



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Eichel and the Sabres visit the Flames

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Buffalo Sabres (13-10-5, third in the Atlantic Division) vs. Calgary Flames (13-12-4, sixth in the Pacific Division)

Calgary, Alberta; Thursday, 9 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: Jack Eichel and Buffalo take on Calgary. He's seventh in the in the NHL with 38 points, scoring 17 goals and totaling 21 assists.

The Flames are 7-3-2 on their home ice. Calgary has scored 15 power-play goals, converting on 16.5% of chances.

The Sabres are 5-7-2 in road games. Buffalo has given up 22 power-play goals, killing 74.7% of opponent chances.

Calgary defeated Buffalo 3-2 in the last meeting between these teams on Nov. 27.

TOP PERFORMERS: Derek Ryan leads the Flames with a plus-five in 29 games played this season. Matthew Tkachuk has recorded four assists over the last 10 games for Calgary.

Marco Scandella leads the Sabres with a plus-12 in 21 games played this season. Eichel has recorded nine goals and 10 assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

LAST 10 GAMES: Sabres: 4-4-2, averaging 3.1 goals, 4.6 assists, 4.1 penalties and 8.8 penalty minutes while giving up 2.9 goals per game with a .910 save percentage.

Flames: 3-5-2, averaging 1.5 goals, 2.5 assists, 3.7 penalties and 7.7 penalty minutes while giving up 2.9 goals per game with a .908 save percentage.

Flames Injuries: None listed.

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

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Sabres Mailbag: Will Jason Botterill pursue New Jersey winger Taylor Hall?

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

December 4, 2019

Ralph Krueger felt a breakthrough coming. The Buffalo Sabres' coach told the media Monday morning that his players had pieced together consistent performances over the previous six games dating back to a 3-2 loss in Boston on Nov. 21.

The next step was finishing. That came Monday night when six different Sabres scored during a 7-1 win over the New Jersey Devils in KeyBank Center. The Sabres (13-10-5) have earned points in five of their last six games and entered Wednesday third in the Atlantic Division.

They head to Western Canada for a three-game road trip, which begins Thursday night against the Calgary Flames. Some of the Sabres' bottom-six forwards have turned the corner, so does that mean a trade isn't necessary after all?

Let's start there with the latest Sabres Mailbag, featuring questions submitted by readers on Twitter.

Matt Weiner: What are the chances the Sabres acquire New Jersey Devils winger Taylor Hall and how much would it cost to get a deal done?

Lysowski: Zero. General Manager Jason Botterill isn't in the market for rentals, especially one as expensive as Hall. The Devils are thought to be asking for a higher return than the Sabres received for Evander Kane in February 2018: a conditional 2019 first-round draft pick, a conditional fourth-round pick in 2020 and Danny O'Regan.

Hall is making only \$6 million this season, but he'll likely command anywhere between \$9 million to \$11 million as an unrestricted free agent in July. He may not be interested in signing with Buffalo, and the Sabres would be wise to not invest so much money in three players. Jack Eichel and Jeff Skinner already account for \$19 million each season. Sam Reinhart and Brandon Montour are pending restricted free agents.

Hall is likely to land with a Stanley Cup contender such as the Colorado Avalanche or Boston Bruins. Botterill is searching for a top-six forward, but Hall doesn't seem to be a fit.

Mark Koschok: Why is there a reluctance to send Casey Mittelstadt to Rochester?

Lysowski: That time has passed. You could argue Mittelstadt should have been in the American Hockey League last season since he wasn't physically prepared for the grind of an 82-game NHL schedule and needed to improve his play without the puck.

Mittelstadt was rushed into a prominent role after the trade of Ryan O'Reilly and departure of Patrik Berglund. Sure, the Sabres want to see more offense from Mittelstadt. A breakthrough would be a boon for a club in need of secondary scoring. But let's not act like the 21-year-old doesn't belong. He had an impressive start to the season, but he's been slow to learn how to play center at this level.

Mittelstadt will be fine. He has too much skill and upside to send him to Rochester. Would you rather have Mittelstadt or Jean-Sebastien Dea in the lineup? There isn't a viable replacement. My opinion is they've committed to Mittelstadt being on this roster and now Krueger's staff needs to find a way to coax more out of him. Moving Mittelstadt to the wing was an excellent decision. You're already seeing more consistent play with the puck.

