



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 21, 2019

Sabres C Eichel day to day with upper body injury

By Associated Press

December 20, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been listed as day to day with an upper body injury.

Eichel practiced with the Sabres on Friday, and his status is uncertain for Saturday's game against the visiting Los Angeles Kings.

The NHL's second-leading scorer was scratched 10 minutes before the start of Buffalo's 6-1 loss at Philadelphia on Thursday night after he participated in warmups.

Eichel said Friday he was feeling better but provided no other specifics on the injury, other than noting it was something that has been bothering him for some time.

Eichel has 24 goals and 50 points in 35 games. The injury put an end to Eichel's 17-game point-scoring streak — the league's longest this season — because the NHL does not allow point streaks to continue if there are missed games. Eichel's point-scoring streak fell one short of the Sabres' franchise record of 18 games set by Gilbert Perreault, who scored in 18 straight games from Oct. 24-Dec. 4, 1971.

Sabres game day: Kings awaiting word on Jack Eichel's availability

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 21, 2019

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (16-13-7) vs. Los Angeles Kings (15-18-4)

Where: KeyBank Center

When: 1 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

Awaiting word: The Kings are ready to go back to Los Angeles after playing six consecutive road games. That chaotic schedule has given coach Todd McLellan and his staff little time to look too far ahead at opponents.

McLellan didn't plan to bother analyzing the Sabres' 6-1 loss Thursday night in Philadelphia. After all, Jack Eichel was out of the lineup with an upper-body injury, but Buffalo's 23-year-old captain could be in the lineup Saturday.

Eichel practiced with the Sabres on Friday, but his availability won't be determined until Saturday morning.

"I don't think the game in Philadelphia is any indication of how this team has been playing, so you almost have to throw that one out and dig a little further back," McLellan said following the Kings' practice Friday in KeyBank Center. "The Toronto game was good for both teams, competitive night, but they are a solid team. Obviously, their captain is driving their team and playing like an MVP, so he has a big part in the direction of the game and how it's going to unfold. We're aware of that."

Lineup: With Johan Larsson (upper body) expected to miss at least the next two games, the Sabres recalled forward Curtis Lazar from Rochester on Friday. Lazar, 24, can play either center or wing and lined up at the former with Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo during practice.

However, Krueger may use seven defensemen since the Sabres' penalty kill struggled against the Flyers. Zach Bogosian, who reportedly requested a trade last week, skated with Rasmus Dahlin in practice, which indicates he could be in the lineup against Los Angeles. Bogosian is one of the Sabres' top options on the penalty kill.

Here is how the Sabres lined up during practice Friday:

Olofsson-Eichel-Reinhart
Skinner-Johansson-Asplund
Vesey-Rodrigues-Sheary
Girgensons-Lazar-Okposo

Dahlin-Bogosian
Scandella-Jokiharju
McCabe-Ristolainen
Miller-Montour

No. 1: Linus Ullmark has emerged as the Sabres' No. 1 goalie over the past month, winning six of his last 10 starts dating back to Nov. 24. Entering Friday, his .916 save percentage during that span ranked sixth in the NHL among all goalies to play at least nine games.

Meanwhile, Kings goalie Jonathan Quick has a 3-0-1 record and .933 save percentage in his last four games.

Special teams: There's no question Dahlin has transformed the Sabres' power play since returning from a concussion Dec. 12. In four games during that span, the Sabres are 4-for-7 on the man advantage with at least one goal in three consecutive games.

The penalty kill will need a jolt of confidence after what unfolded Thursday night in Philadelphia. The Sabres allowed three power-play goals after going 8-for-8 in their previous four games. Losing Larsson will have a significant impact and one of his usual fill-ins, Evan Rodrigues, is also day to day with a lower-body injury.

Improvement: The Kings are 4-0-2 in their last six games, scoring 19 goals and allowing 15. Forward Tyler Toffoli, who was the subject of trade rumors earlier this season, has three goals among eight points during that span.

Offense has been the issue under McLellan. The Kings entered Friday tied for 23rd in the NHL in goals (63) and had the second-worst power play.

Generating chances wasn't a problem when the Kings hosted the Sabres on Oct. 17. Los Angeles had 47 shots on goal, but Buffalo scored a pair of first-period goals and Carter Hutton had his second consecutive shutout. The Sabres have won each of their last three games against the Kings, including a 4-3 overtime win in KeyBank Center on Dec. 18, 2018.

The Sabres have a 15-2-1 record (one tie) at home against the Kings since the beginning of the 1993-94 season. The Kings' only wins in Buffalo during that stretch came on Feb. 21, 2003, and Feb. 17, 2018.

Opposing player to watch: Kings winger Alex Iafallo, a 25-year-old Eden native, has five goals among 16 points through 37 games and is on pace to surpass the career-high 33 points he posted for the Kings last season.

Iafallo is amid a scoring slump, totaling just two assists in his last 12 games. He's averaging 19:12 of ice time during that span. Iafallo had a season-high five shots on goal against the Sabres at Staples Center in October.

This story will be updated following Krueger's media availability at approximately 11 a.m. EST.

With Sabres centers on the mend, Marcus Johansson still trying to 'feel like myself'

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
December 20, 2019

Marcus Johansson was elevated to center one of the most productive lines in the National Hockey League when Jack Eichel was scratched moments before puck drop Thursday night in Philadelphia.

The last-minute change wasn't unusual for Johansson. His first season in Buffalo has included a positional change, an upper-body injury that forced him to miss seven games in November and an ongoing struggle to discover the skill set that earned him a two-year, \$9 million contract in July.

"I don't think anyone in the world can fill Jack's shoes right now," Johansson said following practice Friday in KeyBank Center.

That wasn't Johansson's goal while playing 18:26 in a 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers in Wells Fargo Center. Despite having an impressive start to the season, Johansson hasn't felt comfortable with the puck during his 29 games in a Sabres uniform.

He has five goals among 15 points with a minus-4 rating. With the Sabres in need of secondary scoring, and Eichel's status uncertain for the game Saturday against the Los Angeles Kings, Johansson wants to be part of the solution.

"I still have a long way to go to get to where I usually am, and where I know I can be. But I feel like it's been a little bit better," Johansson said. " ... You always want to be at your best and help the team win. You want to get better every day, too. I come in every day and work hard to do that. I haven't felt like myself pretty much all year."

Most of the 617 regular-season games on Johansson's NHL resume were spent on the wing. The former first-round draft pick had his finest offensive seasons at the position from 2014-17, scoring 61 goals during a three-season span with the Washington Capitals.

