



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 9, 2020

Eichel, Sabres to host the Ducks

Associated Press

February 9, 2020

Anaheim Ducks (22-26-7, seventh in the Pacific Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (24-23-8, sixth in the Atlantic Division)

Buffalo, New York; Sunday, 3 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: Jack Eichel and Buffalo take on Anaheim. Eichel ranks eighth in the NHL with 68 points, scoring 31 goals and recording 37 assists.

The Sabres are 15-9-4 on their home ice. Buffalo has converted on 18.8% of power-play opportunities, scoring 30 power-play goals.

The Ducks are 10-16-4 in road games. Anaheim averages 10.8 penalty minutes per game, the third-most in the league. Erik Gudbranson leads the team serving 91 total minutes.

In their last meeting on Oct. 16, Anaheim won 5-2. Jakob Silfverberg recorded a team-high 3 points for the Ducks.

TOP PERFORMERS: Eichel leads the Sabres with 31 goals, adding 37 assists and totaling 68 points. Sam Reinhart has recorded four assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

Ryan Getzlaf leads the Ducks with 25 total assists and has collected 36 points. Derek Grant has four goals and two assists over the last 10 games for Anaheim.

LAST 10 GAMES: Ducks: 5-3-2, averaging 2.7 goals, 4.4 assists, 3.3 penalties and 7.4 penalty minutes while giving up 2.8 goals per game with a .911 save percentage.

Sabres: 5-4-1, averaging 2.6 goals, 3.9 assists, 2.7 penalties and 5.6 penalty minutes while giving up 2.3 goals per game with a .921 save percentage.

INJURIES: Sabres: Curtis Lazar: day to day (illness), Rasmus Dahlin: day to day (upper body), Kyle Okposo: out (upper body).

Ducks: Erik Gudbranson: day to day (upper body), Ondrej Kase: day to day (head).

Vesey, Hutton help Sabres hold on to beat Rangers 3-2

By Allan Kreda

Associated Press

February 8, 2020

NEW YORK (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres used a solid performance by Jimmy Vesey against his former team and some stellar goaltending from Carter Hutton to get a needed win.

Vesey had a goal and an assist, Hutton stopped 37 shots, and the Sabres held on to beat the New York Rangers 3-2 Friday night.

Zemgus Girgensons and Sam Reinhart also scored to help Buffalo get just its second win in seven games overall, though they have won three of their last four on the road.

"Tonight was a big win," Vesey said. "I've had my chances the last week or two. I've just tried to simplify my game. It's good to get rewarded. Overall, we really liked our compete (level) tonight."

Hutton had six saves in the first period, 10 in the second and 21 in the third when the Rangers tried to rally from a 3-0 deficit.

Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider scored for the Rangers, and Alexandar Georgiev finished with 25 saves.

The Rangers, who speak collectively of putting together a playoff charge to avoid missing the postseason for a third straight season, are 5-5-0 in their last 10 games and sit nine points behind Carolina for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference with the trade deadline looming on Feb. 24.

Rangers coach David Quinn was perplexed by his team's subpar effort, two nights after they defeated Toronto at home.

"They wanted it more than we did," Quinn said. "This was nowhere near what need ... nowhere near enough. I am surprised about tonight."

Vesey, a highly touted free agent out of Harvard who played three seasons for the Rangers before his trade to the Sabres last July, pushed Buffalo's lead to 3-0 with 8:04 left in the third for his eighth.

Zibanejad ruined Hutton's shutout bid with his 22nd goal with 2:53 remaining. Artemi Panarin and Marc Staal had assists on the play.

"I don't know if we matched their intensity," Zibanejad said. "It's all on us. We didn't put ourselves in a good spot to win the game. We were out of sync. This wasn't good enough today."

Kreider then pulled the Rangers within one with his 20th of the season on the power play with 1:38 left. Kreider has goals in eight of the past 11 games. Zibanejad and rookie Kappo Kakko added assists on Kreider's goal, the fifth time the potential free agent left wing has reached the 20-goal mark.

That was as close as the Rangers got.

The inconsistent Rangers were coming off a 5-3 win over the Maple Leafs at the Garden on Wednesday, two nights after they were smothered at home by the Dallas Stars by the same 5-3 margin.

"They did a good job," Quinn said of the Sabres, who had lost at home, 4-3 in a shootout to the league-worst Detroit Red Wings, on Thursday. "They were disciplined. Give them credit."

Georgiev was making his first start since Jan. 21, a 4-2 loss at home to the Islanders. The Rangers have been carrying three goaltenders on their roster since Igor Shesterkin was recalled from Hartford to make his debut on Jan. 7 against Colorado. Shesterkin is 4-1 since his ascension while Henrik Lundqvist has dressed as a backup to Georgiev or Shesterkin on most nights over the past month.

Georgiev had won two of his last three starts – both against the Islanders. He fell to 12-11-1 on the season. Lundqvist has a 10-11-3 mark.

The Sabres had lost three straight against the Rangers while being outscored 15-5. New York had won seven of the last 10 meetings at home.

"It was an unbelievably strong defensive performance by the guys. That was the centerpiece of the victory tonight," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "We like our road game. Let's take it home."

Girgensons opened the scoring with 9:34 left in the first, getting his 10th goal of the season on a nifty move to beat Georgiev. Girgensons fooled the goalie as he skated into the crease, eventually sliding the puck into the net to Georgiev's right.

"He has been a solid performer for us," Krueger said of Girgensons. "We need to get more guys there."

Reinhart made it 2-0 with 4:44 left in the second, scoring his 20th on a breakaway. Sabres captain Jack Eichel and Vesey drew assists as Reinhart backhanded the puck over Georgiev's left shoulder. It is the fourth time in five seasons Reinhart has reached the 20-goal mark for the Sabres, who drafted him with the second overall pick in 2014.

"I liked the way we played. They have some world class players," Reinhart said. "We held it together."

NOTES: The Rangers scratched F Micheal Haley, D Brendan Smith and G Shesterkin. ... The Sabres scratched D Zach Bogosian and C Rasmus Asplund. ... Buffalo also continued to be without injured forwards Kyle Okposo, Victor Olofsson, Vladimir Sobotka and G Linus Ullmark. ... The Rangers won the previous meeting 6-2 at the Garden on Oct. 24. ... The teams meet again March 22 in Buffalo. ... Sabres D Rasmus Dahlin returned after two-game absence with an upper-body injury.

UP NEXT

Rangers: Host Los Angeles on Sunday night.

Sabres: Host Anaheim on Sunday.

Casey Mittelstadt 'adjusting every day' while developing in Rochester

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2020

ROCHESTER – Casey Mittelstadt leaned against a wall in a hallway adjacent to the Blue Cross Arena ice, tilted his head toward the Rochester Americans' dressing room and smiled while explaining how he's adjusting to an assignment that came as a surprise.

"I've loved it down here," Mittelstadt, a 21-year-old center, said following the morning skate Friday. "I haven't played this much in a while, so it's been fun being able to play, making plays with the puck and having some fun. It's been really good."

Mittelstadt didn't feel sorry for himself when he was assigned to the Amerks by the Sabres on Dec. 15. After the initial feelings of shock and disappointment subsided, he quickly decided that embracing his opportunity in Rochester was the only path back to Buffalo.

The former eighth overall draft pick has since positioned himself to receive another call to the NHL. In addition to his seven goals with seven assists in 21 games with Rochester, Mittelstadt is using an improved defensive approach to consistently create scoring chances.

"I think he's maturing a lot right before us," Rochester coach Chris Taylor said. "It was hard at the start coming down, there's no question. It was hard for him to adjust to the different refereeing, how we play is a little different. He's adjusting every day and he's opening up a lot more with the guys. He's becoming one of our leaders."

When Mittelstadt was scratched in three of four games from Dec. 8-14, the Sabres decided he was better off having a prominent role in Rochester, rather than treading water in the NHL. Though Mittelstadt flashed his talent at times while scoring 17 with 22 assists over parts of three seasons, consistency was an issue.

After scoring three goals with four assists in the Sabres' first 10 games this season, Mittelstadt had only one goal on 18 shots with one assist and a minus-11 rating over his next 21 games.

The trouble began on defense. Mittelstadt wasn't making enough plays without the puck to help the Sabres regain possession, and he began to struggle to cover opponents in the defensive zone. Those mistakes would lead to diminished playing time – Mittelstadt played less than 12 minutes in 12 games with the Sabres – and he didn't have the puck enough to make an impact offensively.