Guy Fleegman: Are the Sabres good enough to make the playoffs?

Lysowski: Not yet. The Sabres are much better defensively under Krueger. They've forged the sort of defensive identity that's needed to win at this level and have the talent on the back end to support their goaltending. You'd be hard-pressed to find many teams with as much talent on defense, plus Lawrence Pilut and John Gilmour are viable options in Rochester.

The Sabres also have top-end talent, led by Eichel, who is playing the best hockey of his career. In addition to holding a 10-game point streak, Eichel has transformed into a reliable two-way forward. He back checks as well as anyone on the Sabres, an invaluable asset that allows Krueger to use Eichel in a variety of situations.

However, the Sabres need another top-six forward. Johan Larsson deserves credit for how he's played as Skinner's center over the past week. Krueger's system has the Sabres creating scoring chances, but they need more finishers. Botterill has the prospect depth, draft picks and defensemen to swing a significant trade. The only question right now is whether he has the cap space and if there are any potential trade partners.

The_Real_Radman: With Linus Ullmark playing like a No. 1 goalie, would the Sabres consider trading Carter Hutton and replacing him with Andrew Hammond from Rochester?

Lysowski: No chance. Hutton is 0-5-3 with a .883 save percentage over his past eight starts, but he had a hand in the Sabres' October success. Remember, the 33-year-old had a .943 save percentage while winning each of his first six starts, including back-to-back shutouts. He's a capable NHL goalie who has been the victim of some bad luck over the past month.

Every team needs two goalies in the NHL, especially with how chaotic the schedule is. Hammond has played only seven NHL games over the past three seasons and Jonas Johansson needs more seasoning in Rochester. Plus, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen is not close to joining the Sabres.

Buffalo's goalie coach, Mike Bales, is regarded as one of the best in the NHL. He'll work with Hutton to solve any deficiencies with technique or how to better handle certain situations on the ice. The bigger story here is Ullmark's ascent. Hutton will be fine.

Jodi Jones: What is your opinion of Ralph Krueger as a coach?

Lysowski: I agree with Taylor Hall and others around the league that Krueger is the right person to coach the Sabres. Krueger's personality and approach are perfect for a group of core players whom have never experienced team success at this level. He also has a way of getting the most out of players, as illustrated by Eichel's impressive start to the season.

Krueger had the Edmonton Oilers heading in the right direction before he was dismissed after only one lockout-shortened season. He also orchestrated unprecedented success with Switzerland's national team and VEU Feldkirch in Austria, winning the European championship with the latter. That makes Krueger qualified to complete what some would perceive as a similar turnover. Buffalo's eight-season playoff drought is the longest in the NHL and a number of former Sabres have spoken negatively about their time with the organization. This club needs someone who can create a positive environment for the players and has an ability to help them through the psychological challenges of an 82-game season.

There was always going to be an adjustment with his transition back to the NHL, though. Maybe that's why the Sabres have been slow to adjust on the power play. Penalty kills weren't as aggressive with puck pressure when Krueger was in Edmonton in 2012-13. Subtle changes will come. We've already seen that with the Sabres' 5-on-5 game.

Fletcher Doyle: Where does Lawrence Pilut rank among Sabres defensemen, and should the Sabres trade for a forward when/if they trim their surplus on the blue line?

Lysowski: Pilut is roughly ninth or 10th on the organizational depth chart at the moment. That's not a knock on Pilut. The Sabres are fond of him and are pleased with his development in Rochester this season. There's a surplus of experienced options on Buffalo's roster and a trade will be needed to open a spot for Pilut. This is the best course of action for his development, in my opinion.

The Sabres were forced to rush Pilut to the NHL last season. He was ready in some respects, but he was not equipped to handle the physical demands at that level. An inability to handle pressure on breakouts led to turnovers and he committed unforced errors. Pilut's progress seemed to stall and shoulder surgery didn't help matters. It appears he's finally found his stride with the Amerks and a prominent role there is perfect for his development. He's very much a part of the Sabres' future.

