



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 2, 2019

New Jersey travels to play Eichel and the Sabres

Associated Press

December 2, 2019

New Jersey Devils (9-12-4, eighth in the Metropolitan Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (12-10-5, fourth in the Atlantic Division)

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

BOTTOM LINE: Jack Eichel and Buffalo take on New Jersey. Eichel ranks seventh in the league with 35 points, scoring 16 goals and recording 19 assists.

The Sabres are 8-7-3 in Eastern Conference games. Buffalo has converted on 17.9% of power-play opportunities, scoring 15 power-play goals.

The Devils are 6-8-2 in Eastern Conference play. New Jersey averages 9.5 penalty minutes per game, the eighth-most in the NHL. Kyle Palmieri leads the team serving 27 total minutes.

Buffalo defeated New Jersey 7-2 in the last meeting between these teams on Oct. 5. Victor Olofsson scored two goals for the Sabres in the win.

TOP PERFORMERS: Eichel leads the Sabres with 16 goals, adding 19 assists and totaling 35 points. Olofsson has totaled 8 points over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

Taylor Hall leads the Devils with 17 total assists and has recorded 21 points. Blake Coleman has scored six goals over the last 10 games for New Jersey.

LAST 10 GAMES: Devils: 5-5-0, averaging 2.5 goals, 4.1 assists, 3.7 penalties and 8.3 penalty minutes while allowing 2.8 goals per game with a .911 save percentage.

Sabres: 3-4-3, averaging 2.8 goals, 3.9 assists, 4.2 penalties and 10.6 penalty minutes while giving up 3.3 goals per game with a .892 save percentage.

Sabres Injuries: Rasmus Dahlin: out (upper body).

Devils Injuries: Sami Vatanen: out (upper body), Jack Hughes: day to day (lower-body).

Tavares scores in OT, leads Maple Leafs past Sabres 2-1

Associated Press

November 30, 2019

TORONTO (AP) — Frederik Andersen was put to the test, and the goaltender did enough to get the Toronto Maple Leafs the victory.

John Tavares scored at 1:45 of overtime and picked up his 400th NHL assist, and Anderson made 29 saves as the Maple Leafs beat the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 on Saturday night.

"He gave us a chance to win, especially in the third period, where we had to defend" Tavares said. "He made some big saves, even at the end of the second (period), too. That's why he's one of the best goalies in the league."

Tavares' 10th goal of the season helped Toronto improve to 4-1-0 in its last five games. William Nylander also scored for the Maple Leafs (13-11-4), who split the home-and-home set with Buffalo.

Andersen started in goal in the back half of a home-and-home series, breaking the trend from recently fired head coach Mike Babcock of starting Andersen in the first game of the sequence.

"It was a little different because we didn't have a skate yesterday because of the early game," Andersen said of the change. "I was able to skate a little this morning and obviously, we had more of a relaxed morning."

Rasmus Ristolainen scored for Buffalo (12-10-5). Carter Hutton made 41 saves in defeat and fell to 0-5-3 in his last eight games.

The game marked the home-coaching debut for Sheldon Keefe. The former NHLer from Brampton was named head coach of the Maple Leafs on Nov. 20 after the team dismissed Babcock.

"We had some good moments, but (our effort level) was not where we want it to be or where we wanted it to be," Keefe said of his team's play. "We have to give some credit to Buffalo, they really did a good job in both games against us and made it a little harder on us."

The Maple Leafs outshot the Sabres 11-8 in the opening period. The best scoring chance for either team in the period came when Sabres forward Sam Reinhart's shot from the circle hit the post at 7:31.

The Maple Leafs opened the scoring in the second period.

Nylander went to the net after receiving a pass from Auston Matthews. He deked Hutton and shot the puck over his shoulder and into the net for the power-play goal at 5:30. Tavares picked up his milestone assist on the goal.

"It was a little lucky and it deflected between his arm and in," Nylander said of his goal. "It was nice to get one on the power play, that's for sure."

The Sabres had several chances to score in the period. Andersen made a glove save on a shot by Connor Sheary at 11:50. The play was reviewed as part of Andersen's glove appeared to be over the line, but the review was inconclusive.

"That was amazing, it kind of saved me because that was my guy," Nylander said of Andersen's save on Sheary. "It was a big save for him."

Later in the period, Jeff Skinner had a chance from the slot while Andersen lost control of his stick, but Andersen made the save at 18:31. Victor Olofsson's shot from the circle hit the post at 19:09.

The Maple Leafs outshot the Sabres 16-11 in the second period.

Buffalo tied the score in the third period. Rasmus Ristolainen scored his second goal after he saw a clear path to the net while trying to find a player open. He cut across the net and beat Andersen on the blocker side at 6:58.

"I thought the guys put that away really well and really deserved more than a point here when I look at the third period," Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said. "So really proud of the effort of the guys just digging it really deep and extremely disappointed with the final result."

Tavares scored the winning goal past Hutton from long range.

"My first shot, I think I surprised him," Tavares said of the final play of the game. "Then when I got a little bit of separation again, I got a little bit of a screen and tested him again. I was at the end of my shift, so I wanted to be sure with it and I was able to get some good wood on it and time it right."

NOTES: The Sabres went 0 for 2 on the power play. They now have just one goal with the man advantage in their last 37 opportunities.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Host New Jersey Devils on Monday.

Maple Leafs: At Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday.

Buffalo visits Toronto after Eichel's 2 goal-game

Associated Press

November 30, 2019

Buffalo Sabres (12-10-4, third in the Atlantic Division) vs. Toronto Maple Leafs (12-11-4, fourth in the Atlantic Division)

Toronto; Saturday, 7 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: The Toronto Maple Leafs host Buffalo after Jack Eichel scored two goals in the Sabres' 6-4 win against the Maple Leafs.

The Maple Leafs are 4-5-1 against opponents in the Atlantic Division. Toronto ranks eighth in the league averaging 5.7 assists per game, led by Morgan Rielly with 0.6.

The Sabres are 6-4-0 against the rest of their division. Buffalo has scored 15 power-play goals, converting on 18.3% of chances.

In their last matchup on Nov. 29, Buffalo won 6-4. Eichel recorded a team-high 3 points for the Sabres.

TOP PERFORMERS: Auston Matthews leads the Maple Leafs with 30 points, scoring 16 goals and collecting 14 assists. William Nylander has five goals and five assists over the last 10 games for Toronto.

Eichel leads the Sabres with 34 points, scoring 16 goals and collecting 18 assists. Victor Olofsson has recorded four goals and five assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

LAST 10 GAMES: Sabres: 3-5-2, averaging three goals, 4.3 assists, 4.5 penalties and 11.2 penalty minutes while allowing 3.6 goals per game with a .881 save percentage.

Maple Leafs: 3-6-1, averaging 3.3 goals, 5.6 assists, 2.6 penalties and 5.2 penalty minutes while giving up 3.2 goals per game with a .903 save percentage.

Maple Leafs Injuries: None listed.

Sabres Injuries: Rasmus Dahlin: out (upper body).

Eichel scores twice, Sabres outlast Maple Leafs 6-4

By Mark Ludwiczak

Associated Press

November 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Ralph Krueger's first experience in the Buffalo-Toronto rivalry was a memorable one.

The first-year Sabres coach saw his team overcome an early deficit to beat the Maple Leafs 6-4 on Friday. It was a performance that the inconsistent Sabres needed — and one that Krueger won't soon forget.

"You can feel that it was a highlight day, that it was an experience outside the regular 82-game schedule," Krueger said. "You could feel it really from the get-go this morning and it was a lot of fun."

With large groups of Toronto fans all over the building, it added up to an electric atmosphere.

Jack Eichel led the way for Buffalo with two goals and an assist. Jimmy Vesey, Jeff Skinner, Casey Mittelstadt and Victor Olofsson also scored to help Buffalo improve to 12-10-4. Linus Ullmark made 25 saves.

"We hadn't beat them in a while so it's good to get the two points and I think we needed it as a group as well," Eichel said. "It's two cities that are pretty close to each other and the Leafs have such a big following and a lot of people travel over the border to watch these games. We'd obviously like to see more Buffalo fans in the crowd but it's a little extra motivation."

It was Toronto's first loss under new coach Sheldon Keefe, who replaced Mike Babcock on Nov. 20. John Tavares had two goals for the Maple Leafs, and Dmytro Timashov and Kasper Kapanen also scored. Michael Hutchinson made 30 saves.

"We had a good start to the game ... but I think it got away from us," center Auston Matthews said. "Regroup and get ready for tomorrow."

The fast-paced game was the first half of a home-and-home series, with the two sides meeting again Saturday night in Toronto.

The Leafs were all over Buffalo at the start, opening up a 2-0 lead, before the Sabres turned the tables and answered with four straight goals in the second period.

Tavares opened the scoring with 1:06 remaining in the first period, collecting a setup from winger Ilya Mikheyev in the right circle for an easy finish. Tavares picked up his second of the game 1:21 into the second, poking home a rebound after his initial shot fell wide.

"We got the lead ... we just weren't very hard on pucks and we were sloppy coming through the neutral zone," Tavares said. "We kept shooting ourselves in the foot."

Skinner began Buffalo's surge 5:45 into the second, taking a drop pass from Johan Larsson and beating Michael Hutchinson to the glove side for his 10th goal of the season.

Eichel evened the score midway through the second, racing out of the penalty box and ripping a hard wrist shot into the top corner. It was his 15th goal of the year.

"The way he can take over games, it's impressive," winger Marcus Johansson said about Eichel. "Not a lot of guys can do that. He's so dominant when he gets going like that."

Mittelstadt made it 3-2 with 7:52 left in the second, redirecting a shot from the point by defenseman Marco Scandella. It was Mittelstadt's first point since Oct. 22, snapping a streak of 15 games.

Olofsson made it 4-2 before the end of the second on a terrific setup by Eichel. The Buffalo captain danced in the offensive zone — taking the puck from Toronto defenseman Jake Muzzin and spinning him around — before spotting Olofsson in the right circle, and the defenseman beat Hutchinson high to the glove side.

Timashov got the Leafs back in it 6:50 into the third, burying Jason Spezza's feed from the slot with a one-timer.

Vesey restored Buffalo's two-goal lead midway through the third, taking advantage of a bad Toronto miscue. Vesey stole the puck from Andreas Johnsson in the slot and beat Hutchinson with a deke through the goalie's legs.

Kapanen made it 5-4 with 7:50 remaining, tucking a shot inside the right post on a pass from Nic Petan.

Toronto's best chance to tie it late came on a shot by Matthews from close range with 1:37 remaining; Ullmark denied Matthews with his glove.

Eichel sealed it with an empty-net goal with 27 seconds remaining.

NOTES: The Sabres again dressed seven defenseman and 11 forwards. It's a strategy that coach Krueger has utilized in recent games. C Curtis Lazar, LW Evan Rodrigues and C Jean-Sebastien Dea were scratched for Buffalo. ... Sabres D Rasmus Rahlin remains out with a concussion. Dahlin is on injured reserve. ... He missed his second game after being injured on Nov. 25 against Tampa Bay.

UP NEXT

The Maple Leafs and Sabres meet again Saturday night in Toronto.

'Founders Night' celebration to mark 50th anniversary of awarding of Sabres' franchise

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
December 1, 2019

Dec. 2, 1969.

If you check the history books, it has a famous place in aviation history as the date of the first Boeing 747 jumbo jet preview, with 191 passengers -- mostly media -- on a flight from Seattle to New York City.

In Buffalo, the date has a much more significant meaning. Monday will mark the 50th anniversary of the date the National Hockey League awarded an expansion franchise to Seymour H. Knox III and his brother, Northrup R. Knox, to be operated in Western New York.

On Dec. 2, 2019, the Sabres will play the New Jersey Devils in KeyBank Center and will celebrate "Founders Night" in tribute to the birth of the franchise.

Family members of both Knox brothers will be on the ice for a pregame ceremony and video presentation. Family members of the original board of directors also will be recognized throughout the night.

There will be a pregame happy hour in the Labatt Blue Zone bar with \$5 beer specials, food sampling from corporate partners and live music.

The main pavilion will have a birthday theme. Fans will have the opportunity to take a photo with a Sabres-themed 50th birthday cake and sign a giant birthday card for the team on the 100-level concourse.

It was a multi-year process for the Knox brothers to get an NHL team. Buffalo, remember, was passed over in the 1967 expansion that doubled the NHL from six to 12 teams and created a Western Division of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Minnesota and Oakland.

With attendance lagging in Oakland, the Knox brothers intended to purchase the Seals early in 1969 and planned to move them to Buffalo, but the NHL blocked the move. CBS, which carried NHL games at the time, wanted the lucrative Bay Area television market to remain in the league. And the league was planning more expansion.

The Knoxes eventually landed 20 percent of the Seals as a way to get deeper embedded in the hockey world and push support for an expansion franchise in Buffalo. They paid \$6 million to join the Vancouver Canucks as new franchises for the 1970-71 season and were officially branded as the "Sabres" on May 22, 1970.

Neither Buffalo nor Vancouver has won a Stanley Cup in their 50 years, but both teams have come close. The Canucks have been to the Cup final three times, first losing in a sweep to the New York Islanders in 1982 and then dropping a pair of Game 7s, at the New York Rangers in 1994, and at home to Boston in 2011. The Sabres' two trips ended in Game 6 losses to Philadelphia in 1975 and Dallas in 1999.

Today, both teams are in rebuilding mode. The Sabres are in the NHL's longest playoff drought, dating to 2011, while the Canucks have missed the postseason for the last four years and have not won a series since their '11 run to within one game of hockey's ultimate prize. They will meet Saturday afternoon in Vancouver's Rogers Arena during Buffalo's three-game Western road trip.

Injured Hughes out for Devils

As for Monday's game, the Sabres will meet a New Jersey team that it battered, 7-2, in the home opener on Oct. 5. The Devils are last in the Metropolitan Division at 9-12-4 and will be without No. 1 overall pick Jack Hughes, who sat out Saturday's 4-0 loss to the Rangers with a lower-body injury.

Hughes was injured when he blocked a shot in Thursday's win in Montreal and sat out practice Friday. He's officially listed as day to day. The 18-year-old has four goals, seven assists and a minus-8 rating in 24 games of his rookie season.

The Sabres closed a difficult November by getting points in four of their last five games. The 2-1-2 stretch ended with Saturday's 2-1 overtime loss in Toronto. It was the fourth straight game stretching past 60 minutes that the Sabres have lost, three on deciding goals and one in a shootout.

All-Star balloting opens

Fan voting is open for NHL All-Star Weekend. For the fifth straight year, fans will determine the four captains for the division teams that will participate in the 3-on-3 tournament Jan. 26 in St. Louis.

Fans can cast votes online at NHL.com/Vote and via the NHL app for one player from each division, without regard to position. Voting concludes at 11:59 p.m. ET on Dec. 20, with the top vote-getters by division named captains.

Fans are permitted to select as few as one player and a maximum of four players per ballot. The maximum number of ballots cast per 24-hour period for each fan is 10.

For the first time, players have the opportunity to earn a donation to the charitable organization of their choice as part of the voting process. The player with the most retweets on Twitter and the player with the most likes on Instagram across all of his posts that use the hashtag #NHLAllStar will each receive a \$25,000 donation to the charity of his choice.

Jack Eichel has represented the Sabres in the All-Star Game the last two years. Jeff Skinner joined Eichel for last year's game in San Jose.

Power-play failures loom large in Sabres' overtime loss to Leafs

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2019

TORONTO -- Rasmus Ristolainen had scored his first career goal against his bitter rival and led a Buffalo Sabres defense corps that prevented the Toronto Maple Leafs from scoring a goal at 5 on 5.

Ristolainen, however, had no interest in discussing what he or his teammates did well Saturday night in Scotiabank Arena.

"Personally, I just want to win," Ristolainen lamented following a 2-1 overtime loss. "It doesn't matter how it comes. We need wins."

The results could change if coach Ralph Krueger fixes the Sabres' broken power play, which is an abysmal 1-for-37 over its last 13 games. Buffalo had zero shots on goal in its two opportunities against the Leafs. Jack Eichel and company could barely cycle the puck in the offensive zone on the man advantage.

That made the difference during a game in which Carter Hutton delivered 41 saves, the Sabres' defense prevented the dangerous scoring chances that doomed them against the Leafs last season and the Eichel-led top line had 16 shot attempts.

"For sure the power play is just not functioning at the moment and we have to stick with it, but there are so many good things happening in and around the game," Krueger said. "That is truly one of the sore spots that we'd have after a game like this. They get one, we don't. I think it's the difference in the end, but we have to continue to work on elements of the game we don't like and that's one of them."

The Sabres' power play ranked second in the National Hockey League during their 20-point October. However, they converted at a league-worst 2.7 percent while accumulating nine points in 14 November games.

The top unit, led by Eichel, seemed to be gaining momentum during its three-game road trip to Boston, Florida and Tampa Bay, and broke out of a slump when Ristolainen scored during a 3-2 loss to the Bruins on Nov. 21.

However, their play has deteriorated since Rasmus Dahlin suffered a concussion during the second period of a 5-2 loss at Tampa Bay last Monday. That forced Krueger to experiment with different personnel.

Ristolainen replaced Dahlin as the quarterback on the top power play and Marcus Johansson moved to the top unit when he returned from an upper-body injury Wednesday against Calgary. Victor Olofsson, who has scored six of his 10 goals on the power play, is no longer positioned in the right-wing circle.

Jeff Skinner has also been bumped down to the second unit. The Sabres had trouble entering the offensive zone when they received their first power play with 1:53 remaining in the first period.

"I felt like maybe that's the part today we weren't quite connected," Johansson said. "We need to win more pucks. We had some looks, but we have to get the puck back and get set up again and go back after it. I felt like we had that one chance and we had to go back and get it. That makes it hard. We just put this group together. We have to work on it a little bit and it will get better."

The Sabres seemed to lose momentum when their first chance resulted in zero shots on goal, and the Maple Leafs (13-11-4) took advantage with Johansson in the penalty box for slashing in the second period.

William Nylander knifed through the right-wing circle and went uncovered through the slot before lifting a backhanded shot over Hutton's shoulder for a 1-0 lead with 5:30 remaining. The Sabres' penalty kill had went 6-for-6 over its previous two games after allowing a goal in nine straight.

The Sabres (12-10-5) salvaged their November with points in four of five games, including a 6-4 win over Toronto in KeyBank Center on Friday night. However, effective special teams over the past month could have helped them trim their 12-point deficit behind the first-place Boston Bruins.

