



Buffalo Sabres

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Penalty killing problems haunting Sabres to historic levels

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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LAS VEGAS – The Buffalo Sabres knew their penalty killing has been, well, killing them all season. But even they were surprised to hear Thursday it's been failing at historic levels.

Heading into Friday night's game against the Vegas Golden Knights, the Sabres are last in the NHL in overall penalty kill percentage (74.0) and road percentage (67.8). The overall mark, in fact, would be the lowest in franchise history for an entire season if it holds up.

The Sabres gave up two more goals on the PK on three opportunities in Wednesday's 3-2 loss in Colorado. It was the 11th time this season the Sabres have given up two or more power-play goals in a game. Not surprisingly, Buffalo is just 1-8-2 in those games.

"It's tough there. Really tough because I take a lot of pride in it," defenseman Jake McCabe said after practice in T-Mobile Arena. "Over the years it's become a staple of my game so when I see the numbers slip, I take it hard for sure. I'm a PK guy and I see it's at the bottom of the league, it's not good. Especially on a night your power play doesn't score and you lose the special teams battle, you lose games. Not good."

The Sabres have given up 45 power-play goals this season and the current record for their worst penalty kill is 75.1% during the 2014-15 tank season. The 67.8% figure on the road is far ahead of the previous mark of futility of 73.1% set in '14-15.

Both figures are last in the NHL this season and Buffalo's overall mark is the third-lowest since the 2005 lockout, surpassed only by Chicago's 72.7% mark last year and the New York Islanders' 73.2% mark in 2017-18.

"It's frustrating obviously because it's something you want to take pride in, especially as a goaltender," said Carter Hutton.

"It's fair to say we find that unacceptable," said coach Ralph Krueger. "It's a combination of the structure, the personnel, everything combined, but a lot has to do with confidence. What that PK needs so badly is a run of sorts, something where you can grab on to three or four games with no goals against."

The frustration stems from the fact there's no common thread. Sometimes it's goaltending. Sometimes it's coverage issues. Sometimes it's simply not clearing the puck fast enough.

"We're not doing much different. We're there playing it well and they didn't have too many chances," defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said of the Avalanche. "They kept it simple and got the pressure to the net and got some bounces."

The first goal Wednesday saw Nathan MacKinnon work the puck around Ristolainen and get it down low to J.T. Compher, who used a back pass to feed Gabriel Landeskog.

"It went to the back door guy and he taps it in," Ristolainen said. "They keep it simple. We just have to stay with it."

"I'm in a tough spot in front of the net as I thought he tries to shoot the puck and it goes far side," McCabe said. "I'm on the weak side and they got one more goal than us so they'll get loose pucks."

Martin Kaut gave the Avs a 2-1 lead in the second period with the other power-play goal, which was his first goal in the NHL. It came as he took a big rebound off Hutton's pad that Henrik Jokiharju and Johan Larsson couldn't corral.

"The way we try to communicate it is that initial shots are mine," Hutton said. "The first goal (Compher) tries to cut to the net and doesn't try to pass the puck, he loses it and it goes right to (Landeskog). You live with it. The

other one a rolling screen in front and just a rebound. Usually rebounds don't end up in the back of your net because there's so much traffic there."

Sabres players insist there's not a whole lot different schematically under Krueger than last year, when the club was at 80.9 percent and 12th in the NHL under Phil Housley. Assistant coach Steve Smith, who is a key point man for the power play, was retained from last year's staff so there isn't much difference in the coaching.

Goaltending appears to be a key factor. While on the penalty kill, Linus Ullmark has a save percentage of just .836 and Hutton is at .835. They're 49th and 50th out of the 56 NHL goalies who have played at least 20 games this season.

"It's truly been a handful of different scenarios," Krueger said. "Yesterday was those second chances. Getting puck-focused on the PK, which you can't do. You have to know where the danger lies and the puck belongs to 'Hutts'. You need your goalies to make the first save. Every power play in this league is going to generate shots. It's what happens in the chaos. That's where we have to get better."

The Sabres have found success at home, where they're killing at an 80.8% clip that's more than 13% higher than their road mark.

"I really think it's a confidence thing, especially on the road," Krueger said. "It's a road psychology situation. We're working hard at it. Maybe we're going to use a little more personnel and give it more of a bigger team concept than we have been. We are going to make some strategic changes that I am not going to tell you about now but I can tell you we're working on it."

It's a return to Vegas for Sabres defenseman Colin Miller

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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LAS VEGAS -- Defenseman Colin Miller was down the hall from where he spent the last two seasons and the memories flooded back to him as the Buffalo Sabres practiced Thursday in T-Mobile Arena.

