



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*December 19, 2019*

## **Eichel and Buffalo take on Philadelphia**

Associated Press

December 18, 2019

Buffalo Sabres (16-12-7, second in the Atlantic Division) vs. Philadelphia Flyers (18-11-5, fifth in the Metropolitan Division)

Philadelphia; Thursday, 7 p.m. EST

**BOTTOM LINE:** Jack Eichel and Buffalo take on Philadelphia. He currently ranks fifth in the in the league with 50 points, scoring 24 goals and recording 26 assists.

The Flyers are 13-4-3 against Eastern Conference opponents. Philadelphia has converted on 17.9% of power-play opportunities, scoring 20 power-play goals.

The Sabres are 9-8-4 in conference matchups. Buffalo has given up 25 power-play goals, stopping 75.5% of opponent chances.

The teams face off Thursday for the first time this season.

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Travis Konecny leads the Flyers with 29 points, scoring 11 goals and registering 18 assists. James van Riemsdyk has recorded four goals and four assists over the last 10 games for Philadelphia.

Eichel leads the Sabres with a plus-14 in 35 games played this season. Victor Olofsson has five goals and eight assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Sabres: 5-2-3, averaging 3.9 goals, 6.6 assists, 2.7 penalties and 5.4 penalty minutes while allowing 3.1 goals per game with a .906 save percentage.

Flyers: 6-4-0, averaging 3.3 goals, 5.7 assists, 3.7 penalties and 9.7 penalty minutes while giving up 2.6 goals per game with a .913 save percentage.

**INJURIES:** Flyers: Travis Konecny: out (upper body), Tyler Pitlick: day to day (concussion).

Sabres: None listed.

## **Jeff Skinner's slide is a real head-scratcher for Sabres' offense**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 18, 2019

PHILADELPHIA – Hey, didn't you used to be Jeff Skinner?

For all the talk swirling around Jack Eichel's historic point streak and Victor Olofsson's breakout rookie season, the Buffalo Sabres are again tormented by an unbalanced attack.

Eichel's line is putting up goals in bunches. The trio of Zemgus Girgenson-Johan Larsson-Kyle Okposo doesn't have much finish but is driving play in the offensive zone.

That leaves six other forwards giving them very little. No one is going to crucify rookie Rasmus Asplund, getting his first NHL look. But the other five guys? We're talking veteran players here.

And there's no bigger head-scratcher right now than what's going on with Skinner.

The Sabres opted not to practice here Wednesday after arriving in the early-morning hours following Tuesday's 5-3 loss in Toronto. You would think the off day would provoke some soul-searching for those who are spectators to Eichel's brilliance and not contributing much on their own.

The Sabres gave Skinner an eight-year, \$72-million deal last spring after he gave them a contract-year, 40-goal season. He has 11 goals this season but seven of them came in October. For those scoring at home, that means just four goals in the last 22 games.

Things have really spiraled in Skinner's last seven games: No goals, one assist and a minus-7 rating. He played just 11 minutes, 29 seconds Saturday on Long Island and only 13:37 Tuesday. Those are easily his two lowest ice-time totals of the season. He has one shot on goal – one – combined in his last three games. At times of late, it seems like he can barely keep his feet when he's moving the puck.

Certainly, Skinner is suffering from not playing with Eichel. Coach Ralph Krueger has been adamant about keeping them apart so he could "balance" his lines and that theory hasn't worked a bit. Krueger is lucky Olofsson has blossomed.

Skinner needed to get away from Evan Rodrigues as his center and get back to Marcus Johansson, but it hasn't mattered much as both of them are struggling, too.

Still, for the kind of money Skinner is making, it's not acceptable to say, "He's not playing with good players." What happened to big-money guys making plays once in a while and elevating the play of those around them?

Of late, Skinner has been invisible on the ice. He's skating away from contact, not driving deep in the offensive zone. The Sabres need a legitimate No. 2 center and good luck to them in finding one, maybe not until they give No. 1 pick Dylan Cozens a chance to earn that job next year. But for \$9 million, is Skinner incapable of driving any play himself?

Eichel's streak isn't going to last forever. He's going to need more help. It has to start with Skinner, but he's been so bad of late that Krueger isn't using him on the power play and, like Phil Housley, doesn't trust him enough defensively to use him much in overtime.

And the ultimate wake-up call for Skinner might have been the 6-on-4 they played late in the third period Tuesday looking for a tying tally. You think a coach would use a 40-goal player there, right? Skinner was nailed to the bench.

Skinner's no-shows seem to be spreading around the forward group. Here's a rundown of what's up elsewhere. And advance warning here: It's not pretty.

Conor Sheary (5-5-10 in 29 games): He had two goals in the season opener Oct. 3 in Pittsburgh, two in the destruction of pathetic New Jersey on Dec. 2 – and has one in his other 27 games this season. The Jersey game is the only one of the last 25 he's hit the net in and that snapped a 19-game drought. Has one assist and is minus-6 in his last five games.

His ultimate indignity? Becoming highlight reel fodder forever on Auston Matthews' second goal Tuesday. Sheary played the puck so bad he was trolled as a "pylon" by the Leafs' intermission in-arena host reviewing highlights on the Jumbotron. Certainly unprofessional for a team employee to publicly embarrass another team's player that way, but she wasn't wrong.

Rodrigues (0-3-3 in 19 games): He has no goals in 27 games dating to last season, no points in his last 10 games, one goal in his last 46 games and 10 goals in his last 100 games over three seasons. It would be hard to even say what he's doing well. Certainly Krueger can't use him as Skinner's center anymore. If the Sabres had any depth up front, he wouldn't even be on the team.