Entering Saturday, the Sabres ranked 19th with 26 goals at 5 on 5 since Nov. 1. That's more than the Nashville Predators, St. Louis Blues and Tampa Bay Lightning, among others.

"I think we had some good looks," Ristolainen said of the power play. "Maybe we just need to get more simple and shoot the puck more."

The Sabres received their second opportunity at 11:32 into the second period when Johan Larsson was slashed by John Tavares in the offensive zone. The myriad of errors continued. Olofsson turned the puck over, Colin Miller had trouble handling a pass at the blue line and Brandon Montour was called for offside.

The power play's problems began Oct. 16, when the Sabres went 1-for-7 during a 5-2 loss at Anaheim. The Ducks pressured the puck to prevent Eichel and Olofsson from setting up in their respective spots. That forced Dahlin to make quick decisions and resulted in misfired passes.

Other opponents have used a similar strategy and have increased the pressure with a focus on stopping Eichel and Olofsson.

"We find there are scoring chances there and there is opportunity there," Krueger said Saturday morning. "The momentum has been extremely negative for the power play and as with other components when they're not working, we stay on the topic. We're looking at video, we're looking at changing personnel here and there. I think with Dahlin out it's definitely changed the PP look and we need to adapt to that."

Despite the power play generating no momentum, the Sabres tied the score with 13:02 remaining in the third period on Ristolainen's drive to the net. The defenseman, like Nylander, cut through the right-wing circle before finishing with a far-side backhand shot.

The Sabres were the better team for much of the third period. Sam Reinhart hit the post for a second time, and Marco Scandella twice kept the puck from crossing the goal line. Olofsson then had two scoring chances from the slot during overtime.

However, Tavares gave the Leafs a win with his wrist shot with 3:15 remaining. The Sabres found some solace in the fact they have improved their 5 on 5 game, particularly on defense, over the past week, but they know effective special teams could be the missing piece.

"It definitely gets in your head a little bit, but you can't dwell on it," Johansson said. "You have to go out and execute it."

It was a terrible November at times but Sabres' season wasn't rendered moot

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2019

TORONTO -- Good riddance to November. Let's get Santa in here and see if the Sabres' fortunes get any better.

When they suffered a shootout loss Oct. 28 to Arizona in the final game of the month, the Sabres were 9-2-2 and first overall in the NHL standings. At the close of business on Halloween, their 20 points left them tied with Boston and one point behind Washington for the top spot.

The calendar flipped and so did the Sabres' fortunes.

Saturday's 2-1 overtime loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs left Buffalo at 3-8-3 for the month. That's just one point ahead of hapless Detroit for the fewest number of November points in the league with nine.

The Sabres are nowhere close to being the league's best team like they were in October. They also should be nowhere close to being the worst team like they almost were in November.

Frankly, the Sabres are a hard club to gauge right now. It feels in some ways like they're miles out of the playoff hunt already but everyone feeling that way needs to look at the standings.

You have to wipe your eyes a couple times when you do it. The Sabres are one point out of a playoff spot. One. It was the difference in Saturday's result, as they fell a point behind the Leafs.

They have one more point than Montreal. Two more points than Tampa Bay, which really makes that 0-3 mark against the Lightning tougher to swallow.

The Sabres finished the month 2-1-2. And those five games came after a regulation loss in Boston where they dominated the defending Eastern Conference champions most of the night, only to see Tuukka Rask go all Dominik Hasek on them and steal a game.

That's a pretty good response from a 1-7-1 disaster over the month's first nine games.

"We had a stretch of learning and growing there," coach Ralph Krueger said after Saturday's defeat. "We ran into some injuries which allowed us to see a lot of different looks and a lot of different people."

The Sabres have played 11 forwards and seven defensemen for several games in this stretch. Part of it is all their injuries up front. Another part is the need to get their overly stacked defense corps into games.

"If I look at this stretch since Boston, the last six games we're really, really pleased with the way the team is settling into a pretty consistent game here that gives us a chance every night," Krueger said. "We've been involved in excellent games against some of the strongest teams in the National Hockey League. It's about having the mental strength now to take that into every game we play and just continuing to build forward. We feel to be in a good place."

Krueger came in here at training camp and you had players fawning all over him like he was some psychological truth whisperer. When they started 8-1-1, you wondered if it was real. Lots of underlying numbers were encouraging.

The fool's gold last year was all the overtime and shootout wins. Seven of the 10 victories in the November winning streak came after either 60 or 65 minutes. This year, the issue driving things out of whack is special teams.

In October, the Sabres led the league with 14 power-play goals and were second in conversions at 29.8%. In November, they were a sickly 1 for 37. Yes, 1 for 37. As in 2.7%.

The penalty kill was also in the bottom five of the league in November. Perhaps assistant coach Don Granato can help in these areas now that he's back in the fold after his near-death bout with pneumonia and a blood disorder. Krueger talked about having a fresh set of eyes and, from this view, it's what the Sabres need.

Put just about anybody on the power play at this point. Even guys you might not expect. How could they be any worse?

The height of the Sabres' frustration came late in the second period when Conor Sheary had a golden opportunity on a 2-on-1 break off a Jeff Skinner feed. But Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen speared the puck in his glove. The fans erupted until they suddenly noticed a replay review taking place.

After a couple minutes, the play was ruled no goal and the NHL sent out its cursory explanation that said there was no conclusive way to tell if the puck was over the goal line. Memo to the NHL: In 2019, it's long past time to have puck sensors for plays like this.

Social media was outraged at the result of the review. Of course, given the state of social media, what else is new? But while it certainly looked like the puck in Andersen's glove was over the line, there was no way to definitively see it, which is the standard you have to use.

That said, how about burying a chance instead of firing a puck into a guy's glove?

Want another November nugget? Here's one: Sheary had no goals. In fact, since getting two on opening night in Pittsburgh, he's had just one other one and that came Oct. 17 in Los Angeles. He's not the only player bathed in a huge drought.

Goalie Carter Hutton went 0-5-3 in November and was terrible at times in clearly losing the No. 1 job to Linus Ullmark. But he was on his game Saturday. Hutton made 41 saves on a back-to-back in a tough visiting barn. Still, John Tavares' overtime winner simply can't be flubbed with the glove.

The Sabres did not make Hutton available postgame, which is exceptionally out of character for them. After all the rough games he's had this month, to make 41 saves and still lose had to be crushing.

Hutton and the entire team can take solace that this season isn't dead. Far from it. December will be tough, including next week's trip to Western Canada, two games against Boston, another trip back here to Toronto and rugged home games against St. Louis, Nashville and Tampa Bay.

But the Sabres are still alive. Even after what had the look of a season-killing month. The last 10 days changed the needle on the narrative.

"We started the season well, had the dive there and now we're getting our game back," said Rasmus Ristolainen, who scored Saturday's only goal. "We just have to keep going and keep working harder."

The Wraparound: Toronto Maple Leafs 2, Buffalo Sabres 1 (OT)

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2019

TORONTO – The rivalry is alive and well.

After enduring five consecutive losses to their foes up the Queen Elizabeth Way, the Buffalo Sabres split their home-and-home against the Toronto Maple Leafs with a 2-1 overtime defeat Saturday night in Scotiabank Arena.

The Sabres (12-11-5) are 2-1-2 in their last five games and finished November with a 3-8-3 record. The Leafs (13-11-4), meanwhile, avoided losing back-to-back games to Buffalo for the first time since Feb. 11-March 17, 2017.

Rasmus Ristolainen scored for the Sabres and Carter Hutton had 41 saves in goal. William Nylander broke a scoreless tie with his 10th goal of the season in the second period, and John Tavares scored the game-winner 1:45 into overtime.

Fine first: The Sabres were outshot, 11-8, in the first period but mostly outplayed the Leafs. Following a Toronto turnover, Jimmy Vesey retrieved the puck in the offensive zone and floated a cross-ice pass to Marcus Johansson, whose shot from atop the crease was stopped by goalie Frederik Andersen.

Sam Reinhart also hit the post and Jake McCabe fired a one-timer from the left-wing circle that was turned away by Andersen.

Help wanted: The Sabres played well defensively in the first period, as illustrated by Eichel's back check to knock Zach Hyman off the puck. Buffalo cleaned up every rebound in front of the net and avoided any breakdowns in the defensive zone.

Moments after losing his stick, Henri Jokiharju dove across the slot to prevent the Leafs from making a centering pass. The Sabres have a negative-12 goal differential in the first period of games this season.

Opening salvo: The Leafs broke the scoreless tie with 14:30 remaining in the second period when Nylander cut across the slot and lifted the puck over Hutton's shoulder. The Sabres entered Saturday 2-7-2 when their opponent scored first, and they had killed each of their previous six penalties after allowing a power-play goal in nine consecutive games.

Momentum swing: The Sabres seemed to gain momentum after Hutton's save on Kasper Kapanen midway through the second period. Moments later, Jeff Skinner protected the puck from Tyson Barrie along the boards and found Conor Sheary in front with a backdoor pass.

Andersen used his glove to stop Sheary's one-timer shot. The play was reviewed to see if the puck crossed the goal line while in Andersen's glove, however, the call on the ice stood.

Late flurry: The Sabres had a flurry of chances in the latter portion of the second period, despite having a disastrous second power play. Skinner retrieved his own rebound and had enough time to shoot a backhand from the crease, only to be stopped by Andersen, who dropped his stick moments earlier.

Additionally, Victor Olofsson hit the crossbar with under a minute remaining in the second period. The Sabres were outshot, 16-11, in the second and entered Saturday 0-10-1 when trailing after two periods this season.

Toronto, meanwhile, entered the game 8-0-2 when leading after two periods.

Drive to the net: Ristolainen tied the score, 1-1, with 13:02 remaining in regulation when he skated through the right-wing circle, skated toward the net and lifted the puck over Andersen's shoulder.

The goal was Ristolainen's second of the season and the first of his career against Toronto.

Scratches: Forwards Curtis Lazar and Jean-Sebastien Dea were the Sabres' healthy scratches. Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin (concussion), winger Kyle Okposo (concussion) forward Evan Rodrigues (lower body), forward Vladimir Sobotka (knee surgery) and Tage Thompson (upper body) remain out because of injury.

All-Star: Voting started Saturday for the NHL All-Star Game, which will be held in St. Louis on Jan. 26. Eichel, Skinner and Dahlin are candidates on the All-Star ballot to captain the Atlantic Division in the 3-on-3 event.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to not practice Sunday and will host the New Jersey Devils on Monday night in KeyBank Center. A lower-body injury kept rookie center Jack Hughes out of the Devils' lineup Saturday against the New York Rangers.

Sabres game day: Power play adjusting without Rasmus Dahlin

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2019

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (12-10-4) vs. Toronto Maple Leafs (12-11-4)

Where: Scotiabank Arena, Toronto.

When: 7 p.m.

TV: MSG.

Radio: WGR 550.

Power-play woes: The Sabres are in a 1-for-35 slump on the power play after failing to score on their two opportunities Friday night. Rasmus Ristolainen and Marcus Johansson have been used on the top unit with Rasmus Dahlin out the past two games.

Additionally, Victor Olofsson was not used in the right-wing circle against the Leafs. Instead, Olofsson was positioned in the slot with Johansson in the right circle. The result was only two shots on goal in two power plays.

Losing Dahlin was another blow to the Sabres' power play. His seven points on the man advantage rank third on the team, and he ranks second behind Jack Eichel with 15 assists this season.

Coach Ralph Krueger has used video study and personnel changes to try to spark his special teams. While the penalty kill is 6-for-6 over the past two games, the power play continues to struggle.

"We just need to stick with it," Krueger said of the power play. "We find there are scoring chances there and there is opportunity there. The momentum has been extremely negative for the power play and as with other components when they're not working, we stay on the topic. We're looking at video, we're looking at changing personnel here and there. I think with Dahlin out it's definitely changed the PP look and we need to adapt to that. I feel it's very due for a goal tonight."

Sabres' lineup: Krueger will not reveal his lineup until shortly before puck drop. The Sabres will either use six defensemen with 12 forwards or seven defensemen with 11 forwards.

The Sabres used the latter Friday against the Leafs, as forwards Curtis Lazar and Jean-Sebastien Dea were scratched. Defenseman Colin Miller returned to the lineup after playing only twice in the previous eight games.

"I've actually always liked it as a coach," Krueger said of dressing seven defensemen. "I've used it lots of times in the past and it gives you options to really mix different guys into the lineup. You see the top-end guys don't get extra ice time actually out of it. It's more of a sharing of guys that sometimes don't get the minutes, and I think they're more into the game when they do that. For the D, when you're playing the pace we are right now against the level of teams we're playing right now, they have more energy for their battles when you play with seven. It's also difficult for the opposition to read or react to your lineup."

Here's how the Sabres lined up Friday against Toronto:

Olofsson-Eichel-Reinhart
Skinner-Larsson-Sheary
Girgensons-Asplund-Dea
Mittelstadt-Johansson-Vesey

Montour-Ristolainen
McCabe-Bogosian
Scandella-Jokiharju (Miller)
Ullmark in goal
Lazar not out there.

Goalie change: Carter Hutton will start in goal for only the third time in nine games. The 33-year-old is 0-5-2 with a .869 save percentage in his past seven starts, though he has not received much help from his defense.

Hutton is 3-1 with a .916 save percentage in five career games against the Leafs.

Streaking: Jimmy Vesey has scored in each of the past three games after enduring a 20-game goalless drought to start the season. The 26-year-old has also contributed on the Sabres' penalty kill and his 20 shots on goal over the past eight games rank fifth on the team.

"To be honest, even when I didn't have a goal I thought I was playing some good games right before I finally scored," Vesey said. "It's a funky game sometimes. I guess the percentages were bound to change. I saw that I scored the first one on my 30th shot of the year. That's not good, but you have to think that's not going to last."

Leafs' lineup: Toronto is expected to start Frederik Andersen in goal. Andersen is 10-3 with a .919 save percentage in 14 career games against the Sabres. Additionally, Leafs forward Alexander Kerfoot is eligible to return from a two-game suspension.

Kerfoot has five goals among eight points in 22 games this season. He was suspended for a hit on his former teammate, Colorado Avalanche defenseman Erik Johnson. Toronto did not hold a morning skate Saturday, but here is how it lined up Friday in KeyBank Center:

Johnsson-Matthews-Nylander
Mikheyev-Tavares-Hyman
Petan-Spezza-Kapanen
Engvall-Gauthier-Timashov

Rielly-Ceci
Muzzin-Holl
Dermott-Barrie

Hutchinson
Andersen

Rivalry: Eichel has 19 points in 14 career games against Toronto, including eight in seven road games. His 1.36 points per game against the Leafs are his second-best career output against any NHL team, trailing only his 1.64 points per game against the Ottawa Senators.

Eichel has scored more goals against Toronto (12) than any other opponent. The 23-year-old entered Saturday on an eight-game point streak, and his 15 points during that span lead the NHL.

Eichel is on pace for 50 goals among 107 points, which would be the highest goal and point totals by a Sabre since Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny in 1992-93.

Opposing player to watch: Auston Matthews wasn't pleased with his performance Friday night in Buffalo. The Leafs center was a minus-3 in 24:48 and committed a turnover that led to Vesey's third-period goal.

Matthews has 16 goals among 30 points in 27 games this season. He has nine goals among 14 points in 12 career games against the Sabres. Buffalo has not won back-to-back games against Toronto since 2017.

"They made some adjustments in the third period that we're going to have to counter against," Krueger said. "I think above all it's going to be an angry Toronto team after losing last night. We're expecting their absolute A-game. We need to be strong defensively here to have a chance tonight and we believe in that opportunity."

Linus Ullmark delivers big saves to back Sabres in 'special win'

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 29, 2019

Linus Ullmark smiled at his stall inside the KeyBank Center dressing room Friday night and delivered a harsh self-assessment of a performance that showed the resolve and reliability needed from a No. 1 goalie.

Ullmark lamented the two third-period goals he allowed in the Buffalo Sabres' 6-4 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs. He didn't think he played well in his fourth career game against the Leafs and expressed relief that his teammates, led by Jack Eichel's three points, created enough offense to snap a five-game skid against their rivals.

Eichel, on the other hand, gushed over Ullmark's 25-save performance, including the back-to-back stops on William Nylander in the first period. Those glove saves on Nylander, including one on a breakaway, gave the Sabres (12-10-4) the momentum to rally from a two-goal deficit.

"Huge," Eichel said without hesitation. "As a team I think it gets us a little momentum when your goaltender is playing like that. You're really confident. He made so many big saves throughout the whole night and huge opportunities, too. There's key times in the night he was making a lot of big saves for us. It's so good to see him have success tonight and get the W."

Ullmark, 26, has emerged as the Sabres' No. 1 goalie over the past three weeks, recording a .905 save percentage while starting six of the past eight games. He's made important saves to buy enough time for his teammates to find their game during a month in which Buffalo has only three regulation wins.

The Sabres appeared destined for their sixth consecutive loss against the Leafs (12-11-4), when Nylander earned a breakaway a little over six minutes into the game. However, Ullmark made a glove save on his former teammate and made another less than two minutes later when Nylander skated down the ice for a 2 on 1.

Ullmark also made a glove save on Jake Muzzin, but he could not hold off the Leafs any longer. John Tavares scored his first of two goals when he was left wide open in the right-wing circle for a 1-0 lead with 1:06 left in the first period.

"Obviously it's nice to make those big saves early in the catcher against (Nylander) as well, especially with our history together, but they're such a good team," Ullmark, who played with Nylander for MODO in the Swedish Hockey League, said. "So, even though you make four big saves in the first period they'll have more chances coming. That's what happened later."

The Leafs did not relent. Tavares got a fortuitous bounce when his shot ricocheted off the end boards and toward the front of the net. Toronto's captain managed to poke the puck away from Ullmark and across the goal line for a 2-0 lead at 1:21 into the second period.

The Sabres' offense finally woke up when Jeff Skinner scored his 10th goal of the season to cut the deficit to one. During the first of two failed power plays — the Sabres' slump on the advantage is now at 1 for 35 — Ullmark made another breakaway stop, this time on Kasper Kapanen.

Ullmark was calm in the face of chaos. He didn't always react that way last season, when he recorded a .882 save percentage during an 11-start stretch from Feb. 15 through March 31. The difference, Ullmark said, is having played 76 games in the National Hockey League.

"A lot of things come from experience. I'm in my second year on this level and goaltending is so much about experience and routines," he said. "Whenever you play a lot you can see a lot of situations develop and it's easier to make a read, which is why it looks and feels like the goalie is so composed. That's what happens when you look at guys like Carey Price or Pekka Rinne or all the elite goalies. They always look composed because they know what's going on in front of them. They've seen that situation develop like 20,000 times."