Taylor and the Amerks' coaching staff are willing and able to let Mittelstadt play through those mishaps, and improvement has come with more ice time.

"The biggest thing for me down here is now that I'm playing more, I'm a lot more patient," Mittelstadt said. "When I was in Buff, I'm sure I forced things more with fewer minutes and trying to do more than what's given. I'm learning to be more patient. ... Sometimes live to fight another day."

"When you're playing a lot and you make one mistake it's not a huge deal. You go back out and kind of make up for that. Obviously playing less minutes in Buffalo, if you make a mistake you're usually not going back out for a while. That's been new. It's been different for me. And the more you play the better you're going to get and less mistakes happen."

Mittelstadt has logged more than 20 minutes in games with the Amerks, including time on the power play and penalty kill. The latter is helping him improve defensively at even strength – Rochester used a similar plan with Victor Olofsson and Tage Thompson – which is earning Taylor's trust.

Mittelstadt took defensive-zone faceoffs with the opposing net empty in the final moments of Rochester's 4-2 win Wednesday in Cleveland.

The improvement is part of a thorough plan to help Mittelstadt return to Buffalo.

The Amerks' coaching staff works with its forwards after practice on nuances such as winning battles along the wall, an area in which Mittelstadt needed to improve. Video study has also taught him the value of patience.

Rather than trying to stick-handle around defenders when there isn't an open passing lane – a common occurrence during his 114 games in the NHL – Mittelstadt is learning to use his shot to create chances in front of the net. He has 19 shots over his last seven games, compared to 10 in seven games from Jan. 4-19.

"He's got the vision to make plays and it's great to see him generate off of shots," Rochester assistant coach Toby Petersen said. "It's something we're trying to point out to him a lot through video – how much shooting the puck can break up a good defense. Guys will have good structure and they'll have good positions, but all of a sudden the puck gets to the net and you see that's when mistakes are made. ... It's good to see him start to shoot the puck and play the sort of good, selfish hockey we're looking for."

The transition wasn't seamless. Mittelstadt had one assist and a minus-4 rating in his first five games with the Amerks, as he was slow to adjust to the chaotic nature of the American Hockey League. Few teams play with the defensive structure that Mittelstadt was accustomed to facing in the NHL.

As many as three opposing players were chasing after him in the offensive zone. The league's on-ice officials are also known to call fewer stick-infraction penalties.

The acclimation period is over. Mittelstadt has three goals and four assists in his past seven games entering Saturday's game against the Toronto Marlies. He scored a goal in three consecutive games from Jan. 3-8, and he had two points in Rochester's 5-2 loss to Syracuse on Friday.

Mittelstadt stripped the puck from a Binghamton player in the defensive zone before scoring his first AHL goal on a backhanded shot Jan. 3. He's also using his high-end skill to create, as illustrated Jan. 31 against Syracuse when he skated past a defenseman on the breakout before receiving a pass in the neutral zone and scoring with another backhander.

"He's starting to produce more from an offensive standpoint," Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill told WGR Radio on Tuesday. "You look at, not just his offensive numbers, but what he's creating from a chances standpoint. It's top of the league from that situation. Very similar to what Tage Thompson was doing at the start of the year. We've been very happy with Casey's maturity in the situation."

Six other Amerks have been recalled to the NHL since Mittelstadt was assigned, but stability has allowed him to focus on his progress and develop synergy with a team he'll likely be part of in the Calder Cup Playoffs.

The off-ice adjustment hasn't been difficult, either. He is friends with C.J. Smith and Will Borgen, and knew others from previous camps. Mittelstadt is living in a Rochester hotel and occasionally carools to and from Blue Cross Arena with goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

It's uncertain how long Mittelstadt will be in Rochester. While Botterill has shown patience thus far, the Sabres will likely trade some of their pending unrestricted free agents before the deadline Feb. 24, which could create an opportunity for Mittelstadt to have a more significant role in Buffalo.

A potential recall isn't on Mittelstadt's mind. His attention is directed at helping the Amerks win and ensuring he is developing into a full-time NHL player.

"Obviously, you don't want to get sent down," Mittelstadt said. "You want to be up all the time, but things weren't going my way. I'll be the first to admit I wasn't playing well, either. You focus here and play well, that's how I'll get called up. Focus on what I'm doing. It's obviously out of my control. I can play well and try to do things to help me get called up, but ultimately, it's not my decision. Just go play."

Now back at practice, Victor Olofsson has to stay patient before he returns to Sabres' lineup

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
February 8, 2020

Buffalo Sabres fans don't like hearing the word, but it's going to come into play yet again.

When it comes to Victor Olofsson, patience is the buzz.

The sharpshooting rookie winger returned to practice Saturday, more than a month after suffering what's believed to be a high ankle sprain in the Jan. 2 win over Edmonton. But just because the Sabres have four home games in an eight-day stretch, starting with Sunday's matinee against Anaheim, don't expect Olofsson's 16 goals to be rushed back into the lineup.

"You know that we're nearing a re-entry but I would definitely say it will be a week or more still," coach Ralph Krueger cautioned in KeyBank Center. "This is the first step of reintegrating him into the game, but we're really pleased to see him back out there.

"Even today's practice is a partial pregame skate, partial rehabilitation and regeneration day. For Victor, it's just getting his mindspace back into what he needs to do."

Olofsson went through all drills and had some contact but did not take line rushes. After Sunday's visit by the Ducks, the Sabres host rematches against Detroit on Tuesday and Columbus on Thursday. Based on what Krueger said, it would appear the earliest Olofsson might play is the Feb. 16 game against Toronto.

And while even that date might be optimistic, there's no question Saturday's return to the ice with the team was a huge step forward.

"It's great to be back with the guys," said Olofsson, 24. "I'm not quite there yet but it was nice to kind of get out there, get the feel of the game again and it's good to have a little bit, but not much contact. A few guys around you, so you have to be aware."

At the time of the injury, Olofsson led NHL rookies with 16 goals and 35 points. He entered Saturday still second in goals to Chicago's Dominik Kubalik (21) and third in points behind Vancouver's Cale Makar and Colorado's Quinn Hughes (40 each). Olofsson is third overall on the Sabres' roster in both goals and points (35), behind only Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart in both categories.

The injury was a freaky one to a player who earned NHL Rookie of the Month in both October and December. There was nobody around him as Olofsson passed to Reinhart for a goal before crumpling in the corner after his skate caught a rut in the ice.

"It was unfortunate, no one around me, just kind of got stuck with my left skate and fell," he said. "It happens. I've been trying to stay positive. I've been working very hard to come back here. ... look at it as an opportunity to get stronger and come back with just some fresh start, fresh mind."

Olofsson has missed 13 games, watching many from the press box or on TV at road games. The Sabres are 6-6-1 in his absence

"It's a time where he's been able to do some reflection and some more mental growth," Krueger said. "I always find the injury situation as opportunities for players if they use them properly. He's been able to observe the game from the outside and we've been interacting with him quite a bit.

"I think it's going to take him to even another level of maturity, having a bit of pause in a season which was truly Rookie of the Year in NHL caliber. We're confident he'll be able to get back to that level but with an even higher feeling of confidence."

With the Sabres having limited practice time planned over the next 10 days, Olofsson said he would take a morning skate on gamedays -- even if the team is passing on one -- to get his work in.

"I've got to stay positive and I've got to stay calm and not really rush into it either," he said. "I think that's when you can have those setbacks as well. Obviously, you get really eager to get back into it when you're watching it."

Skinner's small time

Krueger said not to read into Jeff Skinner's low ice time total of 10 minutes, 20 seconds in Friday's win at New York -- even though it was Skinner's lowest for a game he wasn't injured since he played 9:46 for Carolina at Boston in 3-0 win on Nov. 26, 2010.

Skinner averaged 38-second shifts Friday, which Krueger wanted on a back-to-back. Still, Skinner has gone without a goal in 17 games -- a span dating to Dec. 2 that encircles his 10-game absence to a shoulder injury. Skinner had two shots on goal and five attempts in the game.

"What we need Jeff to be doing is getting scoring chances," Krueger said. "We're working hard together with him to get him into those spaces and he's working hard to find those spaces. He's a streaky scorer. We know that. His career has been streaky and the injury took him out of the space that was really a good space. He's on his way back into that space. I think if Jeff can get one, he'll get many."

