



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 23, 2019

Sabres end 3-game losing streak with 3-2 win over Kings

By Mark Ludwiczak

Associated Press

December 21, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Linus Ullmark is taking control in goal for the Buffalo Sabres. He's got the Los Angeles Kings' number, too.

Ullmark made 25 saves to lead the Sabres to a 3-2 win over the Kings on Saturday. It was yet another commanding performance for the 26-year-old netminder, who has become the Sabres' clear top option in the crease this season.

"He made some really nice saves," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "But more than anything he's emitting a calm in his persona, the way he's managing his net, his puck play ... just a lot of things from Linus that we like that we're seeing right now and above all just a consistency in his game. That's something we can definitely build on."

Ullmark improved to 4-0 against the Kings in his career, posting a combined save percentage of .928 and a 1.71 goals-against average. His dominance helped the Sabres end a three-game skid and bounce back from a deflating 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday. Buffalo improved to 17-13-7.

"We had two rough games coming into this one. The good thing is we know it's not about the opponent, it's always about what we can do," Ullmark said. "We didn't feel like anyone was stressed out or anything like that, which is very nice this year. Guys are keeping their composure."

Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella scored for Buffalo, and Victor Oloffson added an empty-net goal.

Ullmark's best moment came at the very end of the second period when he extended his glove to make a highlight-reel save on Anze Kopitar. He also robbed Sean Walker midway through the third from close range and made a key stop with 4:17 remaining on a quick rush to the net by Austin Wagner.

Adrian Kempe and Dustin Brown scored for Los Angeles, which fell to 15-19-4.

"Effort was there, a pretty evenly played game, could've went to either side," Kings coach Todd McLellan said. "Both teams hit a few posts ... so at the end of the night we come out on the short end, but not disappointed in the effort or what was put into the game."

Jonathan Quick was solid in net for the Kings, making 25 saves.

Kempe opened the scoring 1:32 into the second. Kempe found an opening in the high slot for his seventh goal of the season and his third in the last three games.

Ristolainen got the Sabres on the board 7:35 into the second, finishing a rebound from the left circle after two quick shots from Jeff Skinner.

Scandella gave Buffalo a 2-1 lead with 3:12 left in the second, blasting a shot from the point that deflected off Kings defenseman Drew Doughty.

After Oloffson scored an empty-net goal, Brown quickly scored to again make it a one-goal game with 37.7 seconds remaining by finishing a pretty cross-ice feed by Doughty. Los Angeles' comeback effort ended there, however, with the Sabres finishing off the game in the Kings' end.

"I think this game was there for the taking," Doughty said. "I didn't like our effort in the second period again. We could have won this one if we had played a little better overall."

NOTES: Kings C Trevor Lewis was injured 1:31 into the game and did not return. Lewis went in to hit Sabres C Rasmus Asplund and took the worst of collision. The Kings said Lewis suffered an upper-body injury. ... Kings D Kale Clague made his NHL debut. Clague was a second-round pick of the Kings in 2016. ... D Kurtis MacDermid

and RW Matt Luff were scratched for Los Angeles. ... LW Johan Larsson, D Colin Miller and LW Conor Sheary were scratched for Buffalo. Larsson is dealing with a lower-body injury. ... This was the second and final game between the two teams this season.

UP NEXT:

Kings: Return home to play the St. Louis Blues on Monday night.

Sabres: On the road against Ottawa on Monday night.

Rasmus Ristolainen using lessons from the past to improve with Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 23, 2019

The frustration that consumed Rasmus Ristolainen is gone. The 25-year-old defenseman grew tired of losing during his first six seasons with the Buffalo Sabres.

Ristolainen finally experienced success during the 10-game win streak last November, only to endure a historic second-half collapse in which the Sabres finished 27th in the National Hockey League. He's grown tired of having long offseasons and not playing meaningful games in February and March.

His call for change during locker cleanout in April was followed by [reports of a possible trade out of Buffalo](#). Ristolainen didn't stop preparing for the season, though.

He worked with a skating coach for the first time in his career and, upon arriving in Buffalo for training camp, showed an eagerness to help the Sabres solve what went wrong during the second half of last season. The result has been an evolution on the ice the organization has waited to see since Ristolainen was drafted eighth overall in 2013.

"What Risto's done is he's bought in big time to what the entire staff is selling," said Sabres assistant coach Steve Smith, who works with the team's defensemen. "He has come in with an incredible attitude this year. No one ever questioned his work ethic and it's even at a new level where I think mentally he's working harder.

"No one ever questioned how hard he worked in the gym, but the buy-in has been special for him. That's what has allowed him to become not only a better player, but he's been a really, really good teammate for the guys, too. His attitude daily has been really, really strong."

Winning solves everything, Ristolainen explained following practice in KeyBank Center. The Sabres (17-13-7) entered Sunday only two points out of second place in the Atlantic Division and have earned points in 10 of their last 13 games.

Ristolainen ignited the Sabres' offense Saturday by pinching in the offensive zone to score the tying goal off a rebound in a 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings in KeyBank Center. He has nine points in the last 12 games and has three goals among 17 points in 37 games this season.

Entering Sunday, Ristolainen's plus-11 rating since Nov. 29 ranked fourth in the NHL behind Jack Eichel, Colorado Avalanche defenseman Ryan Graves and Minnesota Wild defenseman Carson Soucy. Ristolainen's nine points during that span were tied for second among all NHL defensemen.

Ristolainen is making fewer mistakes in the defensive zone and has done a better job recovering after he commits a turnover. Moments after misplaying the puck in the first period Saturday, Ristolainen skated to the front of the net and contorted his body to block Tyler Toffoli's shot from going past Linus Ullmark.

Additionally, the Sabres allowed only three 5-on-5 shot attempts when Ristolainen was on the ice against the Kings' top line of Anze Kopitar, Alex Iafallo and Dustin Brown.

"There was a little bit of a slow start (to the season), but lately, personally, I think you play well when the team plays well," Ristolainen said. "We had 10 really good games, so it's easy to play. Overall, I think my game's been really solid. That's what I'm aiming toward, to be good in every situation."

Ristolainen is succeeding while playing fewer minutes, something past Sabres coaches failed to accomplish. He has averaged 21:29 of ice time over the past 12 games, compared to playing 23:39 in the Sabres' first 25 games.

Ristolainen's 24:38 average ice time ranked ninth in the NHL last season, while he entered Sunday ranked 32nd in the statistic. Coach Ralph Krueger's strategy to dress seven defensemen has cut down Ristolainen's ice time, which has allowed him and others to get more involved on offense.

Krueger's defensive-zone structure, which is principle-based as opposed to Phil Housley's man-to-man system, has given Ristolainen more confidence with and without the puck. Ristolainen said he knows where his teammates are on the ice at all times, whereas last season there wasn't enough structure in the Sabres' game at 5 on 5.

"He feels really comfortable in the framework," Krueger said of Ristolainen. "We felt that from the get-go. You can see him building in confidence. He also adds a powerful offensive push all the time and in his own unique way. ... He has a high hunger level of wanting to compete every single night, and it's nice to see him keeping it simple in his mind, keeping it simple in his game and being a very important anchor in the way we want to play in both directions."

Ristolainen was disgusted with his game last season. He finished with an NHL-worst rating of minus-41, which isn't necessarily an accurate representation of his overall performance, but is the second-worst mark by any player since the 2004-05 lockout and tied for the worst in franchise history.

The consistent mistakes on defense continued a trend that began when Ristolainen made his NHL debut. At the end of last season, Ristolainen's minus-143 rating – 46 worse than any other player – in 424 games since the start of 2013-14 ranked last in the league.

Upon arriving in Finland for the offseason last spring, Ristolainen continued his intensive strength and conditioning program. He typically doesn't skate until late in the summer. However, a few of Ristolainen's friends in the NHL, including Montreal Canadiens winger Artturi Lehkonen, suggested he work with Finnish figure skating coach Tiia Hurme.

Ristolainen worked with Hurme once a week toward the end of the offseason and intends to include the workouts into his regimen next summer. Different training methods are one of many ways Ristolainen has shown his bosses that his call for change in April wasn't all talk.

"If you're tired of something, change," Smith said. "That's what he's done. He's taken the bull by the horns and said, 'OK, I'm tired of losing, I've got to be part of the solution.' ... He's become part of the solution. I think he's simplified his game. There are a lot of little changes he's made. It's made a big difference.