Ullmark stood tall during a second-period Leafs power play, covering enough of the short side to force Nylander to hit the post. Moments later, Eichel exited the penalty box and tied the score, 2-2, during a 2 on 1.

Casey Mittelstadt and Victor Olofsson also scored in the second period, pushing the Sabres' lead to 4-2. They managed to improve to 11-0 this season when leading after two periods, however, defensive lapses caused coach Ralph Krueger to describe the third period as "stressful."

Dmytro Timashov cut the Sabres' lead to one with a shot from atop the left-wing circle with 13:10 remaining in regulation. Jimmy Vesey scored for the third time in as many games to make it 5-3, only for Kapanen to score on a backdoor pass from Nic Petan.

"It's a tough league to go out and perform every night," Ullmark said. "I personally didn't think I played a very strong game today. I probably could have done a lot more for my boys to keep that third and fourth one out of the net. ... Sometimes you have to say thank you for the coffee and tip your hat to the guys that scored the goal and sometimes you have to kick yourself in the butt and say that's enough and be better."

The Sabres' defensive-zone coverage broke down at times during a late Leafs barrage in the third period. Auston Matthews managed to retrieve the puck in the left-wing circle with no one around him while Toronto had an extra attacker, but the center's shot was stopped by Ullmark with 1:36 remaining.

Eichel then gave the Sabres an empty-netter insurance goal to help them take over third place in the Atlantic Division. Krueger has not named Ullmark his starting goalie and was quick to include Carter Hutton during his postgame news conference.

Ullmark is not taking this recent stretch for granted, though. He planned on meeting with goaltending coach Mike Bales on Saturday morning in Toronto to analyze what went wrong on the third-period goals against the Leafs and experience has taught him the importance of consistency.

"It's definitely been a test for him," Krueger said of Ullmark. "We like the way he's growing through the experience. I think it's one he's ready for, and we'll continue to work with the pair of Ullmark and Hutton, but at the moment Linus has had some responsibility. We look at his last couple of wins, he's been tested at critical phases. We've left guys alone in front and he's had to make big saves. I thought it was a special win for him tonight."

There's no downplaying it: Jack Eichel loves beating the Leafs

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 29, 2019

When the topic of the Toronto Maple Leafs was brought up to him on Thursday afternoon, Jack Eichel looked and sounded like someone told him he was getting pork loin and broccoli for Thanksgiving dinner.

Eichel stuck with the standard cliches. Get back on track. Big two points. Always important against a divisional opponent. Blah-blah-blah. Eichel knew exactly what he was doing. He wasn't going to make any headlines or drive any news cycles, particularly because the media crowd around his locker included several print and TV types from Toronto.

Eichel was completely full of it. I wanted to talk Leafs, Leaf hate, an ugly losing streak against them, and he wasn't buying what I was selling. We both knew the deal. As the captain, he was expertly playing the game behind the game.

Then came the real game late Friday afternoon. And Eichel beat the stuffing out of the Leafs.

He played 21 minutes, 36 seconds and posted his sixth game this season of at least three points. Two goals and a highlight-reel assist on Victor Olofsson's second-period rocket. A plus-4 rating. Eight shots on goal. And a 15-7 dominance in the faceoff circle.

The Sabres were in serious trouble early in the second period in a 2-0 hole. Then they scored four goals — what feels like a week's worth for this group — in a span of just over 13 minutes. Eichel got the empty-netter with 27 seconds left and the Sabres had a scintillating 6-4 win over the Leafs.

Please drive home safely, Toronto fans.

"The Leafs have such a big following and a lot of people travel over the border to watch these games," Eichel said. "We'd obviously like to see more Buffalo fans in the crowd, but it's a little extra motivation."

There's a window into his real thoughts on the Leafs. Eichel has played 14 career games against Toronto and has 12 goals and seven assists. That's 1.36 points per game and the goal total and per-game goal average (0.86) is his most against any opponent. He knows darn well what these games mean.

"He's been playing insanely well for quite a bit now," said fellow Bostonian Jimmy Vesey, suddenly no slouch himself with goals in three straight games. "When he wants to go, not many people are catching him, and when he hangs on to the puck, he does it as good as anyone. When he wants to, he can take over a game. You definitely saw that tonight."

Vesey was referring to the game's signature plays. Eichel's first goal came when he burst out of the penalty box with two minutes of energy built up. Zach Bogosian, whose return has made quite a difference on the penalty kill, got the puck up to Eichel and he flew through the neutral zone. His shot whizzed past Michael Hutchinson to get the Sabres even at 2-2.

It was 3-2 when Eichel then made poor Jake Muzzin look silly in the Leafs end. It was dipsy-doo-dunkaroo around a veteran defenseman with two Stanley Cup rings long enough to find Victor Olofsson in the faceoff circle for a laser that made it 4-2.

"I was just trying to hold possession and Olie finds a great little hole there," Eichel said. "That's a pretty impressive shot there. The goalie is able to see it and it's just Olie having one of the best shots in our league and beating a goalie clean. Real impressive by him. It was a good moment in the game for us to extend that and keep going."

"His skating and puck protection are world-class," Vesey said. "Definitely on display in that sequence. It's fun to watch."

Eichel thoroughly outplayed Toronto's Auston Matthews, who clocked in at 24:48 but was mostly invisible, with only one shot on goal in the game's first 56 minutes and a minus-3 rating.

(I didn't agree at the time, but maybe Mike Babcock knew what he was doing with ice time compared to new coach Sheldon Keefe. Matthews' career-high total didn't result in much of anything and William Nylander's 23:10 resulted in a minus-4 rating).

Eichel was all about sharing the wealth after this one. He marveled at Olofsson's release. He praised the work of Linus Ullmark, who made several key saves early in the game and has clearly wrested the No. 1 goalie slot from Carter Hutton. And he's loving seeing good friend Vesey finally getting rewarded for a couple weeks of strong play.

Coach Ralph Krueger was particularly enthused about Eichel's 200-foot game, which was highlighted by a diving backcheck to thwart John Tavares in the first period and quality work during the Leafs' 6-on-5 push for the tying goal in the final minute.

"He's a dynamic leader not only in the way he's communicating right now but in the way he's playing," Krueger said. "I was most excited about his last couple of minutes and how he came to play without the puck, how hard he defended with the goalie out. ... It was the work he did before (the empty-net goal) that shows Jack is maturing right in front of our eyes. Every day is fun, coaching Jack Eichel."

Eichel is up to 16 goals and 34 points in 26 games. He's seventh in the NHL in scoring and in the rare air where it's always been expected he'd land. One point ahead of Artemi Panarin, two ahead of Patrick Kane. Behind only the Edmonton dynamic duo of Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid, the Boston twosome of Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak, Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon and Washington's John Carlson.

It's pretty crazy how things can change. The victory pushed the Sabres back into third place in the Atlantic, ahead of the Leafs on points percentage even though both teams have 28. Yes, third in the Atlantic is a playoff spot for those of you scoring at home.

With a win Saturday night in Toronto and some help from Nashville in its game at Florida, the Sabres could jump into second. That's astonishing, given how bad things have gone this month.

Most fans probably have no idea of those points. The write-off-the-season level is understandably high but there's simply too many games left for that to be valid. The Sabres are 4-9-3 in their last 16 games, but they're suddenly 2-1-1 in the last four.

Imagine what might happen if they can score a power-play goal by Christmas (another 0-2 night dropped their slump to 1 for 35 the last 13 games).

Now the Sabres get to do it all again with the Leafs on Saturday night in Scotiabank Arena. It's a shame this is only four times a season. Especially when the games are in Buffalo, this is one wild rivalry.

"You can feel that it was a highlight day, that it was an experience outside the regular 82-game schedule," said Krueger, who got his first taste of Buffalo-Toronto frivolity on the ice and in the stands. "You could feel it really from the get-go this morning and it was a lot of fun."

Eichel certainly made it that way.

Casey Mittelstadt breaks out of slump with first goal in November

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 29, 2019

Casey Mittelstadt insists he never worried.

The 21-year-old has scored goals during each level in his career and this recent slump included some encouraging moments. However, Mittelstadt expressed a blend of relief and excitement following his goal Friday night in a 6-4 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Mittelstadt tipped Marco Scandella's shot past Leafs goalie Michael Hutchinson during the second period in KeyBank Center. The goal was Mittelstadt's fourth of the season and first in 17 games, a stretch dating back to a 4-3 win over the San Jose Sharks on Oct. 19.

Mittelstadt had only 13 shots on goal during that scoring drought, five of which occurred Monday at Tampa Bay, and had not recorded an assist since Oct. 16. The former eighth overall draft pick never doubted his skill, though.

One simple reminder kept him confident amid another difficult stretch in the National Hockey League.

"Obviously, it's been tough," Mittelstadt said. "There have been quite a few chances, especially in the last four or five games. Keep going, keep working on it, and I think the biggest thing for me is to remember why you got here and stick to it. Eventually it's going to go. Hopefully they come in bunches."

The goal to end the slump wasn't a remarkable display of skill, a fact Mittelstadt laughed about after the game. One motion with his stick deflected the puck into the net for a 3-2 lead with 7:52 remaining in the second period.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger never doubted Mittelstadt's ability and defended the young forward's play over the past two weeks. During his postgame news conference Friday, Krueger reminded the media that Mittelstadt faced a steep learning curve this season.

After all, learning a new defensive system is difficult for centers, particularly those with less NHL experience. There is more responsibility at the position and even Marcus Johansson, 29, is still adjusting to playing in the middle of the ice under Krueger.

Krueger has attempted to unburden Mittelstadt by moving him to the wing over the past two weeks. The Sabres are thin at center since Evan Rodrigues is out with a lower-body injury, however, playing on the outside over the past two weeks seems to have benefited Mittelstadt.

Mittelstadt scored 12 goals among 25 points in 77 games as a rookie last season.

"He works really hard to be a responsible two-way player and it's taken away from his offense, I believe," Krueger said of Mittelstadt. "Now that he has more comfort defensively we expect that offensive side. ... Still a project who, like a lot of our young players, is going to be exciting to watch grow."

Missing Babcock

Ralph Krueger did not have the opportunity to face his longtime friend Mike Babcock during this weekend home-and-home rivalry matchup. Babcock, who was fired as coach of the Leafs on Nov. 20, worked alongside Krueger for Team Canada during the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Krueger served as consultant for Babcock's coaching staff, and the tournament ended with a gold medal for Canada in Sochi, Russia. Krueger expressed disappointment when asked about Babcock's firing last week in Boston and revealed to the media Friday that he and his friend had spoken about this potential matchup during the summer.

"In the game of hockey there are no surprises," Krueger said. "Expect the unexpected all the time. We would have loved this back-to-back here. We were texting about it quite a bit through the summer and now it's not to

be, but I think as coaches we're conditioned to do the best we can with the day we have today and we also accept surprises."

Miller returns

Defenseman Colin Miller, who was arguably the club's top offseason acquisition, was in the Sabres' lineup for only the third time in nine games. Miller finished with a minus-2 rating and one shot on goal in 13:30 against the Leafs.

The 27-year-old was inserted into the lineup because Krueger decided to use seven defensemen for the fourth time in six games. Miller, though, was forced to play on the left side, a challenge considering he's a right-handed shot.

Krueger explained he views Miller as a valuable option there, but the move does require an adjustment.

"We actually like Colin's game on the left side," Krueger said. "We see him as a real option there. ... Learning to play [the left side] against the top players in the league is an adjustment, but we like the way Colin has been working on that and we see him as a strong option."

The Sabres acquired Miller from Vegas in June in exchange for a second-round draft pick in 2021 and a fifth-round draft pick in 2022. He is one of seven healthy defensemen on Buffalo's roster.

Penalty shot

Sabres rookie center Rasmus Asplund came within inches of scoring his first career goal, on a penalty shot no less. The 21-year-old was awarded the opportunity with 0.9 seconds remaining in regulation when he was tripped from behind on a drive to the net.

Leafs goalie Michael Hutchinson stopped Asplund's backhanded shot.

"I just thought that was a time and place to try something cool, so that's what I tried," Asplund said.

Rare air

With his goal in the second period Friday, Victor Olofsson joined Gilbert Perreault (1970-71) and Richard Martin (1971-72) as the only Sabres players to be the first rookies in the NHL with 10 goals.

Olofsson, 24, has 10 goals among 20 points in 26 games this season. He extended his point streak to six games and has 10 points in his last 11 games.

Dea, Lazar out

Krueger opted to scratch forwards Curtis Lazar and Jean-Sebastien Dea.

Lazar, 24, has been a scratch in two of the past three games. Dea, meanwhile, has appeared in one of three games since being recalled from the Rochester Americans.

The Wraparound: Sabres 6, Maple Leafs 4

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 29, 2019

Cheers erupted inside KeyBank Center when Toronto Maple Leafs center John Tavares scored for a second time for a two-goal lead Friday night over the Buffalo Sabres.

The Toronto fans were quiet for the rest of the second period. The Sabres roared back with four straight goals and won, 6-4, for their first victory over their rivals since March 26, 2018. Buffalo (12-10-4) had lost five straight games to Toronto (12-11-4) and have never endured a six-game skid since the rivalry began.

Jack Eichel had two goals with one assist, while Jeff Skinner, Casey Mittelstadt, Victor Olofsson and Jimmy Vesey also scored. Linus Ullmark had 25 saves and made his sixth start in eight games.

Dmytro Timashov and Kasper Kapanen had third-period goals for Toronto, which lost for the first time under new coach Sheldon Keefe.

Stopped: Ullmark made a pair of glove saves in the first period on William Nylander, the first of which came during a breakaway. The Sabres goalie's second save occurred during a 2-on-1 rush a little over two minutes later.

Captain Jack: Eichel also contributed to the Sabres' defense in the first period, skating back to prevent the Leafs from scoring on a 2 on 1. Eichel knocked the puck off Tavares' stick and Marco Scandella also had sound positioning to prevent a pass during the play. Eichel had a team-high four shots on goal in the first period.

Opening salvo: Following a failed power play, the Leafs took a 1-0 lead with 1:06 remaining in the first period when Tavares was left uncovered on the back door. Toronto's captain snapped a shot into the net on a pass from Ilya Mikheyev.

Second chance: Tavares scored his second of the game after missing the net on a breakaway and poking the rebound past Ullmark for a 2-0 lead with 18:39 left in the second period. Entering Friday, Tavares had 36 points in 30 career games against Buffalo.

Breakthrough: Skinner scored his 10th goal of the season with 13:57 remaining in the second period, when he collected a drop pass from Johan Larsson and ripped a wrist shot into the net from the right-wing circle to cut the deficit to 2-1.

Fast break: Eichel exited the penalty box and retrieved the puck in the neutral zone before scoring during a 2-on-1 rush to tie the score, 2-2, with 10:17 left in the second period. Eichel extended his point streak to eight games, and the goal was his 15th of the season.

Tip-in: Mittelstadt had gone 16 games without a goal and had only 13 shots during that span. That explains why the Sabres' bench erupted when the 21-year-old forward tipped Marco Scandella's shot into the net for a 3-2 lead with 7:52 remaining in the second period.

Quick strike: Eichel skated past Toronto defenseman Jake Muzzin to retrieve the puck in the offensive zone near the end of a Leafs power play and bought enough time until he could pass to Olofsson, whose shot from the left-wing circle beat goalie Michael Hutchinson for a 4-2 Sabres lead with 1:06 until the second intermission.

Olofsson extended his point streak to six games, and he has recorded at least one point in 10 of his last 11 games. The Sabres entered the game 10-0 this season when leading after two periods.

Response: The Sabres scored four goals only once in their previous six games. Their four goals and plus-3 goal differential in the second period Friday marked season highs for a single period.

Leafs' third: Timashov cut the Sabres' lead to 4-3 with 13:10 remaining in the regulation on a shot from atop the left-wing circle.

Streaking: Vesey scored his third goal in as many games by retrieving a loose puck in the slot and beating Hutchinson with a backhanded shot at 8:34 into the third period for a 5-3 lead.

Coverage: The Sabres had another defensive-zone lapse when Kapanen managed to gain possession in the slot and cut the deficit to one with 7:50 left in the third period.

Sold-out crowd: The team announced it sold 19,070 tickets Friday, the Sabres' third sellout of the season.

Injuries: The Sabres were without Rasmus Dahlin (concussion), Kyle Okposo (concussion), Evan Rodrigues (lower body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body) and Tage Thompson (upper body).

Next: The Sabres play the Maple Leafs in Toronto at 7 p.m. Saturday. Buffalo is 2-10-1 in the road portion of its previous 13 home-and-home series against the Leafs.

Sabres game day: Ralph Krueger working to fix struggling offense

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

November 29, 2019

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (11-10-4) vs. Toronto Maple Leafs (12-10-4)

Where: KeyBank Center.

When: 4 p.m.

TV: MSG.

Radio: WGR 550.

Adding offense: Coach Ralph Krueger said repeatedly throughout training camp that his players would have to sacrifice some offense in his defensive-zone structure. This isn't what Krueger envisioned, though.

The Sabres have scored the second-fewest goals (27) in the National Hockey League since Nov. 11, and they have a league-worst six points in 12 games during that span. The power play is in a 1-for-33 slump and a number of forwards are having trouble finishing.

Sam Reinhart has one goal in eight games, Jeff Skinner has one goal in seven games, Conor Sheary is without a goal in his past 17 games and Casey Mittelstadt has no goals with one assist in the past 16 games. Mittelstadt has only 13 shots during that span, five of which came Monday night in Tampa.

Krueger said the cause behind the struggling offense is "probably a lack of confidence," so what's the solution?

"We need to have a concentrated group and we need to continue on building our defensive foundation, which is becoming stronger and stronger, but now adding the offense will be the key," Krueger said. "And our power play, again, is the motor. I mean, it didn't score on so many chances [Wednesday]. It's got to break out of the shell and we have to keep working on that. For me, I think the solution to the offense will be a better power play, more effective scoring chances there, and that will carry into our 5-on-5 play."

Sabres' lineup: Linus Ullmark will start in goal for the sixth time in eight games. He has an .878 save percentage in three career games against Toronto.

Krueger won't reveal his lineup until pregame warmups.