However, Johansson was needed at center because the Sabres were thin at the position during training camp. He has downplayed the significance of a position change, though. Johansson was a center when he was drafted 24th overall by the Capitals in 2009 and played there his first two seasons in the NHL, scoring 27 goals among 73 points in 149 regular-season games. Later, he filled in when Washington was thin down the middle.

Krueger has tried to give Johansson more freedom by placing him on a line with a forward who has recent experience playing center, such as Vladimir Sobotka or Rasmus Asplund, and the Sabres' system doesn't constrict Johansson to remaining in the middle of the ice. Those familiar with Johansson have viewed his skill set as tailor-made to center a line.

"He sees the ice so well and he's so smart," Capitals forward T.J. Oshie said of his former teammate prior to the Sabres' game in Washington last month. "I think he plays more like a centerman because he's so good at controlling the puck and creating offense for his linemates. I know when we had some injuries here, he moved to center and did a fantastic job. He's an all-around great player and good at lots of things. I think he's a very underrated player."

Johansson was a catalyst during the Sabres' 8-1-1 start to the season, scoring three goals among five points in his first six games with Buffalo. However, in 20 games since Oct. 22, Johansson has only one goal among eight points with a minus-10 rating while averaging 17:46 of ice time.

Johansson was growing comfortable with the puck in late October, only to suffer an upper-body injury that forced him to regain his timing. When Johansson is at his best, he can effortlessly carry the puck into the offensive zone before setting up his teammates for scoring opportunities.

There have been encouraging signs since Johansson returned to the lineup Nov. 27. He has formed chemistry with Jeff Skinner – the two are likely to play together Saturday if Eichel is cleared to face the Kings – and had a three-game point streak during the Sabres' trip to Western Canada earlier this month.

Johansson also helped generate the Sabres' only two quality scoring chances through two periods Tuesday night in Toronto. However, his struggles with the puck were illustrated when his turnover during a 6-on-4 power play resulted in an empty-net goal that clinched a 5-3 loss to the Maple Leafs.

"He wants really to be an impact player," Krueger said. "He wants to make a difference every day. I think he's still finding his A-game every single day, but he's working hard at it. He's part of the group as far as the way he's coachable, the way he's taking leadership off the ice, and we're expecting him to still go to another level because of the path he's on."

Krueger spoke highly of Johansson's recent performance on the Sabres' top power-play unit and hopes that role will lead to success at 5 on 5, much like it did with Victor Olofsson. With Johan Larsson expected to miss at least two games because of an upper-body injury, the Sabres need a solution at center behind Eichel.

Evan Rodrigues has zero goals in 20 games and Curtis Lazar, a forward recalled from Rochester on Friday, is expected to replace Larsson in the lineup. Johansson has proven capable of providing supplementary scoring. Though he was limited by injury over the previous two seasons with New Jersey, Johansson had four goals among 11 points during 22 playoff games as a winger with the Boston Bruins last spring.

Johansson hasn't felt comfortable with the puck since he and the Bruins lost to the St. Louis Blues in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. Buffalo has two more games until the three-day holiday break, which Johansson is viewing as a "fresh start," but he'll continue his search to regain his form.

"There are ups and downs," Johansson said. "You can't lay down and stop playing because of that. ... I want to feel like myself and be more comfortable with the puck. I want to make more things happen."

Jack Eichel joins Sabres for practice, uncertain whether he'll play against Kings

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 20, 2019

Jack Eichel's absence from the Buffalo Sabres' lineup may last only one game.

The 23-year-old captain was on the KeyBank Center ice for practice Friday afternoon, less than 24 hours after an upper-body injury made him a late scratch for the Sabres' 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers in Wells Fargo Center. Eichel did not seem to have any limitations and centered the team's top line during drills.

However, Eichel's status for Saturday against the Los Angeles Kings won't be determined until hours before puck drop in Buffalo. Neither Eichel nor coach Ralph Krueger would reveal more details about the ailment, other than the Sabres' top center is "day to day" and had been playing through whatever forced him to miss his first game of the season.

"It's obviously frustrating," Eichel said. "You never want to not be on the ice with the team. I'm a competitive guy, I want to be out there every night. But I thought it was the best for me at that time."

With Eichel out of the lineup, the Sabres had only nine shots on goal when trailing 6-0 at the end of the second period and did not spoil Flyers goalie Carter Hart's shutout until Victor Olofsson scored on a deflection with 8:25 remaining in the third period. The Sabres also lost centers Johan Larsson (upper body) and Evan Rodrigues (lower body) to injury during the loss.

Larsson, who did not practice Friday, will miss at least the next two games after suffering what Krueger classified as a bruise with 16:48 remaining in the second period. Rodrigues, meanwhile, returned to practice Friday but remains "day to day" after taking a slap shot off the back of his left leg with 16:52 left in regulation. His availability against the Kings won't be determined until Saturday morning, according to Krueger.

Larsson's absence forced the Sabres to recall forward Curtis Lazar from Rochester on Friday morning. Eichel's injury also put a stop to his bid at making history in Philadelphia.

Since Eichel was unable to play Thursday, his point streak stopped at 17 games, one off the franchise record held by Gilbert Perreault. Entering the game, Eichel's 16 goals, 31 points and plus-17 rating since the streak began Nov. 16 ranked first in the National Hockey League.

Eichel's 17-game point streak was the longest in the NHL this season and tied with Dave Andreychuk for the second-longest in franchise history, though the latter accomplished the feat in consecutive seasons. With his two points Tuesday night in Toronto, Eichel became the first Sabres player to reach 50 points in 35 or fewer games since 1992-93 (Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny).

Eichel also joined Rick Martin as the only players in franchise history to record at least 20 goals and 50 points in each of his first five NHL seasons. Entering Friday, Eichel ranked second in the NHL in goals (24), tied for eighth in assists (24) and tied for fifth in points (50).

"Yeah, it's not something that came out of nowhere," Eichel said of his upper-body injury. "I guess you could say I've been dealing with it a little bit."

Second-guessing

Krueger is going to think twice the next time there is possible goalie interference when an opponent scores against the Sabres. His failed coach's challenge on the Flyers' second goal 15:32 into the first period Thursday night resulted in a delay-of-game penalty against Buffalo, and Philadelphia scored a minute, 33 seconds later on a shot by Matt Niskanen from the right-wing circle to push the lead to 3-0.

Flyers coach Alain Vigneault later called the sequence the "turning point" of the game and Krueger shouldered blame for giving his opponent additional momentum.

"We made a risky call on the 2-0 goal, which turned into 3-0, which is on us coaches," Krueger said. "We're still trying to figure out what is goalie interference. I think what we've learned is to be cautious and, if that was the lesson we took out of last night, that will help us in the future that's another good learner."