Johansson (5-9-14 in 28 games): He has one goal in 19 games overall and 1 in 11 since returning from the upper-body injury he brought home with him from Sweden. Was a season-worst minus-3 Tuesday in Toronto and committed the grievous turnover during the 6-on-4 advantage that Leafs turned into their empty net goal.

Jimmy Vesey (4-6-10 in 32 games): He had no goals in his first 20 games as a Sabre, scored in three in a row and now is back to one goal in the last nine. And he had observers shaking their heads when he simply stopped skating during a second-period 2-on-1 break and left Sheary to try to do it himself.

Asplund (1-2-3 in 17 games): The Sabres are bringing him along slowly, as he has gone past 13 minutes only three times thus far. Be responsible and don't make big mistakes is what they need from him. It's working.

There are limited expectations for Asplund, Rodrigues and even Sheary. Vesey should be doing more in a contract year. But Johansson and Skinner got \$81 million of the Sabres' money over the summer and are taking up \$13.5 million on their cap.

Especially in the last couple of weeks, this has not been money well spent. Better change fast.

## **If Jack Eichel gets a point Thursday, he'll tie Gilbert Perreault for franchise record**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
December 18, 2019

PHILADELPHIA – In the 50th anniversary season of the franchise, you have to go back nearly 50 years before you find a Buffalo Sabres player who has registered a point in 18 consecutive games.

Jack Eichel can join some pretty good company Thursday night.

If Eichel gets a point in Buffalo's game against the Philadelphia Flyers in Wells Fargo Center, he will equal the club record of 18 set by Hockey Hall of Famer Gilbert Perreault from Oct. 24-Dec. 4, 1971, early in the franchise's second season.

Eichel has 16 goals, 15 assists and 31 points during his current 17-game streak, which ties a pair of 17-gamers put up by Hall of Famer Dave Andreychuk during the 1991-92 and 1992-93 seasons. Perreault's totals were 10-21-31 during his 18-game run.

Entering play Wednesday, Eichel's 16 goals, 31 points and plus-17 rating during the streak all led the NHL since the run began Nov. 16 against Ottawa with his first career four-goal game. His 15 assists were one shy of the league lead during that stretch.

Eichel leads the NHL in scoring in December with 15 points (8-7) and teammate Victor Olofsson is second with 12. After recording two points in each of Buffalo's last four games Eichel is the first Sabre to do that since defenseman Andrej Sekera posted five consecutive multipoint games from Feb. 26-March 6, 2011.

The Buffalo captain is on a careerlong streak of four straight games with a goal, extended by his third-period power-play tally Tuesday night against Toronto. His 24 goals in the season are second to Boston's David Pastrnak, and he's on pace for 56 goals and 117 points this season.

At 24-26-50, Eichel became the first Buffalo player to reach 50 points in 35 or fewer games since 1992-93, when Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny both did it. He also joined the late Rick Martin as the only other player in franchise history to record at least 20 goals and 50 points in each of his first five NHL seasons.

Eichel has good history against the Flyers, with eight goals and 11 points in 11 career games against them. He has five goals and two assists in the last five meetings.

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Sabres prospects went 1-1 on verdicts from USA Hockey on Wednesday, as defenseman Mattias Samuelsson made the cut for the Team USA roster that will play in the upcoming World Junior Championship while fellow blueliner Ryan Johnson did not.

Samuelsson, 19, was Buffalo's second-round pick in 2018. He's in his second season at Western Michigan. Johnson, in his freshman year at the University of Minnesota, was in his first WJC tryout camp at age 18. He was the Sabres' second first-round pick last June, taken at No. 31 with the choice acquired from St. Louis in the Ryan O'Reilly trade.

Also named to the team were Harvard's Jack Drury, a 2018 second-round pick of the Carolina Hurricanes and the nephew of former Sabres captain Chris Drury; Michigan State defenseman Christian Krygier, whose father, Todd, is a St. Francis graduate and played forward for nine NHL seasons with Hartford, Anaheim and Washington; 2019 first-round draft pick forwards Trevor Zegras (Anaheim), Alex Turcotte (Los Angeles) and Cole Caulfield (Montreal); and first-round goalie Spencer Knight (Florida).

Team USA opens the tournament in the Czech Republic Dec. 26 against Team Canada, whose lineup features Sabres 2019 first-round pick Dylan Cozens.

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The Flyers are on an emotional roller coaster after the shock of last week's news that 23-year-old forward Oskar Lindblom has been diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma, a rare bone cancer.

During Tuesday's 4-1 win against Anaheim, the club's first home game since the news, the team did a video tribute for Lindblom and fans stood and cheered while holding "I Fight for Oskar" placards. He met with his teammates before and after the game.

"It was awesome to see Oskar this morning," said goalie Carter Hart, who made 40 saves. "It was good to see him and the positive attitude that he had. It kind of uplifted our group."

"His attitude is unbelievable," added captain Claude Giroux. "We wanted to get this win for him. Every win for the rest of the season is going to be for him."

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- The NHL did not issue any supplemental discipline to Sabres winger Kyle Okposo for his check on Toronto's Travis Dermott in the third period Tuesday in Scotiabank Arena. Okposo did not receive a penalty for boarding.
- The Sabres are 0-4-1 in their last five trips to Philly and have been outscored 20-8 in those games. Their last win here was a 4-3 overtime triumph on Oct. 27, 2015, on a goal by Zengus Girgensons.
- Former Sabres winger Matt Moulson was selected by AHL president David Andrews as a team captain for the AHL All-Star Classic to be held Jan. 26-27 in Ontario, Calif. Moulson played for Ontario the last two years while on loan from the Sabres. Captains are selected for their leadership and service to the league.

