



Buffalo Sabres

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Simmonds relishes opportunity to help Sabres' playoff push

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — It took Wayne Simmonds no more than five minutes into his first Sabres practice to show how much he appreciated being in Buffalo.

Upon skating a few laps and taking a couple of shots, Simmonds found himself next to coach Ralph Krueger when the two shared a laugh.

Given how he and the talent-laden New Jersey Devils failed to come close to meeting expectations through the first five months of the season, the 31-year-old Simmonds felt good to be back in the playoff hunt — however slim the Sabres' chances might appear.

"Obviously things didn't go the way I planned and as the Devils planned," Simmonds said Tuesday, a day after being acquired by Buffalo.

"I don't regret signing there one bit," he added, referring to the one-year, \$5 million contract he signed with the Devils last summer. "But at the same time, I wanted an opportunity to be in the hunt for the playoffs, to play those competitive games. And this was a perfect opportunity for me."

Perfect might not be the operative word for a Buffalo team that began the day six points out of contention with 20 games remaining. And yet it's a better spot than New Jersey, where the Devils dropped out of the race and shed high-priced veterans to build for the future.

For whatever reasons, Simmonds' leadership and physical play failed to make a difference in New Jersey, and the Sabres hope those qualities can provide a boost in their young team's bid to remain competitive down the stretch.

The Sabres have gone 7-3-1 in their past 11 games before a difficult four-game trip, which opens at Colorado on Wednesday.

Buffalo's surge led to general manager Jason Botterill adding talent to a team showing modest signs of growth rather than simply dumping players with expiring contracts.

Aside from landing Simmonds for a conditional fifth-round draft pick, the Sabres acquired 24-year-old forward Dom Kahun in a three-player trade with Pittsburgh.

Simmonds addresses Buffalo's immediate needs, while Kahun has long-term potential on a team seeking to upgrade its top-six depth at forward.

Acknowledging the Sabres aren't "a finished product," Botterill discussed his reasoning behind the trades by saying: "We've talked a lot about playing meaningful games in March, and I think with some of the moves that we made, we're hopefully setting our team up to better accept that challenge."

Though Simmonds' best years might be behind him, the 6-foot-2, 185-pound player is a prototypical power forward, who has scored 20 goals in six of his 12 NHL seasons. He also has developed a reputation of being a respected leader and drew praise from his former Devils teammates upon being traded.

With eight goals and 24 points in 61 games this year, Simmonds has a presence that is considered an upgrade on a team in need of secondary scoring. And his seven years of playoff experience are invaluable to a Sabres team in an eight-year postseason drought — the NHL's longest active streak.

"He's got an excellent spirit, brings good experience with him, loves to do things that we need more of with net pressure," Krueger said. "But above all, also the voice in the room he'll be. He was already engaged today as if he's been here a long time."

Captain Jack Eichel welcomed the reinforcements as a sign of management's faith in the team.

"I think the two additions sends a message to the room they believe in us as a group now," Eichel said. "I think it sends a message to the room we're trying to go for this right now."

Simmonds is now on his fourth team in a calendar year, after Philadelphia dealt him to Nashville at the trade deadline last season. He was so eager to come to Buffalo, which is closer to his family's offseason home in Toronto, that Simmonds waived his no-trade clause to allow the deal to go through.

"It's all in pursuit of the Cup. That's my goal. I want to come here and I want to be a good piece of the team," he said. "I think they're going in the right direction."

The trade also presents Simmonds a chance to prove he's worthy of being signed to a contract this summer, be it in Buffalo or elsewhere.

"Obviously, I'm not going to be the savior or anything here, but just another piece to help the boys out. That's something I relish," Simmonds said. "I've always been a competitor my whole career. And this kind of stuff brings the best out of me."

NOTES: Kahun will join the Sabres once they arrive in Colorado. ... He's listed as day to day after missing the Penguins' past two games with a lower-body injury. ... Kahun played with Krueger's son, Justin, on Germany's national team. He also played under Sabres assistant coach Don Granato when the two were in Chicago last season.

Ex-Sabres Evan Rodrigues, Conor Sheary relish opportunity with Penguins

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2020

While the Buffalo Sabres and their newly acquired winger Wayne Simmonds prepared Tuesday for a four-game road trip, two of the team's former players were getting acclimated to their new surroundings.

The process was easy for one of the two former Sabres. Conor Sheary's practice in El Segundo, Calif., was the beginning of his second stint with the Pittsburgh Penguins, and he is expected to be reunited on a line with Sidney Crosby when the team plays the Kings in Los Angeles on Wednesday.

Sheary was a member of the Penguins' back-to-back Stanley Cups in 2016 and 2017. Most of the coaching staff remains the same. However, Evan Rodrigues had spent his entire NHL career with the Sabres before he was traded along with Sheary in exchange for winger Dominik Kahun on Monday.

Rodrigues is expected to debut with the Penguins on Wednesday after he centered a line alongside recently acquired forward Patrick Marleau and Dominik Simon during practice Tuesday. This is the fresh start Rodrigues sought when he requested a trade out of Buffalo on Dec. 31.

"I think it just started from the get-go," Rodrigues told reporters when asked what went wrong in Buffalo. "Obviously starting the season as a healthy scratch you never really get into the groove of things. You're always playing not to make a mistake, and I think since New Year's, since the turn of 2020, I've really turned it on and the puck is starting to go in for me. I'm starting to play the way I know I can play and just looking to continue that."

The 26-year-old has five goals with one assists in 14 games since requesting a trade. He was a healthy scratch in Buffalo 24 times this season after scoring a career-high nine goals in 2018-19, which earned him a one-year, \$2 million contract last July.

Rodrigues was unable to carve out a role after having a difficult first training camp under Sabres coach Ralph Krueger, which resulted in Rodrigues playing four fewer minutes per game than last season.

Rodrigues, a pending restricted free agent, wasn't receiving much time on the power play – though he was not on either unit during Pittsburgh's practice Tuesday – and struggles defensively often resulted in him being benched in the third period of close games.

Rodrigues had 26 goals with 45 assists and a minus-30 rating in 192 games after signing with the Sabres as a college free agent.

"Obviously, I was really excited, probably through the roof," Rodrigues said. "When you come to such a storied franchise like this with obviously the success they've had in recent years, it's obviously an exciting time and I can't wait to get started."

Sheary was acquired by the Sabres with defenseman Matt Hunwick from the Penguins for a conditional fourth-round selection in the 2019 draft. He had nine goals with 10 assists and a minus-4 rating in 55 games with the Sabres this season.

Sheary began last season on Jack Eichel's wing before he was replaced by Jeff Skinner, who went on to score a career-high 40 goals. Though Sheary did not replicate the career-high 23 goals he scored with Pittsburgh in 2016-17, he provided leadership and skill in the Sabres' bottom-six. Sheary scored a total of 23 goals with 30 assists and a minus-22 rating in 133 regular-season games with Buffalo.

"I've had the luxury in my career of being on two teams in completely different scenarios," Sheary said Tuesday. "I think with Buffalo they're a young team that has to learn a lot. They have a ton of skill and they're on the right path. I think when I got here we were already a contender and just the difference in that was a big learning experience for me in how to handle both situations. I'll take a lot from that experience."

Sheary was also prone to scoring slumps with the Sabres. He scored only one goal in 22 games after having a two-goal performance in the season opener Oct. 3. His play improved over his final month with the team, including two goals in his final six games.

Sheary had six goals with 19 assists in 57 playoff games with the Penguins, including 17 points between their two Stanley Cup runs. The Penguins (37-18-6) entered Tuesday two points out of first place in the Metropolitan Division.

"I was obviously excited," Sheary said. "There was a lot anxiety that went into yesterday just waiting for a phone call, but when I found out it was Pitt I was super excited. I get to come back to a familiar place, familiar faces. I think it's an easy transition for me."

Sabres' new acquisition Wayne Simmonds 'can't wait to get started'

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2020

Wayne Simmonds' pursuit of helping the Buffalo Sabres reach the Stanley Cup Playoffs began Tuesday at 10:55 a.m., when the 31-year-old winger stepped on to the ice in KeyBank Center.

Simmonds quickly shot a puck into the open net and took his first lap on his new home ice. The 12-year NHL veteran then participated in the Sabres' final practice before they embark on a four-game road trip that could keep their playoff hopes alive.