Sabres defenseman Colin Miller has been a healthy scratch in six of the past eight games, and forward Curtis Lazar has been out of the lineup in two of the past three games. Here's how the Sabres lined up Wednesday night against the Calgary Flames:

Olofsson-Eichel-Reinhart
Skinner-Larsson-Sheary
Johansson-Mittelstadt-Vesey
Girgensons-Asplund-Dea

Scandella-Ristolainen
Montour-Bogolian
McCabe-Jokiharju

Rivalry: The Sabres have lost five straight against Toronto and have never endured a six-game losing streak in the rivalry. The two teams will play against Saturday in Scotiabank Arena, making this the first home-and-home between the two teams since Nov. 15-16, 2013.

The Sabres are 10-1-2 (two ties) all-time in the home portion of their 13 previous home-and-home series with the Maple Leafs and 2-10-1 in the road games. Buffalo is 70-30-8 at home against Toronto all-time.

The Sabres were swept by the Leafs (0-3-1) last season for the first time and haven't beaten them since a 3-2 road win on March 28, 2016. Buffalo's had not lost five in a row to Toronto since 1972.

Leafs' lineup: Backup goalie Michael Hutchinson will start for the Leafs. The 29-year-old is 0-4-1 with a 4.44 goals-against average and .879 save percentage in six games this season. Forward Alexander Kerfoot will serve the second and final game of his suspension for a hit on Colorado Avalanche defenseman Erik Johnson.

Here's how Toronto lined up during practice Thursday in KeyBank Center:

Johnsson-Matthews-Nylander
Mikheyev-Tavares-Hyman
Petan-Spezza-Kapanen
Engvall-Gauthier-Timashov/Shore
Kerfoot (suspended)

Rielly-Ceci
Muzzin-Holl
Dermott-Barrie
Marincin

Andersen
Hutchinson

Opposing player to watch: Leafs center John Tavares has only one goal over his past six games, however, he's had remarkable success against the Sabres since being drafted first overall in 2009. Tavares has 18 goals among 36 points in 30 career games against Buffalo.

Changes: The Leafs are 3-0 with a plus-10 goal differential since firing Mike Babcock and hiring Sheldon Keefe. They scored two power-play goals on five opportunities and allowed one goal on the penalty kill in those three games.

For context, the Leafs were 9-10-4 with a negative-7 goal differential and league's 18th-best power play under Babcock this season. Keefe was coach of the Toronto Marlies when they swept the Rochester Americans in the first round of the Calder Cup playoffs last April.

The Sabres get three out of four points against Toronto

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 30, 2019

(WGR 550) - The Sabres pulled up their boot straps and played two really good games against Toronto this weekend, taking three of four points.

Buffalo won its home game 6-4, while the Maple Leafs took the rematch in Toronto, 2-1 in overtime.

I really liked Buffalo's game on Saturday. Buffalo went into the third period down 1-0 and finally tied it when Jack Eichel hustled all around the offensive zone and Rasmus Ristolainen took a puck from the right point all the way to the net to convert his own rebound against Freddie Andersen, who absolutely stole this game for his team. Ristolainen played very well, partly because with seven defensemen dressed, No. 55 only played 19:17.

Buffalo kept coming at Andersen, but Sam Reinhart's tip hit the joint that joins the crossbar and post. It was Reinhart's second post of the game.

John Tavares won the game with a wicked wrist shot from almost the blue line that wasn't tipped and wasn't screened. It hit Carter Hutton's glove and went in. It really was a shame because Hutton was great during this game, making 41 saves. With about 24 seconds left in regulation, he absolutely robbed Andreas Johnsson coming across with a pad save.

With just 12 seconds left, Hutton got a piece of Auston Matthews shot, but it got through him and was slowly heading to the net. Marco Scandella got back and swooped the puck out to preserve a point.

Hutton came into the game really struggling, but other big saves came on Kasper Kapanen walking right in, a power play one-timer from the left circle by Tyson Barrie, and early in the second, Hutton was strong on Frederik Gauthier's rebound try.

The first goal scored on Hutton came on the power play, Will Nylander was allowed to come in front from the corner. His shot ramped up Hutton's stick and under the crossbar, there is absolutely nothing Hutton could do on that one, but the overtime goal must be stopped.

Andersen absolutely robbed Conor Sheary, who was setup by Jeff Skinner. Sheary one-timed the puck immediately right into Andersen's glove. Nobody thought anything of it until league headquarters called to review the play. Andersen's glove was in the net and you could see part of the puck through the webbing of the glove, but the NHL knows its own rules. The league said, "Video Review determined that there was no conclusive evidence that the puck, which was in Andersen's glove had completely crossed the goal line. Therefore, the Referee's call on the ice stands."

In overtime, the game never should've even gotten to Hutton. Victor Olofsson found himself alone in front of Andersen not once, but twice and was robbed both times. Olofsson hit a crossbar of his own in the second period.

Skinner was furious with himself in the second when he had a lot of net looking at him on a backhand shot, but he put it right in Andersen's glove. Toronto outshot Buffalo 43-30, but in my mind, the Sabres had the better chances.

Eichel had an assist and now has points in nine straight games, scoring eight goals and eight assists for 16 points. Eichel has an assist in seven straight games. Other than Andersen, I thought Eichel was the second best player on the ice. He made some plays defensively that the best defensive forwards in the league would've been proud of.

Buffalo is now 2-1-2 in its last five games, picking up 6-of-10 points. That's a big improvement over most of November. The Sabres finish November 3-8-3.

In the Atlantic Division, Florida is in second place with 31 points, Toronto is in third at 30 and Buffalo is in fourth with 29. That leaves the Sabres one point out of a playoff spot. If you want to go by point percentage, the Panthers are at .596, the Lightning are at .563, the Canadiens are at .538, the Sabres are at .537 and the Leafs are at .536.

Buffalo has Sunday off and will host New Jersey on Monday night.

Sabres fall 2-1 in overtime to Toronto

WGR 550

November 30, 2019

A third period goal by defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen helped the Buffalo Sabres pick up a point, but it was not enough in the Toronto Maple Leafs' 2-1 overtime win on Saturday night at Scotiabank Arena.

Buffalo recorded eight shots on goal in the opening period, and had the lone power play chance in the first when Nic Petan was penalized for tripping. The minor was called with less than two minutes to go in the period, but the Sabres were not credited with any shots on goal during their special teams chance. However, Marcus Johansson recorded two of the team's eight shots on goal in the first.

Carter Hutton was up to the task on all 11 Maple Leafs shots on goal. The best chance of the frame came off the stick of Auston Matthews, where Hutton was able to stay with the low-lying shot along the ice and guide it away from the net without further trouble.

Johansson was called for the first minor penalty on Buffalo early in the second period when he was penalized for slashing. William Nylander was able to drive the net and use a backhand shot to beat Hutton and give Toronto a 1-0 lead. The score came over a minute into the power play, and was assisted by Matthews and John Tavares.

The Sabres nearly tied the game halfway through the middle stanza thanks to a cross-ice pass from Jeff Skinner to Conor Sheary, but a big save by Frederik Andersen kept Toronto in front by a goal. The play was reviewed to determine if Sheary's shot had crossed the goal line, but the call on the ice of no goal was upheld:

Buffalo ended the frame with 11 shots for a total of 19 through two periods. Toronto peppered Hutton with 16 shots in the second, with the Sabres' netminder stopping 15 of them. The Maple Leafs enjoyed a 27-19 edge in shots on goal through 40 minutes.

Just over six minutes into the third period, the Leafs held a 6-1 shots on goal advantage for the frame. A minute later, Ristolainen drove the net with the puck and backhanded a shot over Andersen's shoulder to tie the game 1-1. Brandon Montour and Jack Eichel were credited with the assists on the game-tying goal.

Neither team was penalized in the third period, with the Sabres and Maple Leafs trading chances at both ends of the ice. Matthews had one last chance for Toronto before the end of regulation, but defenseman Marco Scandella was able to sweep the puck away from the goal line before it could cross the line.

After keeping the Sabres from scoring at one end, the Maple Leafs were able to capitalize on their possession in overtime to win 2-1. Tavares took the shot that helped win the game for the Maple Leafs. Kasper Kapanen and Andreas Johansson received the assists on the game-winning goal.

SCORING SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 5:30 - William Nylander (10) PP (Auston Matthews, John Tavares)

Third Period:

BUF: 6:58 - Rasmus Ristolainen (2) (Brandon Montour, Jack Eichel)

TOR: NONE

Overtime:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 1:45 - John Tavares (10) (Kasper Kapanen, Andreas Johansson)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 18:07 - Nic Petan (Tripping - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 4:12 - Marcus Johansson (Slashing - 2 min.)

TOR: 11:32 - John Tavares (Slashing - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 30 (8, 11, 9, 2)

TOR: 43 (11, 16, 13, 3)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 41 saves

TOR: Frederik Andersen - 29 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 2 (0%)

TOR: 1 for 1 (100%)

Three Stars:

John Tavares - TOR

Frederik Andersen - TOR

Carter Hutton - BUF

What's Next:

The Sabres return to Buffalo to host the struggling New Jersey Devils on Monday night at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show starts at 6 p.m. on WGR with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog from (716) Food and Sport.

Sabres' Eichel leads a come from behind win over Toronto

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 29, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres had never lost six straight games to Toronto and they still haven't after coming out of Friday with a big come from behind victory.

I think it made it more fun for the fans in the building that Toronto had a 2-0 second period lead only to see Buffalo score four unanswered goals to take a 4-2 lead.

The Sabres were up against, arguably, the worst goaltender in the NHL in Michael Hutchinson, yet five minutes into the second, they hadn't scored on him. Toronto has no salary cap room for a decent backup goalie, so they're basically going with an AHL goaltender when Freddie Andersen needs a rest.

Jeff Skinner has had many chances lately, but he got things going in this one, ripping home his 10th from the slot. It became the Jack Eichel show after that as the Sabres captain just took the game over.

Eichel came out of the penalty box and was in high gear as he carried the puck through the right circle and just wired a rocket to the far side.

Casey Mittelstadt tipped in his first goal in 17 games to give Buffalo its first lead of the game. Mittelstadt said Marco Scandella had told him before the game that the kid was going to tip in one of his shots, and Mittelstadt went to the net to make that happen.

Late in the period, Eichel went over the boards to help finish killing a penalty to Rasmus Asplund. Eichel took the puck deep into Toronto territory and faked Jake Muzzin out of his jock three different times before Victor Olofsson got setup in the left circle. Eichel put the pass right on his stick and Nic Petan just stood there and looked at Olofsson, giving him plenty of time to unleash his big shot.

The game got dicey in the third as the Leafs came at Buffalo hard, but when Dmytro Timashov closed the gap to one, Auston Matthews gave the puck away to Jimmy Vesey in front and he scored his third goal in three games.

Kasper Kapanen made the game 5-4, but Eichel found the empty net for his 16th of the season.

Despite all the losing lately, the win put the Sabres into a third place tie with Toronto, depending on what happens in the night games.

Buffalo had 36 shots in this game and went a perfect 4-for-4 on the penalty kill. Having Zach Bogosian back has really helped the Sabres as they've been 6-for-6 in the last two games.

The Sabres are in Toronto on Saturday with points in three out of four games, going 2-1-1.

Sabres hold off the Maple Leafs, 6-4

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

November 29, 2019

Following a 3-2 overtime loss to the Calgary Flames on Wednesday night at KeyBank Center, the Buffalo Sabres responded with a 6-4 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday afternoon in Buffalo.

Buffalo used a four-goal second period to help take control of the game with goals from Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel, Casey Mittelstadt and Victor Olofsson. In the third period, Jimmy Vesey scored the eventual game-winning goal to give Buffalo the support they needed.

Linus Ullmark was very good in goal for the Sabres once again, stopping 25 of 29 shots faced for his sixth win of the year.

Friday's game was the first game of a home-and-home series with the Sabres and Maple Leafs, with the second game coming on Saturday night at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto.

The Sabres and Leafs each exchanged chances in the opening 20 minutes with both teams getting some glorious scoring chances.

Olofsson had a number of good scoring chances in the first period, picking up three shots on goal. One shot ended up going off the glove of goalie Michael Hutchinson and just wide of the Toronto net.

Eichel had some good chances of his own in the first period as the Sabres captain registered four shots on Hutchinson.

As for Maple Leafs forward William Nylander, he had two great scoring chances in the period that Ullmark turned away with the glove hand. Nylander's first chance was on a breakaway in alone on Ullmark, and the second chance was a nice scoring chance from just inside the faceoff circle.

Toronto was able to break the scoreless tie with 1:06 remaining in the period as a failed clearing attempt in the Buffalo zone ended up in the back of the net. After Sabres forward Marcus Johansson could not get the puck out of harm's way, Maple Leafs forward Ilya Mikheyev found a wide-open John Tavares to the left of Ullmark and the Toronto captain fired home his eighth goal of the year.

The period ended with the Sabres holding a 13-12 advantage in shots, but trailing 1-0 on the scoreboard.

The Maple Leafs were able to extend their lead to 2-0 just 1:21 into the second period as Tavares notched his second goal of the game. After a bad giveaway by Johansson in the offensive zone, Toronto turned the chance into an odd-man rush the other way. Tavares got free for a chance alone on Ullmark, but his original shot was put wide of the net. The puck then bounced right back to the Buffalo netminder, but he failed to cover the puck in time and Tavares poked it off Ullmark's leg and in.

From there, the Sabres took control of the period and responded with four unanswered goals to take the lead.

The first goal came from Skinner a little more than four minutes after the Maple Leafs took the two-goal lead. After Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour made a nice play to keep the puck in the offensive zone at the blue line, he eventually got the puck to forward Johan Larsson, who dropped it back to Skinner for a wrist shot that beat Hutchinson on the glove side.

Nearly four minutes later, Buffalo tied the game as Eichel found the back of the net for his team-leading 15th goal of the season. After coming out of the penalty box, Eichel gathered a loose puck outside of the Buffalo blue line and started a 2-on-1 rush with Johansson. He then decided to shoot the puck and his wrist shot got behind Hutchinson and in to even the game at 2-2.

Buffalo grabbed its first lead of the night almost two-and-a-half minutes later as Mittelstadt was able to get a piece of a Marco Scandella shot from the point that found its way back behind the Leafs netminder. For Mittelstadt, it was his fourth goal of the season and his first goal in 17 games.

The Sabres added to their lead with 1:06 remaining in the period as Eichel went to work in the Toronto zone, which eventually opened up some space for Olofsson inside the left faceoff circle. The Sabres winger was able to then wire a wrist shot over the near side, glove hand of Hutchinson to up Buffalo's lead to 4-2.

The Sabres controlled the last 15-plus minutes of the second period, and ended up out-shooting the Maple Leafs in the period, 13-6.

Toronto got one back to start the third period as the Maple Leafs caught the Sabres on a long shift and it resulted in a one-time feed from forward Jason Spezza to forward Dmytro Timashov. Timashov's shot beat Ullmark on the glove side with his shot for his second goal of the season.

However, the Sabres quickly regained their two-goal lead just 1:44 later as Toronto turns the puck over in front of its own net to Vesey. The Sabres forward tried to make a move to the backhand, but still got enough on his chance and the puck crawled through the five-hole of Hutchinson to make the score 5-3. It was Vesey's third goal of the season, as well as his third goal in as many games.

Kasperii Kapanen got the Maple Leafs back to within one with 7:50 to go in regulation as he escaped the defense of Montour in front of Ullmark and slides a puck past his left leg to make it 5-4.

The Maple Leafs continued to put pressure on the Sabres in the Buffalo end, but Ullmark was on top of his game. With time running down in the third, Maple Leafs forward Auston Matthews had a chance to tie the game at 5-5, but the Sabres goalie got across and turned his shot away with the glove hand.

Eichel put the game on ice with 27 seconds remaining in regulation as he grabbed a loose puck in his own end and sent it the length of the ice and into the empty Toronto net. Eichel's second goal of the game was his 16th of the year.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

TOR: 18:54 - John Tavares (8) (Ilya Mikheyev, Morgan Rielly)

Second Period:

BUF: 5:45 - Jeff Skinner (10) (Johan Larsson, Brandon Montour); 9:43 - Jack Eichel (15) (Zach Bogosian); 12:08 - Casey Mittelstadt (4) (Marco Scandella, Jimmy Vesey); 18:54 - Victor Olofsson (10) (Jack Eichel, Marco Scandella)

TOR: 1:21 - John Tavares (9) (Kasperii Kapanen)

Third Period:

BUF: 8:34 - Jimmy Vesey (3) (Unassisted); 19:33 - Jack Eichel (16) EN (Rasmus Ristolainen)

TOR: 6:50 - Dmytro Timashov (2) (Jason Spezza, Morgan Rielly); 12:10 - Kasperii Kapanen (8) (Nic Petan, Justin Holl)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 16:05 - Marcus Johansson (Tripping - 2 min.); 19:34 - Conor Sheary (Roughing - 2 min.)

TOR: 19:34 - Travis Dermott (Roughing - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: 7:33 - Jack Eichel (Slashing - 2 min.); 16:49 - Rasmus Asplund (Slashing - 2 min.)

TOR: 6:03 - Jason Spezza (Holding - 2 min.); 13:55 - Frederik Gauthier (Holding - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 1:11 - Henri Jokiharju (Slashing - 2 min.)

TOR: 19:59 - Tripping (Penalty Shot - Rasmus Apslund stopped by Michael Hutchinson)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 36 (13, 13, 10)

TOR: 29 (12, 6, 11)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 25 saves

TOR: Michael Hutchinson - 30 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 2 (0%)

TOR: 0 for 4 (0%)

Three Stars:

Jack Eichel - BUF

Jimmy Vesey - BUF

John Tavares - TOR

What's Next:

The Sabres conclude their home-and-home series with the Maple Leafs on Saturday night at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. on WGR with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show starting at 6 p.m. with Brian Koziol.

Carter Hutton's hard luck working against him

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

November 30, 2019

TORONTO — A lot of what's happened with Carter Hutton since his 6-0-0 start to the season has felt like a serious case of Murphy's Law. Anything that could go wrong has gone wrong and since that hot start in October, he's gone 0-5-3, and a fair bit of that has been because of some pretty unfair luck.

But this isn't to make excuses for Hutton.

Following a 5-2 loss in Tampa to the Lightning on Monday, Hutton was despondent searching for answers on how he felt his performance hurt his team. Never mind that of the goals he gave up the first came on a dump off the glass that hit the official and went to Nikita Kucherov right in front of the net. He was screened out on a power-play goal, gave up the third on a tip by Yanni Gourde that was so good the official initially waved off the goal, and goals four and five came short-handed via breakaway and a two-on-one.