Moulson signed a one-year AHL contract with Hershey in July. He has five goals and six assists for the Bears this season.

## **Krueger: We need to be a threat with more secondary scoring**

WGR 550

December 18, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres got off to a slow start on Tuesday night at Scotiabank Arena, which resulted in the Toronto Maple Leafs scoring the game's first three goals. Buffalo made things interesting in the third period, closing the gap to 4-3 with less than three minutes remaining, but ended up falling short by a 5-3 score.

Buffalo has played much better hockey as of late, and Tuesday night was a bit of a surprise factoring in the recent success of the team. In the month of December, the Sabres have gone 4-2-2, earning 10 out of a possible 16 points, and currently sit alone in second place in the Atlantic Division with 39 points. Over the last 13 games, Buffalo has earned at least a point in 10 of those games, going 6-3-4.

One player who has been a huge contributor to Buffalo's recent success is captain Jack Eichel.

The 23-year-old center is on pace for a career-year in the NHL, currently sitting with 24 goals and 26 assists for 50 points in the team's first 35 games of the season. Eichel is on pace to double his career-high total in goals (56), and is also on pace to eclipse the 100-point mark (117) for the first time in his career.

What's even more impressive is that Eichel is currently riding a career-high 17-game point streak, which is one game shy of tying the franchise record set by Hall of Famer Gilbert Perreault back in the 1971-72 season. In that span, Eichel has scored 16 goals and amassed 15 assists for 31 points.

Eichel has a chance to match Perreault's record on Thursday night when the Sabres are in Philadelphia to take on the Flyers at the Wells Fargo Center.

Aside from Eichel's like with Sam Reinhart and Victor Olofsson, the Sabres have found themselves in a familiar problem that they faced for the past couple of seasons - the team is not getting enough secondary scoring. Of the 110 goals scored so far this season, 50 of them have come off the stick of either Eichel (24), Olofsson (14) or Reinhart (12). The next leading scorer after those three is Jeff Skinner, who has 11 goals.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger took the time on Wednesday to join Howard Simon and Jeremy White for his weekly appearance on WGR. Krueger talked about the team's secondary scoring problems, as well as what happened in Tuesday night's loss in Toronto, the Buffalo Bills, and more.

Here is some of what he had to say:

Krueger on Tuesday night's performance against the Maple Leafs:

"We dug ourselves a hole, for sure. It was disappointing because we were off our game last night from the get-go and had trouble finding the principles that make us the best possible team. We were frustrated with that. What I liked was the reaction within the room after two periods and the conversations we had, and the fight in the third where with the 6-on-4 with two-and-a-half minutes to go had an opportunity to at least get a point out of that game, even though we had two off periods. Now it's back to the drawing board and getting the group regrouped for a better game tomorrow. We were disappointed with that loss last night, but let that adversity give us some lessons to take with us."

Krueger on his decision to pull the goalie on the power play late in Tuesday's loss in Toronto:

"It just depends on how much time is left in the game. We would be pulling our goalie irrelevant of a power play or not at about the 2:30 mark. In the old days, you'd used to wait until there was a minute to go, but that's just not enough time to get organized anymore with the way the pace of the game is. You take that risk if you have control, so on that situation last night we felt extremely comfortable. We ended up with an unfortunate turnover after actually getting set up in the zone, but you need to take risks down the stretch when you're down goals in the NHL today. That man advantage usually has been effective for us. We've scored a lot of goals with the goalies out, and yesterday we took it on the chin. But I would make that same decision again today looking at the circumstances that we had."

Krueger on the need to find secondary scoring in the lineup:

"The positive is you have a line like the Eichel line firing on all cylinders as it is. It is certainly one of, if not, the best line in the National Hockey League right now, but we need to get secondary scoring going here. It needs to alleviate some of the 5-on-5 pressure. The opposition is throwing their top [defenders] and top forward lines at Jack and Sam and [Victor Olofsson] here on every road game, and we need to have more pressure there. What we do is we're working with different combinations trying to find ones that will fire and ones that will go for us. We don't need another line scoring at that pace, but we definitely need there to be a threat."

Krueger on the lack of scoring from Jeff Skinner:

"He's been in and out of playing on the first unit, so power play goals aren't really a good measurement. He's getting his opportunities. There's a lot of shots on net. He's getting three to five shots in multiple games here, and he is a streaky scorer. Let's hope in [Philadelphia] that it breaks and he runs a streak here again, but offensively there's a lot of things going right for him."

Krueger on the improved play of Rasmus Dahlin:

"We feel actually that the break did him good so far as watching some games from the outside and being able to see where his positional play without the puck needs to be, and we feel he's come back very strong. He's adding to our offense, our power play is definitely stronger now with Rasmus back into the lineup. With Dahlin, it's an age where the biggest growth with him is going to happen without the puck defensively, and we can see that he's seeing his position better all the time. He's reading the game better all the time, and we're really pleased with him since he came back from the injury."

Krueger on sending Casey Mittelstadt down to the Rochester Americans:

"It's all about him getting reps at a higher level. His ice time has been reduced here as of late, and then being a healthy scratch got everybody thinking about the need for Casey, at this point in his development, to get repetitions and to be able to quarterback a power play the way he can and to play hard minutes 5-on-5 to work on the habits he needs [to work on]."