This is the opportunity Simmonds desired when he spoke to his former boss, New Jersey Devils interim general manager Tom Fitzgerald, ahead of the trade deadline Monday. Simmonds knew a trade was inevitable. He's a valuable veteran forward on an expiring contract and the Devils are last in the Metropolitan Division.

When Simmonds was told the Sabres made an offer Monday, he and his wife, Crystal, agreed to waive his no-trade clause to join a lineup that played its way into the Atlantic Division playoff race.

"The young talent on this team," Simmonds said Tuesday when asked why he chose to join the Sabres. "I think they're going in the right direction, and I thought that I could be a piece that could ultimately help this team get into the playoffs. I'm extremely excited to be here, and I can't wait to get started."

Unlike most of his new teammates, Simmonds is accustomed to playing meaningful games in late February, March and April. His resume includes 44 playoff games, and he has been in the postseason seven times, though his pursuit of a Stanley Cup continues.

Simmonds also wants to use the final 20 regular-season games to prove his value. He has scored eight goals with 16 assists in 61 games this season after betting on himself by signing a one-year, \$5 million contract with the Devils in July.

Analytics show his skills might be diminishing after he eclipsed the 20-goal mark six times, including back-to-back 30-goal seasons from 2015-17. He had 203 goals over his eight seasons with the Flyers and scored 17 regular-season goals between Philadelphia and Nashville last season.

Though the offensive production has dipped over the past two seasons, Simmonds remains one of the most disruptive net-front presences in the league, an area of need for the Sabres as they prepare to face four physical opponents on the road: Colorado, Las Vegas, Arizona and Winnipeg.

"I play a really physical game," Simmonds said. "I'll drop the gloves if need be and at the same time I like to go to the net and get in peoples' faces. That's been a staple of my game for a long time and it's not going to change now that I'm here. I think it's only going to enhance the talent around me."

The Sabres have sought a player in Simmonds' mold for some time. Though their lineup is dotted with skilled forwards, they lacked someone who can use size and strength to screen the opposing goalie or out-muscle defensemen in front of the net.

Rasmus Ristolainen, a 25-year-old defenseman, has been the Sabres' physical presence in front of the net on the power play. Simmonds ranked third on New Jersey in power-play ice time and has scored 10 or more goals on the man-advantage six times in his career. He will be asked to play on the Sabres' power play, which entered Tuesday ranked 17th in the NHL.

Additionally, Simmonds will begin in a prominent role at even strength, as he took line rushes Tuesday with Jeff Skinner and Marcus Johansson. The timing of the trade and travel to Buffalo prevented Simmonds from having in-depth conversations with the coaching staff, so he spoke to coach Ralph Krueger and Johansson between drills.

Though its unclear how Simmonds will fit in Krueger's system, the Sabres expressed excitement for what Simmonds could bring on and off the ice.

"He's someone that you know where he is when they have the puck because he's always such a great net-front presence and then when they don't have it he has that physical presence that makes it a really tough night on us D-men, getting hit time after time," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "It's not easy going back for pucks. You're always looking over your shoulder. It's such a huge add for us. He provides such a physical presence."

Krueger sensed the enthusiasm the moment he heard Simmonds' voice on the phone line late Monday afternoon.

Simmonds wants to be a positive influence on the young Sabres who have yet to experience playoff hockey. His former Devils teammates, including teenage center Jack Hughes, spoke eloquently to a team reporter Monday about the off-ice impact Simmonds had during his short time in New Jersey.

McCabe explained that Simmonds can show young players different methods to prepare for competition. During his career, Simmonds has played 902 regular-season games and has missed only 18 of a possible 574 games between 2013-19.

Simmonds is the latest playoff-hardened veteran added by General Manager Jason Botterill to strengthen the culture around the Sabres. Simmonds was the recipient last season of the NHL's annual Mark Messier Leadership Award, which recognizes an individual as a superior leader and as a contributing member of society.

"Well, I just think he's one of the best net-front presence guys in the league over the last decade," Krueger said. "I think that, whether he's doing it or he's teaching and helping us, there's no better voices in the room than the players themselves. We are trying to facilitate that. ... To have a voice like Wayne's in there helping our group understand what opportunity still lies ahead if we get better at that game is tremendous.

"We have a team physicality and a courage that I like to play and he will just add to that in the right way. We're not asking him to do anything out of the ordinary, just be himself and continue to do what he's good at and step in to what we need him to do here to be the best version of Wayne."

The Sabres entered deadline day only six points behind the Toronto Maple Leafs for the third and final Atlantic Division playoff spot. Last year, Buffalo had fewest points in the NHL following its 10-game win streak in November, including a 2-13-12 record in March.

Simmonds told NHL Network following the trade Monday he would be interested in signing a new contract with the Sabres after the season. How he helps their young roster through the next 20 games will likely determine whether he'll be on the move again.

"I think when you're going down the stretch here, I'm a UFA at the end of the year, " Simmonds said. "Whether I stay here or I go, I've got to prove myself. So playing these meaningful games over the last 20 and trying to push this team into the playoffs. I mean, obviously, I know I'm not going to be the savior or anything here, but just another piece to help the boys out. That's something I relish.

"I'm a competitor. I've always been a competitor my whole career. And this kind of stuff brings the best out of me."

Dominik Kahun surprised by trade from Penguins, happy to play for Sabres

By Jason Wolf

The Buffalo News

February 25, 2020

Dominik Kahun said he was surprised to learn he was traded from the Penguins to the Sabres, his third NHL team in two seasons, at Monday's trade deadline, and hopes he can remain with his new team longer than his stints with Pittsburgh and Chicago.

"Obviously, when I got traded (Monday), first of all I was a little shocked, that's for sure," Kahun said Tuesday during a conference call with Buffalo reporters. "I didn't really see it coming. But I'm really, really happy to play for Buffalo now."

The Sabres acquired Kahun, a 24-year-old forward and pending restricted free agent, for forwards Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues. Kahun, who has 10 goals and 17 assists in 50 games this season, is expected to join the team in Denver on Wednesday in time for the Sabres' game against the Colorado Avalanche, but might not play.

Kahun injured a knee last Thursday and did not play in the Penguins' two games last weekend after participating in warmups. Kahun described the injury as minor and said if he did not play Wednesday, he expected to play Friday at Vegas.

"I don't think it's anything terrible and I will be playing soon again," Kahun said.

Kahun, a native of Czech Republic who went undrafted, has 23 goals and 41 assists between Pittsburgh and Chicago over the past two years. He missed eight games earlier this season with a concussion but played in all 82 games with the Blackhawks in 2018-19.

Kahun played professionally in Germany before his rookie season with Chicago.

"Dominik Kahun I know well," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said after practice Tuesday. "He played multiple world championships with my son and I've seen each and every world championship – which I'd like to stop doing – over the last 20 years. So him winning the silver medal at the Olympic games and being an important part of multiple championships in Germany (with EHC Red Bull München), coached by Don Jackson, one of the best coaches in Europe, a great ex-NHLer who teaches the right way, who believes in the principles I've exchanged with Donnie over the years, so we know that Dominik has gone through a good school. ... So we're excited to have him join us."

Krueger said his knowledge and familiarity with Kahun is a great benefit.

"It helps a lot that you completely understand where he's coming from," Krueger said. "I get his entire school of when he played in Mannheim as a kid to going to Munich, the most powerful franchise in German hockey, and then playing on the A national team as an 18-year-old, that's really rare."

"In all my 13 years with Switzerland's national team, I had one 18-year-old on that team. That was Roman Josi. So you don't make national teams in Europe as an 18-year-old very often. And so just his track record and his ability to step up and play against bigger bodies really quickly was quite interesting. But it helps, for sure, to have some familiarity with the way he's been bred."

Kahun also has experience with Sabres assistant coach Donnie Granato – since both were with the Blackhawks last season – as well as Sabres defenseman Henri Jokiharju, a first-round draft pick by the Blackhawks in 2017. Kahun and Jokiharju used to room together on road trips.

"I think he's a really honest and great guy, a great teammate, and of course, he's a good player," Jokiharju said. "He's got some skills and some speed and he works hard, so I think he's going to be a good addition for our team."

Kahun, a left-handed shot, said he played center his entire life before arriving in the NHL but is willing and able to play any position. He played anywhere from the second to fourth line in Pittsburgh and shifted between the left and right wing.