Against the Maple Leafs on Saturday in Toronto, he found the answers he was searching for ... for the most part. He made 41 saves and was the hard-luck loser in a 2-1 game in overtime when John Tavares fired a shot toward Hutton that he just ... missed. That will happen to any goalie, but for Hutton it's another kick to a leader in the Sabres locker room who could use a lift.

"He was unbelievable, he made some unbelievable stops for us," forward Marcus Johansson said. "He made some early on to keep us in the game and some late as well to get us that one point. He played unbelievable."

Hutton had some help from his friends in the closing seconds of the third period as the Maple Leafs upped the pressure. Auston Matthews snapped a shot at Hutton he thought he squeezed between his pads, only it trickled out the other side where Marco Scandella swept it away from the goal line.

"He's been great, I feel he played a great game tonight," Scandella said. "We should've rewarded him with a win but unfortunately we didn't get that."

Hutton is always affable and good for a line whether it's a win or a loss, but he was not made available by the Sabres following the game. That might be indicative of how hard the losses are affecting him. Processing a loss when you're the guy counted on every night to give the team the best chance to win can be an arduous mental process, even for someone like Hutton who gives off an air of being unflappable when things are chaotic.

But this run of eight consecutive winless starts would be hard on anyone. Hutton's 41 saves against Toronto upped his save percentage during this skid from .869 to .883. During his 6-0-0 start, he had back-to-back shutouts at one point and his save percentage was .943. The overtime loss to Toronto was his best start since losses to Arizona and the New York Islanders.

Against the Coyotes he made 42 saves in a 3-2 shootout loss and he stopped 20 out of 21 in a 1-0 loss at home to the Islanders. But since that Islanders game he allowed 19 goals in four games. Even if those goals are going in off ridiculous bounces, as the cliché goes, they all look the same in the box score.

What helped make Hutton's lack of good fortune stand out was how Toronto goalie Frederik Andersen's good fortune and making the incredible saves in big moments. There was also a little bit of Harvey Dent involved when it came to making your own luck.

Andersen made an incredible glove save against Conor Sheary at 10:50 of the second period. Jeff Skinner found Sheary parked in the slot and he teed up a one-timer that Andersen snagged with the glove. Upon replay, the save was very close to not being a save. Heck, if there are sensors in the puck maybe it was a goal instead of a highlight reel save. But some guys have all the luck.

"I didn't know it was that close," Andersen said. "I haven't seen it yet, so you guys had a better view than me. I thought I had it; I didn't know they were going to go upstairs. I thought it was a save."

It was a save, but that's how it goes when you're playing well sometimes. In Hutton's case, he's struggled and it can be tougher to will good things to happen when things are going wrong.

The Sabres also hit numerous posts throughout the game. According to NaturalStatTrick.com the Sabres had 14 high-danger scoring chances at five-on-five to the Maple Leafs' three and that happened despite getting outshot in the game.

That hasn't always been the way in Hutton's games, but now that Linus Ullmark has gotten the majority of starts recently (six of the past nine games), anything that's gone wrong has worked against Hutton to string together more starts in a row.

Since Hutton's slide began Oct. 24, Ullmark has gone 4-4-1 with a .909 save percentage. The stats aren't wowing, but Ullmark has made the big saves when needed and the Sabres are scoring goals more often for him in support too. The Sabres are scoring an average of 2.7 goals per game in Ullmark's starts since Oct. 24, but 1.9 per game in Hutton's.

Losing a 2-1 game should feel tough, but when nothing's going your way it can feel like the end of the world. For now, the net is Ullmark's but more performances from Hutton like he had in Toronto on Saturday would mean pushing Ullmark to see the net more often.

"We like the way he's growing through the experience. I think it's one that he's ready for," Ralph Krueger said about Ullmark after Friday's win in Buffalo. "We'll continue to work with the pair of Ullmark and Hutton but at the moment Linus has had some responsibility. If you look at his last couple of wins, he's been tested at critical phases. We've left guys alone in front and he's had to make big saves."

Sabres skaters are busting slumps — and it's contagious

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

November 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The idea that as long as things are done the right way, success will be had was beginning to feel a little hard to believe for a handful of Sabres forwards. But lately, fortune has started to smile upon a few guys who endured an incredible run of bad luck when it came to scoring goals.

Think about what it's been like for guys like Casey Mittelstadt and Jimmy Vesey. They are counted on to be contributors to the Sabres offense, yet the goals weren't coming. Even for Zemgus Girgensons, who's counted on more for his physical and defensive presence than his ability to make the net bulge, saw his odds fall by the wayside.

Funny thing about shooting the puck, though ... eventually the puck is going to get past the goalie and the droughts will end. While it's not monsoon season for the Sabres offense, it's not a dust bowl anymore, either.

Think about what it's been like for Mittelstadt of late. John Vogl wrote recently about his goal-scoring troubles and how his need to shoot more was apparent. Before Buffalo's 6-4 win against Toronto on Friday, Mittelstadt's shot totals perked up with seven in three games, including five in the Sabres loss to the Lightning in Tampa.

But against Toronto, he finally broke his 16-game goal drought and did it by putting his stick to a different use.

"I was just talking to Ras (Rasmus Dahlin) about (scoring by tipping a shot)," Mittelstadt said. "Pretty much that makes sense. You get one off your stick or off your shin pads or something and it usually gets you going."

There's a contagious part to goal scoring when teammates are pulling hard for you. When Vesey scored his first of the season in Tampa, the eruption from the Sabres bench was noticeable. The same can be said when Girgensons potted a couple the night before in Sunrise. When Mittelstadt got his first goal since Oct. 19 on Friday, the reaction was comparable to those.

"I thought he handled (the drought) really well," coach Ralph Krueger said. "We don't stress those things or speak about them, we speak about what the players need to do to improve and to have results personally and for the team the way we want it. There hasn't been negative pressure put on him and he hasn't shown any type of frustration, he's just continued to work hard in practice and stuck with it."

"He works really hard to be a responsible two-way player and it's taken away from his offense, I believe. Now that he's got more comfort defensively, we expect that offensive side. He's 21 years old, still a project who, like a lot of our young players, is going to be exciting to watch grow."

Nothing rallies a team like goals from guys who really needed one or guys who rarely score them. Lately, it's been an unfortunate case of both for a few guys.

"Obviously Vesey gets a few and now he's got, what, one in three straight games," Mittelstadt said. "They normally come in bunches. You just got to stick with it and keep going to the areas that you score from and keep trying to make plays."

Vesey is on a three-game goal streak — a virtual bender considering he hadn't scored until he got one in Tampa.

"I've been on some pretty good streaks before in my career. It's just a funny game sometimes," Vesey said. "Sometimes they don't go in and there's nothing you can do. We play a lot of games, and all's you can do is show up the next day. I think my mindset has been a lot better this year staying positive. The first couple years I think I would beat myself up, but I stuck with the process and it's paying off."

It's interesting that Vesey's career scoring performance has been so consistent early on in his career. He's been good for nearly 20 goals and 40 points per season. That he's off on a tear now and his snakebitten teammates are getting off the schneid with him isn't the least bit surprising to him.

"I think it was just percentages, they're bound to go in at some point," Vesey said.

About those percentages — looking at those players shooting percentages before they popped off for a goal or two or three, you could've used it as a crystal ball of sorts to know that a change was coming soon.

In Vesey's case, going from zero percent to anything was an improvement but with three goals on 39 shots he's up to 7.7 percent. His career shooting percentage with the New York Rangers was 12.3 so it stands to reason the burner he's on now could continue.

"Jimmy's just an example of how much finishing is psychological and momentum, as it is with the team in general, you get a positive momentum in roles and it's like that for the individual player offensively," Krueger said. "But to have Jimmy playing more confident ... is a good sign right now."

Before Girgensons netted two goals against the Panthers, he was shooting 4.8 percent when his career shooting percentage before this season was 7.6 percent. Now he's over 10 percent and, well, if you were banking on a lot more offense from Girgensons that would've been a curious reaction.

In Mittelstadt's case, his shooting percentage even before tipping one in on Friday was ideally in line with his career numbers. He's a 10 percent shooter, and he was even while he rode through his 16-game goal drought. Like what was discussed before, it just meant he needed to keep shooting because his skill and abilities mean he can score goals just by doing that. Then again, like Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take," and for an extended time this season that became the norm instead of the exception.

Now that Mittelstadt is seeing some time on the wing playing with Vesey and Marcus Johansson, his ability to create more and shoot more often may already be at hand, and it may pay off for all three of them in the end.

"Mittelstadt had a few good scoring chances (Friday) — he had been working really hard — and I think releasing him to play on the wing is going to help him free up a little bit offensively, and there's nothing like seeing him score today," Krueger said. "There are a few other guys there that would like to do that, too."

It's been easy for the Sabres to rely on Jack Eichel to do the offensive damage this season, but seeing the supporting cast help put a winnable game away is something that could swing the odds in Buffalo's favor more often.

'It's his time': Jack Eichel adds to his breakout season against the rival Leafs

By John Vogl

The Athletic

November 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Zach Bogosian went in for the hug, then knew better. He saw that look of fiery excitement in his best friend's eyes, so the Sabres defenseman just let Jack Eichel slide on by to celebrate on his own.

"Let him do his thing," Bogosian said with a laugh. "Obviously, it's a beautiful goal, so whatever he has to do for the celebration, it's his time."

It's starting to be Eichel's time all the time, but especially against the rival Maple Leafs.

Tired of losing to Toronto, Eichel scored twice on a game-high eight shots and added an assist, a backchecking clinic and physical play during a 6-4 victory Friday. Eichel moved his season stats to 16 goals and 34 points in 26 games, a 51-goal, 112-point pace.

He set career highs last season with 28 goals and 82 points.

"Every day is fun coaching Jack Eichel," the Sabres' Ralph Krueger said.

There's something different about days that involve Toronto, as the first-year coach learned. Leafs fans invade KeyBank Center and crank up the intensity in a building that often lacks noise.

"You could feel that it was a highlight day," Krueger said, "an experience outside of the regular 82-game schedule."

It's an experience Eichel has grown to relish. He has 12 goals and 19 points in 14 games against the Leafs' star-laden roster featuring Auston Matthews, John Tavares and Mitch Marner.

"Anytime you're playing against other top players, you find out what everyone is really made of," Bogosian said. "He seems to elevate himself more and more and more every time. It's great to see."

Eichel was calm and composed following the victory, acknowledging Toronto is a team that creates a "little extra motivation," but he seemingly downplayed the rivalry. Actions spoke louder than words when he stepped out of the penalty box during the second period to make it 2-2, the second of four straight goals for Buffalo.

It's not the first time he's partied hard following a goal against the Leafs.

"It's a pretty storied rivalry, obviously, between Buffalo and Toronto," Eichel said, "two teams that obviously geographically are pretty close and play each other a lot, in the same division and for the most part don't really like each other."

The disdain grew last season as Toronto won all four meetings. Friday's win moved the Sabres' all-time record against the Leafs to 116-73-26, including 71-30-8 in Buffalo.

"Everyone gets into it," said Sabres center Johan Larsson, whose assist gave him 11 points in 16 games against the Leafs. "I usually like these games. It brings the emotions."

While the Sabres won with a team effort — five players scored, 10 had points and Linus Ullmark stopped breakaways and point-blank chances — Eichel led the way. Tavares called him an "elite player" before describing what makes him tough to defend.

"His ability to use his reach, his size, his speed, his strength," the Leafs' captain said.

All were on display.

- First, there was his opening goal.

- After letting a first-period pass slide past him for a Toronto rush, Eichel chased down the play to prevent a scoring chance.

- Heading into the corner against Toronto ruffian Jake Muzzin, Eichel won the physical battle, spun away from Muzzin and Jason Spezza, then set up Victor Olofsson's 10th goal, which made it 4-2.

"He got the puck on his stick and is so strong," Larsson said. "It's fun to see."

- Eichel sent the Leafs packing with an empty-net goal with 27 seconds to play.

"I'm happy for Jack because he does work very, very hard to set himself up for those situations," Krueger said. "He's a dynamic leader not only in the way he's communicating right now but also the way he's playing and the passion he showed."

"You might have been excited for his goals. I was most excited about his last couple of minutes and how he came to play without the puck and how hard he defended when they pulled the goalie out. He did put one in the empty net, but it was the work he did before that, I think, that showed that Jack is maturing right in front of our eyes."

Krueger is relying on the 23-year-old more than his coaching predecessors. Eichel is skating an average of 21:33 per night, third among NHL forwards behind only Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl (22:51) and Connor McDavid (22:12). The Sabres' power play is in a monthlong slump, so during the past two games, Krueger has kept the captain on the ice for 7:08 of the 7:30 of man-advantage time.

Buffalo has also been in a monthlong slump (3-9-3 entering Friday), but the win moved it to 2-1-1 in the past four games. The Sabres also moved past the Leafs and into third place in the Atlantic Division. They play again Saturday in Toronto, and everyone expects Eichel to be ready.

"It's great to see," Bogosian said of the captain and Buffalo's rivalry. "Them being so close and them having some young stars and us as well, it makes for a good, fun matchup."

Sabres rookie Victor Olofsson quickly develops into all-around presence

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 2, 2019

BUFFALO – Victor Olofsson’s ability to quickly adapt and evolve has helped him morph from an unheralded Sabres prospect into one of the NHL’s top rookies.

Just weeks after beginning his North American career last season, Olofsson established himself as one of the AHL’s top scorers with the Rochester Americans.

Following his terrific 30-goal, 63-point campaign, the Swedish winger graduated to Buffalo, scoring six times in the first seven games this year.

But Olofsson, who possesses a lethal shot he often utilizes from the circle, was too one-dimensional earlier in his rookie season.

Olofsson, 24, registered his first eight goals – he scored twice during a six-game recall late in 2018-19 – on the power play, an NHL record.

“I feel like it took me a little time before I felt like I belong here, like I’m a full-time NHL player,” Olofsson said prior to Saturday’s 2-1 overtime loss in Toronto. “I feel like I’m starting to find myself like I usually do if you look back at my career.”

In the past six weeks, Olofsson has started producing at even strength goals and become one of Sabres coach Ralph Krueger’s most trusted forwards.

Olofsson has compiled 10 goals and 20 points in 27 games entering tonight’s contest against the New Jersey Devils, numbers that trail only Sabres captain Jack Eichel, his center most of the season.

Right now, Olofsson is a legitimate Calder Trophy candidate. He leads all rookies in goals and ranks third in points. His 68 shots are also tied for first. At his current pace, he would score 30 goals and 60 points over an 82-game slate.

The former seventh-round pick could enjoy one of the greatest rookie seasons in franchise history.

How rare are 30-goal rookie campaigns? The Sabres have had four in their 50-year history: Gilbert Perreault (38 goals in 1970-71), Rick Martin (44 in 1971-72), Ray Sheppard (38 in 1987-88) and Donald Audette (31 in 1991-92).

A Sabres rookie hasn’t hit the 60-point mark since Sheppard recorded 65.

While Olofsson’s six-game point streak ended Saturday, he was one of the best players on the ice, skating just over 22 minutes, his second-highest total this season.

In overtime, he nearly converted two prime scoring chances.

“I feel better and better every game and feel more and more confident with the puck just in every situation out there, and I think that helps a lot when you do get that scoring chance, to be a little bit calmer maybe,” Olofsson said of his five-on-five play. “In the beginning, I felt like I was maybe sometimes holding my stick a little bit too tight. I wasn’t as relaxed as I usually am.

“It’s the best league in the world, right? So I think it takes time to kind of get used to everything and get settled in.”

The biggest change in Olofsson’s five-on-five play, Krueger said, has been the confidence he displays at left wing beside Eichel and Sam Reinhart on the No. 1 line.

"The power-play goals early, they came quite easily, actually, and then the challenge was to find the spaces," Krueger said. "He's just such a smart player, and what I like about Victor is no matter what we get the defensive consistency from him. His patience has allowed him to find those spaces and holes."

"It's an exciting thing to watch how that line in general has developed their five-on-five game, which was not that strong early in the season, but they're a threat against anybody."

As Olofsson's even-strength play improved, the Sabres' power play imploded. They converted one of their 37 chances over 14 games in November. Olofsson hasn't scored a power-play goal since Oct. 16.

"The thing that made us so, so successful in the beginning," Olofsson said, "I felt like we moved the puck really quick, and I feel like every guy on the power play was a threat, they couldn't really just cover one guy, defend us that way."

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The Sabres will celebrate "Founders Night" tonight at KeyBank Center on the 50th anniversary – Dec. 2, 1969 – of the NHL awarding Seymour and Northrup Knox an expansion team.

Members of the Knox family will be on the ice for a pregame ceremony and video presentation. The Sabres will also recognize the members of the team's original board of directors of their families during the game.

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Popular former Sabres defenseman and analyst Mike Robitaille will be on tonight's MSG pregame show and join play-by-play man Rick Jeanneret in the broadcast booth for the second period.

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A lower-body injury will keep New Jersey center Jack Hughes, the first overall pick in June, out of Monday's game.

Sabres showing signs of progress, close month one point out of playoff spot

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 1, 2019

TORONTO – Following a few dismal weeks, the Buffalo Sabres have quietly started showing signs of snapping out of their long funk.

Sure, Saturday's 2-1 overtime loss to the Maple Leafs closed a disappointing November in which they went 3-8-2, losing 10 out of 13 games.

But the Sabres finished the month strongly, going 2-1-2. Earning points in four out of five contests during a busy seven-day stretch illustrates progress.

They'll begin December in fourth place in the Atlantic Division, just one point behind the Leafs. In the beginning of the season, being so close to playoff spot after 27 games would've been regarded as progress.

Of course, that was before the Sabres started the campaign 9-2-1.

Banking those early points sure has helped them.

"I feel like we're on the right track here," Sabres center Marcus Johansson said after Leafs captain John Tavares scored 1:45 into overtime. "That's more like the way we want to play."

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said: "We're getting our game back."

A day after beating the Leafs 6-4 in Buffalo, the Sabres couldn't finish a slew of prime scoring chances early against goalie Frederik Andersen.

Sabres netminder Carter Hutton, meanwhile, looked confident all night, stopping 41 shots before the capacity crowd of 19,250 inside Scotiabank Arena.

But Hutton likely wants Tavares' goal, a floater from inside the blue line, back. The Sabres did not make him available to the media following the game.

Hutton, who hasn't won a game since Oct. 22, struggled for more than a month and lost playing time to Linus Ullmark. Saturday's effort likely earned the veteran another start soon.

The Sabres haven't exactly helped Hutton much recently. On Saturday, they locked down, preventing the Leafs from generating strong opportunities around him.