Krueger on his relationship with Buffalo Bills head coach Sean McDermott:

"The goal that Sean and I have in common is to make the fan base in Buffalo, for sports, proud of what we're doing. We communicated about that this summer and he's written me that a few times, and all I can share is that it's a very natural friendship that's growing. I'm just really a big fan of the Bills and what they're doing there and how they're doing it, and it feels like vice versa. They like what we're doing. It's good to see some Bills players at games and our players love to go there. The relationship beginning with our owners' passion for sports in Buffalo and getting the sports scene back on track is carried by Sean and myself in the same way. We're just working hard every day to try to do that, and I'm just very, very excited for the Bills [since] they made the playoffs and we're going to be cheering loud for them."

## **Buffalo head coaches McDermott, Krueger growing a 'natural friendship'**

By Sal Capaccio

WGR 550

December 18, 2019

I've often mentioned to people that the head coaches of the two Buffalo major pro sports teams remind me of one another, as far as how they communicate and what their philosophies are on building a team.

On Wednesday, both Buffalo Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger and Buffalo Bills head coach Sean McDermott talked glowingly about each other, their relationship, and their approach to building their teams.

"We just bounce back, and there's always depth in the messages back and forth, with a sentence or two," Krueger said on The Howard and Jeremy Show when asked about the two head coaches texting each other. "Sean's sent some video tips this way of other athletes from other sports, even from basketball, saying something that we both like."

Of course, both teams are owned by Terry and Kim Pegula, who purchased the Sabres in 2011 and then the Bills in 2014. Since then, the two teams have merged under the Pegula Sports and Entertainment umbrella with the moniker "One Buffalo" to show their synergy.

"Ralph has been a good partner of mine, call it, and in some ways a mentor, honestly, in the bandwidth of his experience," McDermott said of Krueger. "He's been in a lot of places and done a lot of things and accomplished a lot over the course of his career, so I try to stay in touch with him and encourage him. I'm not sure I share much that he can use, but he's certainly shared some things that I've been able to use. I think it's really neat to watch the Sabres players and our players pull for one another and support one another, and that's as they call One Buffalo, and that's a unique part and cool part of our city."

The Bills clinched their second playoff berth in three years under McDermott with a 17-10 win over the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday night. They still have an opportunity to win the AFC East with two games to play and a big game Saturday evening in Foxboro against the New England Patriots.

The Sabres currently sit in second place in the eight-team Atlantic Division in the NHL.

"The goal that Sean and I have in common is to make the fanbase in Buffalo, for sports, proud of what we're doing," Krueger said. "We communicated about that this summer and he's written me that a few times and all I can share is that it's a very natural friendship that's growing, and I'm just really a big fan of the Bills and what they're doing there, and how they're doing it, and it feels like vice versa. They like what we're doing."

Bills players have frequently been spotted at Sabres games this season, and when they are, they are often shown on the team's video board, which then gets a loud ovation from the fans in attendance.

"It's good to see some Bills players at games and our players love to go there," said Krueger. "The relationship beginning with our owners passion for sports in Buffalo and getting the sports scene back on track is carried by Sean and myself in the same way and we're just working hard every day to try to do that and I'm just very, very excited for the Bills if they made the playoffs and we're going to be cheering loud for them."

## **Why former Sabres teammate Matt Moulson deserves an assist on Jack Eichel's current scoring streak**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

December 18, 2019

HERSHEY, Pa. – Jack Eichel is rolling.

"Is he?" Matt Moulson asked straight-faced Wednesday.

"I'm just kidding," he added, breaking into a smile.

Moulson knows because he's been watching. And of all Eichel's goals during the past 17 games, the biggest assist belongs to Moulson.

Before the Sabres played Ottawa on Nov. 16, Moulson sent his former housemate and teammate a text to start shooting more. Eichel promptly scored four times against the Senators, starting this 17-game point streak that features 16 goals and 31 points.

"I say 'shoot more' and the guy gets four goals, so I'll take credit even though it was not deserved," Moulson said in Giant Center, home of his Hershey Bears.

The left winger was smiling again, but he seriously deserves some credit for Eichel's unreal run.

"Sometimes it's weird how things happen like that, you know?" Buffalo's captain said.

Whenever the Bears aren't playing, Moulson turns on his TV to either the Maple Leafs or Sabres. Like any fan, he realized Victor Olofsson has an elite shot. But Moulson also noticed that Eichel was looking to set up his linemate too often.

"It's just a little thing I noticed," Moulson said. "Obviously, Olofsson is an unbelievable shooter. At the time, I just thought Jack was maybe looking for him too much and guys weren't respecting his shot because he has, arguably, one of the top three shots in the entire NHL, probably the world. So I just sent a little text about that, just that guys aren't respecting his shot because he's looking to pass more.

"I'm sure he probably thought of that already, so I don't know much help it gave him. But obviously he's playing with a tremendous amount of confidence and really showing the superstar that he is."

The numbers are indeed staggering. During the 17-game run, which is one short of the Sabres record set by Gilbert Perreault in 1971, Eichel has 14 even-strength goals, 24 even-strength points, three game-winners and is plus-17. He's also firing 3.94 shots per game, up from the 3.39 he was taking before Moulson's text.

The text mattered because the person who sent it matters.

"I love Matt and his wife, Alicia," Eichel said. "They're amazing people. His kids, they'll always be family to me. He obviously knows me so well and knows my personality, knows how I am off the ice, on the ice. When someone reaches out to you that knows you that well, it's cool, right?"

"But it's weird that I told you guys that he reached out. It wouldn't be the first time that he's obviously reached out to me. Obviously, it just got out that he said that, 'Start shooting more,' and then all of a sudden things start happening."