"I can be anywhere, winger or center, but most of the time I've played center for sure in my life," Kahun said.

Krueger said Kahun will begin on the wing with the Sabres, but values his versatility.

"For him, I think it's easier on the wing initially, but he definitely gives you that option as a centerman, which I'm well aware of," Krueger said.

The line he plays with hasn't been determined.

"Dominik is definitely a skill player," Krueger said. "He's got good hands, good feet, good speed, and he can play up and down the lineup. We don't have that classic 'top six, bottom six' kind of situation here. We really are doing this by committee right now and everybody knows that (Jack Eichel, Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart) are the driving force in our offense, but everybody's involved in both directions.

"Where he's going to play and how that's going to settle in and whether he's in, we'll make those calls (Wednesday)."

Kahun said it hasn't been easy being traded twice in three seasons.

The Blackhawks dealt him to Pittsburgh in June for defenseman Olli Maatta – a former first-round draft pick and two-time Stanley Cup champion – and a fifth-round pick.

"That's how it is. It's out of my control," Kahun said. "I play hockey. That's what I do best. And it doesn't matter where I play, I always try to help and be the best. Like I said, I was a little surprised. But I'm very excited and I hope that I can stay longer in Buffalo now."

Sabres' Simmonds is glad to be in Buffalo

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 25, 2020

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Wayne Simmonds was traded to Nashville at last year's NHL Trade Deadline, and on Monday, New Jersey traded him to Buffalo.

Simmonds will be an unrestricted free agent on July 1, so he wasn't surprised that he was traded, "I thought something was going to happen. I had a couple of talks with Fitzy [Tom Fitzgerald] the [interim general manager], so it was just a matter of time."

Jason Botterill got Simmonds to provide grit and leadership. Ralph Krueger said he already has seen Simmonds be a leader in the room before his first practice. The winger knows his role and what's expected of him, "I think I bring some solid leadership to this group. I play a physical game, and if you look at the lineup there are a lot of skilled players, and I think I can complement these guys."

Simmonds had to waive his no-trade clause and he said, "It's the young talent on this team. I think they're going in the right direction, and I thought I could be a piece that could ultimately help this team get into the playoffs."

Simmonds knows what games are like at this time of year, and he feels it's his job to help the younger Sabres through it, "It's a lot tighter hockey, and I think I'm a pretty vocal guy and I try to lead by example."

The 31-year-old knows he can't score and play like he used to. He said that makes the next month very important for him, "I'm a UFA [unrestricted free agent] at the end of the year. Whether I stay here or I go, I've got to prove myself, so playing these meaningful games and trying to push this team into the playoffs."

Krueger thinks Simmonds brings a good element to this group. He said, "The conversations with Wayne yesterday and today have been motivational for me too. He's got an excellent spirit and brings a lot of good experience, loves to do things that we need more of with net pressure."

Krueger isn't interested in what has been for Simmonds, he's only interested in going forward, "Let's work with him now and get him playing the game he wants to play and our goal is to get the potential out of the individuals. so beginning today, we work hard with Wayne to find out what that is."

Tuesday's lines:

Olofsson - Eichel - Reinhart
Girgensons - Larsson - Okposo
Vesey - Lazar - Frolik
Skinner - M. Johansson - Simmonds

McCabe - Ristolainen
Gilmour - Jokiharju
Dahlin - Montour

Dominik Kahun is going to meet the team in Denver. Kahun has a lower-body injury and said if he's not ready against the Avalanche, he will be ready in Vegas. Colin Miller missed practice due to personal reasons.

Looking back at all of Jason Botterill's significant moves this season

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 26, 2020

All Jason Botterill can do now is sit back and watch.

The general manager's season is essentially over following Monday's trade deadline. He can make a few recalls and pursue a college free agent or two, but any significant moves are finished for Botterill's teams in Buffalo and Rochester.

So, how did his season go?

Not great. Not fireable. While he certainly won't be a candidate for GM of the year, Botterill should be around to see some of his prized acquisitions suit up next season.

Let's look back at all of Botterill's significant moves for 2019-20.

April 7, 2019: Fires coach Phil Housley

General managers only get to hire a couple of coaches, so getting rid of the first one after just two years on the job is a bold move. It started the clock on the GM's employment status.

But it was clear Housley and the players were severely disconnected. The Sabres had to move on, and Botterill decided quickly to do it.

May 8, 2019: Signs European free agent Arttu Ruotsalainen to a three-year entry-level deal

The diminutive forward was one of the best scorers in Finland, and the Sabres convinced him to sign. They scouted Ruotsalainen frequently while looking at Finnish teammate and 2017 draft pick Oskari Laaksonen.

Ruotsalainen didn't make the Sabres out of training camp and returned to Finland, where he continues to fill the net. He ranks in the top 10 in points per game with 12 goals and 37 points through his opening 38 outings.

May 15, 2019: Hires coach Ralph Krueger

Having seen how important communication is between players and coaches, Botterill went out of the box to nab a motivational speaker who was running a soccer team. It's been a hit in the dressing room.

Players have embraced Krueger's positive, forceful message. Whether it's in team meetings or in the media room, the coach makes his point with positive words that aren't sugarcoated. The results aren't there yet, but the hire looks solid.

June 7, 2019: Re-signs Jeff Skinner to an eight-year, \$72 million contract

One of hockey's worst-scoring organizations couldn't let a 40-goal scorer walk. Keeping Skinner was a vital, necessary move.

Signing him for \$9 million per season with a full no-move clause is highly debatable. It seems like a one-sided negotiation, with Skinner receiving an overpayment and getting a perk that typically results in a giveback. Even before the left winger went 22 games without a goal and watched his totals plummet, there were worries about what the deal would look like when Skinner turns 30 and still has five seasons left.

June 21, 2019: Drafts Dylan Cozens with the No. 7 overall pick

Selecting a big, highly skilled center was a no-brainer given the organization's needs. But Cozens is proving the best of the available options, dominating the Western Hockey League and helping Canada earn gold at the world juniors.

The Sabres signed him to a three-year deal on July 15, 2019, and there's a good chance that contract will start in Buffalo next season.

June 28, 2019: Acquires defenseman Colin Miller from Vegas for a 2021 second-round pick and 2022 fifth-round pick

Botterill took advantage of the Golden Knights' salary-cap woes, plucking the highest-scoring defenseman in the franchise's brief history for a pair of future picks — the distant future.

The present, however, hasn't gone as planned. The Sabres have scratched Miller 16 times. His numbers — everything from ice time to points to Corsi — have fallen off a cliff. There are still two more seasons on the contract that pays \$3.875 million per year, so Botterill is hoping this is just a down year and not a downward trend.

July 1, 2019: Acquires forward Jimmy Vesey from the Rangers for a 2021 third-round pick

Once again, Botterill picked up an established NHL player for a future selection. While not flashy, Vesey averaged 17 goals during his three seasons in New York. That would have ranked third on the Sabres during that time.

This season, he's tied for sixth with nine goals. Vesey is on pace for 12, which would be a career low.

July 1, 2019: Signs forward Curtis Lazar, defenseman John Gilmour and goaltender Andrew Hammond to one-year, \$700,000 contracts

By doling out the league's minimum salary, Botterill improved the Sabres' depth. Lazar has been effective in Buffalo and Rochester. Hammond has been solid with the Amerks, starting 14-11-2 and ranking in the top half of the American Hockey League in goals-against average.

Gilmour has bounced between the teams and hasn't reached the lofty numbers he recorded last season. After 20 goals with the Rangers' minor-league team, he has six in 36 games with Rochester and Buffalo.

July 1, 2019: Signs forward Jean-Sebastien Dea to a two-year, \$1.4 million deal

Botterill gave his former Penguins prospect a multiyear contract to provide leadership in Rochester and depth in Buffalo. In three games with the Sabres, Dea has no points or shots while skating just 7:38 a night. He is pacing the Amerks with 15 goals and 36 points in 50 games.

July 2, 2019: Re-signs forward C.J. Smith to a two-year, \$1.4 million deal

Smith totaled 30 goals last season, finding the net 28 times in Rochester and twice in 11 games for Buffalo. He, too, has experienced a significant dip with 11 goals in 43 games with the Amerks. He hasn't received a call to Buffalo, which has him questioning his place in the organization.

July 5, 2019: Re-signs forward Zemgus Girgensons to a one-year, \$1.6 million contract

It was easy to scoff at the decision. Girgensons had been a nondescript fourth-line player, a job that can go to a younger skater making half of Girgensons' salary.