Quick trip to Rochester

The Sabres sent center Rasmus Asplund and defenseman Lawrence Pilut to Rochester on Saturday so they could play in the Amerks' key game at Toronto but that could be a very temporary move. Both were scratches Friday night in New York and could be immediately brought back up.

"It's a good game in Toronto," Krueger said. "That's an opportunity to keep their feet moving, keep active. They'll be playing some big minutes and we'll reevaluate. It's just about getting them a game."

Pilut was a healthy scratch Friday while Asplund has been a scratch the last two games.

Sabres protest packs plaza with frustration, if not with people

By Lou Michel

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2020

The "Pack the Plaza" rally outside KeyBank Center on Saturday to protest management of the poorly performing Buffalo Sabres was anything but packed, but many who attended considered it a win — some after warming up with hot chocolate and coffee offered by the Sabres' organization.

About 25 disillusioned hockey fans marched around the "French Connection" statue in Alumni Plaza, chanted "Hey, ho, Botterill's Gotta Go" — referring to general manager Jason Botterill — and called on team owners Terry and Kim Pegula to acknowledge the pain fans feel with each loss.

"If Terry Pegula would just acknowledge the problem and have a heart-to-heart with fans, I'm sure he'd subdue some of the anger," said Peter Tripi, a Canisius College sophomore who organized the rally.

The Sabres are at risk of losing the next generation of devoted fans because the team has not earned a spot in the playoffs since 2011, said Trevor Browning, a Williamsville resident attending the protest.

"I went to my first Sabres' game when I was 3 years old. I remember Daniel Briere, Chris Drury ... Dominik Hasek, but the kids today don't have those kinds of memories," the 24-year-old said. "When they get to be my age, they won't be fans."

Though the protesters complained the Pegulas have been too quiet, these hockey fans remained respectful toward the owners. Thankfulness was often voiced for their purchases of the Sabres and the Buffalo Bills and for keeping the teams here.

And while Tripi, who has been interviewed by ESPN over his frustration with the Sabres, was predicting hundreds of protesters at Saturday's rally, just over two dozen showed up.

Tripi nonetheless said he was happy with the attention the protest received from the media and online.

The Sabres' organization is not deaf to the fans' concerns, said Kevyn Adams, the Sabres' senior vice president of business administration.

"We have a great fan base, and it is really important that our fans know how engaged Terry and Kim Pegula are in this organization," Adams said. "We're all in this together and Terry and Kim want the best for this organization. Everybody wants it to be better."

Adams, who made his comments in the arena's lobby, stepped outside and invited the protesters to come inside and warm up from the 21-degree weather and snow flurries.

Many accepted the offer, though others, including Tripi, declined.

They weren't looking for a hot drink in the lobby. They're looking for wins on the ice.

"I'm tired of losing every year," said Tom Bassanello, a 65-year-old season ticket holder from East Amherst.

"It feels like Groundhog Day," he said, referring to the Bill Murray movie where he relives the same day over and over.

Victor Olofsson returns to Sabres' practice

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres appear to be close to getting one of their top scoring threats back in the lineup.

Rookie winger Victor Olofsson, sidelined since Jan. 2 with what's believed to be a high ankle sprain, returned to practice Saturday afternoon in KeyBank Center. Olofsson, who has 16 goals and 35 points in 42 games, has missed the last 13 games due to the injury.

Olofsson, who was leading NHL rookies in goals at the time of his injury, is now second as Chicago's Dominik Kubalik has surged to the lead with 21.

"Physically we still see we need to be patient on this one," said coach Ralph Krueger, who said Olofsson would likely still be out for a week or more. "The few practices we're going to find in these six games in 10 days, every practice will be valuable for him."

The Sabres have four home games in the next week, starting Sunday at 3 against Anaheim. Olofsson did not take line rushes in practice and it's unlikely he would have played in that game anyway after one short practice.

Krueger said Olofsson's return to practice was a first step and essentially ruled him out for this week's rematches against Detroit on Tuesday and Columbus on Thursday.

The Sabres also host Toronto on Feb. 16, then play Feb. 18 in Ottawa and Feb. 22 in Pittsburgh.

"It's hard to say," Olofsson said when asked if he can pinpoint a return date. "I think we'll take it kind of step by step. This was kind of the first step, to just get out on the ice with the other guys. I'm going to continue working very hard here, especially on game days putting in some extra work. We'll see how fast I can get back."

Sabres need to bring a suddenly improving road show back home

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 7, 2020

NEW YORK -- What we saw Friday night in the World's Most Famous Arena is the kind of game the Sabres need to stuff in their carryons and take back to KeyBank Center.

Defense that chokes the neutral zone. Crisp breakouts. Stellar passing. Nifty finishes. All backed by strong goaltending.

It all seems so simple. It's the recipe that should win anywhere.

The Sabres got all of those facets together for the first 57 minutes in building a 3-0 cushion over the New York Rangers. That they were fortunate to survive with a 3-2 win doesn't dull the accomplishment one bit from this view.

Zemgus Girgensons, Sam Reinhart and Jimmy Vesey got the goals and all were beauties, with two of them set up by sublime assists from Jack Eichel. Carter Hutton made 37 saves and has won two of his last three starts after going winless for more than three months.

"Our D did a great job breaking the puck out with 'Hutts' and he's a good (puck) handler who started a lot of our breakouts too," Eichel said. "We had some opportunistic goals, were able to find ways to get the puck out. It's a gritty effort."

After three months of struggles on the road that were capped by a tortuous 1-7-3 slide, the Sabres are suddenly 3-1 in the last four when they arrive via the friendly skies.

Home has been the site of 15 of their 24 wins. But now the atmosphere downtown has been poisoned by the brutal showings since the break. The losses to Ottawa and Montreal, and the mind-blowing shootout defeat to hapless Detroit, ruined any playoff hope during this 10-game stretch where nine are at home.

This was the lone road game and it was a perfect lesson. Starting Sunday against Anaheim, the Sabres have four more home contests in eight days. They have to remember this one. They can turn the boos to cheers pretty quick. Just produce.

"We play a real simple game on the road and stick within a very small picture of going shift by shift," said coach Ralph Krueger. "You can see everybody is all in. We're dealing with some adversity at the end of the game very well. Everybody stays calm on the bench. We like our road game and now let's take it home."

Girgensons' goal was a neat deke after Colin Miller did heavy work. Vesey got the game-winner on a backhand after a ridiculous stretch pass by Eichel from inside his own zone.

And Reinhart scored the prettiest goal of the night, beating Filip Chytil down the ice and burning Alexander Georgiev with a backhand under the crossbar for his 20th of the season.

That came on the end of a shift that totaled 2 minutes, 9 seconds. It was split by an icing call and the Eichel line was stuck on the ice for 66 seconds after that until the goal.

"We were really gassed at the whistle there, but gathered composure and kept them to the outside," Reinhart said. "'Ves' made a good play to turn the puck over and we were able to capitalize on the break."

Eichel gave a quick hesitation with the puck before passing it to Reinhart fully in stride.

"It makes it easy, especially at that point of the shift," Reinhart said. "You're just trying to make a play. Obviously it's nice to see that one go in."

Hutton was three minutes away from a shutout before goals from Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider, the latter on a 6-on-4 with 1:40 left, made things tense. But Hutton held the fort, finishing with 36 saves.

"We did a good job. They've got some dangerous players," Hutton said. "It's tough on a back to back and it's good we started well. It's just a fun game. It was fun playing at MSG. It's a game to get up for."

"His composure tonight really translated through the lineup," Reinhart said. "That was a huge effort from him."

Now it's time for better effort in front of the paying customers at home. Reinhart said simple early shifts with all the lines keeping them short got everyone into the game in the first period. The Sabres allowed just 16 shots on goal in the first 40 minutes.

"We're just putting some things together," Eichel said. "I thought tonight we didn't try to make it an offensive track meet. We tried to bottle up their speed because we know they're a fast team and make a lot of plays."

"We don't feel a negative pressure at home," Krueger said. "It's more possibly we get a little bit too creative or try too much with the puck when there's no opportunity. Today, the management of the puck compared to our last game here in New York when we were a turnover machine (in a 6-2 loss Oct. 24), we learned from that hard lesson."