The shot total – Toronto had a 43-20 advantage – is deceiving.

"It was really strong," coach Ralph Krueger said of the Sabres' even-strength defending. "The puck pressure was amazing from everybody. We were strongly connected from the forecheck all the way back. We felt Toronto didn't get a lot of second opportunities, Carter took care of the first ones.

"But we were really eliminating the second shots and second chances and created a lot of defensive pressure, which gave us some of the offensive momentum that you saw developing during the game."

Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella said of Hutton: "We should've rewarded him with a win."

Leafs winger William Nylander's power-play goal opened the scoring 5:30 into the second period. The Sabres thought they tied it at 10:50, as replays appeared to show Andersen gloved winger Conor Sheary's point-blank shot behind the goal line.

But there wasn't conclusive evidence to overturn the no-goal call on the ice.

"I thought we scored one in the second," Krueger said. "It wasn't counted, but we buried it in our minds and continued to work."

Ristolainen tied it 6:58 into the third period, pinching in and backhanding a shot past Andersen, who improved to 11-3-0 in his career against the Sabres.

"Just crash the net," Ristolainen said.

The Leafs nearly won it in the waning seconds of regulation, but Scandella swept the puck away after center Auston Matthews' shot beat Hutton.

"(We) really deserved more than a point here when I look at the third period, so (I'm) really proud of the effort of the guys just digging it really deep," Krueger said.

While the Sabres have settled down and improved during the last week, their power play is still downright awful. After going zero of two Saturday, they've scored just once in their last 37 tries over 14 games.

Remember, the Sabres' power play ranked first early in the season and was perhaps their best asset.

"The power play is just not functioning at the moment," Krueger said. "We have to stick with it. ... That is truly one of the sore spots that we have after a game like this."

Johansson said: "It definitely gets in your head a little bit."

Sabres notes: Colin Miller trying to stay positive during tough start

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 1, 2019

TORONTO – Who expected Buffalo Sabres defenseman Colin Miller would be a healthy scratch once this season, let alone six times before December?

But a crowded blue line – the Sabres have seven healthy defensemen, including five right-handed shots – forced them to bench one in eight recent games.

Miller, 27, was usually the odd man out.

"I'm not getting many bounces lately," Miller said prior to Saturday's 2-1 overtime loss to the Maple Leafs inside Scotiabank Arena.

After returning for Friday afternoon's 6-4 home win over the Leafs, Miller played again Saturday, the second straight game the Sabres have dressed seven defensemen.

Miller hadn't played consecutive contests since Nov. 8-9.

When the Sabres traded two draft picks to the Vegas Golden Knights for Miller on June 28, it seemed like a steal.

Not only had Miller played for the Stanley Cup in 2018, he was a major contributor to the expansion team's shocking season, scoring 10 goals and 40 points.

Salary cap problems forced Vegas to deal Miller and the four-year, \$15.5 million contract he signed in 2018.

As the Sabres roared out of the gate this season, Miller enjoyed regular duty beside Rasmus Dahlin, skating around 19 minutes most nights.

But after the Sabres started struggling and Zach Bogosian and Brandon Montour returned from their injuries, coach Ralph Krueger began scratching Miller.

"It (stinks)," Miller of sitting out. "Nobody wants to but ... you treat it like a pro and you come in and work hard every day, control what you can. That's what I've tried to do."

Krueger wouldn't get into specifics why he scratched Miller, who compiled a minus-7 rating in his eight outings before sitting out.

"We have a high competition in the defense right now," he said. "He just has to continue to work the way he is and he'll feel more and more comfortable in our system."

Krueger said every player – he also scratched defensemen Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella – "has handled sitting out really well."

"In the team meetings, you wouldn't know who the guys are who are in or not as far as the engagement is concerned," he said.

Miller's status as the seventh defenseman the last two games forced him to play on the left side – right-handed shots normally stay on that side – with Henri Jokiharju or Rasmus Ristolainen.

Before a few outings this season, Miller said he had only played on the left side once or twice as a pro.

"It's different and ... not a situation you're normally in," said Miller, who had registered zero goals and four assists in 20 games this season entering Saturday. "Normally teams have less right-handed defensemen. ... It was a little different, but it's been going OK."

Krueger said: "We actually like Colin's game on the left side. We see him as a real option there. It's, with our sticks at the moment, something we need to know."

The biggest adjustment to playing on the left side, Miller said, is facing the rush.

"You're more to guys coming down on (the) right side, whereas the left side you're not as used to it," he said.

There are, of course, positives.

"In the offensive zone, you can walk the (blue) line a little bit easier, you get it on your forehand and you're on your one-timer," said Miller, who possesses a lethal shot. "So there's pros and cons."

The Sabres have dressed seven defensemen and 11 forwards five times in the last seven games.

"I've actually always liked it as a coach," Krueger said of dressing an extra defenseman. "I've used it lots of times in the past. It gives you options to really mix different guys into the lineup. You see the top-end guys don't get extra ice time out of it. It's more of a sharing of guys that sometimes don't get the minutes, and I think they're more into the game when they do that."

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Sabres rookie center Rasmus Asplund on the penalty shot he received with 0.9 seconds left in Friday's game: "If it's 0.9 seconds left or it's the first shift in first, I think he made the right call."

Leafs goalie Michael Hutchinson stymied Asplund's backhand attempt. As Asplund zoomed in on goal, it looked like he was trying to shoot the puck between his own legs.

"I just thought that was a time and place to try something cool," the Swede said.

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The Sabres scratched center Jean-Sebastien Dea and winger Curtis Lazar (both healthy).

Sabres to start struggling goalie Carter Hutton against Maple Leafs

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 30, 2019

TORONTO – In his last seven starts, Buffalo Sabres goalie Carter Hutton has struggled mightily, compiling a 0-5-2 record with a 4.02 goals against average and an .869 save percentage.

Hutton, 33, will start tonight against the Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena, only his second nod in seven games. He earned his last win Oct. 22.

"He's ready for it," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said this morning. "We feel good. His spirits are good, he's positive, and I'm sure he's going to play a good game here tonight."

Hutton hasn't had many strong games lately. Still, the Sabres, who beat the Leafs 6-4 on Friday afternoon in Buffalo with goalie Linus Ullmark, haven't helped him out much.

In his last outing, Monday's 5-2 road loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning, he faced a slew of breakaways and odd-man rushes.

Hutton has strong numbers – 3-1-0, 2.71 and .915 – in five career games against the Leafs.

Krueger wouldn't reveal the rest of his lineup. The Sabres dressed seven defensemen and 11 forwards Friday, giving defender Colin Miller an opportunity to play after sitting out six of eight games as a healthy scratch.

While the Sabres did not hold a full morning skate, the forwards they scratched Friday – Jean-Sebastien Dea and Curtis Lazar – went on the ice.

That could mean the Sabres will dress an extra defenseman again.

Update: Dea and Lazar are scratched.

"I've actually always liked it as a coach," Krueger said of using seven and 11. "I've used it lots of times in the past. It gives you options to really mix different guys into the lineup. You see the top-end guys don't get extra ice time out of it. It's more of a sharing of guys that sometimes don't get the minutes, and I think they're more into the game when they do that."

Jack Eichel's dynamic outing helps Sabres roar back, beat Maple Leafs

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 30, 2019

BUFFALO – Coach Ralph Krueger said he could feel the electricity hours before captain Jack Eichel starred in the Sabres' wildly entertaining 6-4 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs. The season's first meeting against their fiercest rival would be more than a normal regular-season contest.

"You could feel that it was a highlight day," Krueger said following Friday afternoon's win before the bipartisan sellout crowd of 19,070 inside noisy KeyBank Center. "It was an experience outside of the regular 82-game schedule."

The entire afternoon was a unique experience for the Sabres, who won for just the fourth time in 16 tries (4-9-3).

In addition ending their five-game losing streak to the Leafs, the Sabres' often feeble offense busted loose, scoring six goals for only the second time this season. They had scored two or fewer goals in 11 of the previous 15 outings.

"(We) finally got an explosion of goals in the second period, which should do our psyche a lot of good," said Krueger, whose team couldn't finish its chances in recent games. "In the end, scoring six goals feels very good and very deserved."

For one of the few times in the last five weeks, the Sabres handled adversity well, roaring back from a 2-0 deficit early in the second before grabbing the lead barely 12 minutes into the period.

Eichel, not surprisingly, was their offensive catalyst. After winger Jeff Skinner scored, he tied it after leaving the penalty box almost halfway through the game. Later in the second period, his nifty moves created linemate Victor Olofsson's goal that made it 4-2.

For good measure, Eichel's late empty-net goal sealed the Sabres' 12th win this season.

Still, what impressed Krueger liked most about his No. 1 center on Friday was the passion he showcased late in a one-goal contest.

"I was most excited about his last couple of minutes, how he came to play without the puck, how hard he defended when they pulled the goalie out," Krueger said following the Sabres' first win over the Leafs since March 26, 2018. "He did put one in the empty net but it was the work he did before that I think that shows Jack is maturing right in front of our eyes. Every day is fun coaching Jack Eichel."

Sabres center Marcus Johansson said: "The way he can take over games, it's impressive. Not a lot of guys can do that. He's so dominant when he gets going like that."

Clearly, Eichel loves facing the Leafs. His 12 goals in 14 career games against them is his highest total and goal-per game output (.86) against any opponent.

The Sabres play the Leafs again tonight in Toronto.

Right now, having scored eight goals and 15 points during his eight-game point streak, Eichel is scorching.

But the Sabres are starting to receive critical secondary contributions.

Sabres winger Jimmy Vesey scored for the third straight game Friday after a 19-game drought to open the season. Meanwhile, winger Casey Mittelstadt scored for the first time in 17 games, briefly giving the Sabres a 3-2 lead.

"A lot of guys stepped up for us," Vesey said.

Vesey's third-period goal restored the Sabres' two-goal lead.

"That's what good teams do – they don't let the opposition hang around when they have leads, they know how to put teams away, and it's important that we start to learn how to do that," Eichel said.

Goalie Linus Ullmark's effort will get lost, but a slew of critical saves early – he stopped two breakaways – held the Sabres in the game.

"I could've probably done a lot more for my boys to keep that third and fourth one out of the net," said Ullmark, who stopped 25 shots in his fifth start in six games.

But Ullmark, who started the season as Carter Hutton's backup, has often looked like a difference-maker throughout the busy stretch.

"It's definitely been a test for him," Krueger said of Ullmark's workload. "We like the way he's growing through the experience. I think it's one that he's ready for. ..."

"If you look at his last couple of wins, he's been tested at critical phases. We've left guys alone in front and he's had to make big saves. I thought it was a special win for him tonight."

Sabres notes: Casey Mittelstadt scores goal, ends long slump: 'It's not easy'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 30, 2019

BUFFALO – Like most elite prospects, Casey Mittelstadt was a dynamic scorer in junior and college. So struggling for weeks sometimes in the NHL has been a new experience for the Sabres winger.

"It's not easy, I'm not going to lie," Mittelstadt said after scoring in Friday afternoon's 6-4 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs inside KeyBank Center, his first goal in 17 games. "But at the same time, I've scored pretty much my whole life. I haven't had too big a problem with it.

"When it comes, it usually comes in bunches."

Mittelstadt, 21, hadn't produced anything for weeks. His goal 12:08 into the second period, which put the Sabres up 3-2, was his first point in 16 contests.

The former eighth overall pick sprinkled just four shots on goal over a recent 11-game stretch.

Mittelstadt, of course, possesses dynamic talent. But he scored his first goal since Oct. 19 by tipping defenseman Marco Scandella's point shot by Toronto goalie Michael Hutchinson in front of the net.

"Scandy told me before the game, actually, we were going to connect for one," Mittelstadt said of his fourth goal this season. "He threw that at the net, so it was pretty funny."

To help Mittelstadt and ease some pressure, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger recently switched the youngster from center to left wing. On Friday, he played beside center Marcus Johansson and Jimmy Vesey.

"It makes me remember how hard center is," Mittelstadt said of playing wing. "No, it's good. Honestly, I don't see it too much there being much (difference), especially with (Johansson), who's played a lot of wing. Kind of interchangeable there."

Krueger has expressed confidence in Mittelstadt all season, saying he has sacrificed some offense by embracing the defensive side of the game.

Mittelstadt, Krueger said, handled his slump "really well."

"There hasn't been negative pressure put on him and he hasn't shown any type of frustration," he said. "He's just ... stuck with it. We told you in training camp, he was beginning to learn the game away from the puck at a level that I don't think he was ever engaged with and he is so engaged with that right now. He works really hard to be a responsible two-way player. ...

"Now that he's got more comfort defensively, we expect that offensive side. He's 21 years old, still a project like a lot of our young players who's going to be exciting to watch grow."

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When Toronto fired coach Mike Babcock on Nov. 28, Krueger missed an opportunity to face his good friend this weekend.

"We would've loved this back-to-back here," Krueger said. "We were texting about it quite a bit through the summer, and now it's not to be. I think as coaches we're conditioned to try to do the best we can with the day that we have today and we also accept surprises."

Krueger served as a consultant for Team Canada's 2014 Olympic entry for the Sochi Games, which Babcock led to a gold medal.

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After a 25-save outing Friday in his fifth start in the last six games, goalie Linus Ullmark will likely take a back seat to Carter Hutton tonight in Toronto.

Both goalies have started 13 times this season.

While Ullmark, 26, has wrestled away most of the action, Krueger said the Sabres' busy schedule will force them to utilize both netminders.

"With all these back-to-backs, we always need two goalies, as we will this weekend, and it's just the order that's really deciding it," he said. "And, yes, Linus has had a little bit more responsibility, but we're pretty well split on the season. And I think ... there will eventually be more of split because of the schedule we have and the energy you need to play in goal at this level."

Hutton, 33, has struggled in his last seven starts, compiling a 0-5-2 record with a 4.02 goals against average and an .869 save percentage. He earned his last win Oct. 22.

Notes: For the fourth time in six games, the Sabres dressed seven defensemen and 11 forwards. After sitting out six of the last eight contests as a healthy scratch, defenseman Colin Miller moved in. ... The Sabres scratched center Jean-Sebastien Dea and winger Curtis Lazar (both healthy). ... Vesey has compiled three goals and five points during his career-long four-game point streak.

Sabres drop second game of home-and-home with Toronto 2-1 in overtime

By Adam Unger

WKBW

November 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The second game of the Buffalo Sabres' home-and-home with the Toronto Maple Leafs took more than 60 minutes on Saturday night. The Leafs took down the Sabres 2-1 in overtime. William Nylander started the scoring in the second period; Rasmus Ristolainen had the answer for the Sabres in the final frame of regulation. John Tavares scored the game winner for Toronto.

5 observations from Saturday's game:

Mixing up personnel

Ralph Krueger's original rationale for going with eleven forwards and seven defensemen was to create different looks on the power play and the penalty kill. But the different looks and different combinations didn't stop there at Scotiabank Arena tonight.

Colin Miller was originally listed as the odd defenseman out slotted into a forward spot. Over the course of the game, he was paired with Rasmus Ristolainen and Henri Jokiharju. Everyone, at some point or another, was away from their original partner for multiple shifts at a time.

7 - 1 = 6

The benefit of dressing seven defensemen is apparent on the penalty kill: No matter who's in the box, there's three different pairings at the Sabres' disposal. Having that depth allows Buffalo to press out towards the half boards and fight for the puck behind the net more aggressively and more often.

There's a benefit in the numbers game on even strength. Krueger has benched a blueliner for ten or more minutes at a time in the past. Having seven defensemen at his disposal gives him the option to do so without demanding an excess of minutes from someone else.

Mittelstadt on the wing

The University of Minnesota product hasn't lived up to expectations this season. Aside from a point streak out on the west coast last month, Casey Mittelstadt has been fairly quiet on the stat sheet. He's also proven to be hot and cold on the faceoff depending on his match-up.

Putting Mittelstadt on Marcus Johansson's wing affords the former the opportunity to be more effective in smaller doses on faceoffs. The latter's veteran presence, along with Jimmy Vesey on the other wing, also takes him away from the expectation of being the alpha of his line.

Battle between the pipes

Neither team went with the same goalie that started in Friday night's contest. Carter Hutton was in net for the Sabres; and Frederik Andersen got the nod for Toronto. Hutton and Linus Ullmark are nearly interchangeable; their record, save percentage, and goals against average, are all nearly identical.

Andersen, on the other hand, is tied for the third most wins in the league despite the Toronto's slow start this year. He played like it tonight. Andersen was robbing one-timers, making cross-crease saves, and sprawling out for loose pucks all game long. He was the difference for the Maple Leafs.

Return to normalcy

There was no way for the Sabres to maintain their success rate from October. But the woes of November are behind them now, too. A return to the status quo comes along with flipping the calendar.

The NHL Global Series was book-ended by five days without a game both before and after their double-header with Tampa Bay. Buffalo was behind the rest of the league in terms of games played. The back end of this month saw ten games in just 17 days. A much more evened out schedule awaits them in December. It starts with a home game against the New Jersey Devils on Monday.

5 Observations: Sabres hang on with 6-4 win over Maple Leafs

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

November 29, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Four unanswered goals in the second period was enough for the Buffalo Sabres as they outlasted the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-4 Friday afternoon. Four different players scored in the win while Linus Ullmark made 25 saves as the team improved to 12-10-4. They will travel to Toronto on Saturday for another meeting with the Maple Leafs.

5 Observations from tonight's game

Responding and finishing

How many times have we said a two-goal lead is dangerous? The Sabres found themselves down by two in the 2nd period but found a way to respond. Jeff Skinner got the scoring going, grabbing his 10th of the season, after he took a feed from Johan Larsson. Minutes later, Jack Eichel came out of the penalty box and wasted no time tying things up. It didn't stop there though as Casey Mittelstadt and Victor Olofsson added two more for a 4-2 lead after two.

In the third, it looked like the Sabres could give up a two-goal lead of their own on two different occasions but found a way to hang on. Following the team's loss Wednesday night, players in the locker room talked about responding and finishing games. They did both and it was good to see them get results after not capitalizing many other times.

Jack Attack

Jack Eichel is having himself a season and there's still more games to be played. Following his goal in the second period (see above), Eichel was a big reason for the team's fourth goal. He puck handled both Jason Spezza and Jake Muzzin alongside of and behind the net and was then able to find Olofsson parked in the circle, who later connected on the team's fourth goal. With his two goals (including an empty-netter) and an assist in tonight's game, Eichel now has 16 goals and 34 points in 26 games played this season. Last year, he finished with 28 goals and 82 points so he's well on pace for surpassing those numbers.