Joe H: Do you think Jason Botterill retains his job after this season if the Sabres don't right the ship?

Lysowski: Absolutely. Botterill has done an excellent job revitalizing a roster that lacked depth. He stole Henri Jokiharju from the Chicago Blackhawks and the Jimmy Vesey trade is proving to be a smart decision. Colin Miller also has started to play well since returning to the lineup. Most of Botterill's draft picks are still developing.

Ownership needs to give Botterill a chance to have Lukkonen, Dylan Cozens and Mattias Samuelsson, among others, get closer to the NHL. Plus, this will be a big summer for the Sabres. They'll have cap space to lock up some valuable players and could pursue free agents. A quick hook never solved the Sabres' problems in the past. That approach actually stalled progress.

This franchise is much better off now than it was when Botterill arrived. Give him a chance to see this through. A Tage Thompson breakthrough could drastically change the perception of the O'Reilly trade. Let's see how the next 17 months go. I think it's important to remind readers that it's not fair to compare the Bills and Sabres.

An NFL general manager can remake a roster in one offseason since draft picks can contribute immediately and the salary cap is much easier to navigate. Rebuilds in the NHL can take several years, which is why former Sabres General Manager Tim Murray tried to expedite the process by trading for Kane and O'Reilly.

Botterill is approaching this the right way.

Roster update

Forwards Evan Rodrigues and Kyle Okposo joined the Sabres on their three-game road trip to Western Canada, which begins Thursday night against the Calgary Flames. Rodrigues has been cleared to play, according to Krueger, and Okposo is a possibility to draw into the lineup during the trip.

Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin will remain in Buffalo as he works his way back from a concussion. Dea was assigned to Rochester following practice Wednesday.

Prospect watch

Luukkonen was named the ECHL goaltender of the month Tuesday after compiling a 6-2-1 record and .925 save percentage in nine games for the Cincinnati Cyclones. Additionally, Erik Portillo, a goalie drafted in the third round by the Sabres this past June, was named to Sweden's selection camp roster for the IIHF World Junior Championship.

Portillo, 19, has a .910 save percentage in 13 games for the United States Hockey League's Dubuque Fighting Saints this season.

Sabres prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukonen named ECHL Goaltender of the Month

The Buffalo News

December 4, 2019

Sabres prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukonen has been named the ECHL goaltender of the month for November.

He had a record of 6-2-1-0 with a 1.88 goals against and a .925 save percentage for the Cincinnati Cyclones. He stopped 22 of more shots in seven of his nine games and had back-to-back shutouts on Nov. 14 and 16. Those shutouts earned him ECHL Goaltender of the Week.

Luukonen is on his way back from hip surgery and the Sabres are being cautious with his recovery.

Last season, Luukonen was named the Ontario Hockey League's Most Valuable Player and top goaltender in May after winning a league-best 38 regular-season games, including six shutouts, for Sudbury. Neither the surgery nor the rehab has fazed Luukonen. He's now considered as one of the top drafted goalie prospects in North America.

Portillo and World Juniors

Another Sabres goaltending prospect, Erik Portillo, was named to Sweden's preliminary roster for the IIHF World Junior Championship, which will be held Dec. 26 through Jan. 5 in Czech Republic.

Sabres' Skinner is happy with his place in the lineup

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 4, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Recently, Ralph Krueger put Johan Larsson between Jeff Skinner and Conor Sheary. Of course, all the amateur coaches on Twitter howled that the Sabres coach had no clue what he was doing just like they did with Phil Housley, Dan Bylsma, Ted Nolan and Lindy Ruff.

It's interesting that in three games, Larsson has four points, Skinner has three points and Sheary had a pair goals against New Jersey, scoring for the first time in 20 games.

Fans are convinced that Skinner is furious that he's not playing on a line with Jack Eichel and is sorry he re-signed in Buffalo. Skinner has 11 goals in 28 games and is on a 32-goal pace. He said with a laugh, "I don't think I'm really upset. I just want to win games, and everyone here wants to win games, including the coach. He puts out the best lineup that he thinks is going to win the game and as a player, you go out and play and try to help the team win.

"Lines change over a course of a season and we just try to focus on winning."