"They punished us last time and we were really able to take care of the puck well tonight. We had some extended O-zone shifts, really nice goals to produce that 3-0 lead. There was calm with the puck that we need to have against Anaheim."

The Wraparound: Buffalo Sabres 3, New York Rangers 2

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 7, 2020

NEW YORK — Zemgus Girgensons, Sam Reinhart and Jimmy Vesey provided the offense and Carter Hutton was strong in goal as the Buffalo Sabres survived a frantic finish to beat the New York Rangers, 3-2, Friday night in Madison Square Garden.

The Sabres (24-23-8) won for just the second time in the last seven games but improved to 3-1 in their last four road games. The Rangers fell to 26-23-4 as Buffalo got revenge for a 6-2 loss here in its previous visit Oct. 24.

Hutton was the loser in that game and it started his 12-game winless streak that ended in his overtime win last Saturday over Columbus.

Hutton was particularly sharp in the third period of this one, stopping the first 17 shots he faced before Mika Zibanejad snapped his shutout bid with 2:53 to go. Hutton finished with 37 saves but things got hairy after Chris Kreider's power-play goal with 1:38 left. The Rangers outshot Buffalo, 23-6, in the third period and 39-28 for the game.

This victory was a solid bounceback for Hutton after he was pulled following the fifth goal of Tuesday's 6-1 loss to Colorado.

First strike: The Sabres broke on top at 10:26 of the first period as Girgensons took a pass from Colin Miller and curled the puck around Alexandar Georgiev for his fifth goal at MSG since the start of the 2015-16 season.

The Latvian Locomotive path: Girgensons has 10 goals on the season, his first double-figure campaign since he totaled 15 in his 2014-15 All-Star season.

Second strike: Reinhart made it 2-0 at 15:16 of the second with a top-shelf backhand off a Jack Eichel feed through the neutral zone. Reinhart had a stride on Rangers forward Filip Chytil from the Buffalo blue line all the way to the goal.

Spirit of Sam: Reinhart's 20th goal came in his 55th game, easily beating his previous career best of 69 games in 2015-16.

The clincher: Vesey burned his old team for his eighth goal of the season at 11:56 of the third, sliding a backhand through Georgiev's legs and then pumping his fist in celebration. Eichel also assisted on that one, pushing his team-high scoring totals to 31-37-68.

The Buffalo lineup: The Sabres went with a standard 12-6 setup as Rasmus Dahlin returned after missing the last two games with what's believed to be a shoulder problem. The healthy scratches were Rasmus Asplund up front and Lawrence Pilut and Zach Bogosian on defense.

With Dahlin back in, he paired with Colin Miller. Brandon Montour moved into Pilut's spot next to Rasmus Ristolainen. Jake McCabe was paired with Henri Jokiharju.

Struggle City: The Sabres entered the game 30th in the NHL since Nov. 1 with a 14-21-6 record and .415 points percentage. The only team worse was Detroit, which improved to 9-30-3 (.250) since that date with Thursday's shootout win in KeyBank Center.

Tough to be a teen-ager: No. 2 overall pick Kaapo Kakko is at right wing on the Rangers' fourth line and having a rugged rookie season as an 18-year-old, with just one goal in 32 games entering Friday. For the season he has seven goals and 10 assists in 48 games with a minus-19 rating that's the worst on the team.

Next: The Sabres returned home after the game and will practice Saturday in KeyBank Center in preparation for another batch of home games. Anaheim is in town for a 3 p.m. matinee on Sunday before rematches with Detroit on Tuesday and Columbus on Thursday.

Tom Golisano, Larry Quinn to be honored by Sabres as part of '2000s Night'

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 7, 2020

NEW YORK — Former owner B. Thomas Golisano will be among those honored when the Buffalo Sabres stage "2000s Night," their latest decade tribute in KeyBank Center, prior to Thursday's game against Columbus.

Golisano and former managing partners Larry Quinn and Dan DiPofi will be major attractions in the pregame ceremony and will be honored by the team, much like the Knox family was feted in December on Founders Night.

Golisano purchased the team from NHL operation in 2003 and prevented it from possibly relocating. The Sabres went to the playoffs three times before he sold to Terry Pegula in 2011, including the back-to-back runs to the Eastern Conference final in 2006 and 2007.

The Sabres won the Presidents' Trophy with a league-best 113 points in 2006-07, and it will be on display on the 100 level concourse for fans to take photos with pregame. Golisano, of course, is also remembered for the devastating losses of co-captains Daniel Briere and Chris Drury to free agency on July 1, 2007. The Sabres have yet to win a playoff series since that duo left town.

Quinn, the driving force behind the construction of then-Marine Midland Arena in the mid-'90s, left the organization under the ownership of the Rigas family but returned to join Golisano. DiPofi, the team's longtime chief financial officer, also joined the group.

As in previous decade ceremonies, a large group of alumni is scheduled to be introduced. Subject to change, the current roster of alumni slated to attend is highlighted by former captains Daniel Briere and Jason Pominville, current team broadcasters Martin Biron and Andrew Peters, Sabres development coach Adam Mair and Angola native and youth hockey director Patrick Kaleta.

Other attendees are Eric Boulton, Brian Campbell, Tim Connolly, J.P. Dumont, Paul Gaustad, Michal Grosek, Patrick Lalime, Adam Mair, Jay McKee, Daniel Paille, Michael Ryan and Rhett Warrener.

The first 10,000 fans in attendance will receive a decade-themed pennant. Alumni will be honored on the ice prior to a special 2000s video, with 2000s-themed scoring graphics and music from the decade also on the docket

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Sabres coach Ralph Krueger was pleased with the NHL starting debut of Jonas Johansson in Thursday's shootout loss to Detroit.

Johansson gave up two first-period goals to Dylan Larkin, one on a screened shot and the other on a 2-on-1 in the final second of the period. He was also beaten by Tyler Bertuzzi's quick chip from in front with 6:04 left in the third period. He made 18 saves on 21 shots.

"I thought he dealt with the game well," Krueger said. The first goal "was a no-see goal off the side and they had a strong double-screen on that that we should have done better against.

"We like the game he showed us and he's a good addition to our depth. What you have to love is how he fills the net. His 'pro package' is really strong, meaning all the things he can take care of, and we find he really has a good package that gives him a chance to only get better with experience now."

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The apparent phaseout of veteran Henrik Lundqvist (10-11-3, 3.13/.907) has seemingly begun in the Rangers goal as he sat out for the seventh time in nine games. Alexandar Georgiev (12-10-1, 3.12/.909) will start tonight and rookie Igor Shesterkin (4-1, 2.61/.922) has burst on the scene since his call-up from Hartford.

Lundqvist is signed through next year at a cap hit of \$8.5 million with a no-movement clause. It's conceivable the Rangers could buy out the top goalie in franchise history this summer.

Sabres game day: No time to fret over Detroit debacle as Dahlin returns

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 7, 2020

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (23-23-8) at. New York Rangers (26-22-4)

Where: Madison Square Garden

When: 7 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

NEW YORK – Maybe a quick roadie can help the Sabres snap out of their funk. Remember all the All-Star break chatter? Nine of the next 10 games are at home and that could be a big boost in a playoff push, right? Welp, this is the only road game in that bunch and the days and nights in KeyBank Center have been disastrous.

The Sabres are 1-3-1 in the first five at home and Thursday night's shootout loss to woebegone Detroit easily stands as the lowest moment of the 50th anniversary season.

Coach Ralph Krueger stood defiantly in front of reporters after the debacle, promising to keep his team pushing forward. The empty seats in the arena – and the booing that filled the building much of the night – said the fan base is skeptical.

"There's a bite in that room. They don't want this season to fall away," Krueger insisted of his players. "They want to fight against this storm that we're fighting against. We have to stick together and we have to work together on solutions and that's all we can do in this adversity right now."

The Buffalo lineup: On the back-to-back, the Sabres did not skate this morning. Coach Ralph Krueger said Lawrence Pilut and Zach Bogosian will be healthy scratches and one forward to be announced will be scratches.

Rasmus Dahlin, who has missed two straight games with an upper-body injury, will return.

"It's a game of percentages and again today it's a game where you need to expect the one-goal game," Krueger said 90 minutes before faceoff. "To tip it in our favor it's percentage points, and players like Dahlin can give you those percentage points on the power play or on 5-on-5. It's a nice addition and he's fresh. Coming into a back to back, it's always good to have a fresh body back there."

