueger said. "Very disappointing and we'll let the league deal with the judgment of what happened. But again, right now we're just worried about Rasmus and getting him healthy and hoping that it's not a long-term injury."

Dahlin was seen bleeding from the hit. He was witnessed pinching his nose on the bench after he was able to get himself off the ice to stop his nose from bleeding. A concussion probably wasn't the only injury on the play. There's no mistake being made here why Krueger made it clear he has a concussion.

After seeing Vladimir Sobotka taken out by Nikita Kucherov in Sweden without any supplemental discipline from the NHL, making sure everyone is aware that Dahlin has an injury is pointed at the NHL's Department of Player Safety. The Sabres must have been upset that Kucherov went unpunished — particularly when that meant they had to deal with facing him the very next day in a showcase event — and now that it's their own superstar being taken out of action for at least the remainder of a game, making sure the NHL and the NHL Department of Player Safety know what's going on is as much sensible as it is gamesmanship.

Cernak will have a hearing with the NHL about the hit and a suspension should be coming. But whatever the number is in your head you think it should be, it will probably be smaller. Injuries play a factor in how the NHL metes out punishment, although considering how St. Louis defenseman Robert Bortuzzo just received a four-game slap on the wrist for a severe cross-check that put Nashville's Viktor Arvidsson out 4-6 weeks, who even knows anymore.

The NHL isn't a retribution league anymore (and that's good despite the fondness for Slap Shot-like antics) but the season finale between Buffalo and Tampa Bay on New Year's Eve now at least has a raised eyebrow reaction to seeing it on the schedule. There'll be fireworks at midnight no matter what, but you wonder if there might be a pre-show.

## **2. Special teams are in a bad way**

Think of how the losses to Boston and Tampa Bay occurred and there's a common thread that has been dangling all season.

Two out of three Bruins goals came on the power play. Of the five Lightning goals, one came on the power play and two came shorthanded on one Sabres power play. During the three games, the Sabres power play went 1-for-10. The Sabres penalty kill allowed four goals in 10 chances. At 73.7 percent, the PK is 26th in the NHL and it's been a fight to get it right. With the schedule being as tight as it is with games, it's tough to find time to work things out on the ice. But there needs to be a fix if they're going to climb out of this rut.

"We need to find those moments of high-quality teaching," Krueger said. "We use a combination of video board talks, group talks, and it is a phase where we need to learn through the games, we need to learn between the games where the spaces are there for us to use and I think we've been doing a good job with it.

"I think the players have been excellent and focused and concentrated when we do that and we'll continue to work on our PP, PK and our 5-on-5 game. You know our motto is 'small picture and keep trying to improve every day.' We've got lots of things out of this game (against Tampa Bay) to work on and that's what we'll do getting ready for Calgary."

The Sabres' lone power play goal of the trip came against Boston from Rasmus Ristolainen parked in front of the net, but during the Tampa Bay game Ristolainen was back working on the point on the second unit with Colin Miller. The power play in Tampa had moments with both units where the chances piled up but couldn't score. As long as the chances are there, things will find a way, but it's tough to hear that talk now.

### **3. Linus Ullmark is the No. 1 guy right now**

The No. 1 goalie job in Buffalo is a constantly vacillating thing. Riding the hot hand is probably for the best. The hot hand of the moment belongs to Ullmark who was brilliant in Boston and stood on his head against Florida. Ullmark had to make a shorthanded save early in Sunday's game against Panthers forward Colton Sceviour that set the tone early. After 43 saves and some other brilliant plays, he showed he's in a bit of a zone.

"He's been doing it all year for us. He made more than just one. Timely saves like that are so important, and he's the backbone, him and Hutts, of this team," captain Jack Eichel said Sunday. "They play like that they give us a chance to win every night. There's a lot of confidence in the group in front of them. ... I thought he did a great job coming out, playing the puck. I thought he controlled the game well and he allowed us to kind of find our game."