Things are happening at an unreal rate. Eichel is finding the net on 23.9 percent of his shots during the streak. His wrist shot is connecting 26 percent of the time. His snap shot is at 25 percent. His slap shot is finding the net 16.7 percent of the time and his deflections are working at 50 percent.

It's no wonder Eichel is second in the NHL with 24 goals and fifth with 50 points in just 35 games.

"It's not only good to see, but it's extremely fun to watch," Moulson said. "I feel like every time Jack touches the puck, something good is going to happen."

That was the plan, right? The Sabres banked their future on the 2015 draft pick, something Eichel talked about in-depth last month. He credits the Moulsons for guiding him through his first season – and, through a text, his fifth.

"It takes time for different guys," Moulson said. "He puts a lot of pressure on himself to do well. He wants to be the best and does everything he can to be the best. Sometimes it takes a little time to get comfortable with being one of the best players in the world and being the captain of the team, trying to get the team to the playoffs, which they haven't been in a while.

"A lot of coaching changes, as well, for a young kid that's supposed to be a superstar in the league, getting told different things because there's different coaches. It's an adjustment process."

Ralph Krueger has reached Eichel and the Sabres in a way that coaches Dan Bylsma and Phil Housley couldn't, which also contributes to this hot streak.

"It's big for us to try and build an identity as a team," said Eichel, who pointed to the playoff-bound Bills. "You can see their identity. I think when you look at their group and you look at each guy through the roster, it really stands out how much the team means to them. They've obviously identified their strengths, and they really play to them. Their defense is tremendous. They take care of the football. They do all the little things well and it adds up to wins.

"We're trying to build our identity as much as possible. I think we've identified what our strengths and weaknesses are, for us to be successful in this league what we need to do on a night-in, night-out basis. It's really important. Football, there's a lot of similarities to hockey. You do the little things well and all the little details add up over the course of a game."

Eichel's points are certainly adding up.

"You start getting on a little bit of a run, you start building confidence and you like where your game's at, then you just try and be as consistent as possible," he said.

His old friend, meanwhile, is finding his footing. Hershey has won six in a row to climb into third in the AHL's Atlantic Division. Moulson has three goals in five games, bringing his season totals to eight goals and 16 points in 28 games.

As an added bonus, the 36-year-old will be captain of the Eastern Conference next month at the AHL All-Star Game, the league announced Wednesday.

"It's my first All-Star Game ever, so it's just a huge honor," said Moulson, who was ecstatic when Commissioner Dave Andrews called with the news. "I'll be very excited to have the kids there and my family. It'll be a lot of fun. It's in Ontario (Calif.), so I get to go to the old stomping grounds."

Moulson played the last two seasons for the Ontario Reign after being assigned by the Sabres, which rekindled his love for everything. He became a free agent this summer and decided Hershey would be home, partly because it reminded him of his old home in Buffalo.

"When I came to Hershey, I spent a little time in the summer looking for a place, and it's a lot smaller but it reminded me of the outskirts of Buffalo, where it's a very blue-collar, sports-frenzied type of town where everyone loves their sports," Moulson said. "Great people, blue collar, obviously everyone's working at the Hershey factory, so it reminds me a little bit of it. It's been awesome to be here.

"I had a couple options and, I don't know, I think you just feel when it's right. It just felt right talking to these guys. A championship has always escaped me, so I thought this would be a good chance to play for a great coaching staff and a great organization to try and win the championship in this last year."

This is it for the 14-year pro. He's set to play his 1,000th game soon – he's at 983 after skating in 650 NHL games and 333 in the AHL – and the family awaits. His wife and kids are living in Connecticut. It's not easy, but they see each other on the weekends because it's only a three-hour drive to Hershey.

When Moulson is home alone, he watches hockey on television. Eichel and the Sabres are thankful for that. It led to a season-changing text.

"He's one of the smartest guys I've ever played with," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said of Moulson. "He recognizes that Jack's got superstar talent. He's so strong. He's got such a great shot. And a lot of times I think he was looking to just slow the game down and make the perfect play instead of just shoot.

"Obviously, Moulson can see the game and is able to look at it objectively. It's a good thing he told him."

## **Sabres captain Jack Eichel morphing into superstar during point streak**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 18, 2019

BUFFALO – If you ask Sabres captain Jack Eichel about his recent scoring exploits, he usually starts talking about his linemates or the rest of the team.

Eichel, 23, doesn't want his success to overshadow the Sabres, so the ultra-talented center will heap praise on his wingers, Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart, and others.

"It's tough to pinpoint one thing," Eichel responded when asked how he has elevated his game over the last month. "The group's been playing well."

Right now, probably no one in the world is playing better than Eichel, who has a 17-game point streak entering Thursday's road contest against the Philadelphia Flyers.

The streak, the NHL's longest this season, is one game shy of the franchise record the legendary Gilbert Perreault set early in the 1971-72 season. Eichel tied another Hall of Famer, Dave Andreychuk, on Tuesday.

Andreychuk recorded a point in 17 straight outings in 1991-92 and 1992-93, just two months before the Sabres traded him.

Eichel started his streak in grand fashion Nov. 16 against the Ottawa Senators, scoring every goal in a 4-0 win.

Overall, Eichel has compiled 16 goals and 31 points while pumping a 67 shots on goal during his run. No one else had scored more than 13 goals or 25 points in that stretch entering Wednesday's games.

His league-high shot total was tied with Vegas Golden Knights winger Max Pacioretty.

Greatness, of course, was predicted for Eichel long before the Sabres drafted him second overall in 2015. So was this kind of torrid production.