Lazar reinforces forward line

Lazar, a 24-year-old forward who is a former first-round draft pick, has six goals among 14 points in 18 games with the Amerks and scored one goal in six games with the Sabres earlier this season.

Lazar recently had played center in Rochester and filled in for Larsson during practice Friday, playing on a line with Kyle Okposo and Zemgus Girgensons. Lazar has 16 goals among 52 points in 252 career NHL regular-season games between Ottawa, Calgary and Buffalo. He signed a one-year contract with the Sabres in July.

Center Casey Mittelstadt, who was drafted eighth overall in 2018, was sent to Rochester on Sunday, but he has played only one game with the Amerks and will continue to develop there until he shows he's ready to return to the Sabres.

"Versatility's got to be one thing," Lazar said when asked what led to him being recalled. "I can play all three forward positions. But regardless of where I am, my game doesn't change. I feel like I've really been hitting my stride. Also me playing center, that's something that I felt good about my game on the wing. Now playing back down the middle, which being a natural centerman, it felt good. I'm just trying to ride the momentum back up here and take the chance."

'The Hamburglar' robbing opposing AHL shooters at rapid pace in hot streak

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 20, 2019

ROCHESTER – Having recorded four shutouts in his last 10 starts, Andrew Hammond might be the American Hockey League's best goalie right now.

Hammond, 31, has compiled a 7-2-1 record with a 1.40 goals-against and a .947 save percentage since Nov. 1 with the Americans.

"As far as consistency in my game, I think it's about as good as I ever felt," Hammond said recently.

Considering the dynamic rookie season he enjoyed with the Ottawa Senators in 2014-15 – he closed it by compiling a stunning 20-1-2 record – Hammond's words hold meaning.

"I think about my game, I'm as confident as I was then," said Hammond, who signed a one-year, one-way contract with the Buffalo Sabres on July 1. "It's a different level, too, but at the same time, I feel like the goaltender I was then I'm getting back to. I feel very good about that."

Hammond, of course, is best remembered for backstopping the Senators to an unlikely playoff berth. For three months, the phenom nicknamed "The Hamburglar" was the NHL's hottest goalie.

But Hammond, 31, has endured some tough seasons in the past five years, battling injuries and bouncing around.

The Bowling Green product has played only 37 NHL games since his breakout campaign, his last appearance coming with the Colorado Avalanche in the 2018 playoffs.

Action, even in the minors, has often been sporadic. Over a three-year stretch, he played just 26 AHL games.

By early 2017-18, the Senators buried Hammond down the AHL depth chart with Belleville as he waited for a trade.

"We had four goalies at one point there, and obviously they want to develop younger guys and get them their games, so he wasn't getting the games that he needed," said Amerks winger Tyler Randell, Hammond's teammate in Belleville.

The 6-foot-2, 223-pound Hammond started getting on track in 2018-19, playing 33 contests with the Iowa Wild, Minnesota's affiliate. Despite staying in the minors all season for the first time, he was buoyed by the stability of remaining in one place and being injury-free.

"Right now, I definitely feel more confident than ever about how I'm playing and just knowing what I do to be successful," he said. "Last year, I got a chance to play again regularly. This year, I'm just building off that."

Hammond has developed a rhythm in Rochester that he hasn't felt in a long time. Overall, he has played 16 games, compiling a 10-3-2 mark with a 2.21 goals-against average and a .916 save percentage.

He's on pace to play 45 games, the most since he appeared in 48 contests between Ottawa and the Binghamton Senators in 2014-15.

In Hammond and prospect Jonas Johansson, the Amerks possess arguably the league's best goaltending tandem.

"They're feeding off each other, the internal competition is really good," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. "One does well, the other one's doing really well. It's just great."

Not surprisingly, Hammond has evolved this season, focusing more on his own game than what's happening around him.

"I just think this year, maybe more than others, I'm not worrying about the team around me as much," he said. "I'm just worrying about my job and understanding at the end of the day, my job's just to stop the puck. Whether it's a breakdown or a routine save, it's my job to make those."

Most games, Hammond usually makes routine saves. The Amerks, having allowed only 62 goals in 26 games, showcase the league's tightest defense.

Hammond has faced 30 or more shots in a game only three times this season.

"It's both a blessing and at times it can be a struggle, too, because you're trying to keep your focus," said Hammond, who accompanied the Sabres to Sweden last month as their third goalie. "But I think in a lot of ways it's definitely been great for me because you just really are able to focus on your own game and making sure that you're there for those routine saves and understanding that there's going to be breakdowns."

Upcoming

The Amerks host the Binghamton Devils on Friday and the Utica Comets on Saturday.

Williamsville native Justin Bailey, who spent four years in the Sabres organization, has scored nine goals and 17 points in 29 games with the Comets this season.

The winger hasn't played in Rochester since the Sabres traded him to the Philadelphia Flyers for Taylor Leier on Jan. 19.

Sabres recall Curtis Lazar after losing three centers to injury

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 20, 2019

The rash of injuries that set the stage for an ugly 6-1 loss Thursday night in Philadelphia forced the Buffalo Sabres to recall forward Curtis Lazar from Rochester on Friday morning.

Lazar, 24, had six goals among 14 points in 18 games with the Americans and this is his third time being recalled by the Sabres this season. He had one goal in seven games with Buffalo and can play either center or wing.

Lazar may be needed at the former after what unfolded Thursday in Wells Fargo Center. Jack Eichel was scratched with an upper-body injury after participating in pregame warmups, and Johan Larsson (upper body) and Evan Rodrigues (lower body) did not return to the game after leaving for the trainers' room.

Coach Ralph Krueger is expected to update the media on all three players after the Sabres practice Friday at noon in Buffalo. They were carrying 12 forwards and eight defensemen on their roster, and Krueger has the option of using seven defensemen Saturday afternoon against the Los Angeles Kings in KeyBank Center.

Lazar has 16 goals among 52 points in 252 career NHL games between the Ottawa Senators, Calgary Flames and Sabres.

Eichel returned to practice on Friday

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 20, 2019

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel was back on the ice for practice on Friday after missing Thursday night's matchup with the Philadelphia Flyers due to an upper-body injury.

Eichel was a participant in the morning skate and in the pregame warmup before being a late scratch to the lineup with an upper-body injury. It was the first game he has missed the entire season, and it also snapped his career-long 17-game point streak.

Eichel was back at practice on Friday skating with his usual linemates Sam Reinhart and Victor Olofsson.

Shortly before the game on Thursday, TSN hockey insider Darren Dreger reported that Eichel likely sat out due to the flu. However, Eichel did not say it was a sickness that kept him out. All he would say was it was an upper-body injury that forced him out.