Nylander vs. Ullmark's glove

This is a tale of a Toronto winger and his biggest enemy tonight, Linus Ullmark's glove. Nylander had two REALLY good chances in the first period alone but it was Ullmark's glove who denied him both times. With 6:26 left in the first period, Nylander grabbed a loose puck for a breakaway chance but Ullmark completely robbed him. Not much later, Ullmark robbed Nylander again, this time on a 2-on-1. Nylander finished with four shots on goal while Ullmark finished the night with 25 saves on 29 shots.

Tavares vs. the Sabres

John Tavares has had his fair share of great moments when playing the Sabres and that solid play continued Friday evening. Tavares got the Maple Leafs on the board in the first period after he took advantage of a wide open net following a pass from Ilya Mikheyev. Just minutes into the second period, he added his second of the night, taking the initial shot and then following it up by tapping it in for a 2-0 Toronto lead. In his 31 games against the Sabres, Tavares has 20 goals among 38 points.

Trying to salvage what's left of November

The Sabres have one more game this month, Saturday night in Toronto, before their December schedule begins. November has seen the Sabres go 3-8-2, a disappointing performance after going 9-2-2 in October. A new month may be just what the Sabres need when it comes to "starting with a clean slate" but it would be much easier coming off a win with a little momentum.

Tavares' snipe sinks Sabres in OT

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

November 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – John Tavares ripped a shot over the shoulder of Carter Hutton in overtime to secure a 2-1 overtime win and split the first two games of the storied rivalry between the Leafs and Sabres.

Buffalo beat Toronto 6-4 on Friday.

Rasmus Ristolainen provided the lone goal for the Blue & Gold, who have not won back-to-back games since winning three straight games against Los Angeles and San Jose in mid-October.

Scoreless after the first period, William Nylander opened the scoring, feathering a backhanded attempt past Hutton to give Toronto a 1-0 lead.

Still trailing 1-0 in the third period, Ristolainen bullied his way through the blue paint to pull Buffalo even with his second marker of the season.

Buffalo will look to get back in the win column on Monday when it hosts the New Jersey Devils.

Sabres score 4 goals in 2nd, comeback to defeat Leafs 6-4

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

November 29, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres used a four goal second period to pull-off the comeback against Toronto Friday evening.

The Leafs got on the board with just under a minute to play in the first period with a goal from John Tavares. The Leafs captain would net his second over the game early in the second period to double the lead.

However, Buffalo would score four unanswered goals from four different goal scorers to jump out to a 4-2 lead.

Jeff Skinner jump started the scoring when he rifled home a pass from Johan Larsson. Jack Eichel would tie things up when he jumped out of the penalty box and created an odd man rush.

Casey Mittelstadt snapped his scoreless skid when he deflected a shot from Marco Scandella to give Buffalo their first lead of the game.

Eichel would generate another scoring opportunity as he handled the puck in the corner and fed Victor Olofsson to give Buffalo the two goal lead.

The Leafs would make it a one goal game early in the final period, but Jimmy Vesey would score his third goal in as many games less than two minutes later to put Buffalo back up by a pair.

Toronto scored to pull within a goal again midway through the period, but Eichel would net his second of the game with the empty netter to seal the victory for the Sabres.

Linus Ullmark would stop 25 saves in net for the Blue and Gold. Buffalo heads to Toronto for game two of the home and home series Saturday, November 30th at 7pm.

Tavares' OT goal lifts Maple Leafs past Sabres

By Dave McCarthy

NHL.com

November 30, 2019

TORONTO -- John Tavares scored 1:45 into overtime to give the Toronto Maple Leafs a 2-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Scotiabank Arena on Saturday.

Tavares took a drop pass from Kasperii Kapanen and scored from the high slot when his shot went in off the glove of Carter Hutton.

"I was toward the end of my shift, so I wanted to be sure with it and had some room to get some good wood on it and was able to kind of time it right," Tavares said. "I'm happy I was able to pick the corner there."

William Nylander scored, and Frederik Andersen made 29 saves for the Maple Leafs (13-11-4), who are 4-1-0 in their past five games.

"I thought we were inconsistent. We had some really good moments. The start of the second and third were really good for us, but not where we want to be and what we think we're capable of," Toronto coach Sheldon Keefe said. "We have to give some credit to Buffalo, they did a really good job in both games against us (6-4 loss on Friday), making it harder on us. That's the next phase for us is to find a way to play the way we want to and are capable of when the other team has a good plan and is making it difficult on us."

Hutton made 41 saves for the Sabres (12-10-5), who are 2-4-2 in their past eight games.

"It was a strong game from his side. I thought both goalies played very, very well," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "We needed to take more opportunities on the chances we had. I thought even though shot clock doesn't show it, I thought we dominated in the chances here today 5-on-5 and took too long to get that first one."

Nylander gave Toronto a 1-0 lead at 5:30 of the second period when he took a pass from Auston Matthews, skated toward the net and scored with a backhand over Hutton's blocker on the power play.

"I was a little lucky, I think it hit his stick and deflected into his arm and up, but it was nice to get one on the power play for sure," Nylander said. "I think they thought I was going to pass it backdoor, so I had some room there to go to the net."

Tavares had the secondary assist on the play, his 400th in the NHL.

"I've played with some pretty good shooters. It's not always pretty but I just try to play my game and be effective whether it's putting the puck in the net or setting up teammates," Tavares said. "I didn't know it was right around the corner so it's always nice to get it, especially in a win."

Rasmus Ristolainen tied it 1-1 at 6:58 of the third period when he carried the puck down the right wing, cut to the crease and tucked a backhand inside the left post.

Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella swept the puck off the goal line after Matthews' shot trickled past Hutton with 12 seconds remaining in regulation.

"I think we played a pretty good three periods and maybe we should have earned the win, but that didn't happen," Ristolainen said. "It's a little frustrating but we got a huge point on the road."

They said it

"I'm really proud of the guys. This performance on the workload we've had, they sure showed up and played well. First period was outstanding, we let up a little bit in the second. We really deserved more than a point here when I look at the third period, so really proud of the effort of the guys just digging it really deep and extremely disappointed with the final result." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger on Buffalo playing its fifth game in seven nights

"Obviously he's scored the past three games and he's a really key part to our team. He plays a lot of difficult minutes out there and when he's hot, it kind of gets everybody going." -- Maple Leafs forward Auston Matthews on John Tavares

Need to know

Sabres captain Jack Eichel had an assist to extend his point streak to nine games (eight goals, eight assists). ... Sabres forwards Jimmy Vesey (four games) and Victor Olofsson (six games) each had their point streak end. ... Tavares has four goals in a three-game streak.

What's next

Sabres: Host the New Jersey Devils on Monday (7 p.m. ET; SN, MSG-B, MSG+, NHL.TV)

Maple Leafs: At the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; ESPN+, TVAS, NBCSP, TSN4, NHL.TV)

Sabres at Maple Leafs preview

By Dave McCarthy

NHL.com

November 30, 2019

SABRES (12-10-4) at MAPLE LEAFS (12-11-4)
7 p.m. ET; CBC, SN1, SNE, SNO, SNP, MSG-B, NHL.TV

The Game

The Buffalo Sabres look to complete a home-and-home sweep against the Toronto Maple Leafs when the teams play at Scotiabank Arena on Saturday.

The Sabres scored four consecutive goals in a 6-4 win against the Maple Leafs in Buffalo on Friday. They are 2-1-1 in their past four games and 3-8-3 in their past 14.

The loss was Toronto's first under coach Sheldon Keefe, who had won his first three games since replacing Mike Babcock on Nov. 20.

Goalie Frederik Andersen will start for the Maple Leafs after backing up Michael Hutchinson on Friday; and forward Alexander Kerfoot returns to the lineup after a two-game suspension.

Carter Hutton, who was the backup to Linus Ullmark on Friday, will start for the Sabres.

Players to watch

Sabres center Jack Eichel, who scored twice and had an assist against the Maple Leafs on Friday, has 15 points (eight goals, seven assists) during an eight-game point streak.

Maple Leafs center John Tavares, who scored twice Friday, has four points (three goals, one assist) in his past two games and needs one assist for 400 in the NHL.

They said it

"We're not going to care about the standings until April 4, it's something we've talked about from the start. We need to take care of developing a consistent game here, we're in a learning phase. We want to stay in the race but above all it's about our development right now, small picture. But we love our last five games." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger

"Moving forward it's going to be more important for us to be more consistent over 60 minutes and we can worry about that tonight." -- Maple Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly on giving up a 2-0 lead against the Sabres on Friday

Sabres projected lineup

Victor Olofsson -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart
Jimmy Vesey -- Casey Mittelstadt -- Marcus Johansson
Jeff Skinner -- Johan Larsson -- Conor Sheary
Zemgus Girgensons -- Rasmus Asplund

Jake McCabe -- Zach Bogosian
Brandon Montour -- Rasmus Ristolainen
Henri Jokiharju -- Marco Scandella
Colin Miller

Carter Hutton
Linus Ullmark

Scratched: Curtis Lazar, Jean-Sebastien Dea

Injured: Kyle Okposo (concussion), Vladimir Sobotka (knee), Tage Thompson (upper body), Evan Rodrigues (lower body), Rasmus Dahlin (concussion)

Maple Leafs projected lineup

Andreas Johnsson -- Auston Matthews -- William Nylander
Ilya Mikheyev -- John Tavares-- Zach Hyman
Alexander Kerfoot -- Jason Spezza -- Kasperii Kapanen
Nic Petan -- Frederik Gauthier - Dmytro Timashov

Morgan Rielly -- Cody Ceci
Jake Muzzin -- Justin Holl
Travis Dermott -- Tyson Barrie

Frederik Andersen
Michael Hutchinson

Scratched: Pierre Engvall, Nicholas Shore

Injured: Mitchell Marner (ankle), Trevor Moore (shoulder)

Status report

Krueger said he is considering dressing seven defensemen and 11 forwards as the Sabres did against Toronto on Friday but would not confirm his lineup until game-time. ... The Maple Leafs did not hold a morning skate.

Stat pack

Vesey has five points (three goals, two assists) during a four-game point streak... Olofsson has six points (three goals, three assists) during a six-game point streak... Kapanen has four points (two goals, two assists) during a three-game point streak... Mikheyev has six assists in his past five games... Spezza has six points (two goals, four assists) in his past six games.

Eichel, Sabres defeat Maple Leafs, hand Keefe first loss as NHL coach

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

November 29, 2019

BUFFALO -- Jack Eichel had two goals and an assist for the Buffalo Sabres in a 6-4 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs at KeyBank Center on Friday.

Jimmy Vesey had a goal and an assist, and Jeff Skinner, Casey Mittelstadt and Victor Olofsson scored for the Sabres (12-10-4). Linus Ullmark made 25 saves for Buffalo, which had lost five straight games to Toronto (0-4-1).

"It's always fun to win on home ice, and we hadn't beat them in a while, so it's good to get the two points, and I think we needed it as a group as well," said Eichel, who extended his point streak to eight games (eight goals, seven assists). "Good contributions up and down the lineup starting with our goaltender, who I thought played tremendous."

John Tavares had two goals, and Dmytro Timashov and Kasper Kapanen scored for the Maple Leafs (12-11-4), who lost for the first time in four games under coach Sheldon Keefe. Michael Hutchinson made 30 saves.

Tavares took a pass from Ilya Mikheyev at the bottom of the right face-off circle to give the Maple Leafs a 1-0 lead at 18:54 of the first period.

Tavares scored his second of the game to make it 2-0 when he picked up the rebound of his shot off the end boards and tucked it by Ullmark at 1:21 of the second.

"We came out in the first period and play well, played really well, and the third period," Hutchinson said. "I think it shows a lot about our team that were able to make adjustments after the second period and come out and generate a lot of offense in the third period. We came close a bunch of times, one shift late in the third period there where it just felt like the puck is going to go in, but their goalie made some big saves, and it ended up being the difference."

Skinner scored the first of four straight goals by the Sabres in the second period on a wrist shot to make it 2-1 at 5:45.

Eichel tied it 2-2 at 9:43 off an odd-man rush when he came out of the penalty box, and Mittelstadt put Buffalo ahead 3-2 when he deflected Marco Scandella's point shot at 12:08.

Olofsson scored from the left circle at 18:54 to make it 4-2.

"You got to give some credit to them," Keefe said. "They did do a nice job. ... We knew the neutral zone was going to be hard to get through today, but just how they set up their structure, in all the games we've watched previous to this, other teams have a hard time getting through there, so we thought that'd be a problem for us, but I thought we were in good spots, then just kind of forced one more pass, instead of putting the puck into a better place where we could have gotten after it."

Timashov got the Maple Leafs within 4-3 at 6:50 of the third period.

Vesey scored for the third straight game to make it 5-3 at 8:34.

"You play a lot of games, all you can do is show up the next day," said Vesey, who did not score a goal in the first 20 games this season prior to the streak. "I think my mindset has been a lot better this year. It's been positive. The first couple years, I think I beat myself up, but (I) stuck with the process and it's paying off."

Kapanen scored at 12:10 of the third to get the Maple Leafs within 5-4.

Eichel scored into an empty net from his own zone with 27 seconds remaining for the 6-4 final.

They said it

"I didn't think really any of our guys had great nights, to be honest. Some of their best people were controlling things out there, and I didn't think we had the same level of play throughout our lineup. I wouldn't single out Auston [Matthews]. I played him a lot early in the game, and that might have hurt us now playing from behind in the second half." -- Maple Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe

"He's a dynamic leader, not only in the way he's communicating right now but also the way he's playing. ... He did put one in the empty net, but it was the work he did before that I think that shows Jack is maturing right in front of our eyes. Every day is fun coaching Jack Eichel." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger

Need to know

Sabres forward Rasmus Asplund was awarded a penalty shot with less than one second remaining in the game when he was hooked by Maple Leafs defenseman Travis Dermott. His shot was saved by Hutchinson. ... Kapanen leads the Maple Leafs with 13 points (six goals, seven assists) on the road this season.

What's next

Maple Leafs: Host the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; CBC, SN1, SNE, SNO, SNP, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Sabres: At the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; CBC, SN1, SNE, SNO, SNP, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Maple Leafs at Sabres preview

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

November 28, 2019

MAPLE LEAFS (12--10--4) at SABRES (11--10--4)

4 p.m. ET; MSG-B, TSN4, NHL.TV

The Game

Sheldon Keefe will try to win his fourth straight game since taking over as coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs when they play the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Friday.

Keefe, who replaced Mike Babcock on Nov. 20, became the first coach in Maple Leafs history to win each of his first three NHL games with a 6-0 victory against the Detroit Red Wings on Wednesday.

The Sabres, who are coming off a 3-2 overtime loss to the Calgary Flames on Wednesday, are 2-8-2 in November and have scored two goals or fewer in five of their past six (1-4-1).

This is the first of a home-and-home series, with the two teams playing at Scotiabank Arena on Saturday.

Players to watch

Maple Leafs forward Auston Matthews has 14 points (nine goals, five assists) in 11 games against Buffalo.

Sabres forward Victor Olofsson has five points (two goals, three assists) in a five-game point streak.

They said it

"At the end of the day, we still have to go out there and perform, work, and do the job. It just doesn't change because of a coaching change. ... We still have to go out there and work. We've brought maybe a little bit more emotion and determination in our game in the last three games, and it's helped." -- Maple Leafs defenseman Jake Muzzin

"We're really excited about it. It's been highlighted on the calendar for a while, this back-to-back. You can feel the energy in the group. We're going to make the picture small here and do our best to play some strong hockey. Of course, the rivalry will bring emotion into the building. We know it'll be a mix of people from Canada and Buffalo supporting both sides, which will create a bit of an atmosphere like I'm used to often in Europe, when there's lots of road fans. It'll certainly give a spark to the game." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger

Maple Leafs projected lineup

Andreas Johnsson -- Auston Matthews -- William Nylander

Ilya Mikheyev -- John Tavares -- Zach Hyman

Nic Petan -- Jason Spezza -- Kasper Kapanen

Pierre Engvall -- Frederik Gauthier -- Nicholas Shore

Morgan Rielly -- Cody Ceci

Jake Muzzin -- Justin Holl

Travis Dermott -- Tyson Barrie

Michael Hutchinson

Frederik Andersen

Scratched: Martin Marincin, Dmytro Timashov

Injured: Mitchell Marner (ankle), Trevor Moore (shoulder)

Suspended: Alexander Kerfoot

Sabres projected lineup

Victor Olofsson -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart
Marcus Johansson -- Casey Mittelstadt -- Jimmy Vesey
Jeff Skinner -- Johan Larsson -- Conor Sheary
Zemgus Girgensons -- Jean-Sebastien Dea -- Rasmus Asplund

Brandon Montour -- Rasmus Ristolainen
Jake McCabe -- Zach Bogosian
Henri Jokiharju -- Colin Miller

Linus Ullmark
Carter Hutton

Scratched: Curtis Lazar, Marco Scandella

Injured: Rasmus Dahlin (concussion), Evan Rodrigues (lower body), Kyle Okposo (concussion), Tage Thompson (upper body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body)

Status report

Neither team held a morning skate. ... Hutchinson will start in goal for Toronto.

Stat pack

Eichel has 12 points (six goals, six assists) in a seven-game point streak. ... Barrie has scored in three straight games and has seven points (three goals, four assists) in a five-game point streak. ... Toronto has outscored its opponents 14-4 in the past three games. ... Olofsson has a point in nine of his past 10 games (three goals, six assists).

Sabres grind out road point in rematch with Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 1, 2019

TORONTO - Speaking Saturday morning outside the visiting dressing room in Scotiabank Arena, Buffalo Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said a consistent defensive effort would be the key for his team in the second game of a home-and-home set with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The Sabres, playing their fifth contest in seven days, responded with a complete defensive outing and grinded their way to a road point in a 2-1 overtime loss.

"I'm really proud of the guys," Krueger said. "This performance on the workload we've had, they sure showed up and played well. ... Really proud of the effort of the guys just digging in really deep and extremely disappointed with the final result."

Rasmus Ristolainen scored Buffalo's lone goal at 6:58 of the third period to tie the score at 1-1. John Tavares tallied the winner for Toronto 1:45 into overtime.

"I think we played a pretty good three periods and maybe we should have earned the win but that didn't happen," Ristolainen said. "It's a little frustrating but we got a huge point on the road."

Though the Maple Leafs outshot the Sabres, 43-30, Krueger felt his team did a good job limiting the quality of their opponents' chances. High-danger shot attempts at even strength were 14-3 in the Sabres' favor, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

Carter Hutton was strong making initial saves throughout a 41-save outing. The players in front of him did a good job boxing out and eliminating second chances.