Carter Hutton's disastrous losing streak that reached 12 games before ending Saturday against Columbus started with a 6-2 loss at MSG on Oct. 24. Hutton will get the call in goal against the Rangers again tonight.

"Our last game here was about our puck management. We were turning over pucks en masse here last time," Krueger said. "Better puck management to not feed into their really lethal speed on offense."

Rangers net a big story: The apparent phaseout of veteran Henrik Lundqvist (10-11-3, 3.13/.907) has seemingly begun, as he will sit for the seventh time in nine games. Alexandar Georgiev (12-10-1, 3.12/.909) will start tonight and rookie Igor Shesterkin (4-1, 2.61/.922) has burst on the scene since his call-up from Hartford.

The Bread Man: Rangers winger Artemi Panarin has been worth every penny of that seven-year, \$81.5 million contract he signed last summer. Panarin has 27 goals, 44 assists and 71 points, good for fifth in the league in scoring.

Prospect C.J. Smith believes he's still in Sabres' plans

By Bill Hoppe

The Buffalo News

February 7, 2020

ROCHESTER – Americans General Manager Randy Sexton likes that Buffalo Sabres prospect C.J. Smith feels comfortable engaging in frank conversations about his career.

"We know we can always expect a direct and honest response," Sexton said. "I know he knows, like all of our players, that we care about them as people, as players and that we're doing everything we can to reach their goals of playing in the NHL."

Smith, 25, has experienced a tough season, getting waived early in NHL training camp and suffering a lower-body injury Nov. 2 with the Amerks. Following a brief scoring outburst when he returned from an 11-game absence, he started slumping.

The 5-foot-10, 184-pound Smith has stayed in Rochester all season, watching the Sabres recall five other forwards.

"Sometimes it's easy to get down, and I've definitely had those moments where you get down on yourself," Smith said recently.

In those difficult moments, Smith said his talks with Sexton and Amerks coach Chris Taylor help him refocus.

"Tails does a really good job of recognizing that," said Smith, who has played 13 NHL games. "I got to give a huge shoutout to Randy Sexton. I think they kind of know when I get in those lulls. It happens, and they do a really good job of pulling me out and kind of clearing things up."

Sexton said Smith felt pain-free when he returned Dec. 11. Still, after compiling two goals and five points in his first three games back, he registered just one assist over his next eight outings.

"We didn't see the same kind of attacking C.J. that we knew and have seen before," Sexton said.

So Sexton said they "kind of talked through it three times." In the past several games, Smith has looked more like the 28-goal scorer from last season and has nine goals thus far.

"He's gotten really gotten back to what we've seen and expect from him in the past and he's gotten back to putting himself in the conversations for (a) recall," Sexton said.

Smith said he has "kind of found my game again."

"He's getting his jump back and he's getting confidence," Taylor said.

At his best, Smith said he stops cheating – "Sometimes I want to score too much," he said – and stays on the defensive side of the puck.

"When my game's playing well, I'm on the right side of pucks and winning the 50-50 battles, getting to the net, getting the pucks to the net and just overall being a team player," he said.

Smith compiled 45 goals and 102 points in 119 games over his first two seasons, making him one of the American Hockey League's top scorers. Last season, his exploits forced the Sabres to recall him, and he played 11 games.

The two-year contract Smith signed in July becomes a one-way deal worth \$700,000 next season, according to capfriendly.com.

Smith, a free agent the Sabres' old regime signed from UMass Lowell, said he believes he is still in the team's plans.

"A two-year deal, I think there's obviously still some plans in the future," he said. "So it's a process, sometimes it's slow, sometimes it doesn't go the way you want. But like I keep saying, you got to stick with it."

While Smith acknowledged he can get down, he often speaks positively, saying he must pay his dues and expressing confidence an opportunity will materialize.

"I'm not frustrated at all," he said of his season. "Just keep doing what I'm doing."

In the past, Smith has said Yanni Gourde and Jonathan Marchessault – two high-scoring NHL forwards who spent years in the minors – illustrate patience is critical.

Last week, Smith mentioned Gerald Mayhew, the AHL's leading goal scorer with the Iowa Wild, recently made his NHL debut at 27.

"It just shows you sometimes it's a slow process and sometimes it's not as quick as you want it to be," he said. "But I think I'm still in the plans."

Murray surging

Following a 16-game stretch in which he mustered just one goal and one point, Amerks rookie Brett Murray caught fire last weekend, recording two assists against the Syracuse Crunch before scoring two goals in Saturday's 3-2 win against the Binghamton Devils.

Murray compiled three goals and 14 points in his first 15 games before tailing off.

The 6-foot-5, 235-pound winger played with the Youngstown Phantoms last season in the junior United States Hockey League.

"You forget where he played last year," Taylor said. "He played in the USHL. All of a sudden, you're playing in the American Hockey League. It's not easy, you're going to have your ups and downs. It's a grind. It's a lot of games, it's practices every day. It's totally different.

"So I think obviously with four days off (late last month) might've helped him out just a little to take a deep breath and refresh and get back at it."

The Amerks, who have a six-game winning streak, host the Crunch again Friday before playing a road game against the Toronto Marlies on Saturday.

Olofsson joins the Sabres on the ice for Saturday's practice

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

February 8, 2020

Victor Olofsson has been out of the Buffalo Sabres lineup for more than a month after suffering a lower-body injury on Jan. 2 against the Edmonton Oilers. However, the rookie forward joined the team on the ice on Saturday at KeyBank Center as he continues to near a return to the lineup.

Head coach Ralph Krueger still expects the rookie to miss another week or more as he builds back up his endurance, but he noted that, "for Victor, it's just getting his mind space back into what he needs to do. I mean, you go from the lack of speed you're on a day-to-day existence, to the National Hockey League speed, which will come back at him." Krueger continued, "we need to be patient on this one, but the few practices that we're gonna find in this week where we have six games in 10 days, every practice will be valuable for him, of course." Olofsson played nearly 14 minutes before his injury against Edmonton.

Olofsson admitted that he is, "not quite there yet, but it was nice to get the feel of the game again and it's good kind of have a little bit. I know it's not much contact, but [to have] a few guys around you, you have to kind of be aware of where you have your teammates and the opponents." He worked into the team's 3-on-1 drill, interchanging with Johan Larsson on the wing. He had his greatest success this year while being paired with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

Olofsson said he has been skating and working on his strength work while he has been away from the team during the rehab process. "This is something new... I've been trying to stay really positive and just look at it as an opportunity to get stronger and come back with a fresh start." Buffalo could use not only his offense in the lineup, but his fresh legs when he is ready.

Krueger tried to find the positive in the injury, adding that he, "always find these injury situations [to be] opportunities for players if they use them properly. He's been able to observe the game from the outside, we've been interacting with him quite a bit, and I think it's going to take him even to another level of maturity." The rookie has 35 points this season, including 16 goals for the Sabres.

The blue and gold skated for less than an hour a day before their meeting with the Anaheim Ducks. Buffalo will be playing their third game in four days and fourth in six days. The schedule does not lighten up until after this Thursday's tilt with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The defense did not use any consistent pairings during the skate, but the forwards did show a preview of what the combinations could look like for Sunday:

Vesey - Eichel - Reinhart
Frolik - Lazar - Joahnsson
Girgensons - Larsson - Wilson (Olofsson)
Skinner - Sheary - Rodrigues

The blue and gold also worked on the power play, where the units remained the same as they have been the last several games:

PP1:

Ristolainen
Eichel - Reinhart - Johansson
Dahlin

PP2:

Vesey
Montour - Skinner - Sheary
Miller

The Sabres and Ducks will drop the puck just after 3 p.m. on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network – WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Brian Koziol begins at 2 p.m.

Sabres send Pilut and Asplund to Rochester

By Derek Kramer

WGR 550

February 8, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres made a roster move on Saturday morning, sending defenseman Lawrence Pilut and forward Rasmus Asplund down to the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

Pilut played in 10 games during his call up to Buffalo this season, with no points and a minus-4 rating, while averaging 16:39 of ice time per-game. This is Pilut's second season with the Sabres organization, where he has six points (1+5) in 43 career NHL games.

Asplund had a lengthy call up for his first NHL action since being drafted in the second round of the 2016 NHL Draft. Seeing limited minutes as a rookie, Asplund collected three points (1+2) in 29 NHL games, while averaging 10:50 of ice time per-game.