But few players are providing bang for the buck like Girgensons. He's on pace for 15 goals, which would tie the career high he set as an All-Star in 2014-15. He even filled in as Jack Eichel's winger while Victor Olofsson was injured. He has made a solid case to be re-signed again.

July 6, 2019: Signs forward Marcus Johansson to a two-year, \$9 million deal

After an impressive playoff series with Boston, Johansson sat on the free-agent market for six days. He and the Sabres signed a budget-friendly deal that was fair for both sides. Johansson was one of the bigger names on the market, and Botterill got him.

But like so many others, Johansson's production is way down. It's largely due to a position switch. The Sabres still haven't found their second-line center to back up Eichel, so they moved Johansson from left wing to a spot he hadn't played in seven years. It shows.

Johansson is on pace for just 10 goals and 25 points. That's two fewer goals and the same number of points that Casey Mittelstadt put up last season during his disappointing run as the No. 2 center.

July 9, 2019: Acquires defenseman Henri Jokiharju from Chicago for forward Alex Nylander

It was clear Nylander didn't have a future in the Sabres organization. Jokiharju definitely does. He's been one of the Sabres' steadiest defenders, playing in every game after sitting ninth or 10th on the depth chart entering training camp.

Jokiharju is tied for third among Sabres defensemen with four even-strength goals and fourth with 15 points. The 20-year-old still has another season left on his entry-level contract.

July 12, 2019: Re-signs center Johan Larsson to a one-year, \$1.55 million deal

Just like the Girgensons decision, it was easy to wonder why. Larsson has been a bottom-six player throughout the worst era of hockey in Buffalo's history.

But he's on pace for a career-high 22 points while anchoring the checking line with Girgensons and Kyle Okposo. His even-strength goal differential of +7 is third on the team despite starting in the offensive zone just 36.8 percent of the time.

He's also making a solid case to be re-signed again.

July 25, 2019: Goes to arbitration with forward Evan Rodrigues, who is awarded a one-year, \$2 million deal

It seemed like a fair decision for a versatile forward coming off a nine-goal, 29-point season. But Rodrigues immediately found himself in Krueger's doghouse, getting scratched in the opening three games and sitting 24 times overall. Rodrigues requested a trade, which finally came at Monday's deadline.

The main question is why Botterill took almost two months to move a disgruntled player out of the dressing room.

Aug. 1, 2019: Re-signs forward Remi Elie to a one-year, \$700,000 contract

Claimed off waivers from Dallas last season, Elie had no goals and one assist in a minuscule role with Buffalo before heading to Rochester. He put up eight goals and 14 points in 25 games with the Amerks.

Elie has six goals and 11 points in 27 games during an injury-riddled season with Rochester.

Aug. 3, 2019: Re-signs Jake McCabe to a two-year, \$5.7 million contract

The sides settled before heading to arbitration. McCabe's cap hit of \$2.85 million ranks 113th among blueliners, which technically pays him like a top-four defender. Krueger took an immediate shine to the defenseman, naming McCabe an alternate captain.

Regarded as a stay-at-home defenseman, McCabe starts in the offensive zone just 43.4 percent of the time, second-last on the Sabres to Gilmour (36.3 percent). McCabe is also last in even-strength goal differential at -12, more than double the next blueliner (Miller at -6).

Aug. 3, 2019: Re-signs goalie Linus Ullmark to a one-year, \$1.325 million deal

The Sabres and their netminder went to arbitration but settled before the judge's decision. Buffalo is getting good value from a goalie who ranks 47th in pay and 23rd in save percentage.

Nov. 24, 2019: Acquires defenseman Matt Spencer from Tampa Bay for defenseman Devante Stephens

Strictly a minor-league move, the Sabres added the right-handed Spencer for the left-handed Stephens.

Dec. 15, 2019: Assigns Casey Mittelstadt to Rochester

This is Botterill's signature in-season moment, acknowledging that his first draft pick needed to go to the minors. The problem is the acknowledgment came well after it became obvious.

Pigeonholed by a lack of centers, the Sabres trotted out Mittelstadt for 1 1/2 ineffective seasons. In his last 24 games with the Sabres, he had one goal, one assist and 18 shots, averaged 13:24 per night and was scratched three times.

In his past 24 games with Rochester, he has seven goals and 18 points, slowly gaining the offensive confidence he desperately needs — and should have been getting sooner.

Dec. 30, 2019: Signed forward Dalton Smith to a one-year, \$700,000 contract

This turned into an optical nightmare. Buffalo tried to pitch the signing as a career minor-leaguer finally earning a big-league deal. In reality, Botterill had built a team without toughness and someone had to swoop in to stand up to the hard-hitting (cheap-shooting?) Lightning on New Year's Eve.

If Buffalo really believed Smith had earned his NHL chance, he would have stayed longer than 1 minute, 26 seconds, which was his ice time against Tampa Bay before getting sent back down. Smith, a fan favorite in Rochester, turned into a punchline in Buffalo. The saga prompted Rodrigues to formally issue his trade request after getting scratched for Smith.

Jan. 2, 2020: Sabres acquire a 2020 fourth-round pick from Montreal for Marco Scandella; Sabres acquire forward Michael Frolik from Calgary for that 2020 fourth-round pick

After almost six months of having too many defensemen and not enough forwards, a needed deal finally came. It took a bit of three-team creativity, but Botterill brought in a \$4.3 million forward and shipped out a \$4 million defenseman.

So far, it's the wrong forward. Frolik has one empty-net goal, two assists and 24 shots in his first 17 games with Buffalo. He's headed toward the short list of worst in-season acquisitions, riding alongside the infamous Raffi Torres (no goals, five assists in 14 games in 2010).

Botterill had no control when the market shifted and Montreal flipped Scandella for a second-round pick and a conditional fourth just one month later, but the optics were again bad.

Feb. 14, 2020: Waives defenseman Zach Bogosian

Once again, the sin was lack of urgency in addressing a problem. It took 10 weeks from trade demand to departure for Bogosian.

Understandably, the Sabres preferred to get something — anything — for a 12-year veteran playing a position of need for many teams. It should have been clear nothing was coming, and Sabres players watched a well-liked teammate dangle in the wind.

Of course, the situation was of Bogosian's own doing with his impetuous request after one scratch. Still, the saga could have ended two months earlier with the same result.

Feb. 17, 2020: Signs forward Taylor Leier to a one-year, \$700,000 contract

Unlike Smith, this could be a case of rewarding a player for minor-league effort. While fighting injuries in Rochester, Leier has eight goals in 20 games for the Amerks.

Feb. 24, 2020: Acquires Wayne Simmonds from the Devils for a 2021 conditional fifth-round pick

While Simmonds' best days are behind him, Botterill filled a need by bringing in a gritty leader with playoff experience for the stretch drive. And since the GM gave up essentially nothing to do it, the move looks like a win, especially if Simmonds helps deliver a few victories.

Feb. 24, 2020: Acquires forward Dominik Kahun from Pittsburgh for Rodrigues and forward Conor Sheary

Kahun's offensive numbers with the Penguins nearly equal Rodrigues' and Sheary's combined, so it appears Botterill got the best player in the trade. He also maintains control of the pending restricted free agent, while Sheary was set to leave as a UFA and Rodrigues wanted out. Again, the initial take is the move looks like a win.

But there have been quite a few losses for the GM. Like the on-ice product Botterill assembled, it's been an up-and-down year with significant highs and befuddling lows.

Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek (among others) were options to the underwhelming quartet of Frolik, Vesey, Sheary and Rodrigues, and the team might have benefited with better production at a lower price. There were too many defensemen and too few forwards for far too long.

Botterill's salary-cap management is rightfully being questioned as an overage awaits next season. Injuries handcuffed the GM — season-ending ailments to Vladimir Sobotka (\$3.5 million), Matt Hunwick (\$2.25 million) and Tage Thompson (\$925,000) significantly impacted the bottom line — but Botterill had all season to make space for the bonuses that will be due to Rasmus Dahlin, Jokiharju and others. Now the Sabres' cap ceiling will be lower than that of other teams in 2020-21.

It was wise to trade future draft picks for players who can help now, but the Sabres might miss the playoffs despite giving up three 2021 selections: one of their two second-rounders for Miller, a third-rounder for Vesey and either a fourth or fifth for Simmonds. It's not hard to reacquire picks at the draft, but Botterill's targets haven't helped as much as needed (so far).