The American has already scored 24 goals and 50 points in 35 games, putting him on pace for 56 goals and 117 points. With the Sabres standing in second place in the Atlantic Division after years of futility, he's a legitimate Hart Trophy candidate as league MVP.

A Sabre hasn't cracked 50 goals or 100 points since Pat LaFontaine (53 goals and 148 points) and Alexander Mogilny (76 goals and 127 points) both surpassed the prestigious marks in 1992-93.

Eichel set career highs with 28 goals and 82 points in 77 games last season.

Naturally, growth was expected. Thirty-five or so goals and 90 or more points seemed very possible if he stayed healthy this season.

But Eichel, a two-time NHL All-Star, has reached an entirely new level. He's starting to look like a superstar.

"He's maturing," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "I mean, he went through four years in the National Hockey League, and I think the pain from last year was a big test of where his career was going to go. He has processed it like a winner, and in that adversity grew and he made a lot of decisions through the summer in the conversations we were having that showed that winner within him."

What has changed in the past month? A lot.

Eichel, who possesses a lethal shot, is utilizing it more often. Following his four-goal night, he said his friend and former Sabres teammate, Matt Moulson, told him he wasn't shooting enough.

"One of the biggest things is that he's decided to shoot the puck more often," said a scout who has watched Eichel regularly this season and throughout his career. "He is shooting more than passing. He has such an excellent shot. It's an elite shot and an elite release. He gets it away very quickly and it's very accurate. That is deadly."

Eichel, who registered 61 shots in the first 18 games this season, is on pace for his second consecutive 300-shot campaign.

Stronger defense has also helped buoy Eichel.

"I'm just trying to put more of an emphasis on my defensive game and being more responsible," Eichel said. "I think through that I've had a little bit more success with the puck and offensively."

The scout said Eichel "seems to be more committed to be playing a 200-foot game." That helps give him more space to gain speed before the neutral zone.

Eichel has also thrived defensively in tough late-game situations.

"As much as the points and production's great, you're seeing him, going back to the St. Louis game (Dec. 10), protecting a one-goal lead," Sabres general manager Jason Botterill said. "He's taking the faceoff at the end of the game and trying to protect that one-goal lead and help us win the game.

"In all aspects of the game, he's playing outstanding."

So is Olofsson, a rookie whose shot ranks among the NHL's best. The Swede has drawn attention away from Eichel. The two have played together most of the season at even strength and the power play.

"(He has) also benefited from having Olofsson on the power play because teams cannot key on Eichel all the time," the scout said. "They have to be aware of Olofsson as well."

## **Jack Eichel could tie the Sabres record for consecutive games with a point against the Flyers**

By Paul Ross

WKBW

December 19, 2019

PHILADELPHIA — While it is well-below freezing in Western New York , Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been red hot !

Eichel has the chance to tie a franchise record that was set nearly 24 years before he was born, in Thursday night's game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Starting with a four goal performance against the Ottawa Senators on November 16th, Eichel has recorded 16 goals and 15 assists in the Sabres last 17 games in a row.

If Eichel records a point against the Flyers, he would tie the Sabres franchise record set by Gilbert Perreault of 18 consecutive games with a point back in the 1971-72 season.

## **Bills and Sabres have that 'MyOneBuffalo' feeling, and it's pretty cool**

By Leo Roth

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

December 18, 2019

ORCHARD PARK – Buffalo Bills coach Sean McDermott has credited many mentors during his 21 years of coaching football.

Jimmye Laycock at William & Mary, Andy Reid and Jim Johnson with the Philadelphia Eagles, Ron Rivera with the Carolina Panthers, Leslie Frazier on his own Bills staff.

Over the last six months, though, one of McDermott's closest confidants has come not from the world of football, but from hockey.

The dual ownership of Buffalo's NFL and NHL franchises by Terry and Kim Pegula has created a synergy between the Bills and Sabres under the "MyOneBuffalo" marketing tag that continues to grow in unexpected ways.

Like the personal relationships being formed by professional football and hockey players and coaches from diverse backgrounds representing the same city.

McDermott, 45, and Sabres coach Ralph Krueger, 60, began forging a friendship after Krueger was hired last May. They realized quickly they were kindred spirits entrusted with a similar task: return their franchises to former glory.

"Ralph has been a good partner of mine, call it, and in some ways a mentor, honestly, in the bandwidth of his experience," McDermott said. "He's been in a lot of places and done a lot of things and accomplished a lot over the course of his career, so I try to stay in touch with him and encourage him. I'm not sure I share much that he can use, but he's certainly shared some things that I've been able to use."

While the sports McDermott and Krueger coach couldn't be more different, their fan base in western New York is the same. Krueger told The Howard and Jeremy Show on WGR (550-AM) that their relationship has grown "naturally" and some topics, like motivating millionaire athletes, are universally shared by professional coaches.

"We just bounce (things around) and there's always depth in the messages back and forth with a sentence or two," Krueger said. "Sean has sent some video tips this way of other athletes from other sports, even from basketball, saying something that we both like."

The Bills hadn't been to the playoffs in 17 seasons but have now qualified twice in three years under McDermott. Buffalo's 10-4 record is its best since 1999 and it can grab a share of first-place in the AFC East Division with a win at New England (11-3) on Saturday.

The Sabres, meanwhile, haven't been to the NHL playoffs for a league-high eight consecutive seasons. Under Krueger, the team started 9-2-1, hit a slump, but has rebounded to a 16-12-7 record, good for second place in the eight-team Atlantic Division behind another Boston team, the Bruins.

After the Bills punched their playoff ticket late Sunday night with a 17-10 win in Pittsburgh, Krueger was among the first to send a text congratulating McDermott.