"That's what we're trying to do is take away time and space and make it a hard game," said defenseman Marco Scandella, who cleared a puck off the Buffalo goal line in the dying seconds of regulation. "I feel like it was hard game both ways."

The Sabres remained patient within the confines of their game plan even when the goals weren't coming. Sam Reinhart and Victor Olofsson both rung posts in the first two periods, while Frederik Andersen used his glove to rob a Connor Sheary one-timer in the second.

Sheary's shot - which would have tied the game at 1-1 - was reviewed by officials to see if the puck crossed the goal line in Andersen's glove. The call on the ice stood due to inconclusive evidence.

"I thought both goalies played very, very well," Krueger said. "We needed to take more opportunity on the chances we had. I thought even though shot clock doesn't show it, I thought we dominated in the chances here today five-on-five and took too long to get that first one."

"Again, I thought we scored one in the second. It wasn't counted, but we buried it in our minds and continued to work."

The Sabres conclude their busy week having taken six of an available 14 points (2-1-2). Krueger had said prior to the game that he felt they were beginning to find consistency in their defensive identity, a trend that continued Saturday.

The one area still in need of a momentum shift is the power play, which remained cold during a 0-for-2 night. The Maple Leafs, meanwhile, scored their lone goal in regulation on a power play during the second period, a backhand off the stick of William Nylander.

"It definitely gets in your head a little bit but you can't dwell on it," alternate captain Marcus Johansson said. "You've just got to go out and execute it. We've got to work on it, we've got to stick with it. Like I said, we just put this group together. We've just got to figure it out together."

The Sabres get a day of rest Sunday. They then begin another busy stretch of four games in seven days, including a three-game swing through Western Canada.

They'll go into it with plenty to build on.

"We're really pleased with the way the team is settling into a pretty consistent game here that gives us a chance every night," Krueger said. "We've been involved in excellent games against some of the strongest teams in the National Hockey League.

"It's about having that mental strength now to take that into every game we play and just continue to build forward. But we feel to be in a good place, guys feel confident. We really showed it here in Toronto today coming off this back-to-back and being the better team down the stretch today."

Up next

The Sabres return home to host the New Jersey Devils on Monday. It will be Founders' Night at KeyBank Center, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the day Buffalo was awarded an NHL franchise.

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m., or you can listen to the game on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.

At the Horn: Sabres 1 - Maple Leafs 2 (OT)

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

November 30, 2019

Carter Hutton stopped 41 of 43 shots on Saturday, but he wasn't able to get all of John Tavares' long-range shot with 3:15 remaining in overtime. That shot proved to be the winner in the Buffalo Sabres' 2-1 loss against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena.

Rasmus Ristolainen tied the score midway through the third period as Buffalo was able to earn a point in the second game of the home-and-home series against Toronto.

Buffalo picked up three points on the weekend after beating the Maple Leafs 6-4 on Friday.

Jack Eichel extended his point streak to nine games with the primary assist on Ristolainen's goal. He now has 16 points (8+8) during that stretch. Eichel has also totaled 20 points (12+8) in 15 career games against Toronto, including nine (5+4) in eight road games.

What happened

The Maple Leafs capitalized on a power-play opportunity early in the second period for the game's first goal. William Nylander lifted a backhand shot high over Hutton's shoulder while in tight to put Toronto up 1-0 5:30 into the second.

The Sabres had several great chances to tie it, including a shot by Conor Sheary that looked like it may have gone in, but it was ruled to have not crossed the line after video review.

Jeff Skinner was denied by Frederik Andersen with 1:29 remaining in the middle frame on a backhand opportunity, and with about 45 seconds left, Victor Olofsson's shot was deflected and hit the crossbar.

Ristolainen was finally able to break the shutout when he walked in and scored on a backhand shot of his own 6:58 into the third period to tie the game.

The Maple Leafs had a few good chances in the final 30 seconds of regulation, but Hutton came up big to make sure the game went to overtime. With about 12 seconds left, Marco Scandella was able to clear the puck before it crossed the goal line after a shot by Auston Matthews found its way past Hutton.

Hutton made 39 saves in regulation.

What it means

The Sabres' record is now 12-10-5 through 27 games and they're 5-7-2 on the road. They're also 2-4 in overtime this season.

Tonight's game wraps up Buffalo's seventh of 14 sets of back-to-back games this season, which began last night.

The Sabres are now 2-4-0 in the first game of back-to-back sets and 2-4-1 in the second game so far this season. Buffalo's point breakdown in previous back-to-back sets is: four points (0), three points (0), two points (4), one point (0) and zero points (2). They were able to pick up three points this weekend.

Roll the highlight film

Believe it or not, this was Ristolainen's first career goal against Toronto:

Up next

It's Founders' Night at KeyBank Center when Buffalo hosts New Jersey on Monday. Tickets are on sale now.

December 2, 1969 was the day the NHL awarded the Knox brothers and the City of Buffalo an expansion franchise so to honor the 50th anniversary of that historic moment, the Buffalo Sabres are celebrating.

Members of Seymour H. Knox III and Northrup R. Knox's families will be welcomed onto the ice as part of a pregame ceremony and special video presentation. Those who served on the original board of directors and their families will also be recognized throughout the night.

Be in your seats early for that, but make sure you arrive at KeyBank Center before the ceremony for birthday-themed festivities to mark the occasion.

There will be a pregame happy hour in the main Labatt Blue Zone bar with \$5 beer specials, food sampling from various corporate partners, and live music.

Hutton to start as Sabres look to sweep home-and-home set with Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 30, 2019

TORONTO - Coming off a thrilling victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs at home on Friday, the Buffalo Sabres are preparing for an emotional response when the two teams meet for a rematch tonight at Scotiabank Arena.

It will be the home debut for Maple Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe, who was undefeated in three games behind the Toronto bench prior to Buffalo's 6-4 win at KeyBank Center.

"I think, above all, it's going to be an angry Toronto team after losing last night and we're expecting their absolute A-game," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "We need to be strong defensively tonight to have a chance and we believe in that opportunity."

Carter Hutton will start in net for the Sabres, who will announce the rest of their lineup at game time. They dressed 11 forwards and seven defensemen Friday, a look Krueger has utilized often of late as the team has navigated a stretch of five games and seven days.

"It gives you options to really mix different guys into the lineup," Krueger said. "You see the top-end guys don't get extra ice time out of it. It's more of a sharing of guys that sometimes don't get the minutes, and I think they're more into the game when they do that."

"For the D, when you're playing the pace that we are against the level of teams that we're playing at right now, they have more energy for their battles when you play with seven. It's also, again, difficult for the opposition to read or react to your lineup."

Krueger said he's been pleased with the way the Sabres have handled their busy schedule of late. They're 2-2-1 in their last five games and have led in each contest. Their win Friday propelled them into third place in the Atlantic Division with 28 points.

"We're not going to care about the standings at all until April 4," Krueger said. "It's something that we've spoken about from the start. We need to take care of developing a consistent game here. We're in a learning phase with the Buffalo Sabres and we want to stay competitive and stay in the race, but above all it's about our development right now, small picture and taking care of that."

"We love the last five games. They've been against very strong opponents. We've been in every game, we've made life difficult for other teams, and the results didn't go our way, but we feel there's a real interesting phase developing right now of consistency within the style of play. We've had the heaviest workload in the National Hockey League here of late and you still see the guys on topic and on page. We're expecting them to be able to do that again tonight."

Number to know: 6

Victor Olofsson extended his career-best point streak to six games with a goal on Friday, his 10th of the season. He has three goals in this last four games, all of which have come at even strength while skating on a line with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

"The power-play goals early, they came quite easily actually and then the challenge was to find the spaces," Krueger said. "He's just such a smart player, and what I like about Victor is no matter what we get the defensive consistency from him. His patience has allowed him to find those spaces and holes."

"It's an exciting thing to watch how that line in general has developed their 5-on-5 game, which was not that strong early in the season, but they're a threat against anybody. That's only going to continue to grow."

Tune in

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. with puck drop scheduled for 7. Be sure to stay tuned during the first and second intermissions for the premier of Beyond Blue and Gold: Ray vs. Domi. You won't want to miss it.

Eichel excels on both ends of the ice in Sabres' win over Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 29, 2019

Jack Eichel stepped over the boards with 1:36 remaining, one of five Sabres tasked with protecting a one-goal lead against the Toronto Maple Leafs inside KeyBank Center on Friday. Toronto had just called a timeout, prepping for a 6-on-5 attack with goalie Michael Hutchinson pulled.

Sixty-nine hectic seconds later, Eichel was still on the ice, watching his shot travel out of the Buffalo zone and into the empty Toronto net at the other end of the ice. He lifted his stick into the air as his teammates surrounded him, exhausted and victorious.

The goal capped a three-point night for the captain in Buffalo's back-and-forth, 6-4 win over the Maple Leafs. But for all his offensive contributions, it was Eichel's late defensive presence that stuck out in coach Ralph Krueger's memory afterward.

"I was most excited about his last couple of minutes, how he came to play without the puck, how hard he defended when they pulled the goalie out," Krueger said. "He did put one in the empty net, but it was the work he did before that I think that shows Jack is maturing right in front of our eyes.

"Every day is fun coaching Jack Eichel."

The victory was far from a one-man show. Jeff Skinner, Casey Mittelstadt, Victor Olofsson and Jimmy Vesey all added goals as the Sabres erased a 2-0 deficit in the second period and then fended off an aggressive Maple Leafs comeback attempt in the third. Linus Ullmark made 25 saves.

Yet it was Eichel who led the way, beginning when he traveled from end to end on a backcheck and lunged to break up a would-be breakaway for John Tavares in the first period.

Tavares did eventually score a pair of goals, the latter of which put the Maple Leafs ahead 2-0 early in the second. Even then, the Sabres felt comfortable with the way they had been playing. Skinner cut the deficit in half with his 10th goal of the season, scored at the 5:45 mark of the period.

Eichel took a penalty for slashing less than two minutes later. He waited while the penalty kill did its job - it held the Maple Leafs power play without a goal on four tries - then left the box, picked the puck up at the defensive blue line, gained a head of steam as he carried it through the neutral zone and buried a hard wrist shot on a 2-on-1 rush with Marcus Johansson.

In that moment, Johansson felt momentum swing in Buffalo's direction.

"It felt like we played good," he said. "They had some chances, but it felt like we played pretty good. Once we got the 2-2 goal, I felt like we just kind of kept taking over a little bit."

Mittelstadt deflected a shot from Marco Scandella to put the Sabres ahead less than three minutes later. Eichel struck again with 1:06 left in the period, this time setting up Olofsson to make it 4-2.

It was no ordinary assist. The play began with Eichel winning a foot race against Maple Leafs defenseman Jake Muzzin to a loose puck in the corner of the Toronto zone. He used his body to shrug Muzzin away, carried the puck behind the net and - with all five Maple Leafs skaters focused on him - delivered a quick pass to Olofsson in the left faceoff circle.

"He had almost all five of them on him," Olofsson said. "He held onto the puck and passed to me at the right moment, so I had a lot of time."

Johansson spent seven seasons as Alex Ovechkin's teammate in Washington. He played with Taylor Hall in New Jersey and David Pastrnak, Brad Marchand, and Patrice Bergeron in Boston. So, when he credits his young captain with having the ability to take over games, it means something.

"The way he can take over games, it's impressive," Johansson said. "Not a lot of guys can do that. He's so dominant when he gets going like that.

"He's so big and strong, too. It's not just that he can play with the puck and make plays. He's so big and strong and fast. He's got everything. When he does that, it kind of sparks the whole team."

Statistically speaking, Eichel is taking over games like never before. This was his sixth three-point outing of the season - two more than his previous career high, set in 2016-17. Only Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl have more such games this season.

Eichel has tallied 15 points (8+7) during his eight-game point streak. Through 26 contests, he's on pace for 82-game totals of 50 goals and 107 points.

Oh, and he has also never shied away from the rivalry with the Maple Leafs. He has 12 goals in 14 career contests against Buffalo's neighbors to the north, his best per-game output against any opponent.

The two teams meet again at Scotiabank Arena in less than 24 hours.

"We always play them hard and they always play us tough," Eichel said. "... It's good to see us get a win tonight. I don't think we did too well against them last year. We've got a big game tomorrow night. We know they're going to be ready to go. We've just got to be ready at puck drop."

Vesey makes it 3 in a row

The Maple Leafs struck early in the third period on a one-timer from Dmytro Timashov, cutting the Sabres' lead to 4-3 with 13:10 remaining. It was Vesey who provided the added insurance less than two minutes later. As with his last two goals, it was a quick reaction that put himself alone with the goaltender.

Vesey now has goals in three straight games since scoring his first of the season in Tampa on Monday.

"I guess the floodgates are open now," he said afterward. "I've been on some pretty good streaks in my career before. ... Sometimes it's a funny game and there's nothing you can do. You play a lot of games; all you can do is show up the next day. I think my mindset has been a lot better this year."

Up next

The two teams will meet for the back end of the home-and-home set in Toronto on Saturday. Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m., or you can listen to the game on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7.

Make sure to stay on MSG during the first and second intermissions for the premier of Beyond Blue and Gold: Ray vs. Domi. Find more information in the tweet below.

At the Horn: Maple Leafs 4 - Sabres 6

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

November 29, 2019

Jack Eichel extended his point streak to eight games with a three-point night against the Toronto Maple Leafs in the Buffalo Sabres' 6-4 win on Friday at KeyBank Center.

Buffalo used a four-goal second period to rally back from an early 2-0 deficit.

Jimmy Vesey was credited with the game winner 8:34 into the third period. Jeff Skinner, Victor Olofsson and Casey Mittelstadt also scored for Buffalo. Eichel picked up two goals and an assist for his ninth multi-point game of the season.

Linus Ullmark had a strong game in net for Buffalo, making 25 saves. He faced a barrage of Maple Leafs chances, especially in the final three minutes when Toronto made their final push.

Rookie Rasmus Asplund was awarded a penalty shot with 0.9 seconds remaining. He was stopped by Michael Hutchinson, who was credited with 30 saves in the game. The attempt was Buffalo's first penalty shot since Dec. 22, 2017 against Philadelphia when Brian Elliot stopped Evander Kane.

What happened

Toronto got on the board first with a pair of goals from captain John Tavares. His first came with 1:06 to play in the first period and then he doubled the score at the 1:21 mark of the second.

Then Buffalo staged their comeback, starting with a goal from Skinner 5:45 into the second and then one from Eichel at 9:43. Mittelstadt deflected in a point shot from Marco Scandella to put Buffalo ahead with 7:52 to go in the middle frame. Olofsson's hard wrist shot with 1:06 to go in the second found the back of the net to give the Sabres a 4-2 lead.

The Maple Leafs made it a one-goal game when Dmytro Timashov scored 6:50 into the third, but the Sabres responded right away when Vesey scored his third goal in three games 1:44 later.

Toronto got back within one with 7:50 to go. Kasperi Kapanen capitalized on a pass from Nic Petan.

Eichel iced it with an empty-net goal with 27 seconds left.

What it means

Buffalo is 12-10-4 on the season and 7-3-3 on home ice after the win.

Eichel's second-period goal has extended his point streak to eight games and he now has 15 points (8+7) in that stretch.

With Buffalo's fourth goal of the game, Olofsson extended his career-best point streak to six games (3+3).

Olofsson has now recorded points in 10 of his last 11 games (4+6), including a point in each of his last six home games (2+4).

With his goal today, Skinner now has 10 goals at 5-on-5 this season, tying him for sixth in the NHL. Since joining the Sabres prior to the 2018-19 season, Skinner's 37 5-on-5 goals are tied for third in the NHL, three off the league lead.

Vesey's assist on Mittelstadt's goal has extended his point streak to a career-high four games (2+2). Mittelstadt's marker was his fourth of the season, and his first since Oct. 19.

Roll the highlight film

Eichel now has 19 points (12+7) in 13 career games against Toronto. Here's his first goal:

Up next

The Sabres and Maple Leafs will go at it again tomorrow night in Toronto.

And don't miss the intermission report after the first and second periods for the broadcast premiere of "Beyond Blue and Gold: Ray v. Domi." Former enforcers Rob Ray and Tie Domi sat down to watch all 13 of their NHL fights, and we recorded every minute of it.

Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. with the Buick Game Night pregame show starting at 6:30 on MSG.

Ullmark to start at home vs. Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 29, 2019

Linus Ullmark will start in net when the Buffalo Sabres open a home-and-home set with the Toronto Maple Leafs at KeyBank Center this evening.

Ullmark has started four of the last five contests for the Sabres, stopping 115 of 126 shots in that span (.913). He's 5-5-2 with a .914 save percentage this season.

Though Ullmark has shouldered a heavier workload of late, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said the team still expects to utilize an even rotation with Carter Hutton moving forward. Hutton has already made 13 starts this season; Ullmark will make his 13th tonight.

"It's an interesting situation," Krueger said after practice Thursday. "With all these back-to-backs, we always need two goalies, as we will this weekend, and it's just the order that's really deciding it.

"And, yes, Linus has had a little bit more responsibility, but we're pretty well split on the season. And I think that that is the way we're feeling it's going to play out, there will eventually be more of split because of the schedule we have and the energy you need to play in goal at this level."

The rest of Buffalo's lineup will be revealed at game time. The Sabres will warm up with 19 skaters, leaving them the option to dress 11 forwards and seven defensemen or go with the traditional 12-6 lineup.

The Maple Leafs have won three straight games since replacing Mike Babcock as head coach with Sheldon Keefe, who was formerly the coach of their AHL affiliate in Toronto. They sit third in the Atlantic Division with 28 points, two ahead of the Sabres.

The Sabres, meanwhile, have led in each of their last four games but only have three points to show for them. They're looking to rebound from an overtime loss to the Calgary Flames on Wednesday.

"I think we all see that we have to take advantage of opportunity," Krueger said. "There's been, since the Boston game, a real drive to create presence in front of the net of the opposition and there's been opportunity which we've left out because we haven't been getting pucks to the net and we're missing at bad angles and turning puck back the other way.

"... I think we need to continue the path that we're on defensively. This commitment to everybody working together in both directions is high, and our final piece will be to get our power play firing, the motor of our offense, and then to use the opportunities we're creating with much more of a passion and more aggressiveness where then second chances and blue paint pressure would be the final component for us to get results."

Coverage on MSG begins at 3:30 p.m. Puck drop is scheduled for 4.