"If you look at his statistical information, clearly he's way above where he was at this point last year. I'm not talking about goals and assists. I'm just talking about Corsi numbers and possession numbers. ... On a daily basis when we do chance reports, most of the time he's playing against the top lines and still coming out on the positive side. That shows you something about what he's done."

Smith added that Ristolainen has improved his positioning in the defensive zone and is no longer always going for the big hit. He's also keeping his stick on the ice, another improvement that caused Smith to call Ristolainen's habits "very, very good."

The changes were made partly out of experience. Ristolainen learned that his game can't slip if he wants to play meaningful games late in the season. He's no longer allowing a bad play to haunt him, either. Ristolainen was upset with himself when the Kings scored 1:32 into the second period Saturday, but he managed to score the tying goal less than seven minutes later.

"It's always fun when you win and play meaningful games," Ristolainen said. "My first few years here the meaningful games stopped early. We're playing meaningful games now and hopefully until the end of the year. That's what you're aiming for and it's a battle to get to the playoffs."

Sabres defensemen continue to ignite offense in come-from-behind win

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
December 21, 2019

Rasmus Ristolainen did not hesitate to skate to the net when his Buffalo Sabres teammate, Marcus Johansson, went to the bench in the second period Saturday afternoon.

Ristolainen, a 25-year-old defenseman, had confidence that whichever forward stepped on the ice would know to cover the blue line. So, Ristolainen crept toward the net and was in position to score on a rebound off Jeff Skinner's shot to ignite the Sabres' offense.

"I feel that's my office now, the blue paint," Ristolainen joked following the Sabres' 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings in KeyBank Center.

Last season, those sort of risks often led to an opponent earning an odd-man rush. However, better defensive play by the Sabres' forwards, particularly at 5 on 5, has freed up their defensemen to contribute more offense.

Ristolainen and Marco Scandella scored the tying and go-ahead goals, respectively, Saturday to buoy an offense that was in desperate need of secondary scoring behind Jack Eichel, Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart.

"I think our forwards are really working two ways," Ristolainen said. "It's really easy to trust them, they're coming back. I saw maybe one forward was changing there, so I felt a little chance to go down to the net and the puck got to me and I put it in."

The trust wasn't always there last season. Though former coach Phil Housley encouraged his defensemen to pinch in the offensive zone, the Sabres' forwards failed to understand their responsibility to protect against a quick breakout pass and potential odd-man rush.

When Johansson left the ice to end a one-minute shift, Eichel knew to remain close to the blue line in the event of a Sabres turnover. Meanwhile, Ristolainen was left alone in front of the net to score on Skinner's rebound to tie the game, 1-1, with 12:25 remaining in the second period.

The goal and subsequent comeback showed a "mature sign" within the Sabres, coach Ralph Krueger said. They had a poor response in a 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday when Eichel was scratched after warmups with an upper-body injury and entered Saturday on a three-game winless streak.

This was Buffalo's third slow start in as many games and it was thoroughly outplayed during the first period, though the Kings did not take the lead until Adrian Kempe scored on a shot from the slot at 1:32 into the second period.

"You can see D diving in and making some more plays, playing with more confidence," Scandella said. "Opening up space for the forwards and, at the same time, we're going to be getting chances, too."

Ristolainen has nine points in the Sabres' previous 12 games and, entering Saturday, his plus-11 rating since Nov. 29 ranked fourth in the NHL. His three goals this season are tied with Henri Jokiharju for the most among Sabres defensemen, all of whom are benefiting in Krueger's system.

Sabres defensemen have combined for 83 points through 37 games, despite losing Rasmus Dahlin for eight games. Dahlin is second on the Sabres with 19 assists, four defensemen have at least 10 points and six have at least two goals. It was only the second time this season multiple defensemen scored for the Sabres.

Some of that offense is the product of better breakout passes. The Sabres struggled to exit their defensive zone last season because forwards were often cheating too far up in the neutral zone, which led to turnovers and led to an opponent generating offense in transition.

Buffalo is working as a five-man unit, as illustrated on Scandella's goal at 16:48 into the second period. Reinhart drew a Kings forward away from the blue line by chipping the puck into the corner and passed back to Scandella, whose slap shot ricocheted off Los Angeles defenseman Drew Doughty and into the net for a 2-1 lead.

"I feel like the forwards are really working hard for us, and I feel like we have really good skating defensemen out there," Scandella said. "But we have forwards who can find us and we're playing with confidence right now and trusting each other."

The evolution of the Sabres' defense corps began without the puck. Krueger implemented a different defensive-zone structure after the team's man-to-man system was picked apart to the tune of 3.30 goals against per game last season.

Comfort in Krueger's system has given the Sabres more confidence in the offensive zone. With eight healthy defensemen on the roster, Krueger opted to use only 11 forwards against the Kings. His players appear to be growing more accustomed to that unorthodox lineup.

"It's part of the seven D philosophy that you can really release yourself more," Krueger said. "You know if you get caught out for a longer shift there's an opportunity for a break, and I think the guys are starting to get used to that. It's not the norm in the National Hockey League, so very few defensemen are going to like playing with seven. But it does give us more of an opportunity to involve them in the offense and to get a little more cycling going."

A responsible defensive approach allowed the Sabres to improve to 14-0 when leading after two periods, and they are 17-13-7 this season with one game remaining before the holiday break. Ristolainen's goal sparked a turnaround that included 22 shots on goal over the final two periods.

Olofsson scored an empty-net goal with 1:33 remaining in regulation for his 24th point in 22 games, and his 34 points this season lead all NHL rookies. Eichel also assisted on the Sabres' final goal to record a point in his 18th consecutive game, though the injury officially ended his streak Thursday night in Philadelphia.

Eichel's 18 straight games with a point marks the fifth-longest personal streak in the NHL in the last decade, and he finished one off the franchise record held by Gilbert Perreault.

Skinner recorded his first point in seven games, and Curtis Lazar had an impressive performance while filling in for Johan Larsson, who is expected to miss at least one more game with an upper-body injury. The Sabres need to find more offense when Eichel's line isn't producing and their defensemen could potentially be part of the solution.

"Tonight I thought the D did a really good job of being involved in both ends of the rink," Krueger said.

After Sabres' holiday break, GM should start takin' care of business

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 21, 2019

Whenever the Buffalo Sabres win, you can hear the Bachman-Turner Overdrive '70s ditty "Takin' Care of Business" pulsing through their dressing room. It's pretty appropriate for what we saw Saturday in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres were hardly spectacular but they were solid in their 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings, an improving team on the finale of a six-game road trip.

After a rough 40 minutes Tuesday in Toronto and a horrible Thursday in Philadelphia, the Sabres had to have this game and they got it. They have to have Monday's game in Ottawa, too, and it won't be a gimme because the Sens are better than most of us expected.

The players will get a holiday break and then the schedule turns brutal for six games: Boston, at Boston, Tampa Bay, Edmonton, Florida and at St. Louis. Yowza.

General Manager Jason Botterill has a lot to think about. I vote he drinks more sage tea than egg nog over the holidays to give a little jolt to his brainpower.

It seems pretty clear the Sabres are taking the patient approach again, that maybe they expected this to be a transition year to clean out lots of cap space and really start to build a team next year through free agency and, presumably, the additions of Dylan Cozens and maybe Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

But once again, Botterill & Co. better pivot.

The Sabres didn't last year and they let their 10-game winning streak slide into oblivion. Perhaps they (correctly) felt that was a mirage. No such luck this year. You can't let Jack Eichel's Hart Trophy-caliber season go to waste. The Atlantic Division is weaker than anybody expected. You can make this into a playoff team, which is the position it's been now for nearly a month.

Doing nothing until the trade deadline in February would be managerial malfeasance of the highest order.

Let's start in goal. Linus Ullmark is 7-2-2 in his last 11 games. He was terrific again Saturday. Carter Hutton is 0-6-4 in his last 10. He's a mess. It's to the point where the Sabres may not be able to put Hutton back on the ice. He has a 4.19 goals-against average and .867 save percentage in that stretch.

Job one for Botterill might be to do what the Devils did to Cory Schneider earlier this month and put Hutton on waivers to get him some work in Rochester. Or he could simply call up Amerks standout Andrew Hammond and go with three goalies. Hammond would play and give Ullmark some respite and Hutton would keep working in practice and off-ice with goalie coach Mike Bales.