"I usually go to bed way earlier than when that game ended so I had to catch up on my sleep, but I'm so pleased for the communication with Sean through the year, we've been exchanging messages more than anything in the last while, always giving each other some kind of a push," Krueger told reporters at practice Monday. "There are a lot of parallels right now between the Bills and the Sabres. Sean and I are passionate here, both of us, to get the sports community back on the track it deserves to be on. Both of us are having a lot of fun in our work, and I've become as big as any Bills fan out there."

Krueger, who has dual Canadian and German citizenship, played professional hockey and then coached in Germany. He also coached the Swiss National Team in three Olympics, was chairman of his own "futbol" team,

famed Southampton in the English Premier soccer league. He also has held leadership roles with the World Economic Forum.

"I just think it's neat to see Sabres players and our players pull for one another, support one another, that's why they call it One Buffalo and that's a cool and unique thing about our city," McDermott said.

Sabres players got a kick out of Bills Pro Bowl cornerback Tre White listing his college as "THE Tre'Davious White Goalie Academy of Louisiana at Buffalo" during his taped introduction for NBC's Sunday Night Football broadcast. White's goalie academy shtick is part of a Bills-Sabres cross-marketing campaign that has a cult-like following.

Before the Pegulas' arrival, the Sabres played the NHL's first Winter Classic in 2008 at the Bills stadium, New Era Field, then called Ralph Wilson Stadium.

"It's honestly one of the beautiful things about playing in Buffalo," goalie Carter Hutton told NHL.com. "We've got sports fans through and through, whether it's the Bills or Sabres. Tre White's a character and he's a heck of a player."

Bills and Sabres players have been spotted at each other's games. Josh Allen enjoys wearing a Sabres' jersey marking the team's 50th anniversary.

"Talking to Josh a little bit here and there, it's awesome seeing him doing so well, he's such a competitive guy and he puts it on the line every week," Jack Eichel said. "It's awesome to see."

Eichel, 23, the face of the Sabres to Allen's face of the Bills, is riding a 17-game point streak and has 50 points in just 35 games. He sent Allen a text after the Steelers victory congratulating his MyOneBuffalo counterpart.

"They're playing pretty well right now and I appreciated the text from him," Allen said. "I'm a big fan of his and what they're doing, so go Sabres."

And Bills.

## **Hart Trophy Watch: Jack Eichel is dominating and keeping Sabres alive, but is he the MVP so far?**

By Pete Blackburn  
CBS Sports  
December 18, 2019

We're not yet to Christmas, so perhaps some might argue that it's too early for discussions about regular season awards like the Hart. But this is my column and I say it's not too early, especially when there are so many players thriving and putting their names into that discussion right now. So let's talk about it.

Perhaps no one on the planet is playing better hockey than Jack Eichel right now. The Buffalo Sabres captain is in the midst of a 17-game point streak -- the longest the NHL has seen this season. He's scored 16 goals and added 15 assists over that span, and he's doing his best to almost single-handedly keep the Sabres in contention.

For the second straight season, the Sabres got off to a blazing hot start only to squander the early momentum as they came crashing back down to the earth. But Buffalo is currently holding onto second place in what's essentially a wide open Atlantic division behind Boston, and Eichel's play is the biggest reason they find themselves in that spot.

To illustrate just how important he's been, here's an examination of his production compared to the rest of the team during the past 17 games:

- 16 goals
- 15 assists
- 67 shots on goal
- 101 shot attempts
- With him on ice Sabres up 24-10 at 5v5, 40-16 in all situations
- Without him on ice Sabres down 23-15 at 5v5, 39-16 in all situations
- Sabres have won 7 of those 17 games..

It took just 35 games for Eichel to hit the 50-point mark with 24 goals and 26 assists. He's on pace to shatter his previous highs in goals (28) and points (82) and he's averaging nearly 22 minutes of ice time per night -- a massive load for a player whose team obviously realizes how much they need him.

Buffalo is a somewhat young and inexperienced team that is desperate for a taste of success. They haven't made the postseason since 2011 and their last playoff series win came in 2007. The 23-year-old Eichel is obviously going to slow down and put up some goose eggs eventually, but if he continues to play even near this well for the remainder of the season and ends up dragging Buffalo back into the postseason, there's no question he's going to find himself in the MVP conversation.

That being said, he's certainly not the only guy making his case through the first few months of the season, so let's quickly look at some of the other challengers.

Connor McDavid and/or Leon Draisaitl

The Hart has never been split between two players before but this might be as good a season as any to consider it. McDavid and Draisaitl have simply willed the Oilers' relevance into existence this year thanks to their spectacular play and it's certainly arguable that no two players are more important to their team than these two are to Edmonton.

At the time this is being written, McDavid and Draisaitl lead the NHL in points with 59 and 57, respectively. Of the Oilers' 66 goals at five-on-five this year, McDavid and Draisaitl have directly accounted for 35 percent of that output. If you factor in goals from Zack Kassian, who has spent most of the season playing alongside the two, that total share jumps up to 53 percent.

The Oilers' success is absolutely and directly correlated to the production of McDavid and Draisaitl, so if that duo plays well enough to carry Edmonton into a playoff spot then they'll be in the Hart conversation. It'll probably be McDavid who gets more attention considering he's the most talented player in the league and has won the award before, but at this rate Draisaitl deserves almost as much recognition.

### John Carlson

I touched on Carlson's incredible start in last week's column and he's undoubtedly the leading favorite in the Norris race right now, but he also deserves some consideration when it comes to the Hart. The Washington Capitals defenseman has 12 goals and 45 points through the first 35 games of the season, putting him on pace for 28-77-105 -- or the best season ever by a defenseman not named Bobby Orr or Paul Coffey.