"It's obviously frustrating. You never want to not be on the ice with the team," Eichel said following practice on Friday. "I'm a competitive guy. I want to be out there every night, but I just thought it was the best for me at that time [to sit out]."

"It's not just something that came out of no where. It's something that, I guess you could say, I've been dealing with."

The 23-year-old said that he felt pretty good on the ice, and that he'll if he can play Saturday afternoon's matchup with the Los Angeles Kings at KeyBank Center.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said after practice that Eichel's prognosis is day-to-day, and that the staff will make the call on Saturday morning as to whether or not he will return to the lineup. However, he did not elaborate on what happened with Eichel that led him to be the late scratch.

Eichel was one game away from tying Gilbert Perreault's franchise record 18-game point streak before sitting out of Thursday's contest. He said that he was disappointed that the streak had to come to an end, even though he did not have the chance to match the feat.

As for other injury news from Friday's practice, Evan Rodrigues was back on the ice after leaving Thursday's game with a lower-body injury. The Buffalo forward took a shot off the back of the leg in the third period of the team's 6-1 loss to the Flyers.

"It obviously got me in a spot with no protection," Rodrigues said of the shot that hit him. "On set, it kind of went numb, but as the night went on and overnight and this morning, it's been feeling better, and I'm good to go."

"It didn't feel good right away. I couldn't feel my foot at all. But again, it came back and everything's good. I'm good to go."

Rodrigues is, arguably, off to the worst start of a season in his career with just two assists in 20 games played this year. The 26-year-old has not registered a point since Nov. 14 against the Carolina Hurricanes, and has not scored a goal since last season on March 17.

While the offense has not been going Rodrigues' way, he is trying to push through the struggles and get back on track by getting other areas of his game in check.

"It's not going the way I want it to, but you kind of got to get out of your own head a bit and just play. These kind of things happen. You see it around the league; look at a guy like [Ottawa Senators forward Anthony] Duclair, who this year is having a huge year after bouncing around a little bit before that. It's just one of those years, but at the same time, there's a lot of hockey to go. You just have to believe in yourself, and continue to push, continue to fight and do all the little things right and the offense will come."

Rodrigues was back centering a line at practice with Jimmy Vesey to his left and Conor Sheary to his right.

Krueger said that Rodrigues is in a similar situation to Eichel, where he is day-to-day and he will be evaluated on Saturday morning before being given the okay to play. However, Krueger did say that the assessment of Rodrigues on Friday did look good.

Johan Larsson is not going to be in the lineup for the Sabres over the next couple of games.

The 27-year-old suffered an upper-body injury late in the first period of Thursday's loss in Philadelphia. Krueger said that he will be out for at least the next two games before the Christmas break, and he hopes that it is only a one week injury.

"He'll definitely miss the next two games," he said. "It's an upper-body that we think we can manage in the near future."

Larsson has had a very nice bounce-back season in 2019-20 after a 2018-19 season which had many thinking that his future in Buffalo was in doubt. Through 33 games this year, Larsson has four goals and eight assists for 12 points, and is on pace for a career-high 28 points.

Earlier in the season, Larsson missed a couple of games due to an upper-body injury, but Krueger made it clear that this is not the same upper-body injury that he had suffered then.

"It's a new bruise. It's obviously nothing that serious, but he's a tough guy. He worked and tried to go through it yesterday, but we found it was better to pull him."

The Sabres' penalty kill on Thursday struggled mightily against the Flyers, giving up three power play goals on five attempts. Defenseman Zach Bogosian is known for his penalty killing prowess, and was skating on a pair with Rasmus Dahlin at practice. While no details were given about the lineup for Saturday, we could see Bogosian re-enter the lineup after sitting out the last four games as a healthy scratch.

Earlier on Friday, the Sabres called up forward Curtis Lazar from the Rochester Americans. He slotted in to Larsson's empty roster spot, centering Zemgus Girgensons to his left and Kyle Okposo to his right.

Here's how the lines looked on Friday:

Olofsson - Eichel - Reinhart
Skinner - Johansson - Asplund
Vesey - Rodrigues - Sheary
Girgensons - Lazar - Okposo

Dahlin - Bogosian
Jokiharju - Scandella
McCabe - Ristolainen
Miller - Montour

Tune in Saturday for pregame coverage starting at noon on WGR with Brian Koziol, where you will hear more from Krueger, Eichel, Rodrigues, and Rasmus Asplund.

Sabres call up Lazar from Rochester

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 20, 2019

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) - With the Buffalo Sabres dealing with more potential injuries at forward, the team has announced the call up of Curtis Lazar from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

In Buffalo's 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday night, forward Johan Larsson and Evan Rodrigues left the game due to injury and did not return. Larsson was injured in the first period of play with an upper-body ailment, while Rodrigues left the game in the third period after taking a shot to the back of his left foot in front of the Flyers net.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel was also a late scratch for the Sabres with what the team is calling an upper-body injury. However, TSN hockey insider Darren Dreger reported that Eichel was sick with the flu.

This is Lazar's third call up of the season. He has appeared in six games with the Sabres this year, picking up a goal and seven penalty minutes.

In 18 games with the Amerks this season, Lazar has scored six goals and picked up eight assists for 14 points.

The Sabres will practice at KeyBank Center this afternoon before facing the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday afternoon at 1 p.m. That game will be aired on our sister station, News Radio 930 AM WBEN with Buffalo Bills pregame coverage taking place on WGR.

Sabres mailbag: How the team fills their middle line center spots, potential trade options and more

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

December 20, 2019

Writing a mailbag piece is fun because, really, it's up to you fine readers to supply the opportunity to write about whatever it is you're asking. It's also good to know what's at the forefront of the fans' minds with the Sabres.

This time around, putting out the call made it very apparent there are more than a few things in your thoughts as the Sabres figure themselves out. The Bills are going to the playoffs and the Sabres would like to be in the same discussion come springtime. It sure seems wild (for now) that it's a possibility.

You all had questions about how the Sabres are going to try to figure things out and I thank you all so much for them. Let's dig in.

With Mittelstadt moved down to the AHL, how do they fill in for the 2nd or 3rd line center spot? - Dj N.

What needs to be done first after that embarrassing 6-1 loss to the Flyers? Trade for someone capable of scoring a goal? Trade for a capable goaltender? Trade for a capable GM? All three? - Jakub V.

It sure seems like these questions are appropriate and also lacking for answers within the organization.

Moving Mittelstadt to Rochester felt like the right thing to do because what he needs to get figured out can't be learned with 11 minutes per game in the NHL. The problem with seeing this happen now is it shines a big, bright light on the issues we've all known about since the summer that haven't been addressed.