Skinner started the season playing with Marcus Johansson and Vladimir Sobotka. Skinner liked being with them, "For me, you just try to find some chemistry with your linemates and work together to get on the same page. But in the end, you have to worry about your own game and what you bring to the table and that line had some success."

Skinner has talked about how much he enjoyed playing with Sobotka because he's a smart player that gave support to him and Johansson on both sides of the puck.

As far as playing with Larsson and Sheary, Skinner said, "I think the line's playing well. It's a good combination. Obviously Shears and Larry, they work really hard, they're hard on pucks, they're quick to battles and they win a lot of battles. For me, I just try to read off them, and hopefully we can keep it up."

This line spends a lot of time in the offensive zone with the puck. Skinner said it's because of the way they get in on the other team's defense, "For those two guys, it's a pretty big strength in their game. Shears, in particular, he's fast on the forecheck, he's annoying to play against and he puts a lot of pressure on opposing teams' defensemen. As the second guy in, it makes your job a little bit easier because they're under a little bit more stress, and that's been a positive in our line."

With Larsson, you know what you're getting, and that makes it very easy to read what he's going to do. Skinner said, "He competes extremely hard and he wins a lot of his battles. I think as a winger, when you have a centerman that does that, it's definitely easier to read, and right now he has a lot of confidence and he's making some really nice plays with the puck. It's fun to be on his wing right now."

J.S. Dea won't be going with the team to Western Canada as he was sent back to Rochester after Wednesday's practice. Dea dressed for one game and played 5:53.

Krueger said Kyle Okposo is going on the trip and is still day-to-day. Evan Rodrigues has been cleared and is available to play if needed.

Rasmus Dahlin is still progressing from his concussion, but he will stay behind and won't play in Calgary, Vancouver or Edmonton.

Sabres prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has been named ECHL Goaltender of the Month for November. The Sabres' 2017 second round pick was 6-2-1-0 with a 1.88 goals-against average and .925 save percentage.

Luukkonen had back-to-back shutouts during the month and is third in the league in goals-against average and fifth in save percentage. Luukkonen didn't start playing for Cincinnati until November because of offseason hip surgery.

Wednesday's lines:

Olofsson - Eichel - Reinhart
Skinner - Larsson - Sheary (Dea)
Mittelstadt - Johansson - Vesey
Girgensons - Asplund - Rodrigues
Okposo

McCabe - Bogosian (Miller)
Montour - Ristolainen
Scandella – Jokiharju

Krueger: It's about playing within our principles and desired structure

WGR 550

December 4, 2019

While the month of November ended up not going so well for the Buffalo Sabres with a 3-8-3 record in 14 games, the team started to put things together with a strong six-game stretch to close out the month. Buffalo ended up going 2-2-2 in that stretch with wins over the Florida Panthers and the Toronto Maple Leafs in convincing fashion.

The Sabres opened the month of December with a statement 7-1 win over the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center that got them to an overall record of 13-10-5 through 28 games this season. That currently has Buffalo tied for second place in the Atlantic Division with the Panthers at 31 points, but still 14 points back of the first place Boston Bruins.

Up next for the Sabres will be a challenging three-game road trip through Western Canada, starting Thursday night with a matchup against the Calgary Flames, followed by matchups with the Vancouver Canucks on Saturday afternoon and Edmonton Oilers on Sunday night.

Buffalo has been getting some key contributions to its success in the recent stretch of games, including some much needed goal scoring with 25 goals in the last seven games.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been red-hot for the Sabres as of late, riding a 10-game point streak with nine goals and 10 assists along the way. Victor Olofsson has also played well in his rookie season with 12 points (5+7) in his last 13 games played.

Defensively, the Sabres have gotten some strong play from their goaltending while limiting the opposition to just 19 goals-against in the last seven games.

Linus Ullmark has appeared to cement himself as the Sabres' No. 1 goalie for the time being. Over his last seven games, Ullmark has a 4-2-1 record with a 2.60 goals-against average and a .919 save percentage. He has earned the start in seven of the team's last 11 games played since returning from Sweden for the NHL Global Series.

Along the way, the Sabres have had to deal with some adversity as injuries have taken its toll on the team at forward. For the last handful of games, Buffalo has resorted to playing with just 11 forwards in the lineup, while playing with an extra defenseman and rotating guys around.