Miller was an expansion-year stalwart for the Vegas Golden Knights and even scored their first goal in their Game 1 win over Washington in the Stanley Cup final. It was a season that started with the horror of the mass shooting on the Strip that claimed 58 lives but then saw a new hockey team galvanize a city on a run that was one of the most remarkable in the history of the four major pro sports leagues.

"It was a special year with so many things going on, with the expansion draft, the shooting, new team, new coach, so many different things," Miller said. "It was fun to be a part of the team. The city rallied together after that terrible night. We came up short but it was a lot of fun."

Miller chuckled when asked his memories of the Cup final opener, a 6-4 Vegas victory made memorable when legendary boxing announcer Michael Buffer hit the ice to announce the starting lineups.

"The fans saw a lot more than we did," Miller said. "We saw him come out and do the intro. It's Vegas. It's a show and they try to put on the best of the best. It seems to have taken off here. It obviously helps when the team does well and they've been very good this year and the other two years."

Miller had 10 goals and 41 points for Vegas in the expansion season, then added three goals and seven points in the playoffs. He has just one goal, an overtime winner at Edmonton, and 10 assists this year for the Sabres, who meet the Golden Knights here Friday night.

Miller, acquired in a July trade, has been getting much more consistent ice time of late as Rasmus Dahlin's partner with the Sabres regularly going with only six defenseman. He played 19:27 in Wednesday's 3-2 loss at Colorado but was frustrated by his decision on the winning goal as he left the front of the net and J.T. Compher was alone to pounce on the puck and snap a tie with 8:06 to play.

"Obviously not a great play by me there," Miller said. "I've got to take away the higher priority, the more dangerous guy. We had our chances down the stretch to get it back, get another one."

"If you look at our game as a whole defensively, it was pretty good. You're going to give up chances. It was high energy. These are all playoff games for us right now."

Kyle Okposo sat out practice due to a maintenance day but coach Ralph Krueger said he should be fine for Friday's game.

"It's that time of year where you're always going to err to resting somebody who's got a bump or bruise," Krueger said. "It's nothing he has trouble with during the games."

Newly-acquired Dominik Kahun practiced fully Thursday and seems in line to make his Buffalo debut Friday night. He was at left wing on a line with Marcus Johansson and Jimmy Vesey.

"Dominik just looks really comfortable," Krueger said. "It's excellent he had that friendship with Henrik Jokiharju last year (in Chicago). You can see they're hanging out and he's just part of the living room already. Good kid, very coachable, very open-minded. It was good to see the skill set I already know on the ice. It's certainly another tool for us."

Lawrence Pilut was called up from Rochester but was not at practice. John Gilmour was sent down. Krueger said the Sabres want to keep both players in games, but said Pilut could be a candidate for the lineup at any time.

The Golden Knights are 11-3-2 under new coach Pete DeBoer, who took over last month after Gerard Gallant was fired following Vegas' 4-2 loss in Buffalo. Nevertheless, Krueger said Vegas looks like a similar team.

"We're actually quite surprised. Not a huge shift in the way they play," Krueger said. "I think he's a smart coach who understands what the skill set is here and we don't see a huge structural difference. We see some nuances within it but as a one-off from the outside, it's a pretty similar structure and a disciplined group of players who understand the game away from the puck really well."

Marc-Andre Fleury got his fifth shutout of the season in Wednesday's 3-0 win over Edmonton so it remains to be seen if he'll meet the Sabres Friday or if former Buffalo netminder Robin Lehner, acquired at the deadline from Chicago, will get his first start for Vegas.

Lehner told Vegas reporters Thursday how thrilled he was to see the emergence of Sabres captain Jack Eichel into an elite player.

"It's impressive. Since day one Eichel came in, I've seen his potential and he's really taken a step to grow into one of the best players in the league," Lehner said. "When he's on, I think he's up there with anyone, with (Connor) McDavid, (David) Pastrnak, all those guys. Whoever you want to call out. So that's good on him. He's a tremendous player and he's improved a lot, and it's fun to see."

Lehner went 7-1-1 for the Blackhawks in December but is just 4-4-1, 3.58/.897 since Jan. 1. The Hawks traded him after there was no real discussion on a longterm contract.

"We walked up one point behind a playoff spot. Then all of a sudden I found myself on the bench for no reason," Lehner said. "That was tough. Plus, negotiations had totally died out. ... I thought there was a future there, and I did everything to get a future there, and I still couldn't get a future there. In the end, the last couple weeks were tough mentally to kind of find a motivation needed."