In the Sabres' most ideal world, Marcus Johansson and Evan Rodrigues snap out of slumps and carry things forward. Following the 6-1 loss to Philadelphia on Thursday, in which Jack Eichel missed the game with an upper-body injury and Rodrigues and Johan Larsson each were injured during the game, those backup hopes and dreams are not tenable.

The future means asking Dylan Cozens to be that No. 2 center. As for the present, it should mean being able to move a defenseman to get a center who is most likely more of a No. 3 but can play the part of a No. 2 in a pinch. Adding a center like that can do a couple of things: 1) It can move Johansson off the center spot and have him handle action on the wing. 2) Assuming the player acquired has term on their contract, it doesn't necessarily block a spot in the future.

They have to make a move to get a forward, but we've known they've needed to do that since summer. The same goes for moving a defenseman. The dam will break at some point, but when a team shows signs it can be in the hunt for the playoffs, a little bit of help would go a long way.

Reinhart was drafted as a center but it feels like those days are well behind him. Is there any chatter in the organization of seeing if he can take on the 2C role? - Vladimir G.

Moving Mittelstadt to the AHL opens another C spot in a lineup that is already thin there on talent. Would you consider trying Reinhart at this position now with an even bigger hole and the unlikeliness of acquiring a solid one mid season? - Alex N.

The idea of Sam Reinhart being a center seems to have expired a while ago. It's not as if the opportunity to try him there again hasn't been available either. Whether it's Eichel's injuries or the lack of command others have shown in taking on the role, three coaches have now had the option to give Reinhart another whirl at playing center and none have gone back to it.

Desperate times call for desperate measures and all, but the times haven't ever been dire enough to go back to Reinhart playing the pivot. Some guys just move on from that spot and that's OK. Jeff Skinner was a center when

he came up and now it seems weird to think of him playing that position at all because he's made the wing his home. Reinhart has done that, too.

We're so removed now from Reinhart getting those chances that the idea seems almost foreign to do it again. It's too bad, because had Tim Murray's ideal plan to have Eichel as the top center and Reinhart as the No. 2 guy worked out, it would be simpler to add wingers as opposed to possibly getting stuck making a questionable deal to add another center.

Hey Joe buddy,

So Eichel is living up to the hype that he came into the league with. Furthermore, he's developing into a leader, which is a role we didn't get to see him do at Boston University or as a member of the World Junior team. Is he comfortable in this newer position? He's not a grizzled veteran, but he's no longer a bona fide newbie in the league either. - Brandon G.

It's been a work in progress for Eichel to adapt to being a leader, but he's certainly taken that on fully this season. Eichel has been doing the captain-like things everyone wants to see from leaders on and off the ice. He donates a suite at every game to a charity organization. He squares up with us reporters after each game. Even if he doesn't speak, he's there waiting in the room just in case and he's carried the team in play all season. That's not to say he hasn't been The Man before, but that he's done more of everything else you expect from a team leader and, yes, he seems comfortable with it now, which is a big step.

The thing we forget with Eichel is that he's still incredibly young. He and others like him are tasked with being the face of the franchise so early in their careers they have to figure out how to do that while they're still maturing themselves. Hockey has a throwback sort of culture in which the veterans are always tasked with being the visible leaders, but the NHL now is becoming a younger league each season. That means younger players are going to be tasked with being the leaders for everyone. It's his fifth season, but Eichel has a lot more command of the position now than he's ever had and that will only help Buffalo as time goes on.

Is Botterill going to continue to sit on his hands? We are in year five of Eichel. He is having a MVP level season, yet he doesn't have much scoring help. Where is the scoring going to come from? How long until Eichel wants out and to win? It's a lot to unpack, but I feel like we are wasting his talent. - Garret S.

When Eichel inevitably (probably?) comes back down to earth shooting percentage wise, who, if anyone, can step up and fill that scoring void? Should we expect it to be Skinner? Olofsson? Someone else entirely? - Hannah B.

I feel the frustration here and I get it all around.

The scoring should be able to come from within. Skinner and Johansson are capable of doing a lot more than they have and the same can be said of Conor Sheary and Jimmy Vesey. It feels like a lot of the issues in getting these players going consistently could be worked out by getting a center that can distribute as well as grind things out defensively.

What may be more troubling is that most of the players that have contributed goals have been riding high with shot percentages. The catch is players like Eichel and Olofsson lean into that by shooting more often. It's easy to ask that the other players shoot more as well, but things don't always work out that way. Also, low-percentage shots aren't great shots to take.

What's been shown to be effective for the Sabres this season is when they pressure teams all over the ice, they're good at forcing turnovers which lead to chances and sometimes turn into goals. The problem is playing that pace of hockey 60 minutes every game is hard to do. Better consistency and more confidence in their ability to play that way would go a long way. We see it when they score a goal, they press hard and play with a lot more conviction, but doing that if they're down a goal or in an even game will show they've evolved as a team.

Hey Joe – we met after a game in Niagara a couple years ago when you were there to watch UPL play for Sudbury. Hope all is well!

With the stellar play from Ullmark this year, I'm guessing there is less pressure to rush Luukkonen along. Do you think he gets some time in Rochester this year or will he ride out the season as Cincinnati's starter (barring an Amerks/Sabres injury)?

Thanks! - Nino B.

Thanks for checking in, Nino. It was a pleasure meeting you.

As for the goalies, the message is clear they're not in a hurry to get Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to Buffalo now. Getting him back into form after double hip surgery is the most important thing and getting him games consistently is vital. With Andrew Hammond and Jonas Johansson in Rochester, perhaps the thought was Luukkonen would at some point supplant Johansson, but the Americans' tandem is playing very well and Luukkonen is playing in a league (ECHL) where defense is stressed a bit more.

It's not a sexy setup by any means, but for now it's the best all-around in the organization and keeps everyone playing. At some point we'll see Luukkonen get some games in Rochester, if for no other reason than to see how he's progressed. He's 20 years old still and there's a lot to learn for him, but getting his development right is the priority. Goalies tend to take a little longer in general.

So, on the 'big' trade side, now that we saw the return for Hall, what's the type of similar package you'd think makes sense for the Sabres to land some kinda fish or is our cap situation too difficult to navigate because we obviously have to move out some salary to take on any? In which case, why not make some table setting moves? - Mark C.

The return the Devils got for Taylor Hall read like a lot on paper. It's probably a good enough haul given that Hall is an unrestricted free agent this summer, but it still felt underwhelming because there's no immediate NHL help there.

For me, that's the sort of trade the Sabres can make to get help. There are picks around and there are mid-level prospects that can be had, but getting the salary right is a big thing. New Jersey paid half of what's left for Hall, which helps sweeten the offer, but unlike the Coyotes, the Sabres don't have cap space to just add a guy wantonly.