You obviously can't run Ullmark out there every night, but his confidence is high. He made several of the kind of bailout saves Saturday that Hutton has proven incapable of in recent weeks.

The best one might have been on a backhand from Anze Kopitar with six-tenths of a second left in the second period and the Kings on the penalty kill. Ullmark speared the shot with his glove after the Sabres pussyfooted around with the puck in their own end, preserving his club's 2-1 lead and preventing would could have been a devastating short-handed goal.

"That's the thing with goaltending," Ullmark said. "It doesn't matter whatever happens. I'm the last line of defense, so I've got to clean up if there's any mishaps in front of me. Doesn't matter if it's five minutes into the game or at 19:59."

It also meant the Sabres led going into the third period. They improved to 14-0-0 when leading after 40 minutes, a really good sign of the club's growth.

"Every team in this league has the skill and the danger to press when they're down in the third and to go all-in," said coach Ralph Krueger. "It's always very threatening and I'm just proud of the guys' understanding of what it takes. The work and the inside positioning and management of the puck especially is something they're getting better at all the time."

"It's not about the opponent. It always comes down to what we can change and what we can do," Ullmark said. "I didn't feel like anyone was stressed out or anything like that, which is very nice this year. Guys are keeping their composure."

The Sabres clearly need help up front while they wait for Jeff Skinner to find his game. He was much better Saturday than he's been in a while, setting up Rasmus Ristolainen's goal to get a point for the first time in eight games.

They have to make a decision on Zach Bogosian, who surprisingly got back into the lineup Saturday after his trade demand. I would have buried Bogosian in the press box after that but he has value on the penalty kill and as a physical presence. He played 18 minutes Saturday and was good. If he wants to be here and can play like that, I'd keep playing him.

The Sabres are 11-3-3 at home, one of six teams in the league with three or fewer regulation losses on home ice. They have that stretch with nine home games in 10 starts coming, beginning Jan. 28. They need to stay in the race until then.

They need a shakeup among the forward group. They need to open the logjam on defense (for giving up a second-round pick, they've gotten awfully sour on Colin Miller). They need to do something about Hutton.

The players and coaches are doing their part. Starting Friday when the shackles of the holiday roster freeze are lifted, it's time for Botterill to follow the lyrics of his team's victory song and start takin' care of his business.

The Wraparound: Buffalo Sabres 3, Los Angeles Kings 2

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 21, 2019

The mystery ended moments before puck drop Saturday in KeyBank Center when Jack Eichel was listed on the Buffalo Sabres' roster report for their game against the Los Angeles Kings.

That officially ended Eichel's one-game absence with a upper-body injury and gave the Sabres a much-needed boost after losing by five goals Thursday night in Philadelphia. Eichel, whose 17-game point streak ended because of the injury, proceeded to lead the Sabres to a 3-2 win over the Kings.

The Sabres (17-13-7) snapped a three-game losing streak and won their fifth consecutive game at home to keep pace in the Atlantic Division. Victor Olofsson scored an empty-net goal with 1:33 remaining for his 24th point in 22 games.

Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella scored for the Sabres, who received 25 saves from Linus Ullmark. Adrian Kempe had Los Angeles' first goal and Dustin Brown scored with 37.7 seconds remaining in regulation to cut the deficit to one goal. The Kings (15-19-4) were 4-0-2 in their previous six games.

Collision: Kings winger Trevor Lewis left for the trainers' room 1:31 into the first period when he collided with Sabres winger Rasmus Asplund. Lewis did not return to the game, leaving Los Angeles with 11 forwards.

Close call: During a 4 on 4 late in the first period, a broken play turned into a 3 on 1 for the Kings and center Michael Amadio hit the crossbar on a shot from the left-wing circle. Ullmark stopped all 10 shots he faced to keep the game scoreless in the first period. Entering Saturday, the Sabres were 6-4-1 when leading after the first period.

Help down the middle: Forward Evan Rodrigues returned to the Sabres lineup after a lower-body injury limited him to 11:52 in a 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday. Coach Ralph Krueger opted to use seven defensemen and 11 forwards, with Zach Bogosian drawing into the lineup for the first time since he reportedly requested a trade.

Slow start: Krueger couldn't have been happy with a third consecutive slow start for the Sabres. They had only six shots on goal through 20 minutes and failed to generate any significant scoring chances against the Kings.

Opening salvo: The Kings took a 1-0 lead at 1:32 into the second period when the Sabres lost a battle for a loose puck in the corner and failed to cover Kempe, whose shot from the slot beat Ullmark.

Momentum swing: Buffalo began to control play shortly after Kempe's goal, and Sam Reinhart nearly tied the score with his shot on a scramble in front of the net. Marcus Johansson then missed a net during a 2 on 1 with Jeff Skinner.

Response: Ristolainen tied the score, 1-1, when he scored off Skinner's rebound at 7:35 into the second period. Ristolainen has a point in three of the past five games, and Skinner recorded a point for the first time in seven games.

Quick whistle: The Sabres had a potential goal wiped out in the second period because of a quick whistle on a shot on goal by Eichel. Reinhart appeared to score off the rebound with 3:55 remaining in the second period, but the officials ruled no goal on the ice and the call stood after a review.

Fine finish: Scandella gave the Sabres a 2-1 lead with 3:12 remaining in the second period on a shot from the point that went off Kings defenseman Drew Doughty and into the net.

Entering Saturday, the Sabres were 13-0 when leading after two periods, while the Kings were 0-16-1 when trailing after 40 minutes.

Closing out: The Sabres had four shot attempts, including Eichel's slap shot that hit the post, during a third-period power play that was cut short by Reinhart being penalized by interference. Kings goalie Jonathan Quick also stopped Reinhart on a shot off a Eichel drive to the net.

Scandella and Ullmark then teamed up to stop a Kings 2-on-1 rush with 4:16 left in the third period.

Scratches: Forward Conor Sheary and defenseman Colin Miller were healthy scratches for the Sabres. Sheary has two goals in his last 26 games, and Miller has been scratched three times in Buffalo's past four games.

Injuries: Forward Vladimir Sobotka (knee) remains out indefinitely, while center Johan Larsson (upper body) is expected to miss at least the next two games. Forward Tage Thompson is also on injured reserve with an upper-body injury.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to practice Sunday in preparation for their road game Monday against the Ottawa Senators.

Sabres down the Kings, 3-2; Eichel extends personal point streak to 18 games

WGR 550

December 21, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres snapped a three-game losing skid on Saturday afternoon thanks to a 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings in front of the home crowd at KeyBank Center in Buffalo.

After missing Thursday night's 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, Sabres captain Jack Eichel was able to return to the lineup on Saturday, and while his 17-game point streak in consecutive games was snapped, he did add an assist in the third period to up his personal point streak to 18 games.

Meanwhile, the Sabres used a pair of second period goals from defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella to take the lead heading into the third, and then Victor Olofsson got the game-winner with 1:33 remaining when he scored into an empty Los Angeles net.

The first period was a relatively quiet 20 minutes for both teams, where they traded power play opportunities towards the end of the period, but to no avail. The Kings were able to outshoot the Sabres, 10-6, but the score remained even at 0-0.

The Sabres found themselves trailing the Kings early in the second period on a goal from forward Adrian Kempe. Kempe scored after being uncovered in the slot 1:32 into the period as he ripped a wrist shot over the shoulder of Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark and in.

However, Buffalo responded a little more than six minutes later as Ristolainen was able to put in a Jeff Skinner rebound off to the left of Kings goalie Jonathan Quick to tie the game at 1-1. The Sabres defenseman ended up jumping in on the offense as Skinner cut out to the front of the net for a shot. After his initial rebound was stopped, the secondary rebound went right to Ristolainen, who buried his third goal of the season.

The Sabres grabbed the lead for the first time on the night with 3:12 left in the period as Scandella scored on a blast from the point. Scandella was credited for his third goal of the season that ended up going off the leg of defenseman Drew Doughty in front of Quick and in.

The score remained 2-1 after 40 minutes of play, with the Sabres outshooting the Kings in the period, 11-10.

Buffalo carried its lead deep into the third period when the Kings decided to pull Quick for an extra attacker. However, the Sabres were able to up their cushion to 3-1 as Olofsson scored into an empty net to make it a 3-1 game. The play started when Eichel moved the puck along the boards to Reinhart, who then moved the puck up to Olofsson for the goal. The goal was Olofsson's 16th goal of the season, which continues to lead all rookies.