But Jokiharju is a player. Mittelstadt is finally getting development time. The Sabres have a coach who connects with the players. Cozens looks like a future stud.

Those things saved the GM from having a season to forget.

Sabres look to Wayne Simmonds for leadership heading into meaningful March games

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

February 25, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — In the 11 previous seasons of Wayne Simmonds' NHL career, he's been on a team that's advanced to the Stanley Cup playoffs seven times.

The Sabres are hoping to make this season his eighth. Buffalo has put themselves in a position to play meaningful games in March. By bringing the 31-year-old forward aboard, Buffalo adds a savvy, hard-nosed veteran who has the postseason experience that this team collectively lacks.

"He's one of the best net front presence guys in the league over the last decade. Whether he's doing it or whether he's teaching and helping us, there's no better voices in the room than the players themselves and we are trying to facilitate that," coach Ralph Krueger said. "But when we leave the room, they spend more time alone than with us. So to have a voice like Wayne's in there, helping our group understand what opportunities still (lie) ahead if we get better at that game is tremendous. We have a team physicality and courage that I've liked of late and he will just add to that in the right way. We're not asking him to do anything out of the ordinary — just be himself and continue to do what he's good at and step into what we need him to do here — to be the best version of Wayne."

What Simmonds has done well this season with the Devils, is a lot of what he's done through his career. He's physical, he does a lot of work around the net, and he's a presence on the power play causing trouble for defenders and goaltenders alike down low. But it's how he goes about it that sticks out to those who have battled against him but now hope to follow his lead.

"You know where he is when they have the puck because he's always such a great net front presence. Then when you don't have it, you know he's got that physical presence that it makes it a real tough night on us D-men," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "But it's not easy going back for pucks — you're always looking over your shoulder. It's such a huge, huge add for us. He provides such a physical presence and, not only all that, but he's played so long in this league. And he's been such a high-end power forward for so long that he's played in playoff games, he's played in these meaningful games and that's going to be huge for us down the stretch just with his leadership."

While the Sabres haven't experienced the playoffs since 2011, Simmonds becomes another member of the current roster who has been to the postseason much more recently.

Marcus Johansson went all the way to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup final with the Bruins last season. Kyle Okposo has been to the postseason with the Islanders, Brandon Montour with the Ducks, Curtis Lazar with the Senators, Colin Miller with both Boston and Vegas, and Jimmy Vesey in one season with the Rangers. Michael Frolik won the Cup with the Blackhawks in 2013. Those voices carry weight and come with varying levels of playoff experience and different varieties of leadership. Adding another voice to the mix — and one whose particular set of skills sets him apart from the group — makes him a special ingredient for what Buffalo is trying to cook up in chasing down third place in the Atlantic Division.

"I hope my style of leadership, my style of play — that all meshes well here," Simmonds said at KeyBank Center on Tuesday. "I'm a vocal guy and if I'm not happy, I'll say something. But you've kind of got to pick your spots too this time of year, right? You want everyone to be known in the room."

The Sabres' team theme this year has been "Play Connected," a philosophy that Simmonds subscribes to already.

"I think teams that have had success that I've been on, it's an 'all-for-one, one-for-all' mentality, right," Simmonds said. "You go into the game and it's a five-man pack everywhere you go and not only does that show on the ice but off the ice as well. So I think it's huge — if you're going to go grab a beer or go out to dinner, you want the majority of the guys to be doing that off the ice and on the ice."

Wayne Simmonds thrilled to join Sabres: ‘A perfect opportunity for me’

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2020

BUFFALO – Sabres newcomer Wayne Simmonds has reached a critical point in his career. The 12-year veteran needs to play meaningful games. Staying another six weeks with the hapless New Jersey Devils wouldn't have helped him much.

Simmonds, 31, has endured the worst season of his NHL career. Given his age and declining production – just eight goals in 61 games this season – he needs to demonstrate he still possesses the skills that have helped him score 251 goals.

"I'm a UFA at the end of the year, whether I stay here or I go, I've got to prove myself," Simmonds said following Tuesday's practice, his first with the Sabres. "So playing these meaningful games over the last 20 and trying to push this team into the playoffs, I mean, obviously, I know I'm not going to be the savior or anything here, but just another piece to help the boys out. That's something I relish."

Simmonds relished a fresh opportunity and liked the Sabres' young talent so much he waived his no-trade clause to join them before Monday's trade deadline.

"A lot of good people in that organization," Simmonds said of the Devils. "I don't regret signing there one bit. But at the same time, I wanted an opportunity to be in the hunt for the playoffs, to play those competitive games, and this was a perfect opportunity for me."

That opportunity materialized because the Sabres have roared into the playoff chase, winning five out of their last six games, including two straight. They're six points out of the Atlantic Division's final postseason spot.

So for the first time in years the Sabres are in the hunt past the 60-game mark. Just playing meaningful late-season games is significant for them.

That's why general manager Jason Botterill added assets before the deadline. Simmonds only cost the Sabres a conditional fifth-round pick. The Sabres also dealt Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary – two forwards who clearly weren't in their future – to the Pittsburgh Penguins in exchange for forward Dominik Kahun.

Simmonds will likely make his Sabres debut tonight against the Colorado Avalanche, the start of a four-game road trip against Western Conference opponents.

Kahun, meanwhile, has been nursing a lower-body injury. He said on a conference call Tuesday he will play Friday if he can't face the Avalanche. He did not practice Tuesday and was scheduled to meet the team in Colorado.

"I feel we come strengthened from the trade deadline," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said inside KeyBank Center. "No. 1, the confirmation of the path that we're on here, we've got that ability to just go back to work tomorrow."

Not surprisingly, the moves have energized the Sabres, many of whom are experiencing their first playoff push.

"The additions sends a message to the room they believe in us as a group now," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said. "We had a good mood in here after our game Sunday. I think that the guys in the room really started believing in each other and believing in ourselves what we're doing here, and I think when you go out and do something like that, you don't sell players as much as you're trying to add and make your team better, I think it sends a message to the room we're trying to go for this right now."

Simmonds' experience and gritty style should help the Sabres down the stretch. He has played 902 NHL games, more than anyone on the roster.

"I bring some solid leadership to this group," Simmonds said. "I play a physical game and you look at the lineup, there's a lot of good players. I think I can complement these guys."

Simmonds said his aggressive style includes getting "in peoples' faces" in front of the net and fighting.

"That's been a staple of my game for a long time and it's not going to change now that I'm here," he said. "I think it's only going to enhance the talent around me."

Krueger said of Simmonds: "He's one of the best net-front presence guys in the league over the last decade."

The coach also believes Simmonds' voice can impact the Sabres. He said the team won't ask him to do anything out of the ordinary.

"Just be himself and continue to do what he's good at and step in to what we need him to do here to be the best version of Wayne," Krueger said.

But the Sabres don't have the Simmonds who once scored 63 goals over a two-year stretch. Since the Flyers traded him to the Nashville Predators before last year's deadline, he has only scored nine goals in 78 outings.

"After so many years in Philadelphia and being such an important part of a lot of successful years there and being a centerpiece, sometimes it takes a player a while to adjust to the reality that that's over," Krueger said. "Let's work with him now and let's look forward and get him playing the game he wants to play, and we'll get to know him really quickly."

Simmonds practiced at right wing Tuesday beside center Marcus Johansson and Jeff Skinner.

The Sabres gave Simmonds No. 17, his regular digits. Injured forward Vladimir Sobotka wore the number earlier this season.

Dominik Kahun excited to join Sabres: ‘I’m really, really happy’

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2020

BUFFALO – Dominik Kahun experienced an unconventional path to the NHL. In 2012, the Sabres forward left Germany for North America, hoping a stint in junior would help him get drafted. Two years later, he went home without a team.

“I came to the OHL, my goal was to get drafted and play in the NHL, but I didn’t get drafted there,” Kahun said on a conference call Tuesday.

So Kahun, who was acquired from the Pittsburgh Penguins before Monday’s trade deadline, decided to play in Germany.

Kahun, 24, closed his four-year DEL career by winning three straight championships with Munich EHC. He also turned heads starring for the German national team in tournaments, including the 2018 Olympics.

A few months after earning a silver medal, the Chicago Blackhawks signed Kahun to an entry-level contract.