Ullmark's .915 save percentage makes him one of the better goalies in the league. While Hutton started out hot, he's had a "if he didn't have bad luck he'd have no luck at all" kind of run of late. Weird bounces and deflections have found their way past him and his start against Tampa Bay saw the first three goals come off a clearing attempt that hit an official, a shot he didn't see because he was screened perfect, and a deflection that was so good the officials waved it off initially. Factor in a shorthanded breakaway and a shorthanded 2-on-1 goal and it's just a miserable night to deal with as a goalie.

Still, Hutton took it all on himself for not being better.

"It's a frustrating game, they capitalized on their chances, they're a pretty good team," Hutton said. "I don't know, I don't have much answers right now. It's pretty frustrating for me personally."

The hope is that maybe Ullmark is taking a step and Hutton is just in a temporary funk, but since starting the season 6-0-0, Hutton is 0-4-2 in his last six games with a .876 save percentage. He's fighting it hard.

### **4. Slumps busted**

If the Sabres offense breaks out in the near future, this road trip might get credit for helping that along. Take a look at the goal scorers in these three games:

Ristolainen, Brandon Montour (2), Zemgus Girgensons (2), Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel, Victor Olofsson, Sam Reinhart, Jimmy Vesey.

Out of that group, three (Ristolainen, Montour, Vesey) got their first goals of the season. Girgensons went 13 straight games without a goal before scoring twice against Florida. Skinner had one goal in his previous nine games before Eichel's pass went off his skate and in. Olofsson didn't have a goal since the second game in Sweden against Tampa Bay, a drought of five games. Vesey getting his first goal as a Sabre against Tampa Bay in his 21st game of the season was a huge relief and very much overdue.

"(Had) a breakaway (Sunday) night as well," Vesey said. "I think next shift we had a power play and I had a Grade-A right in front. I just got to keep working and capitalizing on those. I think that power play chance, if I score there then it's 3-1 and then it might be a different game. Good feeling to get that out of the way but tough feeling overall without getting anything out of (Monday's) game."

We've said for a bit the Sabres need more from guys not named Eichel and they got that this weekend. Call it upside or overdue but just call it a good thing to see.

## **5. Eichel's continued brilliance**

You might say it's silly to keep pointing out how the best player on the team continues to be just that, but he's doing pretty special things this season.

He has points in six straight games after posting an assist on Reinhart's goal on Monday. In those six games, he's got 11 points including six goals. On Monday, he became the first Sabres player to reach 30 points in 24 or fewer games since Thomas Vanek did it in 2012-2013. He's tied with four other players (Auston Matthews, Artemi Panarin, Patrick Kane, and Jonathan Huberdeau) for seventh in the NHL in points.

Eichel is an elite player doing elite things and if the Sabres could get into playoff position, you could start dropping Eichel's name into some very early, very casual Hart Trophy discussions. But the Sabres have a few things to tighten up first and then have a malaise to sort out before any of that can even be broached.

## **Rasmus Dahlin's concussion another worry for struggling Sabres**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
November 27, 2019

BUFFALO – Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin often struggled in the Sabres' first 24 games this season, looking like a youngster in need of a confidence boost.

Still, Dahlin, who suffered a concussion in Monday's 5-2 road loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning when Erik Cernak elbowed him in the face, is a dynamic talent. The reeling Sabres sorely need him in the lineup.

The Sabres haven't given an update on Dahlin, who left the game with about 2:30 remaining in the second period. They had Tuesday off following their 10th loss in 12 games (2-8-2).

For concussing Dahlin, the NHL suspended Cernak two games on Tuesday.

With the Sabres on the power play, Cernak elbowed Dahlin in the left circle after the Swede backhanded a pass.

According a video the NHL Department of Player Safety released Tuesday explaining the suspension, the Lightning argued in the hearing "Dahlin's glove drove Cernak's elbow upward and caused the head contact."

"It is clear to us that Cernak's elbow is already on a trajectory where head contact is inevitable," the department said.

Cernak, 22, had never been suspended in his 78-game NHL career. The two-game ban will cost him \$7,500, according to the NHL.

The Slovak wasn't penalized for the hit. The Sabres did not retaliate against the defenseman.

Losing Dahlin, 19, for an extended period would be a huge blow to the Sabres, who host the Calgary Flames tonight at KeyBank Center.