The Kings had some fight left in them late as Dustin Brown got the game back to within one goal with under a minute left to play. However, that would be all that the Kings could muster in the dying seconds of the game as the Sabres held on for the 3-2 win.

Ullmark was very good in net for Buffalo, making key saves in the second and third period on high-danger chances. He stopped 25 of 27 shots and picked up his 11th win of the season.

The Sabres now have 41 points on the year, and are alone in second place in the Atlantic Division.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:**First Period:****BUF:** NONE**LAK:** NONE**Second Period:****BUF:** 7:35 - Rasmus Ristolainen (3) (Jeff Skinner, Jimmy Vesey); 16:48 - Marco Scandella (3) (Sam Reinhart, Henri Jokiharju)**LAK:** 1:32 - Adrian Kempe (7) (Blake Lizotte)**Third Period:****BUF:** 18:27 - Victor Olofsson (16) ENG (Sam Reinhart, Jack Eichel)**LAK:** 19:22 - Dustin Brown (8) (Drew Doughty, Alex Iafallo)**Penalty Summary:****First Period:****BUF:** 15:52 - Brandon Montour (Interference - 2 min.)**LAK:** 17:08 - Tyler Toffoli (Tripping - 2 min.)**Second Period:****BUF:** NONE**LAK:** 18:33 - Joakim Ryan (Holding - 2 min.)**Third Period:****BUF:** 6:37 - Sam Reinhart (Interference - 2 min.)**LAK:** 5:37 - Jeff Carter (Tripping - 2 min.)**Shots on Goal:****BUF:** 28 (6, 11, 11)**LAK:** 27 (10, 10, 7)**Goalies:****BUF:** Linus Ullmark - 25 saves**LAK:** Jonathan Quick - 25 saves**Power Plays:****BUF:** 0 for 3 (0%)**LAK:** 0 for 2 (0%)

Three Stars:

1. Linus Ullmark - BUF
2. Marco Scandella - BUF
3. Adrian Kempe - LAK

What's Next:

The Sabres will travel to Ottawa on Monday night to face the Senators at the Canadian Tire Center in Kanata, Ontario. Faceoff is set for 7:30 p.m. with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Schopp and the Bulldog starting at 6:30 p.m. on WGR.

The Sabres got back into the win column against the Kings

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 21, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres rebounded on Saturday against a Los Angeles team that had come to town 4-0-2 in its last six games.

Buffalo had two terrible starts in a row in Philadelphia and Toronto, and you could see them being careful in the first period.

Rasmus Ristolainen said in the postgame show that he really got angry early in the second after Adrian Kempe jumped into the slot and nobody noticed. Before that happened, battles were lost and Ristolainen was on the ice and was very upset about it.

After that goal, you could see the Sabres start to play the game that gets them points. They were quick on both sides of the puck and got to battles early to win them. Ristolainen is making an effort to get into the offensive zone and help. In his last 12 games, No. 55 has two goals and seven assists for nine points.

He was able to tie the game when he read an opening coming in from the right point. He crossed over right in front of Jonathan Quick and found himself with the puck and an open net.

Jeff Skinner seemed much more engaged in this game and was ferocious on battles. He battled hard on this play too and deserved the assist he got.

If you give Marco Scandella the chance to wind up to the rafters, he has one of the hardest shots in the NHL. He did just that before the second period ended to give the Sabres the lead.

Jack Eichel returned after missing one game with an upper-body injury and he was an absolute force in the final 40 minutes. Eichel went hard the net coming from the left circle and couldn't push the puck past Quick. Sam Reinhart had most of the net open on the rebound, but the puck hit something on the way.

Eichel then had a gorgeous tip coming through that Quick stopped that, but the puck was laying there next to him. The referee blew the whistle just as Reinhart got there to put it in. They reviewed it, but the call of the quick whistle stood.

In the third period on a power play, Eichel one-timed one of the cross bar. He shot that so hard, I half expected the puck to break in half.

The Sabres had another crossbar by Victor Olofsson while Quick was pulled. Olofsson had already scored his 16th of the season while Quick was out of the net before that.

Olofsson has goals in four of his last five games, and has four goals and four assists for eight points in his six-game point streak. Eichel assisted on Olofsson's empty netter, giving him points in the last 18 games he's played, but the NHL, in its usual way, doesn't recognize the streak because Eichel missed the Flyers game due to injury.

Linus Ullmark made some great saves in this game, but none were better than the one he made as the second period ended. Anze Kopitar was left along in front of Ullmark and absolutely robbed him with the glove.

The two points Buffalo earned vaulted them from tied for fourth place in the Atlantic Division to second all by themselves. Now they wait for Montreal at Edmonton, Florida at Carolina, Detroit at Toronto and Tampa Bay at Washington.

A lot of little improvements add up for the Sabres in a bounce-back win

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

December 21, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres' 3-2 win against the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday might be best described as "sleepy." But when you look at how the little things the Sabres did added up, it looked more like the sort of game you want to have after one that left you wanting to burn the tape.

When you look at all the things that went wrong in a 6-1 loss against Philadelphia on Thursday — whether it's the penalties, the goaltending, the defensive coverage or the lack of Jack Eichel — the Sabres found ways to improve upon all of them against Los Angeles.

Although Buffalo's first period wasn't one to get excited about against the Kings, it also didn't put them in a big hole. Going away from the first 20 minutes with a 0-0 score may not have been exciting, but given how wonky the starts have been the past couple of games, it made for a pleasant change. That said, it still wasn't a great beginning. The Kings outshot the Sabres 10-6 and, according to Natural Stat Trick, LA had 10 scoring chances to the Sabres' four at five-on-five.

"I didn't like the first period. I thought they had (their) foot on the gas and they were getting more chances and shots on net," defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said. "But the second period was really strong for us."

Well ... it wasn't totally great in the second period, either. Just 1:32 into the frame, Adrian Kempe got the Kings ahead 1-0, having a lot of time to set up and fire a shot past Linus Ullmark. But that goal snapped the Sabres out of the doldrums as opposed to snowing them under. Against the Flyers, the goals came quickly and often. Against the Kings, the Sabres got them right back from not-so-common sources.

Ristolainen tied the score with his third goal of the season 6:03 after Kempe scored. Ristolainen jumped into the play while Jeff Skinner and Jimmy Vesey kept the action in tight around the Kings' goal and helped maintain possession in the zone. This afforded Marcus Johansson the chance to hop off and change, and when he headed to the bench, Ristolainen sprang into action.

"I think that's my office right now, the blue paint, that's the only place I can score right now," Ristolainen quipped.

"I think our forwards are really working two-way. It's really easy to trust they're coming back (defensively)," he added. "I saw maybe one forward was changing there, so I felt a little chance to go to the net, and the puck came to me and I scored."

It's been the Sabres' team saying this season to "play connected." Saturday, with the forwards covering for defensemen when they pinched in and forwards helping the defense out on the Sabres' end of the ice, that theme was in full effect.

Ultimately, it was the defense that made the offense go. Marco Scandella's third goal of the season put the Sabres ahead 2-1 at 16:48 of the second period when his slap shot beat Jonathan Quick. That sent the Sabres into the third period with a lead.

"You lick your chops at those — you don't get those very often," Scandella said of the opportunity to step into a big slap shot. "I feel like in the new NHL, guys come out really quick. Unless it's a one-timer, you don't get time to really tee it up unless there's a breakdown in the system."

Getting more offense from the defense is a big thing considering how little scoring has come from lines not centered by Eichel. Getting Ristolainen crashing the net and Scandella scoring from out high makes the Sabres' game less predictable. There's also intelligence that comes from recognizing the right time and opportunity to unleash a slap shot.

"You just don't want to get blocked and they turn it the other way," Scandella said. "It's about being smart, so I'm sure there's more opportunities to take big bombs, but do you want to get blocked and risk counterattacks?"

It's smarter sometimes to just get it through, keep them in zone, keep our game feeling it. Keeping possession is huge, making them not feel like they have the puck very often like we did in the second period and took over."

Buffalo is now 14-0-0 when going into the final period with a lead.

"Every team in this league has the skill and danger to press when they're down in the third and to go all-in. It's always very threatening," coach Ralph Krueger said. "I'm proud of the guys understanding what it takes, and the work and the inside positioning and the management of the puck, especially, is something we're getting better with all the time. ... It is a mindset. It's playing for the team, sacrificing and doing what the team needs. That's how you get those finishes like we got today."