Vegas announced a four-year, \$5.6-million extension Thursday for fourth-liner William Carrier, the played the Golden Knights took from the Sabres in the expansion draft. Carrier has seven goals and a career-high 18 points this season.

Sabres to alter ticket pricing model, increase prices

By Lance Lysowski
The Buffalo News
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The cost for a season ticket to watch the Buffalo Sabres in KeyBank Center will go up an average of 2.5% for the 2020-21 season.

The Sabres rescaled pricing at the arena from 15 to 30 price points to ensure that fans closer to the action pay more than those in the same section sitting farther away, the team confirmed to The Buffalo News. Ten of the price points will see a decrease from this season. That includes some seats in the 100 level.

The team said it increased prices by following the National Hockey League's standard analytical model, which examines level of demand, seniority of season ticket holders and team performance. The Sabres have eight home games remaining and are in jeopardy of their playoff drought reaching nine seasons.

A letter detailing the changes went out to season ticket holders Thursday.

"It's important to start with the fact the whole building was rescaled and when we got advice from the National Hockey League and looked at markets across the league, best practices, we internally made the decision to use our analytic department to speak to us and give us the data back," Kevyn Adams, the Sabres' vice president of business administration, said. "That's how we got here. I think the biggest part is now we have 30 different options for our fans and season ticket holders. We can find the right seat for everybody and we wanted to make sure we listened to our fans and gave them options. It's consistent with what the rest of the league is doing and that's an important part of this."

There is an increase in most areas on the side of the arena in which the Sabres shoot twice, as well as seats along the glass. Seats in the 200 level range from \$106 to \$129 per game, while the 100-level seats will cost between \$53 and \$95.50 per game. The 300 level will cost between \$24 and \$57.40 per game.

The Sabres announced the change earlier than usual to provide ticket holders with enough time to discuss their options with a customer service representative. Fans are also receiving one more preseason and regular-season game in 2020-21 because the Sabres are not playing at a neutral site. The team faced the Pittsburgh Penguins at Penn State University this past preseason and lost a regular-season home game when it played the Tampa Bay Lightning in Stockholm, Sweden.

Season ticket holders received a 2.4% price increase this season, however, each section was priced the same, meaning someone sitting closer to the action could pay as much as someone farther away. Following NHL best practices, the Sabres examined demand internally and on the secondary market.

Next season's ticket packages include three preseason games and 41 regular-season games. The team did not raise ticket prices in 2018-19 and installed a 4% blanket increase the previous season.

"If our fans are telling us that the shoot twice end is extremely important to them, it doesn't make sense that a person sitting in the same seat at the shoot once end pays the same," Adams said. "We're giving our fans more options. It's great we have 10 of our 30 price points going down. There are now opportunities, if our season ticket holders look where they're sitting and they're not happy with what comes back, there's an opportunity to move somewhere in the building and assist them in that."

Sabres season tickets are among the cheapest in the NHL. According the 2019 NHL Fan Cost Index published by the independent Team Marketing Report, the Sabres' average season ticket price was fourth lowest in the league, behind the Florida Panthers, Arizona Coyotes and Colorado Avalanche.

The Sabres are also among the league leaders in seats purchased by season ticket holders. Entering games Wednesday, Buffalo ranked 20th in average attendance with almost 800 fewer tickets sold per game than last season.

Despite having three sellouts, the Sabres finished last season with an average home attendance of 17,908, the franchise's lowest mark since it drew 16,886 per game during the 2005-06 season.

In addition to sending season ticket renewals out earlier, the Sabres are in the process of creating a fan advisory panel similar to the one used by the Bills. The team will ask season ticket holders for feedback on the game day experience and will roll out changes next season when the Sabres will switch to royal blue jerseys.

The Sabres also learned during the franchise's celebration of its 50th anniversary that theme nights resonate with fans.

"We're evaluating the whole fan experience," Adams said. "From the time our fans step out of the car until they get back in the car, we have to provide them with the best possible experience and we have to, in my opinion, listen. What do the fans like. What do they want? This is going to be an offseason where we have a ton of work in front of us and it goes back to us making sure we're engaged with our fans and hearing what they're telling us."

Confident Sabres back on the ice for practice Thursday

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

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The Buffalo Sabres got right back to practice on Thursday following their 3-2 loss to the Colorado Avalanche one night ago. It was a spirited practice inside of T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, where Dominik Kahun skated on a line for the first time since being acquired by blue and gold from the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Yesterday's result was the same, but the effort and competitiveness against Colorado was much better than the meeting in Buffalo earlier this month. The Sabres were aggressive, and at times the better team against the Avs, putting them back on their heels and on the defense. That was not the case in the 6-1 win at KeyBank Center on February 4.