Despite some shaky moments, Dahlin has already recorded 16 points and skates almost 19 minutes a contest.

The Sabres, of course, possess defense depth. In recent games, they've been dressing seven defenders and 11 forwards. Even with an extra playing, one has been sitting out.

On Monday, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger scratched alternate captain Jake McCabe.

Benching McCabe, a young veteran often regarded as one of the Sabres core pieces, underscores their problems.

Right now, they're a mess. They've been plummeting down the standings for almost a month. Nearly every player is struggling.

Since Oct. 28, they've mustered an NHL-low two wins and six points. Every other team had earned at least four victories entering Tuesday's games.

In that span, the Sabres have scored a league-low 27 goals and allowed 42. Their special teams rank dead last over that stretch.

So why have the Sabres imploded following their scorching 9-2-1 start? Myriad things have contributed to their wretched stretch, according to one scout who has watched them regularly this season.

The scout said the Sabres miss veteran Marcus Johansson. An upper-body injury has sidelined the Swede the last seven games.

Without Johansson, the Sabres don't have a second-line center to take pressure off the top trio and feed winger Jeff Skinner the puck.

Meanwhile, some of the Sabres' recent personnel decisions – for example, Krueger recently benched Dahlin a full period and scratched defenseman Colin Miller five times – surprised the scout.

"His confidence definitely isn't the same," he said of Dahlin. "I don't quite get some of the benchings. They haven't lost him, but they've kind of hurt his confidence in regards to his overall game.

"I didn't really understand them scratching Miller. ... I mean, you go out and acquire this guy, and then why do you do that?"

The scout also said the Sabres need more production from their third- and fourth-liners. He said bottom-six forwards must thump opponents, create excitement and change the tempo of the game.

"They don't do that," he said. "Plus they don't generate much offense."

The scout also believes some of the juice the Sabres received from Krueger's arrival has worn off.

"There's a bump ... then everything kind of drops back to what it was," he said.

## **Erik Cernak suspended two games for elbowing Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 26, 2019

**BUFFALO** – The NHL has suspended Erik Cernak two games for his elbow to the face that concussed Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin in Monday's 5-2 road loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The reeling Sabres haven't given an update on Dahlin, who left the game with about 2:30 remaining in the second period. They had today off following their 10th loss in 12 games (2-8-2).

With the Sabres on the power play, Cernak, a defenseman, elbowed Dahlin in the left circle after the Swede backhanded a pass.

According a video the NHL Department of Player Safety released tonight explaining the suspension, the Lightning argued in today's hearing "Dahlin's glove drove Cernak's elbow upward and caused the head contact."

"It is clear to us that Cernak's elbow is already on a trajectory where head contact is inevitable," the department said.

Cernak, 22, had never been suspended in his 78-game NHL career. The two-game ban will cost him \$7,500, according to the NHL.

The Slovak wasn't penalized for the hit.

Losing Dahlin, 19, for an extended period would be a huge blow to the Sabres. While the Swede has struggled this season following a superb rookie campaign, he is still a dynamic talent.

The Sabres host the Calgary Flames on Wednesday at KeyBank Center.

## **Cernak suspended two games for Lightning for elbowing**

NHL.com

November 26, 2019

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Erik Cernak has been suspended for two games, without pay, for elbowing Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin during NHL Game No. 365 in Tampa on Monday, Nov. 25, the National Hockey League's Department of Player Safety announced today.

The incident occurred at 17:26 of the second period. Under the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and, based on his average annual salary, Cernak will forfeit \$7,500.00. The money goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

## **Long-term injury reserve hampering Buffalo Sabres in NHL trade market**

By Lyle Richardson

Sporting News

November 26, 2019

Last week, TSN's Darren Dreger reported on Buffalo Sabres general manager Jason Botterill's efforts to find help for his struggling roster through the trade market.

After playing well in October, the Sabres had just two wins in the first 11 games of November. A lack of scoring depth has them tumbling in the Eastern Conference standings, raising fears of a repeat of last season's death spiral.

Dreger said Botterill would like to make one or two trades within the next couple of weeks. He's made offers for forwards to several clubs but the system was "gummed up a bit" by multiple teams carrying players on long-term injury reserve (LTIR).