The Sabres host the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. at KeyBank Center. Pregame coverage with Brian Koziol will begin at 2 p.m. on WGR Sports Radio 550.

Sabres take two points from the Blueshirts

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

February 7, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres played their best game of the week on the back-end of two games in as many nights to defeat the New York Rangers, 3-2 at Madison Square Garden.

Once again, the start of the game and the first 10 minutes of game action was working in the Sabres' favor. I have thought that Buffalo has been the better team in the majority of their games out of the bye week. They may not have gotten results from it, but they were taking the play to the opposition.

The Sabres were able to capitalize off of a nifty pass by Colin Miller to Zemgus Girgensons in the offensive zone to take the lead in the first period. Girgensons walked in on Rangers goalie Alexandar Georgiev and deked him out of the net to put the blue and gold up 1-0. It was the forward's 10th goal of the season, and it gave Miller points in back-to-back games.

The pace to the opening 20 minutes was frenetic and up-and-down, just as we like to see the game be played.

The Blueshirts had their opportunities. Artemi Panarin was noticeable in the offensive zone and it is no surprise that he was probably the home team's best player in the first. The shots on goal finished up 6-6, and neither team had a power play chance in the first stanza.

Carter Hutton had to make a few big saves early in the second period to keep Buffalo in front by a goal. Mike Zibanejad nearly tied the game with a shot using Jake McCabe as a screen in front of Hutton, but he was able to square up to the chance.

The first power play of the night went to the Sabres thanks to a Panarin holding minor. Buffalo had two high quality scoring chances. The first was a tape-to-tape pass from Jack Eichel to Sam Reinhart, who just could not get it past the pad of Georgiev. Brandon Montour pinched down by the goal line and nearly cashed in a rebound chance, but Rangers defenseman Jacob Trouba got a piece of the puck to knock it out of play and keep it 1-0 Buffalo.

Just a couple minutes later the blue and gold's lead doubled to 2-0 thanks to good work in transition and then finish by the Eichel-Reinhart-Jimmy Vesey line. The play started in the Sabres end with Vesey moving the puck up to the captain, who found Reinhart on the move. He pulled Georgiev to the near post and kept the puck on the back hand to roof a shot to the far corner.

In the third period, the passing was, once again, pinpoint as Eichel found Vesey with a stretch pass into the offensive zone, allowing the forward to score on his former team and make it 3-0 Buffalo. It would be such an important goal as the Blueshirts would make one last push to try and collect a point.

The Rangers used their up-tempo offense and a power play to make it a one-goal game within the final three minutes or regulation. The Sabres' lead was trimmed to 3-1 when Mika Zibanejad recorded his 22nd goal of the season, just two nights after he helped his team defeat the Toronto Maple Leafs. Chris Kreider's 20th goal of the season with 1:38 to go in regulation cut the lead to 3-2 in favor of the blue and gold, and they would hold on for the win.

Overall, it was a good effort for the Sabres to allow them to pick up three out of a possible four points in two days. It is not the full four points they were looking for, but an effort they can build off of against the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday afternoon.

The two teams will drop the puck just after 3 p.m. on the flagship home of the Buffalo Sabres – WGR Sports Radio 550.

Sabres hang on to beat the Rangers, 3-2

WGR 550

February 7, 2020

After another disappointing loss at home for the on Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings, the Buffalo Sabres bounced back on Friday night with a 3-2 win on the road over the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

The Sabres and the Rangers played a generally uneventful opening 20 minutes with each team only taking six shots on goal and not taking a penalty.

However, it was Zemgus Girgensons who put Buffalo on the board first with a nice move to the net to beat Rangers goalie Alexander Georgiev for his 10th goal of the season. It was defenseman Colin Miller who made a nice play to fake a shot on goal, which opened up a lane for Girgensons to get to the net, and Miller was able to spring the Buffalo forward for the goal.

Things opened up for both teams in the second period, but both goalies did a good job keeping each other off the board. Buffalo applied some pressure and forced Artemi Panarin to take a holding penalty midway through the period, but the Sabres were unable to convert on the man advantage.

Five minutes later, it was Sam Reinhart who found himself in alone on Georgiev off a brilliant feed from Sabres captain Jack Eichel, and Reinhart made no mistake with a backhand over the left shoulder to put the Sabres up 2-0.

The third period had even more action than the second. Buffalo took an early penalty as Artemi Panarin got in behind the Sabres defense, but Henri Jokiharju was able to slow him down enough to protect the Sabres' two-goal lead while taking the penalty. The Sabres killed off that penalty, but the Rangers did not let up. New York peppered Carter Hutton with 23 shots in the third period.

The Sabres were able to pad their lead with another slick Eichel pass, this time from in the Buffalo zone to Jimmy Vesey at the Rangers' blue line. Vesey danced through three Rangers before slotting the puck through the five-hole of Georgiev to give the Sabres a 3-0 lead.

The Rangers continued to put pressure on the Sabres and it eventually paid off. Artemi Panarin skated up the left side of the ice and threw a pass out in front that Mika Zibanejad was able to tip past Hutton to put the Rangers on the board.

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen took a penalty shortly after, leading to the Rangers' second goal with 1:38 remaining in regulation. Zibanejad led a rush up the right side of the ice, using his speed to gain the zone before putting a pass to Kappo Kakko in front making Hutton make the save. Chris Kreider reached his stick in and the puck barely made it past Hutton and across the goal line to make it a 3-2 game.

Luckily for the Sabres, they were able to turn away the Rangers in the dying seconds of the game to hold on for the 3-2 win.

GAME SUMMARY

Scoring Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 10:26 - Zemgus Girgensons (10) (Colin Miller)

NYR: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 15:16 - Sam Reinhart (20) (Jack Eichel, Jimmy Vesey)

NYR: NONE

Third Period:

BUF: 11:56 - Jimmy Vesey (8) (Jack Eichel)

NYR: 17:07 - Mika Zibanejad (22) (Artemi Panarin, Eric Staal); 18:22 - Chris Kreider (20) (Kaapo Kakko, Mika Zibanejad)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

NYR: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

NYR: 10:21 - Artemi Panarin (Holding - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 3:18 - Henri Jokiharju (Holding - 2 min.); 18:02 - Rasmus Ristolainen (Hooking - 2 min.)

NYR: NONE

Strategic Financial Solutions Stats of the Game:

Shots:

BUF: 28 (6, 16, 6)

NYR: 39 (6, 10, 23)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 37 saves

NYR: Alexander Georgiev - 25 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 1 (0%)

NYR: 1 for 2 (50%)

Three Stars presented by Losi and Gangi:

Carter Hutton - BUF

Jack Eichel - BUF

Mika Zibanejad - NYR

What's Next:

The Sabres are back home to take on the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is set for 3 p.m. with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Brian Koziol set for 2 p.m on WGR.

Sabres need quick turnaround against the Rangers

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

February 7, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres have a quick turnaround after their 4-3 shootout loss to the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday night at KeyBank Center.

Buffalo will look to put the defeat behind them on Friday when they face the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Evan Rodrigues scored the game-tying goal with less than a minute to go in regulation on Thursday, but had a blunt assessment on the team's effort over the first 40 minutes. The blue and gold trailed 2-0 through two periods of play, and he thought that the team "had moments in the first and second that were positive and we did the right things, but we didn't do it consistently enough. We waited too long to turn it on." Rodrigues continued, "we had chances and [it] just didn't go our way tonight." His goal came with the Jonas Johansson pulled in favor of an extra skater.

Rodrigues did not stop there, adding that the lack of energy at the start of the game, "clearly wasn't good enough. We obviously have to put a better product out there. We have a young goalie getting his first start and we're letting him hear boos in his first start, so it's on us as a team and obviously you don't want to see that for a young kid obviously playing in his first [NHL] game as a goalie."

Johansson made his first NHL start on Thursday after making his NHL debut on Tuesday night when he replaced Carter Hutton in a 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche. He made 18 saves in the loss.

The Blueshirts pose a tough test for Buffalo after thumping the Toronto Maple Leafs, 5-3 on Wednesday night. It marked the seventh win in the last 10 home games for the Rangers. Igor Shesterkin was in goal for New York on his way to his fourth win since being recalled from the Hartford Wolf Pack of the American Hockey League. Many around the league see Shesterkin as the goalie of the future for the Rangers. He is one of three goalies on the roster along with Henrik Lundqvist and Alexandar Georgiev.