“When I think about it, it was the best thing I could do,” Kahun, who was born in the Czech Republic, said of playing in the DEL.

So far, Kahun’s NHL career has been a whirlwind. The Sabres are already his third team.

“When I got traded yesterday, first of all, I was a little shocked,” he said. “I didn’t really see it coming. But I’m really, really happy to play for Buffalo now.”

Kahun spent all of last season in Chicago, scoring 13 goals and 37 points in 82 games. But the Blackhawks dealt him to the Penguins in June.

He produced in Pittsburgh, compiling 10 goals and 27 points in 50 outings.

“I learned new stuff,” he said of his time with the Penguins. “It could definitely make me better and stronger again. But, yeah, now I’m in Buffalo and I’m excited for that.”

He added: “I hope that I can stay longer in Buffalo.”

Kahun suffered a concussion last month, costing him eight games. An upper-body injury sidelined him his last two contests with the Penguins.

He said if he doesn’t make his Sabres debut tonight against the Colorado Avalanche, the start of a four-game road trip, he will play Friday versus the Vegas Golden Knights.

“I don’t think it’s anything terrible,” he said of his injury. “I will be playing soon again.”

Kahun should feel some comfort with the Sabres.

He played with coach Ralph Krueger’s son, Justin, on the German national team. Krueger knows him and has watched him up close for years.

The two shared what Kahun called “a very good call” after the Sabres sent the Penguins forwards Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary in exchange for Kahun.

“He told me how he saw me play for Germany and he knows what kind of player I am,” Kahun said. “He told me that I would definitely love the group of guys, that we have a great group. I’m very excited to play.”

Krueger called Kahun “a skilled player” who “can play up and down the lineup.”

"He's got good hands, good feet, good speed," he said.

Kahun also knows Sabres assistant coach Don Granato, who had the same role in Chicago last season.

Krueger said Kahun, having played in the DEL and garnered so much international experience, has "gone through a good school."

Kahun played on Germany's top national team at 18, something that Krueger, an international coaching veteran, said is "really rare."

"In all my 13 years with Switzerland's national team, I had one 18-year-old on that team and that was Roman Josi," he said of the Nashville Predators defenseman. "You don't make national teams in Europe as an 18-year-old very often. So just his track record and his ability to step up and play against bigger bodies really was quite interesting."

Krueger said Kahun had an experience similar to Sabres winger Victor Olofsson, who came to North America last season after morphing into an elite player in his native Sweden.

Kahun did not practice Tuesday inside KeyBank Center. He left Los Angeles, where the Penguins play tonight, to meet the Sabres in Colorado.

"Where he's going to play and how that's going to settle in and whether he's in, we'll make those calls (today)," Krueger said.

Kahun said he grew up as a center but has played winger since coming to the NHL. Krueger said he wants to ease him in as a winger at first.

—

Sabres defenseman Colin Miller missed Tuesday's practice for personal reasons, according to the team.

Simmonds eager to help Sabres make a push for the playoffs

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 25, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. [WKBW] — Wayne Simmonds is ready to prove he still belongs in the NHL.

On Tuesday Simmonds joined his new teammates for the first time as the Buffalo Sabres get ready for a playoff push.

"I think this team is going in the right direction," Simmonds said after his first practice as a Sabre. "I thought that I could be a piece to ultimately help this team get into the playoffs."

During his first skate with his new team, Simmonds skating on a line with Jeff Skinner and Marcus Johansson. The 31-year-old winger said he'll do whatever he needs to down the stretch to prove to the Sabres and the other teams in the NHL that he can still play.

"I'm a UFA [unrestricted free agent] at the end of the year, so whether I stay here or I go, I need to prove myself," Simmonds said. "Obviously I know I'm not going to be the savior or anything here but just to be another piece to help the boys out. That's something that I relish. I'm a competitor and I've been a competitor my whole career and this kind of stuff brings the best out of me."

Simmonds and his new teammates begin a four-game road trip starting Wednesday in Colorado. For the full interview with Simmonds, head to the top of the page!

Veteran forward Wayne Simmonds practiced with the Sabres Tuesday

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

February 25, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Veteran forward Wayne Simmonds practiced with the Sabres Tuesday morning.

The Sabres acquired Simmonds from the New Jersey Devils for a conditional 2021 fifth-round draft pick.

The Sabres also acquired forward Dominik Kahun from Pittsburgh for Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary. Kahun will join the team Wednesday in Colorado and head coach Ralph Krueger said he will decide in the morning if Kahun is in the lineup.

Simmonds waived his no trade clause to join the Sabres. "The young talent on this team, I think they're going in the right direction, and I thought that I could be a piece that could ultimately help this team get into the playoffs," he said.

"I'll drop the gloves if need be and at the same time I like to go to the net and you know get in people's faces. Its been a staple of my game for a long time and its not going to change now that I'm here. I think its only going to enhance the talent around me," he added.

During practice, Simmonds was on a line with Marcus Johansson and Jeff Skinner.

Wayne Simmonds Hopes to Lead Sabres to Playoffs

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

February 25, 2020

You can consider Ralph Krueger a big fan of how his team treated the trade deadline. While the Sabres entered Monday with 16 players set to become free agents, they opted to add pieces rather than subtract them.

"I feel we come strengthened out of the trade deadline," says the Sabres head coach. "Number one, the confirmation of the path we're on here. We've got that ability to just go right back to work tomorrow. We've come out of it with our soul, our habits intact with added power."

Wayne Simmonds, who joined the Sabres for his first practice after Monday's trade, brings 44 games of playoff experience and a solid veteran presence. Dominik Kahun, acquired for Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues, will join the Sabres in Denver ahead of Wednesday's game. Both players have spoken with Krueger about their roles on the team.

"It was a very good call," says Kahun, who played with Justin Krueger (Ralph's son) for Germany at the 2017 World Championship. "He told me how he saw me playing for Germany. He knows what kind of player I am. I'm very excited to play. I can't wait until I get started."

"I think they're going in the right direction," says Simmonds, explaining why he waived his no-trade clause. "I thought that I could be a piece that could ultimately help this team get into the playoffs. I'm extremely excited to be here, and I can't wait to get started."

After Tuesday's practice, Krueger called Simmonds one of the NHL's top netfront presences over the past decade, adding that he expects the 31-year-old to log minutes on the power play. Simmonds welcomes a large offensive responsibility to complement his expected leadership role.

"I've always been a guy who's tried to help the younger guys out. It's extremely important," he says. "Especially with the way the league is going. Teach them a couple of things. Just talk to them. Not even about hockey, just about their life on a day-to-day basis. I think it's extremely important to get to know each and every single one of your teammates. I think that just builds the team and makes it a lot stronger."

Both players should make their Sabres debuts this week — Simmonds is likely to play Wednesday while Kahun (lower-body injury) is questionable.

Dominik Kahun on the Penguins trading him to Buffalo: 'I didn't really see it coming'

By Matt Vensel
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
February 25, 2020

For the second time in less than a year, Dominik Kahun got dealt Monday. And, just like he was when the Penguins got him from the Chicago Blackhawks last June, the winger was stunned Monday to learn he was on the move again.

The Penguins traded Kahun to the Buffalo Sabres in exchange for Conor Sheary, a key role player on their two recent Stanley Cup teams, and Evan Rodrigues.

"When I got traded [Monday], first of all, it was a shock, for sure. I didn't really see it coming," the soft-spoken Kahun said Tuesday on a conference call organized by the Sabres. "But I'm really, really happy to play for Buffalo now."

His inclusion in a trade was indeed a tad surprising. He just last week returned from a month-long absence due to a concussion. And while he was still trying to fit in with his new team and secure a spot on one of the top two lines, he did have 10 goals and 27 points in 50 games with Pittsburgh prior to the trade.

Kahun in his brief time with the organization showed that he had playmaking ability and decent wheels. And he didn't seem to make many mistakes. But he also wasn't necessarily a player who grabbed your eye. You might glance at the box score after a game and wonder, "Wait, Kahun had two points tonight?"

The Penguins were obviously not convinced that Kahun would be a good fit on a line with either Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin during their playoff push.

The Blackhawks were willing to move on him from him, too, even though he had produced solid numbers as a rookie playing with some of their top players.

So, it's probably understandable that the 24-year-old is surprised and perhaps a little puzzled that he has already been traded twice in his first two NHL seasons despite putting up 23 goals, 64 points and a plus-16 rating in 132 games.