Under the collective bargaining agreement, teams with limited salary-cap space can garner a measure of in-season cap relief by placing a sidelined player on LTIR. That allows a team to exceed the \$81.5-million cap up to the injured player's annual salary-cap hit in order to bring in a replacement via trade, waiver claim, or call-up from the minors. Once the injured player is healthy, the team must clear sufficient salary-cap space for his return.

In a subsequent interview with Buffalo radio station WGR 550, Dreger felt there were 10-12 teams in that position. That also includes the Sabres, as CapFriendly indicates they're carrying Vladimir Sobotka and Matt Hunwick on LTIR. If they intend to swing a trade for a scorer, their limited cap space means it'll have to be a dollar-in, dollar-out deal.

Dreger believes Botterill could be keen to add a top-six and a bottom-six forward but didn't indicate which teams the Sabres GM spoke with. He could draw upon his blueline depth for trade bait to land a forward. Rasmus Ristolainen, Marco Scandella, and Colin Miller have occasionally surfaced in the trade-rumor mill.

CapFriendly indicates the Arizona Coyotes, Boston Bruins, Calgary Flames, Dallas Stars, Detroit Red Wings, Philadelphia Flyers, St. Louis Blues, Toronto Maple Leafs, Vancouver Canucks and Washington Capitals also have players on LTIR. Like the Sabres, they could have difficulty making moves if necessary to bolster their rosters.

Most of the clubs on this list are also in the market for forward depth. The Leafs, Coyotes, Canucks and Red Wings, however, could be potential trade partners for the Sabres. They have plenty of forward-line depth but need some help on the blueline.

Leafs GM Kyle Dubas could be reluctant to make a trade until he's evaluated his club's performance under new head coach Sheldon Keefe. Botterill could target a young Leafs winger like Kasperii Kapanen or Andreas Johnsson.

The Coyotes could be in the market for a short-term replacement for rearguard Niklas Hjalmarsson, who's sidelined until January with a cracked fibula. A young, affordable winger like Christian Fischer might fit the Sabres' need for a bottom-six forward.

It's believed the Canucks have attempted to move a forward for some time. Botterill won't be interested in overpaid veterans like Loui Eriksson or Brandon Sutter. It's unlikely he'll look at struggling younger forwards like Sven Baertschi or Jake Virtanen. Perhaps he'd consider Josh Leivo or Tim Schaller for his bottom-six needs.

Shoring up a porous blueline could be a priority for the rebuilding Red Wings. Speedy winger Andreas Athanasiou's inconsistent play led to his name popping up in recent trade chatter. If Botterill wants to be bolder, he could make a pitch for promising winger Filip Zadina, who's bounced between the Wings and their AHL affiliate in Grand Rapids.

Regardless of whoever Botterill's talking to, time is not on his side. He'll need to make a season-saving deal soon or risk watching his club once again drop out of playoff contention.

## **Tampa Bay Lightning's Erik Cernak suspended two games for elbowing Rasmus Dahlin**

By Sammi Silber

Sporting News

November 26, 2019

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Erik Cernak was issued a two-game suspension for elbowing Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, the NHL Department of Player Safety announced Tuesday.

In Tampa's 5-2 victory over Buffalo on Monday, Dahlin was skating in the offensive zone and made a pass before Cernak came in and blindsided the 19-year-old defenseman with an elbow to the face. There was no call on the play, but Dahlin left the game, bleeding and holding his face as he headed down the tunnel.

Sabres head coach Bill Krueger told reporters postgame that Dahlin had sustained a concussion from the hit.

"We'll let the league deal with the judgment of what happened. Right now, we're just worried about Rasmus and getting him healthy and hoping it's not a long-term injury," Krueger said, via The Buffalo News' Lance Lysowski.

Due to the severity of the injury and the contact with the head, Cernak received the suspension. He does have a history, having been suspended for one game during the IIHF World Junior Championships when he elbowed Finland forward Mikko Rantanen in the head.

In 20 games this season, the 22-year-old Slovak has a single goal for the Lightning.