Luckily for Buffalo, the team is starting to get some healthy bodies back to practice, including both Evan Rodrigues (lower-body injury) and Kyle Okposo (concussion), who both returned to the ice this week.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger took the time on Wednesday morning to join Howard Simon and Jeremy White for his weekly appearance on WGR. He touched base on some of the key injuries to the lineup, as well as the team's play while shorthanded up front and more.

Here is some of what he had to say:

Krueger on getting Evan Rodrigues and Kyle Okposo back at practice:

"Rodrigues is definitely back up to speed and it was good to see him back in the group yesterday, but it was his first skate, so we'll be integrating him gradually. He should be available [for the Western Canada trip]. We get one more practice again today, which is a beautiful thing with two practices in two days, and we'll know more after today. He's very close."

"We were so happy to see Kyle back on the ice yesterday. We all know how much was on the line here with another head injury, and we were pleased to see him back. He felt good yesterday in practice. We will be taking it slower with Kyle, for sure, but he's very close, which is good. These are experienced guys who help in the maturity of the process that we're in right now. We were all happy to see Kyle on the ice yesterday practicing with us."

Krueger on the health of Rasmus Dahlin:

"Rasmus is not going on the trip. That's one we also need to be careful on. We're happy with the progress that he's making [with his recovery from a concussion] and we're optimistic that we will have him back soon, but we're going to leave him here to rehab one more week and hopefully he can re-integrate next week."

Krueger on playing with 11 forwards and seven defensemen:

"When you look at us playing 7-11, which is very rare in the National Hockey League, we've had a lot of success with that in this past week. That would mean seven defensemen rotating in seven different pairs, so each player actually has two partners that he goes with. You can get a seven-pair rotation. It has worked really well for us. It has kept the group energized.

"The 11 forwards has been interesting too. It's been difficult to match against us because we have a line with [Rasmus] Asplund and [Zemgus] Gigrensons that doesn't have anybody injected in there. Jack will play with them, you'll have [Jeff Skinner] in there, or other players so the opposition's coach has a little bit of trouble reading us. On the road this week, we might stick with that strategy, but we'll just keep it in the pocket for now."

Krueger on Victor Olofsson's growth this season in Buffalo:

"The habits he has are outstanding. He is extremely responsible defensively too. What that does is that he is often is above the puck and when it becomes available to us, Jack and Sam [Reinhart] are so good at puck possession, Victor's outstanding at finding the holes, and his shot is a lethal weapon that we're seeing more and more in his first season in the National Hockey League. We all know that takes time before you reach your peak, and his peak is still a long way to go. Everybody in Buffalo has got to be excited about that."

Krueger on the maturation of Jack Eichel:

"He just really is maturing quickly and understanding what we need in a game. His offense, actually, is profiting from it. He's so well positioned defensively, he's as quick back into our own end as anybody on the team and he understands what his responsibilities are. A lot of our offense comes out of the good defense that we're playing, at times, and we can explode the other way with the defense involved. Jack is just as strong and as quick as anybody in the league, and he uses that now on both sides of the puck and he's having a lot of fun with that. We're really pleased. He's a leader off the ice, but he's definitely also an example and a leader on the ice. It's hard to sometimes to believe that he's only 23 years of age."

Sabres' Marcus Johansson frustrated by struggles: 'I know how well I can play'

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 4, 2019

BUFFALO – In his first days here, Marcus Johansson quickly established himself as one of the Sabres' most reliable presences on and off the ice.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger named Johansson an alternate captain before he played a regular-season game. Krueger also switched the veteran to center, a position he hadn't played regularly since his rookie year.

Johansson, 29, started the season scorching as the No. 2 center, scoring four goals in the first nine games as the Sabres roared out of the gate. But like his team, he has cooled off.

The Swede has compiled zero goals and three assists in his last 12 outings entering Thursday's contest against the Calgary Flames, the start of a three-game road trip.

The struggles have left Johansson frustrated and searching for answers.

"I want to get back to my game, to playing the way I know I can and feel comfortable in that," he said following Wednesday's practice inside KeyBank Center. "It feels like it's been a while since I did that now."