Head coach Ralph Krueger continued to express that sentiment following the team's skate off the Vegas Strip on Thursday. He continued that, "we feel confident right now, we believe in our game and we're expecting another good one, but as we all know that only the result in the end counts at this time of year." The difference in the game was special teams and the pair of power play goals that Colorado scored against Buffalo.

Colin Miller agrees with his bench boss, adding that, "the majority of what we do is we're always trying to focus on our own game, so, I'm not too sure how much [of it] that is" Miller continued, "it's great for us maybe as a little bit of a confidence booster."

Vegas shutout the Edmonton Oilers on Wednesday night, with Marc-Andre Fleury making 29 saves for his fifth shutout of the season. The Golden Knights have now won seven straight games dating back to February 15 against the St. Louis Blues. Miller knows the team well, having played for Vegas in each of the first two years of the franchise. He believes that, "they're a playoff team, and you know, they're the teams that we're gonna have to beat here if we wanna get in the playoffs as well." The rear guard appeared in 147 games for the Golden Knights in his two seasons.

Kyle Okposo did not skate on Thursday and was given a maintenance day to be ready for Friday night's game, according to Krueger. The head coach also said that the reason for sending Joh Gilmour down to Rochester was to get the defenseman back in games. Earlier in the day the team announced that it had recalled Lawrence Pilut in Gilmour's place. The final decision on the game night roster against the Golden Knights will be known tomorrow.

Krueger said on Thursday that there will be different players used on the penalty kill starting on Friday. The Sabres did not work on special teams on Thursday, but did work on passing and moving the puck up and down the ice with regular line combinations. The top forward line for the blue and gold remained unchanged, while Michael Frolik took Okposo's spot on the wing at practice. The line combinations at practice were:

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

Dahlin-Miller
Montour-Ristolainen
McCabe-Jokiharju

Sabres recall Lawrence Pilut, send John Gilmour to Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 27, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres swapped defensemen with the Rochester Americans today, recalling Lawrence Pilut and sending John Gilmour back to their AHL affiliate.

Pilut, 24, has compiled zero points in 11 NHL games this season. He has produced offensively with the Amerks, scoring six goals and 23 points in 37 outings.

The Swede has been shuttling between Buffalo and Rochester over the past several weeks.

Meanwhile, Gilmour, 26, served as the Sabres' extra defenseman during his recall. He scored zero points in four contests after starting the season in Buffalo. He has compiled six goals and 13 points in 32 appearances with the Amerks.

Sabres season tickets to climb 2.5 percent next season

WGRZ

February 27, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Be prepared to pay a little more for Sabres games next season at KeyBank Center.

2 On Your Side has learned that season tickets will climb an average of 2.5 percent for the 2020-21 season.

That rise in price is a stark contrast to what some fans are paying for Sabres games this season on secondary markets. Earlier this month, some fans could get tickets for less money than a meal at McDonald's.

Tickets to a February home game against the struggling Detroit Red Wings went for as low as \$6, plus fees, on StubHub. Another game earlier this month, against the Columbus Blue Jackets, had tickets listed for \$7 before fees.

The Sabres began the work week six points out of a playoff spot before Wednesday night's loss in Colorado.

Before that, Buffalo had won five of its previous six games and became a buyer at the NHL's trade deadline, acquiring veteran forward Wayne Simmonds from the New Jersey Devils for a conditional 2021 fifth-round draft pick.

'It's in his DNA': Kahun made strong impression on Granato in Chicago

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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LAS VEGAS - Don Granato's immediate thought when reflecting on his season with Dominik Kahun in Chicago is how much the forward's teammates enjoyed playing with him.

Granato was an assistant coach with the Blackhawks last season. Kahun was an undrafted rookie who, playing his pro first season in North America at age 23, quickly earned the respect of his peers on a veteran-laden team.

"They liked playing with him on a line, the power play, whatever," Granato said. "You could see it. He's a fun personality but a contributing personally from the standpoint of he's very serious about his performance.

"... I'm excited that I have a chance to be on the same team again. It was fun to be around him every day in Chicago. It's fun to see him here now. I think he'll fit in fast, fit in well."

Kahun participated in his first full practice with the Sabres at T-Mobile Arena on Thursday and by all accounts is adapting quickly to his new surroundings. He already has a friend on the team in defenseman Henri Jokiharju, who he roomed with in Chicago.