"That's something that is out of my control. I play hockey. That's what I do best. It doesn't matter where I play. I always try to help and be the best," he said. "I was a little surprised but I'm very excited. I hope that I can stay longer in Buffalo."

That said, he was polite when asked about his experience with the Penguins.

"It's a great team with, obviously, very good players," he said. "So I could learn from them. I learned new stuff. They definitely made me better and stronger."

Five players who won and five players who lost on NHL trade deadline day

By Jared Clinton

The Hockey News

February 25, 2020

In the aftermath of the trade deadline, colleague Matt Larkin ran down which teams won and lost the deadline. Among the winners were the Carolina Hurricanes, Pittsburgh Penguins and Ottawa Senators, teams that got exactly what they needed, be it extra pieces for a Stanley Cup run or futures for the rentals on their roster. Meanwhile, the Buffalo Sabres, Calgary Flames and Dallas Stars wound up among the losers, be it for their puzzling choices or inaction.

But what it means to win or lose on deadline day as a franchise is not the same as what it means to win or lose as a player. Thus, we thought it would be interesting to take a look at Monday's moves – and Monday's moves only, as trades happening prior were not considered – and view it through the eyes of the players themselves.

With that in mind, which players benefitted most Monday and which players should be most upset by what did or, in one case, didn't happen? Here's a look at five players who won and lost on deadline day:

WINNERS

Andreas Athanasiou – Detroit Red Wings to Edmonton Oilers

There's more to this than simply getting out of Detroit, which could itself be considered a win given the Red Wings have been historically awful this season and are all but guaranteed to finish dead-last in the NHL. As soon as his move to Edmonton was announced, Athanasiou was pencilled in as a top-six winger, which means one of two things: either he plays alongside Connor McDavid or alongside Leon Draisaitl. Difficult to see any downside there.

Athanasiou's speed seemingly makes him a great fit as McDavid's winger, and if Athanasiou can develop chemistry with No. 97 there's no telling what kind of numbers the duo could produce as the Oilers seek a post-season berth. But potential playoff games and playing with one of the best one-two center punches in the league aside, there's a third victory for Athanasiou here, especially if he does find an offensive spark in Edmonton. The 25-year-old is set to become a restricted free agent at season's end. If he produces at a top-six rate and looks like he could be a long-term solution on the wing for the Oilers, he's going to get himself a nice new contract.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau – Ottawa Senators to New York Islanders

As is the case with Athanasiou, the instant victory for Pageau is moving from a league bottom feeder to a team in the thick of the post-season race. But better than any of that for Pageau is that it took mere hours for him to get the one thing he's needed all season: a new contract.

A pending unrestricted free agent heading into the deadline, the high price the Islanders paid for Pageau – picks in the first, second and third rounds, the latter conditioned upon New York winning the Stanley Cup – sent a message that the organization believes their window is open and set to remain that way for the next few seasons. And they sent a stronger message that Pageau was no simple rental later in the day when they inked him to a six-year, \$30-million extension. That's a tidy raise for Pageau, whose current contract carried a \$3.1-million cap hit. The 27-year-old earned it with a 24-goal, 40-point output in 60 games this season.

Will Pageau maintain that scoring rate? Unlikely, especially not as a part of coach Barry Trotz's defense-first system. But Pageau is also the perfect fit for Trotz's Islanders, an intelligent and versatile two-way forward who kills penalties with aplomb and would be any coach's dream.

Patrick Marleau – San Jose Sharks to Pittsburgh Penguins

Traded and then bought out ahead of the season, Marleau seemed destined to end up back with the Sharks ahead of the 2019-20 season. And while that didn't materialize, injuries and a popgun offense necessitated San Jose's signing of the 40-year-old winger days into the season, and he managed to score 10 goals and 20 points in 58 games while proving he had more than fumes left in the tank. With the Sharks foundering, however, the dream scenario of Marleau returning to his longtime home and helping San Jose hoist its first Stanley Cup had gone up in smoke. That didn't mean Marleau's dreams of winning a championship before his career was up were dashed, though, and his move to the Penguins gives him one more shot.

Marleau isn't going to be a feature of the offense in Pittsburgh, of that much we can be sure, but he can certainly contribute as a bottom-six piece for the Penguins. Heck, he could even skate on the second power play unit, which is an added bonus. Pittsburgh is a legitimate Stanley Cup threat this season and they've only improved ahead of the deadline. Once healthy, the Penguins will be a short-odds contender.

By the way, fans also win as part of this deal, if for no reason other than Christina Marleau's Tweets about her husband's childhood love of the Penguins.

Vincent Trocheck – Florida Panthers to Carolina Hurricanes

Winning at the deadline for players isn't all about going from a basement team to a contender. In the case of Trocheck, in fact, getting flipped from Florida to Carolina was a lateral move of sorts. The Panthers are four points back of the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with 70 points in 62 games, while the Hurricanes are two back of the final post-season berth with 74 points in 61 games.

What makes this a win for Trocheck, though, is that he's going to an organization that is heading in the right direction and desired what he brings to the forward corps. Carolina saw a valuable, middle-six forward who can play down the middle or on either wing, contribute offensively, play sound defensive hockey and has excellent analytics. Then the Hurricanes went out and paid the price to get the 26-year-old, a sign the franchise is invested in winning. After moving out Trocheck, it feels as though the opposite can be said of the Panthers.

Wayne Simmonds – New Jersey Devils to Buffalo Sabres

We panned the trade and not without reason. It didn't and still doesn't make sense that the Sabres sold any assets at the deadline to acquire even a single piece given they're as far out of the post-season race as they are and that a bottom-six veteran winger isn't going to alter Buffalo's fate. And yes, even if the cost was nothing more than a single, late-rounds pick, it was still more than the Sabres should have given up.

That said, Simmonds can consider this an audition. If he performs well, maybe he's found himself a surefire landing spot for next season. The Sabres clearly see value in the 31-year-old and he has chipped in eight goals and 24 points this season. Maybe he finds a fit on the power play with Jack Eichel over the late stages of the season, gets hot at the right time and lands a nice ticket for the 2020-21 campaign. There's nothing but opportunity in Buffalo for Simmonds.

LOSERS

Danton Heinen – Boston Bruins to Anaheim Ducks

Cost-cutting measures are bound to happen at some point for every franchise. Such is the reality of the salary cap era. With that in mind, Heinen seems to have been a victim of circumstance in Boston. The Bruins are loaded with talent and have some important free agent concerns this summer, most notably defenseman Torey Krug, so every penny saved matters. And really, looking at it from a financial perspective is the only way to make good sense of the Bruins' decision to send Heinen to the Ducks for Nick Ritchie, which otherwise seems to be a push.

It's not that there are no positives for Heinen, 24, in Anaheim. He'll get the opportunity to skate up the lineup, perhaps even in the Ducks' top six. But he's also going from a Boston team that was one of the handful of legitimate Stanley Cup favorites this season to an Anaheim outfit that won't make the playoffs this season and is likely a few campaigns out from consistent post-season contention.

At least the weather is nice?

Dominik Kahun – Pittsburgh Penguins to Buffalo Sabres

Unlike Simmonds, who is getting the chance to audition in Buffalo, Kahun didn't really need that opportunity, nor is it one he's going to be able to appreciate as much knowing what he's left behind.

With the Penguins, the 24-year-old RFA-to-be was having himself a quality season as a depth contributor. His 10 goals and 27 points were in line with the 13 goals and 37 points he had produced a season prior as a rookie, and Kahun looked as though he was carving out a nice niche for himself in Pittsburgh as a role-playing scorer on a top-heavy, Stanley Cup-contending team. And, yes, while Kahun will get the same opportunity to produce and maybe even a shot at top-six work with the Sabres, he hardly comes out a winner here when he's going to be

spending the early part of his summer getting ready for next season while his former Penguins teammates are chasing a championship.

Joe Thornton – San Jose Sharks

There was chatter heading into the weekend and talk throughout Monday that Thornton was open to moving on. There were even reported suitors, the Panthers and Dallas Stars among them. When Marleau was sent packing by the Sharks, too, one couldn't help but feel Thornton's exit from San Jose was on the horizon.

And then...nothing.