Doing a money-in-money-out deal more than likely means not landing that big fish unless it's the kind of trade both sides are nervous to make. Think of the Seth Jones-Ryan Johansen trade. When the talent levels are that high, there's a chance a team makes the right deal for them but still looks foolish because the one they gave up goes on to better things elsewhere. Moving guys on expiring deals like Zach Bogosian or Marco Scandella means either getting mid-round draft picks or another NHL player in need of a change of scenery.

Hello Joe. In your opinion, is lack of talent sometimes confused with lack of effort? I ask bc at the Sabres worst over the last 10 years what appears to be lack of effort is such an issue, especially under the Housley regime. This blows my mind. How could players not play hard, especially early in the season? Then I thought maybe I didn't understand what I was watching.

Does thinking too much slow a player down and that looks like no effort? What elements factored into the Sabres slow game starts and apparent lethargy? Thanks! - Fred D.

This question made me think about the 2014-2015 team. That team had a distinct lack of overall talent but they played really hard. They weren't good at all, but they gave a lot of effort and you saw that. A more talented group not going hard is really noticeable because we know how much better they can be and that's part of what's stood out with the Sabres this season.

We've seen the highs they can reach and how well they can play, so if they're off during any given game you know it immediately. We saw it for 40 minutes against Toronto and for 60 minutes against Philadelphia. It's a long season that it can be a slog at times and staying mentally sharp is a big deal. I've asked players about the mental part of the game and it's one a lot of them take very seriously. As for overthinking on the ice, players do their best to not think out there because thinking impedes their natural hockey instincts.

But when a team is caught thinking it won't look like poor effort, it'll look like they're scared. Actively thinking while the game moves by as fast as it does will show on any player's face. Slow starts and the like sometimes happen because the opponents blitz them right from the start. Trying to find answers to that on the fly can be difficult. At least in the Sabres' case they've had mostly very good second periods that allowed them to recover.

With Bogo asking for a trade, what is a reasonable return considering the salary he carries with it? Do you think Botterill will ever move some of the D-Man depth for a forward to help out? - Brendon K.

The good news here Brendon is, yes, Botterill will move a defenseman/men at some point. The bad news is I've stopped guessing "when" it will happen because I figured "when" was going to be at some point in August. We're almost to 2020 and that hasn't happened yet. The thing is, Botterill doesn't feel pressured to act on impulse and certainly not when a player or player's agent tries to force the issue, much to that player's — and the fans' — chagrin. Nathan Beaulieu found that out the hard way last season.

All that said, a reasonable return for Bogosian would be a forward with a similar contract both in years and money that maybe could use a new address to spark his game. A center would be preferable, but a winger would do well here because they could also use the help. What Botterill has to figure out is whether the offers will be better now or later.

You'd figure Bogosian's stock at the moment has to be low because he's coming off another hip surgery and probably needs more games to get into better form. But that's hard to do when there are eight defensemen. That leads us back to the cycle that started in August. The players deal with it when things are like this with the roster, but if the success both personally and for the team isn't there, it makes everyone miserable because they're not getting the minutes or the success they were told would happen.

Sabres' Marcus Johansson says he hasn't felt like himself all season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 20, 2019

BUFFALO – Even during the opening weeks of the season, as Marcus Johansson scored goals and solidified himself as the Sabres' No. 2 center, his play irked him.

"I didn't feel like myself with the puck and stuff like that," said Johansson, who scored four goals and seven points in the first nine games. "I mean, sometimes you still get points and the team wins. You kind of don't think about it as much."

These days, Johansson, 29, thinks about his game a lot – probably too much. The Swede has scored just once in his last 20 outings entering Saturday afternoon's home contest against the Los Angeles Kings.

"He is at times too hard (on himself) and needs to lessen up there because we are definitely optimistic about where he's going to end up," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said following Friday's practice inside KeyBank Center.

While Johansson feels some of his recent outings have been better – he ended his 13-game goal drought Dec. 7 – he's not exactly pleased.

For example, in Tuesday's 5-3 road loss to the Toronto, his late giveaway led to the Maple Leafs' final goal.

"I still got a lot to go to get to where I usually am and I know I can be," said Johansson, who has been skating on top power play. "But I feel like it's been a little bit better but not where I know I can be and I want to be."

Johansson has a history of scoring, having produced two seasons of 20 or more goals and five seasons with 40 or more points.

Krueger said Johansson "wants really to be an impact player."

"He wants to make a difference every day," he said. "I think he's still finding his A-game every single day but he's working hard at it. He's part of the group as far as the way he's coachable, the way he's taking leadership off the ice, and we're expecting him to still go to another level because of the path he's on."

Clearly, the upper-body injury Johansson suffered Nov. 9 has stymied him. He missed seven games before returning Nov. 27.

But Johansson believes his problems started before then.

"I just haven't felt like myself all year," he said. "But I guess it's good that there's room for a lot of improvement."

Johansson wants to use the upcoming Christmas break – the Sabres have three days off following Monday's road game against the Ottawa Senators – to recharge.

"Hopefully it can turn around here and with a good few days off here soon," he said. "(I'm) looking forward to that and kind of (getting) a little bit of a fresh start afterwards."

Johansson, of course, is hardly alone in his offensive struggles. The Sabres need more secondary scoring.

To wit:

– Winger Jeff Skinner, who signed an eight-year, \$72 million contract in June, has an eight-game goal drought. He scored 40 times last season.

– Winger Conor Sheary has a six game-goal drought and just two scores in his last 26 appearances. Sheary scored four of his five goals in two games.

- Winger Jimmy Vesey has scored one goal in his last 10 games and four goals in 33 games.
- Center Evan Rodrigues has scored zero goals in 20 games.
- Center Casey Mittelstadt scored four times in 31 games before the Sabres demoted him Sunday.

The Sabres are especially thin down the middle.

In Thursday's ugly 6-1 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, an upper-body injury forced the Sabres to scratch center Jack Eichel late.

With the Sabres' top scorer and most dynamic presence sidelined, Kruger moved Johansson up to pivot the top line between Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart.

"I don't think anyone in the world can fill Jack's shoes right now," Johansson said. "We missed him. You go down 3-0, you miss your best player and one of the best players in the world. It's a tough uphill battle."

Eichel, who practiced Friday, could play against the Kings. But an upper-body injury will sideline Johan Larsson, who has been a strong presence in recent weeks.

Johansson, who hasn't played center regularly since his rookie season, practiced between Skinner and rookie Rasmus Asplund on Friday.

"It keeps you involved," Johansson said of playing center. "You're involved offensively and defensively. I like that. It gets you into the game quickly and you feel like you're always a part of something on the ice when you're out there."