Part of that sacrifice came with shortening the bench. Krueger used three lines in the third period, and an 11 forward, seven-defensemen lineup meant Rasmus Asplund and Evan Rodrigues spent most of the third period watching the action.

Asplund played one 1:23 shift, killing an interference penalty against Sam Reinhart, while Rodrigues did not see the ice in the third. Against the Flyers, the Sabres were forced to shorten the bench with an 11-7 lineup after injuries to Johan Larsson and Rodrigues. That taste of a three-line forward setup was put to use against the Kings, and it helped the Sabres prevent a third-period rally.

"It was just a feeling, actually, that started kind of mid-second period that we needed to do something today," Krueger said. "We just looked like we weren't quite on the game, and sometimes when you go with a shorter bench, it just gives everybody less time to think and they just go play a little bit freer. It worked out today."

Special teams weren't a big factor in the victory over the Kings. Penalties were scant, and while the Sabres didn't connect on the power play, neither did the Kings. After Buffalo allowed three power-play goals in five chances to the Flyers on Thursday, they held the Kings to 0-for-2 in 2:16 of power-play time, another needed change.

With Larsson out and Zach Bogosian's return to action for the first time since he reportedly asked for a trade, the penalty-kill units got a bit of an overhaul. Curtis Lazar (who was recalled because of Larsson's absence) worked with Zemgus Girgensons up front with Scandella and Bogosian, while Asplund was with Marcus Johansson and backed by Jake McCabe and Ristolainen.

In the end, a Victor Olofsson empty-net goal at 18:27 of the third that made it 3-1 proved to be the winner. Eichel got a secondary assist to extend his personal scoring streak to 18 games. It might not count as far as the NHL's make-your-eyes-go-crossed way of viewing these things, but with that top line getting the call late in the game to hold the lead, getting a cookie like an empty-net goal and the points associated makes everyone happy. Now the Sabres have to build off this and take it with them to Ottawa to make the holiday break a happier one.

Victor Olofsson could enjoy one of Sabres' greatest rookie seasons

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 23, 2019

BUFFALO – With the Sabres up one goal late Saturday afternoon, winger Victor Olofsson grabbed a pass at his own blue line, skated through the neutral zone and backhanded the puck into an empty net.

After the Los Angeles Kings scored in the final minute, Olofsson's 16th goal this season became the winner in the Sabres' 3-2 victory. It was also his 24th point in the last 22 games entering tonight's road contest against the Ottawa Senators.

Olofsson, 24, has been the NHL's hottest rookie, piling up points and morphing into the Sabres' top offensive threat not named Jack Eichel.

The Swede possesses a deadly release, and he has consistently utilized his wicked one-timer to score from the circle.

The empty-netter, of course, lacked the flash that accompanies most Olofsson goals. Still, it illustrates his rapid development and growing confidence.

Earlier this season, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger sometimes replaced Olofsson on the top line beside Eichel and Sam Reinhart late in games. Not anymore.

"I want to be a player that the team and the coaches can trust, and if you get to play even in the last few minutes when we're up by a goal, I feel like that's a big confidence boost right there," Olofsson said following Sunday's practice inside KeyBank Center.

Krueger said most teams wouldn't use their top scoring line late in a one-goal game. But he likes the players' connectivity and how they work to get the puck back in the defensive zone.

"We just have more and more confidence with them as a line, and Victor is a big part of that," Krueger said. "He's really, really quick at reading when Jack and Sam have something ahead of him, how he supports that and how he gets above that. He's always tracking back as hard as he attacks forward."

The mature game Olofsson showcases has him on pace to enjoy one of the greatest rookie campaigns in Sabres history.

Olofsson has already scored 16 goals and 34 points in 37 contests, gaudy numbers that rank first among NHL rookies and only trail Eichel's 24 goals and 51 points on the Sabres.

At his current rate, the former seventh-round pick would compile 35 goals and 75 points over an 82-game season.

Olofsson has scored nine goals in the last 15 games. He hasn't gone more than four outings without a point this season.

After a scorching start on the power play – he scored six goals in the first seven games – Olofsson quickly transformed into a stronger all-around presence.

"He's more confident," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "I think that anytime you come in and you're cast in a role with Eichs and Reino, I think you automatically get on your heels a little bit and just start looking for those guys, especially Jack.

"He's done a good job just playing his game, and he's making the right play. If that calls for him to skate, he skates. If it's pass, pass."

In recent weeks, Olofsson has displayed a heavier game and utilizing his 5-foot-11, 183-pound frame.

"I feel like that's a big part of it," he said of his recent success, "and I feel like I could put guys on my back and protect the puck a lot better than I did in the beginning of the season."

Olofsson's playmaking has also improved. For example, in Tuesday's 5-3 road loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs, he created a goal by bouncing a pass off the boards and hitting Eichel in stride.

"I feel like that kind of goes hand in hand with just being strong on pucks and a little bit more calm and confident with the puck," said Olofsson, who registered four assists in the first 15 games.

Eichel said Olofsson has "underrated hockey IQ."

"He sees the ice well," he said. "You can tell he's getting more and more confident."

Naturally, Krueger has awarded Olofsson more ice time. In his last nine games, he has averaged 21 minutes, 11 seconds.

"I'm beginning to play big minutes almost every game," he said. "I feel like that helps me a lot just to be comfortable and confident."

Critical goal from Rasmus Ristolainen's 'office' helps Sabres beat Kings

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 22, 2019

BUFFALO – Having scored all three of his goals this season at the net, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen feels very comfortable around that area these days.

"I feel that's my office now, the blue paint," Ristolainen joked after scoring in Saturday afternoon's 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings. "It's the only place I can score right now, so I've got to go there a couple times a game, maybe get a bounce like today."

Ristolainen tied the game at 1 by converting a rebound from goalie Jonathan Quick at the bottom of the left circle 7:35 into the second period.

Still, that goal wasn't the result of a lucky bounce, said defenseman Marco Scandella, whose goal later in the period put the Sabres up for good.

"We have really good forwards who can find us so we're just playing with confidence right now and using each other," said Scandella, who scored on a slap shot from inside the blue line at 16:48.

Ristolainen said: "Our forwards are really working two ways. It's really easy to trust them, they're coming back. I saw maybe one forward was changing there, so I felt a little chance to go down to the net and the puck got to me."

In 38 games under coach Ralph Krueger, the Sabres, according to Scandella, have grown more comfortable with each other and the new system.

"You can see D diving in and making smart plays and just playing with more confidence," Scandella said. "(We're) opening up space for the forwards and at the same time, we're going to be open and getting chances, too."

The Sabres sorely need more secondary scoring. With a slew of forwards slumping, they've been relying too much on captain Jack Eichel's line for offense.

Not surprisingly, two critical goals from defensemen turned out to be the difference Saturday before the announced crowd of 17,484 inside KeyBank Center.

The Sabres generated little early, falling behind 1-0 when Kings winger Adrian Kempe beat goalie Linus Ullmark 1:32 into the second period.

After an early whistle negated a goal by Sabres winger Sam Reinhart minutes later, Ristolainen's goal was huge.

"It shows resiliency," Scandella said. "We didn't let ourselves go down after that. We just kept pushing, and I felt like we had a really good second period."

Ristolainen said Kempe's goal – "It was a tough shift, long shift," he said – ticked the Sabres off.

"I got angry, so I hope we got angry," he said. "We got a couple long shifts in their zone and I think that really got us going. I don't think they can handle us down there, and we had those long shifts that grinded them down and gave us a lot of energy."

The Sabres then grinded out their 11th home win and 17th overall. Ullmark looked sharp throughout his 21st start, making 25 saves, including a point-blank glove stop on Kings center Anze Kopitar as time expired in the second period.

"He's emitting a calm in his persona," Krueger said.

The Sabres, who often imploded late in games in past years, improved to 14-0-0 this season when leading after two periods.

"It is a mindset," Krueger said of closing out games. "It's playing for the team, sacrificing and doing what the team needs. That's how you get those finishes like we did today."

Saturday ended up being a tight finish.

After winger rookie Victor Olofsson scored an empty-net goal, Kings winger Dustin Brown answered with 38 seconds left.

Eichel, who missed Thursday's ugly 6-1 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers with an upper-body injury, assisted on Olofsson's goal.