Johansson scored his last goal Oct. 19.

A few things have probably contributed to Johansson's slump.

The upper-body injury Johansson suffered Nov. 9 set him back, according to Krueger. He missed seven games before returning Nov. 27.

"Offense, it's just got to have some time again," Krueger said. "He lost a little timing there."

Normally, Johansson said, he loves playing with the puck. But he hasn't felt comfortable handling it lately.

"I just haven't played good with the puck," said Johansson, who signed a two-year, \$9 million contract July 6. "It feels like all year my hands haven't felt good and (I) haven't really felt like myself in that aspect."

While Johansson was reluctant to give details, he said he has been having problems with his Bauer sticks, the same ones he has used the last few years.

"It just hasn't felt right," he said. "That's all I got to say about it. If I knew more, I would change it."

Johansson, of course, possesses plenty of value if he's not scoring. He's one of a handful of Sabres who have a history of winning.

He came within one victory of winning the Stanley Cup with the Boston Bruins last season. He also spent seven years with the Washington Capitals, a perennial powerhouse.

Krueger said right away, Johansson recognized the Sabres needed to expand their leadership. Taking some on, Krueger said, has "probably taken something away from his game."

"We need support in the way we share the burden of leadership, and Marcus took so much on his shoulders here through training camp into the start of the season," he said.

He added: "He works so hard (on) himself and so hard at his game that I'm sure it's going to come back. He's brought some stability to our game."

Krueger also said he wants Johansson "to take it a little easier on himself."

"I know myself, what I can do," said Johansson, who usually produces around 20 goals and 50 points over a full season. "I mean, right now, I feel like I'm not close to my own potential. It's been OK, I guess, but not at all close to my potential. It's been a little frustrating.

"I do put a lot of pressure on myself because I know myself, I know how well I can play. I mean, I think I put more pressure on myself than anyone else."

Johansson could finally be turning a corner. In Monday's 7-1 shellacking of the New Jersey Devils, he skated a season-high 19 minutes, 58 seconds.

He has spent the last few games pivoting Casey Mittelstadt, who usually plays center, and Jimmy Vesey.

Mittelstadt and Vesey recently ended their slumps. Perhaps Johansson is next.

"We can pretty much read off each other and do whatever," Mittelstadt said. "He likes to play kind of a give-and-go game and I've always played that way. I feel like we've done well so far and obviously we're still building and learning how to play with each other, but it seems like a good start."

Kyle Okposo accompanies Sabres on road trip

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 4, 2019

BUFFALO – Winger Kyle Okposo, out since suffering a concussion Nov. 16, accompanied the Sabres on their three-game road trip, which begins Thursday against the Calgary Flames.

Okposo, who started practicing Monday, has missed the last nine games. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said the veteran is day-to-day.

Meanwhile, with forward Evan Rodrigues ready to return from a five-game absence (lower-body), the Sabres sent center Jean-Sebastien Dea back to the Rochester Americans this afternoon.

Dea played one game with the Sabres but mostly sat out as a healthy scratch. Instead of utilizing Dea or someone else up front, Krueger has dressed seven defensemen and 11 forwards six times recently, going 3-1-2 with the lineup.

"That definitely has been working for us," Krueger said following this morning's practice inside KeyBank Center. "I think bringing in the 11 forwards ... what it does is give players down the lineup more shifts to keep them active, and it looks like they're feeding off of that in a good way, too.

"So we definitely will be going in and out of that, I would say, throughout the season."

Sabres' Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen named ECHL goalie of month

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 4, 2019

Buffalo Sabres prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has been named ECHL Goaltender of the Month for November after compiling a 6-2-1-0 record with a 1.88 goals-against average, a .925 save percentage and two shutouts with the Cincinnati Cyclones.

After undergoing hip surgery in late April, the Sabres sent Luukkonen, 20, to the Cyclones last month to begin his pro career.

The Sabres drafted the Finn, the Ontario Hockey League's MVP and top goalie last season, in the second round in 2017, 54th overall.

In other prospect news, goalie Erik Portillo has been named to Team Sweden's squad for the upcoming World Junior Championship.