Sabres' Jack Eichel practices, offers few details about upper-body injury

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 20, 2019

BUFFALO – Sabres captain Jack Eichel said he has been dealing with the upper-body injury that sidelined him for Thursday's ugly 6-1 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers.

"It's not something that came out of nowhere," Eichel said after practicing this afternoon inside KeyBank Center.

Eichel, who's day-to-day, according to coach Ralph Krueger, has dealt with the injury well. The slick center carried a 17-game point streak into Thursday's game, the second-longest in franchise history.

But after skating in the pregame warm-up, the Sabres announced Eichel would be out.

"It's obviously frustrating," Eichel said. "You never want to not be on the ice with the team. I'm a competitive guy, I want to be out there every night. But I thought it was the best for me at that time."

The Sabres have remained tight-lipped about Eichel's injury, offering few details. Eichel spoke for less than a minute today.

"It's upper body, and we'll leave with that," Krueger said.

Krueger said the Sabres will make a call on Eichel on Saturday morning before their afternoon game against the Los Angeles Kings.

Eichel practiced today between Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart, his regular linemates.

"I felt pretty good, not bad," Eichel said.

While Eichel can continue a personal point streak, the NHL won't recognize it as an official record because he missed a game. He was one game shy of Gilbert Perreault's franchise record.

Eichel has been the NHL's hottest player, compiling 16 goals and 31 points during a streak that started Nov. 16.

In other injury news, Krueger said center Johan Larsson, who left Thursday's game with an upper-body injury, will miss the next two contests.

Krueger said Larsson's injury isn't related to an upper-body injury he suffered earlier this season. Larsson tried to continue Thursday before leaving the game.

"It's a new bruise," he said. "Again, it's obviously nothing that serious, but he's a tough guy and he worked and tried to go through it yesterday. We found it was better to pull him."

To replace Larsson, the Sabres recalled forward Curtis Lazar from the Rochester Americans this morning. Lazar practiced today in Larsson's spot between Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo.

Meanwhile, center Evan Rodrigues practiced today after leaving Thursday's game. Rodrigues needed to be helped off the ice after a shot hit an unprotected part of his left ankle.

"The assessment looked positive today, but, again, we're going to evaluate in the morning," Krueger said.

Rodrigues said he couldn't feel his foot at first and thought he had suffered a deep bruise. By this morning, however, it felt better.

—

Lazar, 24, has played six games with the Sabres this season, scoring one goal.

Before being summoned for the third time since October, he played four games at center, his natural position.

"I've always been able to slide over to the wing," he said. "But I feel like I can give more down the middle."

Why can Lazar give more at center?

"Just being around the puck," he said. "I really like to build my speed through the dots and get in on the forecheck."

—

Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian, a healthy scratch the last four games, practiced beside Rasmus Dahlin on Friday, a sign he could return Saturday afternoon.

After losing three centers, Sabres recall Curtis Lazar from Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 20, 2019

BUFFALO – The Sabres, who lost three centers in about a three-hour span Thursday night, recalled forward Curtis Lazar from the Rochester Americans this morning.

Lazar, 24, has recorded one goal in six NHL games this season. This is third time the Sabres have summoned him.

The Sabres ended Thursday's ugly 6-1 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers without captain and leading scorer Jack Eichel, Johan Larsson and Evan Rodrigues.

"Three centermen down and under assessment," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger told reporters in Philadelphia.

Eichel, who skated in Thursday's pregame warm-up, has an upper-body injury. His absence ended his 17-game point streak.

Larsson left with a lower-body injury early in the game. Rodrigues departed after a shot hit the back of his ankle.

Stay tuned for more updates.

Jack Eichel considered day-to-day after missing Thursday's game in Philly

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

December 20, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — It seems like whatever caused Jack Eichel to miss Thursday's game in Philadelphia won't keep him out of the lineup too much longer.

Eichel was back on the ice at practice on Friday after he was a last minute scratch against the Flyers with what the team is calling an "upper-body injury". Eichel and head coach Ralph Krueger would not say exactly what the issue was.

"Yeah it's obviously frustrating, you never what to not be on the ice with the team and I'm a competitive guy, I want to be out there every night but I just thought it was the best for me at that time," Eichel said after practice on Friday.

Eichel is now considered "day-to-day" so his status for Saturday afternoon's game against the Kings is up in the air.

"It's not something that just came out of nowhere. It's something that, yeah I guess you could say I've been dealing with it a little bit," Eichel said.

Because he missed the game, his 17-game point streak came to an end one game shy of tying Gilbert Perreault for the longest in Sabres' history.

Even though he seemed like a full-go at practice on Friday, he is now considered "day-to-day" so his status for Saturday afternoon's game against the Kings is up in the air.

Kings at Sabres preview

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

December 20, 2019

KINGS (15-18-4) at SABRES (16-13-7)

1 p.m. ET; MSG-B, FS-W, NHL.TV

The Game

Jack Eichel will be a game-time decision for the Buffalo Sabres when they play the Los Angeles Kings at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

Eichel was a late scratch with an upper-body injury Thursday prior to the Sabres' 6-1 loss at the Philadelphia Flyers. The center practiced Friday, but coach Ralph Krueger said Eichel is day to day.

Eichel had 31 points (16 goals, 15 assists) in a 17-game point streak, which ended with his absence at Philadelphia. It was the longest streak in the NHL this season and one short of the Sabres record (Gilbert Perreault, Oct. 24-Dec. 4, 1971).

The Kings will finish a six-game road trip. They are 4-0-2 in their past six games after going 2-6-1 in their previous nine and have scored at least three goals in five of those games.

Players to watch

Kings forward Tyler Toffoli has eight points (three goals, five assists) in his past six games.

Sabres forward Victor Olofsson has 23 points (nine goals, 14 assists) in his past 21 games.

They said it

"I'm not sure that we've played our best hockey, and that might sound strange ... but I think we're better than we've played or have played better than we have in the past six periods. We have to play better [Saturday] if we want to have success and continue on." -- Kings coach Todd McLellan on the road trip

"We need to start working for some leads. There's no question that we're better off, with the way we play, holding a lead and building on that. We'd like to concentrate on that. I didn't feel a quit in the team [Thursday]. I just thought we lost our structure, we lost our principles, and we're almost trying too hard." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger

Kings projected lineup

Alex Iafallo -- Anze Kopitar -- Dustin Brown

Kyle Clifford -- Jeff Carter -- Trevor Lewis

Tyler Toffoli -- Michael Amadio -- Nikolai Prokhorkin

Adrian Kempe -- Blake Lizotte -- Austin Wagner

Joakim Ryan -- Drew Doughty

Ben Hutton -- Matt Roy

Kurtis MacDermid -- Sean Walker

Jonathan Quick

Jack Campbell

Scratched: Matt Luff, Kale Clague

Injured: Derek Forbort (upper body), Alec Martinez (lower body)

Sabres projected lineup

Victor Olofsson -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart

Jeff Skinner -- Marcus Johansson -- Rasmus Asplund

Jimmy Vesey -- Evan Rodrigues -- Conor Sheary

Zemgus Girgensons -- Kyle Okposo

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

Linus Ullmark
Carter Hutton

Scratched: Curtis Lazar, Colin Miller

Injured: Johan Larsson (lower body), Tage Thompson (upper body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body)

Status report

Rodrigues practiced Friday after taking a puck to the back of the leg against Philadelphia. He's day to day and could play against the Kings. ... Larsson will be out Saturday and Monday at Ottawa.