While the NHL no longer recognizes it as an official streak, Eichel has recorded a point in 18 straight outings.

"I felt good," Eichel said of his return. "Like, in the first period, I think it took me a little bit to get into it. But I think I got more into the game as it went on and started to feel better. I had some chances.

"I thought we started moving our feet, competing better in the second period. I think that's when we turned the tide of the game."

Sabres notes: Zach Bogosian feels good in return after healthy scratches

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 22, 2019

BUFFALO – For Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian, sitting out four straight games, the first healthy scratches of his 12-year NHL career, wasn't easy.

"Anytime you don't get a chance to be in there to be a part of the team and do what you want to do and do what you love, I mean, it's tough," Bogosian said after skating just over 18 minutes in his return in Saturday afternoon's 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings.

Heck, hours after Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Bogosian would sit out Dec. 12, it was reported the veteran had requested to be traded.

Still, Krueger said Bogosian, 29, handled his difficult new role well.

"We've worked him hard and he's embraced the asks from us as coaches, what we've requested to be a teammate and to work himself into the lineup," Krueger said.

Bogosian's fresh opportunity materialized Saturday at KeyBank Center.

Following Thursday's disastrous 6-1 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, Krueger changed his defense corps, scratching Colin Miller and inserting Bogosian, one of seven defensemen he dressed.

Bogosian mostly played with Rasmus Dahlin and killed penalties. He also skated a little with Brandon Montour, moving to the left side.

"It was a strong game coming back," Krueger said of Bogosian. "First of all, he was pleased to be back in the lineup. He adds power back there, adds energy, and we liked it because when you come from practicing to the pace of a game like today, and the push they gave in the first period, especially, it was a good test for all the D."

Bogosian said it took him "a little while" to get going.

"Anytime you sit out for a period of time, it's tough to get back into it," he said. "I liked the way I played (in the second and third.)"

He added: "Me and (Dahlin) have always, from Day One, had chemistry, so anytime we are paired together, we're both comfortable with where each others' games are at. We seem to find each other well and read off each other."

Bogosian, a popular teammate, said nothing changed off the ice during his time as a scratch.

"We've got a good bond here in the locker room," he said. "Still the same old stuff for me. I mean, it's been good. It's been an opportunity for me to just keep working hard and grow my game. That's what I'm going to keep doing."

–

The Sabres scratched winger Conor Sheary on Saturday for the third time in six games.

Sheary, 27, has struggled most of the season, scoring just two goals in his last 26 outings.

Overall, the American has compiled five goals and 10 points in 30 contests this season. He has two two-goal games.

Meanwhile, after getting recalled from the Rochester Americans on Friday, Curtis Lazar centered Zemgus Girgensons and Kyle Okposo.

Following his news conference, Krueger praised Lazar and Rochester's staff.

—

After starting Thursday, Sabres goalie Carter Hutton took a backseat to Linus Ullmark again.

Hutton, 34, has been mired in a career-worst slump. Since beginning the season 6-0-0, he has compiled ghastly numbers, going 0-6-4 with a 4.19 goals-against average and an .867 save percentage.

Notes: Sabres center Johan Larsson missed his first game with an upper-body bruise. Krueger said the Swede will be sidelined until after the NHL's three-day Christmas break, which begins after Monday's road contest against the Ottawa Senators. ... Sabres center Evan Rodrigues, who left Thursday's game after taking a shot off his left ankle, played Saturday. ... Eden's Alex Iafallo, a winger who's in his third season with the Kings, recorded an assist.

Olofsson scores fourth goal in five games, Sabres defeat Kings 3-2

By Anthony Reyes

WKBW

December 21, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres bounced back from an ugly loss in Philadelphia Thursday to defeat the Los Angeles Kings Saturday 3-2.

The Kings got on the board first, with forward Adrian Kempe scoring early in the second period for a 1-0 lead.

The Sabres then received goals from two defensemen, Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella, to take a 2-1 lead into the third period.

Sabres forward Victor Olofsson scored his fourth goal in five games late in the third period to give the team a 3-1 lead.

The Kings added a late goal from Dustin Brown but the Sabres ultimately won 3-2.

The Sabres next play the Ottawa Senators Monday at 7:30 p.m.

Eichel gets point in 18th straight game, Sabres top Kings

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

December 21, 2019

BUFFALO -- [Jack Eichel](#) had an assist in his return to the lineup to push his personal point streak to 18 games when the Buffalo Sabres defeated the Los Angeles Kings 3-2 at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

Eichel has 32 points (16 goals, 16 assists) during his streak. He did not play in a 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday because of an upper-body injury, and fell one game short of the Sabres point streak record of 18 set by Gilbert Perreault (Oct. 24-Dec. 4, 1971).

"In the first period, I think it took me a little bit to get into it," Eichel said. "But I think I got more into the game as it went on and started to feel better. I had some chances. I thought we started moving our feet, competing better in the second period. I think that's when we turned the tide of the game."

[Rasmus Ristolainen](#), [Marco Scandella](#) and [Victor Olofsson](#) scored for the Sabres (17-13-7), who were 0-2-1 in their past three games. [Linus Ullmark](#) made 25 saves.

[Adrian Kempe](#) and [Dustin Brown](#) scored, and [Jonathan Quick](#) made 25 saves for Los Angeles (15-19-4), whose six-game point streak ended (4-0-2).

"Effort was there, a pretty evenly played game, could've went to either side," Kings coach Todd McLellan said. "Both teams hit a few posts. ... So at the end of the night we come out on the short end, but not disappointed in the effort or what was put into the game."

Kempe scored in the slot to give Kings a 1-0 lead at 1:32 of the second period. It was his third straight game with a goal.

Ristolainen tied it 1-1 at 7:35 when the rebound of a [Jeff Skinner](#) shot bounced to him at the left side of the net.

"I think we got a little [ticked] off," Ristolainen said. "I was out there. It was a tough shift, long shift. Personally, I got angry, so I hope we got angry. We got a couple long shifts in their zone and I think that really got us going. I don't think they can handle us down there, and we had those long shifts that grinded them down and gave us a lot of energy."

Scandella put Buffalo ahead 2-1 with a shot that redirected off [Drew Doughty](#)'s leg and in at 16:48.

"I thought we could have had the lead after the first," Doughty said. "We had some early chances and then they kind of took over after the first five minutes of the second period. They outplayed us, I thought, and then we didn't start playing until maybe the last five, 10 minutes of the third, and that's why we lost."

Olofsson scored into an empty net at 18:27 of the third period for a 3-1 lead. Eichel had the secondary assist.

Brown made it 3-2 with 38 seconds left off a one-timer at the left side of the net.

They said it

"I think this game was there for the taking. I didn't like our effort in the second period again. We got points in every game except for one (on six-game road trip) so that's really positive but I would have liked to have seen two points in a couple of the other games and I would have liked to have seen two points tonight. It's a little bit frustrating." -- *Kings defenseman Drew Doughty*

"I think the pace they were playing and the way they were pressuring us, they weren't able to maintain that by the look of it, and we really came alive and started moving the puck quicker. We started skating more. I thought it was a truer sign of where we're going as a team. With that goal against, you can go [down] or you can go [up] and you could just feel everybody raise the game after the goal against." -- *Sabres coach Ralph Krueger*

Need to know

Olofsson extended his point streak to six games (four goals, four assists). ... Sabres defenseman [Zach Bogosian](#) played 18:04 and had one shot on goal in his first game after being scratched the previous four games. ... Kings defenseman [Kale Clague](#) played 17:57 in his NHL debut. ... Los Angeles forward [Alex Iafallo](#), who grew up in Eden, New York, just south of Buffalo, had an assist and has four assists in six games against the Sabres. ... Kings forward [Trevor Lewis](#) left the game at 1:31 of the first period following a collision with Sabres forward [Rasmus Asplund](#) and did not return. There was no update after the game.

What's next

Kings: Host the St. Louis Blues on Monday (10 p.m. ET, FS-W, FS-MW, NHL.TV)

Sabres: At the Ottawa Senators on Monday (7:30 p.m. ET; RDS2, TSN5, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Eichel blossoming into force for Sabres no surprise to Perreault

By Mike Zeisberger

NHL.com

December 22, 2019

When Gilbert Perreault saw a 16-year-old center with the USA Hockey National Team Development Program named Jack Eichel, he immediately predicted greatness for the kid.