Mika Zibanejad has helped quarterback the top line for the Rangers again this season. He is coming off of a 74-point (30+44) campaign last season, with 45 points already this year in his fourth season in Manhattan. However, he has 21 goals and 24 assists while being paired with Chris Kreider and Pavel Buchnevich this year. The three forwards combined for seven points against Toronto two days ago.

Sam Reinhart looks to have a quick memory after Thursday night, admitting after the game that the team is, "gonna show up and we're gonna compete to the best of our ability every night. And that's what I do on a daily basis, trying to get myself ready the best I can to be the best version of myself every day and night." He added that, "[it's] never easy. We didn't do our job that we set out to do when we woke up this morning, so it's disappointing." Reinhart was on the ice for the game-tying goal, as well as the much talked about second Red Wings goal on Thursday.

The Rangers are two points better than Buffalo heading into Friday's matchup. It is the second meeting of the season at Madison Square Garden between the two teams. The Sabres suffered a 6-2 loss where they gave up three goals in the first period before ex-Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella recorded his second goal of the season for the blue and gold. Vladimir Sobotka scored the other Sabres goal, and Hutton made 18 saves in the loss.

Buffalo and the Rangers drop the puck just after 7 p.m. on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network – WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog starts our coverage at 6 p.m.

Ryan Miller was a star in goal but even brighter on the catwalk, friends say as he returns with Anaheim Ducks

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 8, 2020

Patrick Kaleta, who became a youth hockey coach after retiring from the Sabres organization, took his boys to a tournament in Minnesota. He noticed the Wild were hosting the Anaheim Ducks, so he shot former teammate Ryan Miller a text.

"He said, 'Yeah, come on over to the hotel,'" Kaleta said. "He let me bring my two goaltenders over to his lobby, and he sat there and took the time to meet them, shook their hands and essentially gave those two kids something they'll remember for the rest of their lives."

That's the Miller whom friends and teammates remember most. He has more wins than any goalie in Buffalo history, but it was the man away from the rink who made the biggest impression. He was a philanthropist, musician, coach, photographer, clothing store owner, friend and role model.

"He's a fascinating person," Andrew Peters said. "The guy is very intelligent, artistic — I think he's a genius."

Nearly 21 years after being drafted by Buffalo, Miller is still making saves and memories. As the 39-year-old returns to town with the Ducks, some of his best friends and former teammates looked back at his 12 years with the organization:

- Jason Pominville, who arrived in Rochester with Miller in 2002, played 11 seasons with the goalie and sat next to him during plane rides.
- Brian Campbell, a fellow All-Star in 2007 during their five seasons together.
- Martin Biron, who shared the crease with Miller for four years.
- Cody McCormick, a teammate for five seasons.
- Marcus Foligno, who arrived as a rookie in 2011 and spent three years with the goalie.
- Peters, a teammate in Rochester and Buffalo for the goalie's first six seasons.
- Kaleta, who was Miller's roommate on the road for part of their eight years with the Sabres.

The first thing that came to mind for nearly everyone was Miller's annual "Catwalk for Charity." Held seven years in a row, the event raised more than \$1 million for the goalie's Steadfast Foundation, which he created to benefit people battling cancer, especially those with childhood forms of the disease.

Pominville: His "Catwalk for Charity," that was a great way of getting the boys together, having fun. The guys had a couple drinks and it was a good night out. The amount of money he was able to raise for charity was pretty phenomenal for a one-night event. That was always a fun time.

Kaleta: It's really hard to get everyone together, especially during the season. Just having the team together, I think it does wonders for building a team. That event specifically was one of those things every year that was more important than people think.

McCormick: Just as importantly, it got the wives together. They're able to talk, and people start hanging out away from the rink. You can create better surroundings for a team.

Pominville: Honestly, it was unbelievable. He did a good job of setting it up and talking to the coaches and staff about when he could do it so we could have off the next day, so the guys could have fun with it and enjoy it.

Pominville: No one was really shy on stage. The fans absolutely loved it. It was something completely different and fun. Fans got to get close to the players and interact in different ways that maybe they're not used to, while having a few cocktails — sometimes a few too many — and having fun with it and raising money for charity. It was a great idea and all the players every year were looking forward to that night.

Kaleta: Seeing the best player in Buffalo go out of his way to do all the things he did in the community, that's being a role model. He could very easily go home, make his money, be good, that's it, but his heart and the amount of time he gave and the amount of money he gave to Buffalo is something to be highly commended.

McCormick: He really reached into the community and he brought players with him. Everybody was better for it when they participated in those events. I think a lot of young guys realized that if Ryan Miller is putting something like this on, there's no reason why somebody else can't follow up and do something similar. Maybe not at that level, but he's putting his time into something away from the rink and so can I.

Miller almost always had something going on away from the rink. He was an accomplished photographer, owned a clothing store in his hometown of East Lansing, Mich., and played guitar in a band with teammate Derek Roy.

Peters: He loved his music and was way ahead of music. Ask him how many CDs I might have stolen from him. He used to burn a CD every week and bring it in the locker room with some new eclectic music that no one's ever heard, and then three or four years later they're this huge band.

Kaleta: Being roommates on the road was a lot of fun. He'd be watching politics and all that kind of stuff, and I'd know how to push his buttons by throwing on a cartoon or something like that. We'd have some pretty funny combos.

McCormick: Away from the rink when you sit and talk with him, he's just a very intellectual person. You can be having a conversation and think something is black and white, and he'll be able to come in from another angle and you see there's a bigger picture than just black and white. You see the way he sees things, and it's just coming from a different perspective.

Peters: People know he's an intelligent guy. When you hear him speak, he's obviously a very deep thinker.

Pominville: He was great with you (media) guys, too. Every time he'd talk to you guys, he put thought into his answers. He wouldn't just throw stuff out there without thinking about it, and that goes a long way with the players who pay attention and listen to the comments that are said after games. He was definitely a leader on the team, not only from his actions but from what he said.

Peters: He's super serious about his craft and he's a very serious individual, but let me just tell you this: He liked to have fun. It wasn't even just going out and partying, but going to dinners and ball-busting. He knew when to be serious and when to let loose a little bit. The real pros know what to do and when to do it, right? Millsie was smart like that, and when he picked his spots he had a lot of fun. He always came to the Halloween party with a great costume. He put a lot of thought into stuff like that.

Biron: We did some crazy stuff on the road as a team. It was so great. I'm so glad there were no iPhones and no pictures and no Twitter back then because we just had a really great time.

Peters: And then there'd be times he'd come to the rink and be like, "I made some killer homemade guacamole last night." I'd be like, "Oh, you're a real badass, Millsie. Look out for this guy, he's crazy."

Pominville: He would like to throw chirps here and there and would definitely take some, as well. When you look at him (at 6-foot-3, 170 pounds), a lot of guys would throw "have a burger" and those type of chirps at him. Fun teammate.

Peters: He's subtle. He could slice a throat or two, for sure, and he did it in such a subtle way. His straight face and monotone, that was Millsie.

On game day, it was all business. The goaltender won a franchise-record 284 games, a Vezina Trophy and an Olympic silver medal in part because of his strict routines.

Foligno: I never talked to him on game days. He was the most intimidating human being on a game day.

McCormick: He was just dialed in when he was at the rink. He did a lot of things that were superstitious but also routine. He always taped his stick while he was still wearing his suit.

Foligno: He was on a clock. He had to do this at this time. Everything about him was all mental preparation, visualizing. He goes to the bench and stares at the ice for a bit.

Campbell: You knew you didn't have to worry about him being ready for games. He was in it to win it. He was always preparing himself and thinking about his craft and working at it, trying out new ideas.

Pominville: A lot of times it was pretty funny, his way of analyzing his own gear and trying to find ways to get better by looking at his gear, looking at his pads, where his pads were leaving areas exposed. He would sit in his gear, basically in the butterfly position and would kind of be looking at himself. Then he would take the pads off and lay them on the ground and would be looking at them to see what he could do or how he could shape his pad to give himself an edge.

Biron: He was a perfectionist. If he played the guitar, he needed to be perfect. If he took pictures, they needed to be perfect. As a goaltender, it needed to be perfect. His equipment needed to be perfect.

Foligno: He was a guy that would go all out in practices, too.