The winger practiced on a line with Marcus Johansson and Jimmy Vesey, a look the Sabres could utilize if he makes his debut against the Golden Knights on Friday. Krueger expects Kahun's history at center, where he played most of his life prior to coming to the NHL, to allow him to adapt quickly to the team's expectations away from the puck. Offensively, he sees an opportunity for chemistry with Johansson.

"There's a skill there that I think could connect with his," Krueger said. "We just feel that, again, we need to get the other lines going right now. We all know that Eichel and Larsson have a clear identity. We're looking for another mix in the other two lines and we've been moving those lines around for our liking, actually, a little too much.

"But we see Dominik has a high skilled player with a lot of speed who should be able to connect with Johansson on his offensive side. We'll see how it all comes out tomorrow. We haven't decided final on the lines. We wanted to look at something today and that's definitely one of our options."

Granato describes Kahun as having an agile skillset.

"It's quick turns and tight turns and an ability to gain a puck that's bouncing or a puck that looks like it's a broken play, but it's a small area," Granato said. "Very good small area skills, being agility, tight turns and quickness - quickness with his feet, quickness with tight turns, quickness with his hands."

More than quickness, though, Granato spoke at length about Kahun's intangibles. He managed to play all 82 games as a rookie last season, double the length of the regular season schedule he was used to with his pro team in Germany. He played more than 400 minutes alongside Jonathan Toews at 5-on-5 which, Granato explained, takes another level of demand to match the intensity of a star player.

Granato felt Kahun earn the respect of players like Toews because of the seriousness with which he took his craft. He's known for spending long amounts of time working on skills before and after practice. He's consistent in his preparation and, by extension, in the games themselves.

Kahun left that impression while going through the learning experiences every rookie must face, from knowledge of systems to comfort within one's role.

"He went into each one of those situations trying to absorb it and trying to apply it, and I sense that now," Granato said. "So, I'm excited to see him and see his progress that he's made because I know he's made progress. It's in his DNA to keep getting better."

Looking ahead

The Sabres' spirits were up in the wake of their 3-2 loss in Colorado on Wednesday, a game with a playoff-like intensity that they very nearly tied in the final minute. They can expect a similar atmosphere Friday against a Golden Knights team that leads the Pacific Division and has won seven straight games.

Krueger said that while the competitive nature between Colorado and Vegas is identical, their personalities are completely different.

"You look at how dynamic Colorado is in the offense and how they attack in groups of five relentlessly and how they use the backside of the rink on the attack is unique whereas Las Vegas is a much more structured and organized team with an amazing defensive discipline, and they explode out of that."

The Sabres, meanwhile, don't change based on their opponent but rather seek to dictate the play with their own consistent identity.

"That's the interesting thing about the way we play is we don't change our strategy Colorado to Las Vegas," Krueger said. "I think that gives our guys a comfort to just be able to continue where we left off in the Colorado game, build on it here, knowing that they're very hot and very confident but so are we."

"We feel confident right now. We believe in our game and we're expecting another good one but as we all know, only the result in the end counts at this time of year."

Thursday's practice

Kyle Okposo took a maintenance day but is expected to play against the Golden Knights on Friday.

The Sabres made a change on defense prior to practice, assigning John Gilmour to Rochester and recalling Lawrence Pilut. Gilmour had not appeared in a game since being recalled on Feb. 15. Krueger said the swap was made to ensure both players get ice time.

"Definitely to keep them playing," he said. "I mean, that was the reason Pilut went down, it was not because of a lack of performance. We were really happy with him and we were really happy with Johnny Gilmour when he was here earlier in the season. So, we just want to keep them in game shape."

"Pilot is a candidate to come in at any time and we think it was good for him to go down and have some games as it is now for Johnny. So, that was the swap."

Pilot did not make it to Las Vegas in time for practice. Here's how the team lined up.

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

62 Brandon Montour - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 33 Colin Miller
19 Jake McCabe - 10 Henri Jokiharju

40 Carter Hutton
34 Jonas Johansson

Sabres recall Pilut from Amerks

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 27, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has recalled defenseman Lawrence Pilut from the Rochester Americans of the AHL.

Pilut, 24, has played in 11 NHL games this season, averaging 16:08 of ice time.

He's tied for sixth in Amerks scoring, despite playing in only 37 of the team's 56 games. He's recorded 23 points, including a career-high six goals with Rochester.

Defenseman John Gilmour has been assigned to the Amerks.

The Sabres are set to practice this afternoon at T-Mobile Arena. They'll play the Golden Knights tomorrow night (9:30 p.m. pregame on MSG; 10 p.m. faceoff on MSG and WGR 550). Stay tuned to Sabres.com for full coverage.