Seven years later, the Hockey Hall of Famer is proving to be prophetic.

Perreault, who played 17 seasons for the Buffalo Sabres, remembers how Eichel's dynamic skill set caught his attention at the 2013 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge in his hometown of Victoriaville, Quebec.

"From the first time I saw him, I immediately told myself: 'This guy is going to be a superstar in the NHL one day,'" the 69-year-old told NHL.com from Victoriaville this week. "I was so impressed with his skating, his shooting, the way he made plays.

"And now, that's exactly what he is -- an NHL superstar."

Eichel fell a game short of matching Perreault's Sabres-record point streak of 18 games, from 1971-72, when he missed Buffalo's 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday because of an upper-body injury. He returned to the lineup Saturday and had an assist when the Sabres defeated the Los Angeles Kings 3-2 to extend his personal point streak to 18 games.

"I think you've got a lot of confidence right now -- I'm the benefactor of some really good hockey," Eichel said. "It's a full team effort here and just trying to contribute, work hard."

Eichel has 51 points (24 goals, 27 assists) in 36 games. He's on pace to surpass his career highs in goals (28) and points (82) set last season.

"No one should be surprised that he's taken the next step this year," Perreault said. "He's only 23. He's only getting started."

Perreault, the Sabres leader in goals (512), assists (814) and points (1,326), said it's all part of Eichel's evolution on his continuing path to greatness.

"It takes time," Perreault said. "I came into the League in 1970 and it was a while until our Sabres team made the Final in 1975. It takes four or five years. A lot of it has to do with the guys around him. They've done a nice job surrounding him with talent, guys like [Jeff] Skinner, [Rasmus] Dahlin and [Sam] Reinhart. They're starting to jell and it shows."

"I won't be surprised if he breaks all the records in Buffalo if he plays his whole career there," Perreault said. "He's going to get all the records there if he's not hurt."

It's a crisp late November day in Buffalo and the Sabres are holding what is turning out to be an especially feisty practice drill at KeyBank Center.

For 10 seconds Eichel is in the corner trying to dig the puck out against three defenders. In this chaotic sea of sticks and elbows, he finally emerges with it and lets out a loud whoop to let everyone know.

"That's Jack," Sabres assistant Don Granato said. "He's just an ultra-competitive guy, even in practice. He's been that way since he's been 16. Before all of this hype at this level, he was every bit the competitor then. He's just more knowledgeable now, more experienced. And that's why the way he's playing now shouldn't be a surprise."

Granato would know. He was Eichel's coach with the National Team Development Program in 2013-14. Like Perreault, Granato knew there was something about the kid that might lead to future greatness from the moment he first saw him.

"I met him at our training camp in 2013 and you could see Jack was special right then," Granato said. "You could see he wanted to be impactful. When we stepped on the ice, results mattered. Winning matters. Then. And now. You could see that.

"Look at our practice. We run any drill and you can see he wants to win it. He's a leader. Always has been."

Granato points to the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship as an example. He was an assistant with the U.S. team when a group of older players approached the coaching staff calling for Eichel to be captain.

"We thought he was too young for that," Granato said. "He was only 18. But they convinced us. It says a lot when your peers, even the older ones, respect you like that and want to be around you.

"That's why I don't think it's fair when people look at how he's playing this season and say 'Well, he's just matured.' He's always been that way. He's continuously made himself a better player. He's at a point where he's been through the League enough where he's got that pure confidence in his ability to play and lead."

Toronto Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews, Eichel's teammate with the U.S in 2015, has seen firsthand how much the Sabres forward has elevated his game. In the past three weeks, Eichel had eight points (three goals, five assists) in three games against Toronto.

"He's been on fire, he's extremely confident to begin with but when you're really feeling it like that, every time you touch the puck you feel dangerous and that the puck is going to go in," Matthews said. "He's been at the forefront of that."

Opponents also are noticing Eichel's improvement in his own end. He entered the season as a career minus-65 player; this season he is plus-16.

"As you go through ups and downs and try to find ways to get better, you realize how important playing away from the puck is," Toronto captain John Tavares said. "He's certainly getting better ... he's one of the best players in the League."

Eichel and Granato were walking to the team bus after Buffalo's 5-3 loss to the Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena on Tuesday when a fan yelled a message at him.

"Jack, you're going to win the Hart Trophy!" the supporter said.

Eichel didn't hear him. He was listening to music on his headphones. Even if he had, the topic of the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP isn't a subject he wants to hear about.

"We've got a long year here," he said. "Not even halfway through the season. I'm not thinking about it at all. There's a lot our group needs to accomplish. A long way to go for us to be where we want to be coming into the Playoffs."

Eichel's reluctance to talk about the MVP race hasn't stopped the outside conversation from putting him among the leading candidates with centers Nathan MacKinnon of the Colorado Avalanche and Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers. Eichel said he studies the nuances of MacKinnon's game.

"The discrepancy between the best player and the bottom line ... it's not crazy," Eichel said. "The little details really add up. I think all the best players do it, and I'm just trying to do it myself."

It's something that has been noticeable according to forward Sam Reinhart, Eichel's teammate with the Sabres for five seasons.

"There's just a different strength in everything he's doing," Reinhart said. "Strength, power, composure, you name it. I could have told you this was going to happen with him. You could see it [progressing]."

"We've always known the dominant force he could be, and he's had a tremendous amount of success. But I think it's a combination of he's coming into his own and how our team is playing too."

Eichel is showing the hockey world this season what he's always been capable of. To that end, just how high can keep elevating his game?

For Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger, it will be fun to see what the answer is.

"Is he one of the best players in the League? He always has been for me since Game 1," Krueger said.

"Let everybody else decide [Hart favorites] right now."

Sabres look to take positives from win into Monday's game at Ottawa

By Chris Ryndak

NHL.com

December 22, 2019

With about 3:30 left in Saturday's game against the Los Angeles Kings - after a stretch of nearly six minutes without any whistles - Buffalo Sabres coach Ralph Krueger turned to a small group of players to help seal the victory.

Ahead 2-1, the line of [Jack Eichel](#), [Sam Reinhart](#) and [Victor Olofsson](#) were on the ice when Olofsson potted an empty-net goal with 1:33 remaining. The goal proved to be the game-winner in a 3-2 victory.

"What we love about their game is how connected they are defensively and how hard they work to do the right things without the puck to get it back," Krueger said after practice on Sunday at KeyBank Center. "That's the goal of course: When you don't have it, get it back."

"They are as good as any line as I've seen at working when we don't have the puck and positioning themselves. We just have more and more confidence with them as a line."

That line, along with [Marcus Johansson](#), [Zemgus Girgensons](#), [Kyle Okposo](#), [Rasmus Ristolainen](#), [Henri Jokiharju](#), [Zach Bogosian](#) and [Jake McCabe](#) were on the ice for nearly every second of Buffalo's late defensive effort.

When asked about the development of Okoposo's defensive role, Krueger shed some light on how he manages the end of games in which Buffalo has a lead and what he's looking for when it comes to players he can consistently rely on in those moments.

"We have a lot of confidence in him without the puck. You saw him also part of the Closing Team yesterday. I kind of call it the Closing Group - who's closing the game out, which 10 guys are going to be out there the last four minutes - and Kyle was in that mix again," Krueger said.

"And it's just because, again, the puck management that he has right now is outstanding. He's making really good decisions under pressure and also defensively, getting into position, working hard, using his body and size and again, also the leadership he gives in the room, you can't buy that. It's fantastic to have [Kyle Okposo](#) in the mix and we're excited that he's becoming such an important part of this whole project."

It's not a surprise that those qualities align with what he said about Eichel, Reinhart and Olofsson, and it's also how he described the late-game play of Ristolainen and Jokiharju [earlier this month](#).

(We'll have more on Olofsson in today's episode of Sabres In 50)

[Curtis Lazar](#) briefly found himself in that mix as well yesterday. Brought up from Rochester on Friday for his third recall of the year, the center skated 15:53, including 1:26 on the penalty kill. He filled in for an injured [Johan Larsson](#) on a line with Okposo and Girgensons.

"He goes to Rochester, spends some time down there and works specifically on the game he needs to play here in the NHL," Krueger said. "It's working down there too, he becomes a major player for them, and he returns a better player. He returns embracing the system and principles, the concepts that are up here. That was an impressive turnaround and we're cheering for him to sustain that."