Sure, plenty of that production comes from Washington's fearsome power play unit, but Carlson is also doing plenty of work at five-on-five while averaging nearly 25 minutes a night for the Caps. His offensive numbers may not end up being as sexy as some forwards, but he's a workhorse who's putting up historically good numbers for a defenseman. That should be good enough for some.

### Nathan MacKinnon

The Colorado Avalanche star has been in the Hart conversation in each of the past two seasons and he's in the midst of his best season yet. He's currently third in the league in points (20-31-51) behind McDavid and Drasaitl and is on pace to hit 50 goals and 100 points for the first time in his career.

Colorado has been the best team in the Western Conference so far this year despite a plethora of key injuries, including lengthy simultaneous absences from both of MacKinnon's top line wingers in Mikko Rantanen and Gabriel Landeskog. MacKinnon's stellar play and production is one of the biggest reasons why Colorado has been able to not only stay afloat but continue to thrive without those key pieces. If the Avs keep pace and finish as one of the league's top teams with their stud center near the top of the league's statistical leaderboard, he's going to get plenty of consideration.

### Connor Hellebuyck

The Winnipeg Jets came into this season with pretty low expectations after losing almost their entire defensive corps over the summer, but they've been a pleasant surprise and find themselves in the playoff picture sitting third in a very tough Central division. The biggest reason for their surprising success is the play of Hellebuyck between the pipes.

The 26-year-old goaltender ranks third among starters in save percentage (.926) but that number becomes a lot more impressive when you consider the quality of shots he's stopping. The Jets' defense has allowed the third-most high-danger chances in the league so far this season. Winnipeg has the league's second-worst expected goal share (44 percent) but, in reality, they own the fifth-best goal share (54 percent), and Hellebuyck standing tall under immense pressure is a big reason for that discrepancy.

Is it sustainable? Maybe not, but on the chance that this trend continues, Hellebuyck is as deserving as any other name on this list.

## **Jack Eichel making a compelling case for the true definition of MVP**

By Ken Campbell

The Hockey News

December 18, 2019

On Tuesday night in Toronto, the present and future of American hockey was on full display and it was a wonderful spectacle to watch. Jack Eichel, the second overall pick in the 2015 draft, and Auston Matthews, the first overall pick one year later, went hammer-and-tong, seemingly oblivious to the rest of the world and conducting their own anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better contest.

And Jack Eichel showed exactly why if the season were over today and the Sabres were in the playoffs, he and Nathan MacKinnon of the Colorado Avalanche would be the top two contenders for the Hart Trophy as the league's most valuable players. Of course there are others in the mix, but here's the thing. In Edmonton, Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl have each other. The same goes in Boston where Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak feed off each other, along with their Hall of Fame-bound center Patrice Bergeron. But MacKinnon, because of injuries to teammates, and Eichel, because he has nobody around him to match his skills, have had to do things entirely on their own.

And the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-3 win over Eichel's Buffalo Sabres displayed for all to see that if Eichel doesn't get it done for his team, it ain't gettin' done. The gap between MacKinnon and the No. 2 scorer on the Avalanche is 23 points, which is the highest gap in the league. With his 49th and 50th points Tuesday night, Eichel has an 18-point lead on rookie linemate Victor Olofsson, second in the NHL. Eichel is on a 17-game point streak in which he has scored 16 goals and 31 assists, while most of the Sabres' secondary scorers are going in the opposite direction. Jeff Skinner, who signed an eight-year, \$72 million deal for his ability to produce offense, has 11 goals in 35 games and hasn't found the back of the net in seven. Conor Sheary has five goals, Marcus Johansson has one goal in 19 games and Casey Mittelstadt was struggling so mightily he was sent to the minors.

"We have to push to find deeper scoring in the lineup for sure," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said after the Toronto game. "It's excellent that Jack does that. He is playing at the top of his game, and it's a pleasure to stand behind him every night here and see how much heart and soul he's got, but in a game like this, we need more depth. We need the whole lineup to come through to be able to get points at the end."

If he were to win the Hart, Eichel would be only the second player in franchise history to be named MVP, after the greatest Sabre (and in this writer's opinion the greatest NHL goalie) of all-time, Dominik Hasek. If Eichel records a point Thursday night in Philadelphia, he'll tie Gilbert Perreault for the longest scoring streak in franchise history at 18 games. At this point in his career, Eichel is trending in the same direction as the two greatest players in Sabres history. And at 23, he's just getting going. (It's actually freaky when you realize that Eichel is actually 15 months younger than Olofsson, who is one of the leading contenders for rookie-of-the-year honors.)

Eichel has spent a lot of time losing during his career, as evidenced by the fact that he's in his fifth NHL season and is still waiting to see what all the fuss around these playoffs is about. He has found a soul mate in the indefatigably optimistic Krueger and things are going well personally. He grudgingly acknowledged that he's playing the best hockey of his career right now, but isn't getting caught up in the Hart talk.

"We've got a long year here," Eichel said. "Not even halfway through the season. I'm not thinking about it at all. There's a lot that our group needs to accomplish and a long way to go for us to be where we want to be, in the playoffs at the end of the year."

The same goes for Krueger, who knows deep down that any success the Sabres have this season is inextricably tied to the production of one of the league's most dynamic players.

"Is (Eichel) one of the best players in the league? He always has been for me since Game 1," Krueger said. "Let everybody else decide right now. We just want to build a season here. We want to keep that picture really small, and if any of those things come at this team after the season, I'll be the loudest cheerer in the room."