Stat pack

Reinhart's next goal will be his 100th in the NHL. ... The Sabres are 0-2-1 in their past three games after a three-game winning streak and 7-for-27 (25.9 percent) on the power play in nine games in December. ... Kopitar has 17 points (seven goals, 10 assists) in 18 games against Buffalo. ... Iafallo, who grew up in Eden, New York, just south of Buffalo, has three assists in five games against the Sabres.

Eichel day to day for Sabres, might face Kings

NHL.com

December 20, 2019

Jack Eichel is day to day for the Buffalo Sabres with an upper-body injury and will be a game-time decision when they play the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday (1 p.m. ET; MSG-B, FS-W, NHL.TV).

"With Jack, it remains day to day," coach Ralph Krueger said after Buffalo's No. 1 center skated at practice Friday. "As you can see, he was out there practicing. We'll make that call in the morning."

Eichel was scratched after being injured during warmups before the Sabres' 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers at Wells Fargo Center on Thursday, ending his point streak at 17 games. He had 31 points (16 goals, 15 assists) during the streak, the longest in the NHL this season. It's the second-longest by a Buffalo player since the Sabres entered the NHL in 1970; Eichel missed a chance to tie the Sabres record of 18 set by Gilbert Perreault from Oct. 24-Dec. 4, 1971.

"It's obviously frustrating," Eichel said. "You never want to not be on the ice with the team. I'm a competitive guy, I want to be out there every night. Just thought it was the best for me at that time."

Eichel, who's second in the NHL with 24 goals and tied for fifth with 50 points, said the injury is something he's been coping with during the streak.

"It's not something that came out of nowhere," he said. "It's something that I guess you can say I've been dealing with it a little bit."

Asked how he felt at practice and if he was optimistic about playing against the Kings, Eichel says he "felt pretty good. Not bad. We'll see what happens."

The Sabres recalled forward Curtis Lazar from Rochester of the American Hockey League on Friday.

Krueger said forward Evan Rodrigues, who also skated Friday, is day to day with a lower-body injury, and that forward Johan Larsson will miss at least the next two games with an upper-body injury. Each was injured during the loss to the Flyers.

"The assessment looked positive today but again we're going to evaluate in the morning," Krueger said regarding Rodrigues. "Larsson will definitely miss the next two games. We're hoping it's a week. It's an upper-body [injury] that we think we can manage in the near future, but he will be out the next two games."

Eichel, Rodrigues practice with Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 20, 2019

Buffalo Sabres coach Ralph Krueger described the status of captain Jack Eichel as day-to-day after the forward participated in practice with the team at KeyBank Center on Friday.

Eichel was ruled out with an upper-body injury prior to the start of Buffalo's game in Philadelphia on Thursday. Krueger said the situation developed while Eichel was on the ice for warmups.

The Sabres have two games remaining prior to the Christmas break, beginning with a matinee against the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday.

"It remains a day-to-day," Krueger said. "... He was out there practicing, and we'll make that call tomorrow."

Eichel's absence ended his point streak at 17 games, one shy of Gilbert Perreault's franchise record. He led the NHL with 31 points, 16 goals, and a plus-17 rating in that span.

"It's obviously frustrating," Eichel said. "You never want to not be on the ice with the team. I'm a competitive guy, I want to be out there every night. But I thought it was the best for me at that time."

Evan Rodrigues also practiced after taking a shot off his leg that forced him to leave the game against the Flyers in the third period. Krueger said the assessment of Rodrigues' injury on Friday was positive, but his status will also be re-evaluated Saturday morning.

Johan Larsson, who left the game in Philadelphia during the second period, remained absent with an upper-body injury. Though the injury is not considered serious, Krueger said the centerman will miss the next two games leading into the break.

"It's obviously nothing that serious but he's a tough guy," Krueger said. "He worked and tried to go through it yesterday and we found it was better to pull him."

The Sabres recalled Curtis Lazar on Friday morning to round out the 12-man forward group. Lazar stepped right into Larsson's slot centering a line with Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo, which has served as a tone-setting trio for the team all season.

"The games I watch - and I try to watch as many as I can - I think that is a pretty good fit for me because I like to keep it simple and it's effective," Lazar said.

"I think you see what those guys have been able to do, not only chipping in the offense but just shutting down other teams' top lines, killing penalties, and kind of accepting that role. I think that's something I'm going to try and help out with."

Lazar previously appeared in six games for the Sabres, though he spent those outings on the wing. He returned to center, his natural position, in Rochester's last four contests and felt positive effects.

"Just being around that puck," Lazar said. "I really like to move my feet through the dots and get on that forecheck. But it's being around it, supporting it, and just kind of, I guess, watching everything develop and being callous in the D-zone. It's a lot of stuff I take pride in, and I feel like I excel at that."

Here's how the Sabres lined up in full on Friday:

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 74 Rasmus Asplund
13 Jimmy Vesey - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 43 Conor Sheary
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 27 Curtis Lazar - 21 Kyle Okposo

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
6 Marco Scandella - 10 Henri Jokiharju
19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
33 Colin Miller - 62 Brandon Montour

35 Linus Ullmark
40 Carter Hutton

Sabres recall Lazar from Rochester

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 20, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has recalled forward Curtis Lazar from the Rochester Americans (AHL).

He has one goal with the Sabres this season in six games played. In 18 games with Rochester, he's recorded six goals and eight assists for 14 points. He currently leads all Amerks with 0.78 points per game.

Lazar joins the Sabres for his third recall of 2019-20.

In last night's loss to Philadelphia, captain Jack Eichel was a late scratch due to an upper-body injury (ending his 17-game point streak), and both Johan Larsson and Evan Rodrigues left the game with injuries. Stay tuned to Sabres.com for updates from today's practice.

The Sabres host the Los Angeles Kings tomorrow afternoon at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is scheduled for 1 p.m.