Catch Lazar's interview with Brian Duff and Martin Biron on yesterday's Lexus Postgame Report here:

Keeping the picture small

Five of the Sabres' next six games are against Atlantic Division opponents, but the focus right now is only on the next game: Monday night in Ottawa.

It will be Buffalo's last game before the League-mandated holiday break. Their first game after the time off will be [at home against Boston on Friday](#).

The Sabres were able to shake off back-to-back losses in which they were outscored 11-4 with that 3-2 victory over the Kings yesterday afternoon.

"It was huge for us. It's not always going to be perfect," Johansson said. "You're not going to win every game, but it's good to get back on the horse quickly once you lost track for a game or two, whatever it is.

"Yesterday, we played a good team game and that's the way we want to play. We beat a good team yesterday. They've been playing well lately. That was very good for us, not just to get a win but get back to ways of playing quickly."

The Sabres ended up outshooting Los Angeles 28-27, and Krueger put an emphasis on the way the team was able to control the pace and out-chance the Kings.

"You could feel everybody getting right back on track to what we need to play for a game. We did dominate the scoring-chance game yesterday and after the first period, really took over the game - going down 1-0 and showing character down the stretch to get the win," he said.

"The reaction was excellent, the type of game we played was outstanding against a very experience, veteran team that has been really successful of late and came in here with a lot of confidence and really played their A-game, especially early on. For us to come out with a deserved win was the perfect story. Now to build on it through into Ottawa is the challenge."

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

Sunday's practice

Here's how the team lined up during practice on Sunday at KeyBank Center

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

19 [Jake McCabe](#) - 55 [Rasmus Ristolainen](#)
26 [Rasmus Dahlin](#) - 4 [Zach Bogosian](#)
6 [Marco Scandella](#) - [Henri Jokiharju](#)
33 [Colin Miller](#) - 62 [Brandon Montour](#)

35 [Linus Ullmark](#)
40 [Carter Hutton](#)

Ristolainen, Scandella fuel resilient win over Kings

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 21, 2019

[Rasmus Ristolainen](#) was at the end of a long shift when Adrian Kempe opened the scoring for the Los Angeles Kings inside KeyBank Center on Saturday afternoon. The Kings opened the second period by clogging the neutral zone and forechecking their way to Kempe's goal at the 1:32 mark.

Ristolainen was on the ice for the entirety of those 92 seconds, and he wasn't happy about it.

"I think we got a little pissed off," Ristolainen said. "I was out there. It was a tough shift, long shift. Personally, I got angry, so I hope we got angry. We got a couple long shifts in their zone and I think that really got us going."

"I don't think they can handle us down there, and we had those long shifts that grinded them down and gave us a lot of energy."

The Sabres responded by scoring twice in the period off the sticks of Ristolainen and fellow defenseman [Marco Scandella](#), setting the tone for what ended as a 3-2 victory.

Buffalo shut down Los Angeles long enough for [Victor Olofsson](#) to deposit an empty-net goal with 1:33 remaining, extending his point streak to six games. Dustin Brown scored the Kings' second goal with just 37.7 left on the clock.

It was a resilient effort from the Sabres following their 6-1 loss in Philadelphia on Thursday. [Jack Eichel](#) was back in the lineup after missing that game with an upper-body injury and looked like himself, tallying six shot attempts and an assist in a team-high 22:11.

As important as the presence of their captain was, so was the Sabres' ability to stick with their game plan in the face of adversity. None of the players who spoke after the game were happy with their first period, which ended scoreless but with a 10-6 shot advantage in favor of the Kings.

When Kempe opened the scoring for Los Angeles to start the second, Buffalo responded with its best hockey.

"You could just feel everybody raise the game after the goal against," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "It really launched a strong stretch where I thought we could've had even more of a lead than we had."

"We were just playing with more confidence, tracking harder, getting pucks deep, and just feeling good about our game," added Scandella.

Kempe's goal wasn't the only moment of adversity the Sabres faced in the period, either. [Sam Reinhart](#) had what would have been the go-ahead goal waved off because of an early whistle, a call that could have shifted momentum in either direction. Scandella's goal came less than a minute later, a slap shot from the point fed by Reinhart.

"It shows resiliency," Scandella said. "We didn't let ourselves go down after that. We just kept pushing, and I felt like we had a really good second period."

[Linus Ullmark](#) robbed Anze Kopitar just before the horn sounded to end the second period, as big as any of the 25 saves he made in the victory. The Sabres entered the contest 13-0-0 when leading after two periods, a record they improved upon with their third-period effort.

"I think more than anything, it's learning to deal with those situations, period," Krueger said. "Every team in this league has the skill and the danger to press when they're down in the third and to go all-in. It's always very threatening. I'm just proud of the guys understanding what it takes and the work and the inside positioning."

"The management of the puck, especially, is something that we're getting better at all the time. We still have a ways to go. There were a couple of breakdowns we didn't like so much in the third, but you're always going to have them when a team pushes with that strength. But it is a mindset. It's playing for the team, sacrificing and doing what the team needs. That's how you get those finishes like we did today."

Eichel extends his (personal) point streak

Though his absence on Thursday ended Eichel's point streak in the eyes of the NHL record books, his secondary assist on Olofsson's goal extended his personal point streak to 18 games. It's the fifth-longest personal point streak of the last decade and ties Gilbert Perreault as the longest in Sabres history.

Eichel said he felt better as the game wore on.

"I felt good," he said. "Like, in the first period, I think it took me a little bit to get into it. But I think I got more into the game as it went on and started to feel better."

Up next

The Sabres have one game remaining before the Christmas break, in Ottawa on Tuesday night. Coverage on MSG begins at 7:30, or you can listen to the game on WGR 550. The puck drops at 8.

At the Horn: Kings 2 - Sabres 3

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 21, 2019

[Linus Ullmark](#) made 25 saves and earned First Star honors in the Buffalo Sabres' 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday at KeyBank Center.

[Rasmus Ristolainen](#) and [Marco Scandella](#) scored for Buffalo, and [Victor Olofsson](#) added an empty-net goal with 1:33 remaining.

Ullmark improved to 11-7-3 on the season and is 7-2-2 in his last 11 appearances. He has won all four of his career meetings with Los Angeles.

[Jack Eichel](#) kept his personal point streak alive with the secondary assist on Olofsson's goal. While the NHL declared Eichel's point streak dead since he missed the team's last game with an upper-body injury, the Sabres captain now has points in each of his last 18 games, totaling 32 points (16+16).

What happened

The Kings opened the scoring 1:32 into the second period when Adrian Kempe netted his seventh goal of the year on a quick shot from the slot.

The Sabres then responded with a pair of goals in the period. First, Ristolainen buried a rebound at the 7:35 mark to tie the game.

Then, Reinhart thought he gave the Sabres the lead with 3:55 remaining when he knocked home a rebound past Jonathan Quick, but the officials determined that the whistle had already blown before the puck crossed the goal line.

The Sabres didn't waste time getting back on the board. Forty-five seconds later, Scandella's low slap shot from the point found the back of the net to give Buffalo a 2-1 lead.

Olofsson's empty netter stood up as the game winner after Dustin Brown scored on a one-timer with 37.7 seconds remaining.

Ullmark was sharp throughout the game. He stopped Anze Kopitar on a backhand as time expired in the second period and stopped a 2-on-1 with about 4 minutes remaining for two of his flashier saves.

What it means

The Sabres are now 17-13-7 on the season and 11-3-3 on home ice.

The Sabres are 11-3-3 through their first 17 home games of the season, putting the team on pace for its ninth-best home record in a season. Buffalo has a plus-19 goal differential at home this year.

The Sabres have also compiled a 16-2-1 record (one tie) at home against the Kings dating back to the beginning of the 1993-94 season, outscoring Los Angeles 76-34 in those games. The Kings' lone wins in Buffalo during that stretch came on Feb. 21, 2003 and Feb. 17, 2018.

Olofsson has now recorded 24 points (10+14) in his last 22. Games. He's also on a six-game point streak with four goals and four assists in that stretch.

With two assists today, Reinhart now has 10 points (3+7) in the Sabres' last nine games.

Roll the highlight film

Scandella's slap shot should earn him a spot in the Hardest Shot event at the [Sabres Skills Challenge on Jan. 5](#):

Up next

The Sabres will practice on Sunday before heading Ottawa for Monday's road game against the Senators. Faceoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m.