Portillo has compiled a 10-2-1 mark with 2.13 goals-against average and a .910 save percentage in 13 games with the junior United States Hockey League's Dubuque Fighting Saints this season.

The Sabres drafted Portillo, 19, in the third round this year, 67th overall.

Sabres, Flames look to build on momentum

Yahoo! Sports

December 4, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres might have stopped the freefall just in time, but it won't be easy to keep moving in the right direction.

As the Sabres kick off a three-game road trip through Western Canada with a Thursday clash at the Calgary Flames, they are on a 3-1-2 run capped by a 7-1 home win over the New Jersey Devils on Monday.

However, five of Buffalo's next eight games are against clubs currently sitting in a playoff position, and the other three opponents are the Toronto Maple Leafs, Nashville Predators and Flames - clubs expected to be in the hunt for a playoff spot.

"The last couple of weeks, we think we've been playing pretty good hockey," forward Conor Sheary said. "We haven't gotten a lot of results, and part of that is because of secondary scoring. The other part is special teams, and both of those were good (against the Devils). Hopefully that will give us confidence moving forward."

This season has been a roller coaster for the Sabres. They posted an 8-1-1 mark in the first 10 games, then won only twice in their next dozen outings before stemming the tide.

The hope is that one-sided victory over the cellar-dwelling Devils - Buffalo staked itself to a 5-0 lead by the end of the first period - is a sign things are in order.

"They did a good job of managing it with 5-0," Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger said. "We haven't been in that position before, and Linus (goaltender Linus Ullmark) did a good job too. It was nice to see the guys explode. ... Just a lot of things happening that we can build on."

The Flames appear to also be finding their form. Coming off a 3-1 win over the Ottawa Senators on Saturday, Calgary has a 3-0-1 mark in the past four games, and the team must be happy the calendar has turned to a new month. In November, the team saw defenseman T.J. Brodie collapse on the ice during practice and coach Bill Peters become embroiled in a controversy that led to his resignation.

"Everyone's been through a lot, emotionally, lately here," forward Milan Lucic said. "When you're on the ice, it's like that Happy Gilmore 'Happy Place'-type of thing. You're not really thinking about anything other than when you were a kid playing the game of hockey. When you work hard and get the result, there's no better feeling, so we've got to keep that going."

The win over Ottawa kicked off a stretch in which the Flames play seven of nine games at home. With the benefit of some rest - they actually had two consecutive days off following their last game - the Flames are optimistic they are prepared to take advantage of the opportunity before them.

"The biggest thing we've noticed over the last couple of games was how tight we were defensively," interim coach Geoff Ward said. "It was better than it has been. Good teams and winning teams, they know how to manage games. Even on nights when you're not having your best effort, defensively and away from the puck, you're still good and you find a way to keep yourself in the game and a lot of times, win the game."

The Flames also will receive a boost against Buffalo as second-pairing defenseman Travis Hamonic is poised to return after missing six games due to a lower-body injury.

Luukkonen named ECHL Goalie of the Month for November

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 4, 2019

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has been named ECHL Goaltender of the Month for November, the league announced Wednesday.

Luukkonen (second round, 2017) saw the start of his season delayed as he recovered from offseason hip surgery. Since making his debut for the Cincinnati Cyclones on Nov. 2, he has six wins in nine contests and ranks fifth in the league with a .925 save percentage. His 1.88 goals-against average ranks third.

He posted back-to-back shutouts on Nov. 14 and 16, when he made a combined 55 shots in victories over Allen and Fort Wayne.

The strong start to his pro career marks a continued progression for the 20-year-old, who dominated in his first North American season with OHL Sudbury in 2018-19. He set Sudbury franchise records in wins (38) and shutouts (6) and became the first European to win the Red Tilson Trophy, awarded to the league's Most Outstanding Player.

Luukkonen also won gold with Finland at the 2019 World Junior Championship, where he posted a .932 save percentage in six appearances.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill said in mid-November that the plan for goalie is simply to get as much work as possible in his first pro season.

"His interaction with Seamus Kotyk, our goalie development coach, has been excellent," Botterill said. "For us, right now, the biggest thing is a young player just making the adjustment to pro is just to get him into as many games as possible down there."