The hours ticked by, the deadline drew closer and then the trade freeze came into effect with Thornton remaining a Shark. Thornton admitted his disappointment, too, saying "it would have been nice to have a chance" to chase the Stanley Cup after "hunting this thing down for 22 years," according to The Athletic's Kevin Kurz.

Heading into the season, it was believed this could be Thornton's last go-round in the NHL. He's 40 and on his third consecutive one-year contract. He's past the back-nine of his career and rounding the bend towards the clubhouse. And that he'll be in San Jose for the remainder of this season means there's an honest-to-goodness possibility he ends his career as a member of a lottery team. If this season is the end of the line, Thornton will hang 'em up as the second-highest scoring player in NHL history to retire without winning a Stanley Cup.

Robin Lehner – Chicago Blackhawks to Vegas Golden Knights

This might seem a strange inclusion to some. Lehner, 28, is going from a Blackhawks team on the outskirts of the wild-card race to a Golden Knights club that is in top spot in the Pacific Division and has potential to make a deep playoff run. But there are more factors to consider. For instance, Lehner is going from a role as a split-starter to likely backup to Marc-Andre Fleury. The newcomer in Vegas will have to unseat the incumbent and steal the job if he wants to spend the playoffs as the go-to guy for the Golden Knights.

More importantly, though, there has to be some disappointment here for Lehner, who is staring down another summer of uncertainty. Last summer, the Islanders stunned everyone by letting the Vezina Trophy finalist walk. This off-season, he'll be looking for another gig once again, as there's no chance he's re-signed by a cap-strapped Vegas team. Lehner will have more competition, too, with the likes of Braden Holtby, Jaroslav Halak, Anton Khudobin and Jacob Markstrom set to become UFAs this summer. According to The Athletic's Mark Lazerus, Lehner wanted to try to make a three-year deal work with the Blackhawks. It didn't come to fruition. So, potential Cup run aside, it's an unfortunate turn of events for a goaltender who seems interested in finding a long-term home.

Sam Gagner – Edmonton Oilers to Detroit Red Wings

It'd be easy to say this is simply a situation that is the inverse of Athanasiou's move to Edmonton, but there's more to it than that. For seven seasons at the beginning of his career, Gagner was one of the fixtures of the Oilers' roster and was supposed to be one of the players who helped right the ship for a franchise that had sailed far off course. Instead, despite his best efforts through nearly 500 games with the organization, he didn't once taste the post-season in Edmonton. Ahead of the 2014-15 season, he was moved to the Tampa Bay Lightning and subsequently on to the Arizona Coyotes, which began a run of four teams in four seasons.

Late last season, though, the Vancouver Canucks moved Gagner to the Oilers, and this season seemed to be his chance, at long last, to help Edmonton to the post-season. Alas, that won't be the case. Gagner was part of the Athanasiou trade package, a throw-in to make the money work. Given the way the past couple seasons have gone for the 30-year-old, who knows how many campaigns Gagner has left as an NHL regular. It has to be tough to realize that after nearly 550 games as an Oiler, he might never be part of an Edmonton team that makes the post-season.

Simmonds hopes to provide leadership, physicality for Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

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Wayne Simmonds waived his no-trade clause for an opportunity to help the Buffalo Sabres make a push in the Atlantic Division, the veteran forward said Tuesday following his first practice with the team.

The Sabres acquired Simmonds, 31, from the New Jersey Devils in exchange for a conditional fifth-round pick in 2021. It was one of two deals the team made to revamp its forward group on Monday along with the acquisition of Dominik Kahun from Pittsburgh.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill said both moves were made with the goal of best preparing the team to play meaningful games in the month of March. The Sabres trail third-place Toronto by six points with one game in hand and 20 left to play.

Simmonds was already embracing that challenge on Tuesday. Coach Ralph Krueger said the winger was engaged at practice as if he had been with the team all along.

"I think they're going in the right direction and I thought that I could be a piece that could ultimately help this team get into the playoffs," Simmonds said. "I'm extremely excited to be here and I can't wait to get started."

Botterill cited Simmonds' leadership, physical game, and willingness to play in front of the opposing net as factors that made him an attractive asset going forward. Simmonds didn't shy away from any of those responsibilities during his introduction to the Buffalo media.

A veteran of seven playoff runs in 12 seasons, Simmonds won't let his "new guy" status prevent him from speaking up in the dressing room. He's been traded three times prior, including from his longtime home of Philadelphia to Nashville at last year's deadline.

"The way the league is going there's a lot of younger guys," he said. "A lot of guys haven't been through these games coming down the stretch. It's a lot of tighter hockey. I think I'm a pretty vocal guy and I try to lead by example. That's what I'm going to try to do here and bring that to the table."

Don't expect Simmonds to be shy on the ice, either.

"I play a really physical game," he added. "I'll drop the gloves if need be and at the same time I like to go to the net and get in peoples' faces. That's been a staple of my game for a long time and it's not going to change now that I'm here. I think it's only going to enhance the talent around me."

The Sabres hope that physicality will extend to some offense, too. Simmonds has been known throughout his career as a net-front presence. He has six seasons of 20 plus-goals on his resume, the latest of which came in 2017-18. He scored 17 goals last season.

Simmonds was most recently the net-front man on New Jersey's power play, where he scored five of his eight goals this season. He tallied five points (3+2) in his last eight contests prior to the trade.

"I just think he's one of the best net-front presence guys in the league over the last decade," Krueger said. "I think that, whether he's doing it or he's teaching and helping us, there's no better voices in the room than the players themselves."

"We are trying to facilitate that. But when we leave the room, they spend more time alone than with us. To have a voice like Wayne's in there helping our group understand what opportunity still lies ahead if we get better at that game is tremendous."

Simmonds acknowledged that he has no expectation of coming in and being a savior. Rather, he wants to fit in as one of the guys, prove himself before unrestricted free agency, and, hopefully, make a push for the playoffs.

He relishes those opportunities. Krueger said the excitement was evident in their first phone conversation on Tuesday.

"I think a lot of it is in the National Hockey League your psychological situation," Krueger said. "I think if we can build on the spirit he's got coming in here and just get him having fun, I think he lost a bit of that. After so many years in Philadelphia and being such an important part of a lot of successful years there and being a centerpiece, sometimes it can take a player a while to adjust to the reality that that's over.

"Let's work with him now and let's look forward and get him playing the game he wants to play, and we'll get to know him really quickly. Our goal here as a coaching staff is to get the potential out of the individuals. So now, beginning today, we work hard with Wayne to find out what that is."

Tuesday's practice

Kahun did not arrive in Buffalo for practice and will instead meet the Sabres in Denver, where they open a four-game road trip against the Colorado Avalanche on Wednesday. Colin Miller also did not practice due to personal reasons.

Kahun, who was acquired yesterday in exchange for forwards Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues, spoke with the Buffalo media during a conference call Tuesday to express his excitement in joining the team.

"When I got traded yesterday, first of all, I was a little shocked, I didn't see it coming," he said. "But I'm really, really happy to play for Buffalo now."

He has 27 points (10+17) in 50 games this season. He's missed the last two with a lower-body injury and sat out eight games earlier this calendar year with a concussion. He suited up for 82 games as a rookie with the Blackhaks in 2018-19.

He's hopeful he can make his Sabres debut tomorrow night, but his status will be determined after he meets with the team's medical staff.

He already has some familiarity with the Sabres' coaches. He and assistant coach Don Granato were both with the Blackhaks last season and Kahun played with Krueger's son in Germany.

"Dominik, he's definitely a skilled player. He's got good hands, good feet, good speed, and he can play up and down the lineup," Krueger said. "We don't have that classic top six, bottom six kind of situation here. We really are doing this by committee right now, and everybody knows it."

While Kahun will start on the wing, there is a possibility he could move to center at some point. Kahun played down the middle until he arrived in the NHL last year.

"I think it's positive that I can be anywhere, like winger or center, but most of the time, I've played center," he said.

Simmonds, meanwhile, practiced on a line with Jeff Skinner and Marcus Johansson. The full lineup is below.

Forwards:

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 90 Marcus Johansson - 17 Wayne Simmonds
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo
13 Jimmy Vesey - 27 Curtis Lazar - 67 Michael Frolik

Defensemen: 10 Henri Jokiharju, 19 Jake McCabe, 26 Rasmus Dahlin, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 58 John Gilmour, 62 Brandon Montour

Goalies:

40 Carter Hutton
34 Jonas Johansson