Pominville: You could go a full practice without scoring a goal on him. He would compete on every rebound. Goalies see a lot of shots in practice. Some of them will stand up and just try to save it with their glove, but he would go down on everything, compete on everything, which was very impressive because he would do it every day and he played basically 72 games. It's completely insane how he was able to do that.

From 2006 to 2013, Miller was third in the NHL with 434 appearances in 540 games. After helping the Sabres to back-to-back Eastern Conference finals in 2006 and 2007, he appeared in 76 games in 2007-08.

McCormick: That's amazing. The wear and tear and still being able to perform at that level, he's an unbelievable athlete, to say the least.

Campbell: It was a nice piece to the puzzle for us at that time. He was talked about for quite a long time, and it's nice for a prospect to pan out and be something special.

Kaleta: He was one of the best goalies to ever put on the Sabres uniform, and by no means is that a fluke. It comes down to the way he prepares, his mindset, his attention to detail. All those cliché things are things that Ryan Miller perfected.

Pominville: I sat with him on the plane every road trip. (Goalie coach) Jim Corsi would always come back to our seats and bring the computer. Jimmy had a glass of wine and stood with us talking about the game and how the game went. We'd start going on about the game and what we could do better. Millsie's way of analyzing his game, the team's game, what we need to get better, his thought process was always out there and pretty interesting.

Peters: He just sees things differently. You know what he said to me one day? I'll never forget it. He told me, "You need to change your curve." I was like, "Shut up, Millsie." He's like, "No, seriously, you need to change your curve." I said, "Why, you don't like my high heat beating you over the glove side?" I gave him some smartass remark. He's like, "No, you have a twist in your blade. The way you shoot and the length of your stick and the way you receive passes, I see the puck how it hits your blade when you receive a pass or when you shoot." At the time you're like, "Come on." Then I look back, and he's absolutely right. Now when I play (pickup games), I use a completely different curve and I'm thinking, "I wish I used this when I was playing," and it's exactly the same curve Ryan was telling me I should have used when I was 26. It was specific for the plays I made on the boards or handling the puck in the corner. It was just incredible the way he sees things.

Pominville: His talent is unbelievable to me. He was the most dominant player I have played with as far as being able to control a game on a nightly basis. Him being in his prime when he played here, you knew every time he played he'd give us a chance to win.

Biron: Fans loved him, and why not, right? He was a very interesting man, a good-looking man, had so much success, was the face of USA Hockey.

Kaleta: I acted as his bodyguard on the road when all the people would try to get his autograph. He was a highly sought-after person. You'd be surprised how many people waited for him or would track him down, and he was always 100 percent nice about it. For me, looking from the outside in, you could see how high-profile people could get aggravated with that kind of stuff because it's nonstop. But he was honestly a true professional every single time. Then the times I felt it was getting overboard, I would just move us along.

Peters: I can't believe he's still playing. It's unbelievable. He's driven, right? He's one of the most driven human beings I've ever met.

Pominville: Millsie dominated in college, comes here and does the same in Rochester. When he stepped in to play in Buffalo, he was ready to go. It was going to be his net. Once he got that net, there was no chance anyone was ever taking that back — and basically no one ever did. It was his net until he got traded.

Biron: You look back at it, and he was just fantastic.

Sabres rookie Victor Olofsson practices, nearing return from lower-body injury

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 9, 2020

BUFFALO – Sabres winger Victor Olofsson said he has never experienced anything like the lower-body injury that has sidelined him the last 13 games.

In his first seven years as a pro, the high-scoring Swede showcased terrific durability, never missing more than a couple weeks of action.

Then on Jan. 2 against the Edmonton Oilers, Olofsson's left skate got caught in the ice, causing him to fall backwards.

"It was unfortunate, no one around me, just kind of got stuck with my left skate and fell," Olofsson said after returning to practice Saturday. "It happens. I've been trying to stay positive. I've been working very hard to come back here."

But don't expect to see Olofsson play this afternoon against the Anaheim Ducks at KeyBank Center or later this week. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Olofsson needs "a week or more" before he returns, meaning he could miss at least another four games.

"It's just getting his mind space into what he needs to do," Krueger said. "I mean, you go from the lack of speed in your existence on a day-to-day basis to the National Hockey League speed, which is going to come back at him.

"So I think it was good for him to be in the drills today and, again, physically, we still see we need to be patient on this one."

When Olofsson was injured, the Sabres said he would be out five or six weeks, so his first practice and Krueger's words match their original time line.

"Still taking it pretty slow," Olofsson said. "But it gets a lot better every day."

Olofsson called practicing again "a huge step."

"It's not quite there yet, but it was nice to kind of get out there and get the feel of the game again," he said.

The Sabres sorely need Olofsson, one of the NHL's top rookies. They've compiled a lackluster 6-6-1 record without him.

Sabres winger Jimmy Vesey has recently played well in Olofsson's spot at left wing beside top center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, scoring two goals in the last two contests. But Krueger tried a slew of replacements before finding any success.

Olofsson quickly morphed into one of the NHL's top rookies, scoring six goals in the first seven games and establishing himself as a Calder Trophy candidate. Overall, he has compiled 16 goals and 35 points in 42 outings.

Despite missing five weeks, Olofsson ranked second among rookies in goals entering Saturday's games, trailing only Chicago Blackhawks winger Dominik Kubalik, who has scored 21 times in 52 contests. Olofsson ranked third among first-year players in points.

"Honestly, I haven't really been paying much attention to that," Olofsson said of the goal-scoring race. "Right now, I'm just looking forward to getting back. I just want to play hockey right now."

Olofsson said he started skating a few weeks ago. Naturally, when he watches the Sabres play, he said he gets "really eager to get back into it."

His presence, especially on the power play, where he has utilized his lethal shot from the circles, likely would've translated to more victories.

The Sabres have scored just one goal four times during his absence.

Krueger believes Olofsson can benefit from the break in his season and the opportunity to watch games from a different perspective.

"He's been able to do some reflection and some more mental growth," Krueger said. "I ... think it's going to take him even to another level of maturity, having a bit of a pause in a season which was truly rookie of the year, NHL-caliber.

"We're confident he can get back to that level, but even with a higher feeling of confidence, having looked at the game from the outside now."

Vesey has certainly generated more confidence playing beside Eichel and Reinhart.

"When you play with them, you have to understand you're going to go up against top lines in the league, you're going to play 20 minutes and it's a grind in both directions," Krueger said. "I think Jimmy's really taken on that side of the responsibility with them."

Vesey's goal in Friday's 3-2 road win against the New York Rangers, his old team, was especially satisfying.

In his first visit back Oct. 24, he was injured in the Sabres' 6-2 loss.

"It was a good feeling it made it 3-0," he said, "but I thought it was a big goal in that game, just get that extra cushion, and it turned out to be the game winner."

Sabres assign Rasmus Asplund, Lawrence Pilut to Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 8, 2020

BUFFALO – The Sabres assigned forward Rasmus Asplund and defenseman Lawrence Pilut to the Rochester Americans this morning.

Both players were scratched for Friday's 3-2 road win against the New York Rangers.

The Amerks play a road contest this afternoon against the Toronto Marlies.

Asplund, 22, has scored one goal and two points in 29 games with the Sabres this season. Meanwhile, Pilut, 24, has compiled zero points in 10 NHL outings.

The Sabres host the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday afternoon.

Update: Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said the youngsters will play today.

"It's a good game in Toronto today," he said. "That opportunity to keep their feet moving, to keep active, and they'll be playing some big minutes today."

Krueger said their status will be reevaluated later today.

Olofsson returns to practice with Sabres

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

February 8, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — When the Sabres took the ice at KeyBank Center on Saturday, forward Victor Olofsson joined them for practice. He got hurt January second against Edmonton.

The Sabres have desperately missed his offense. Olofsson has 16 goals and 35 points in 42 games this season. Olofsson scored nine of his goals on the power play.

Just because he returned to practice doesn't mean he's going to step on the ice for a game right away. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said the rookie forward is most likely out for another week to 10 days.

Olofsson suffered a lower body injury. Speculation has it that it was a high ankle sprain in third period.

The Sabres are home Sunday afternoon against Anaheim. The Ducks won the first meeting between the teams in California in October, 5-2.

Frustrated Sabres fans participate in 'Pack the Plaza' protest

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

February 7, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Once again it looks like Sabres fans will see another season end without the playoffs. If things stay the same, it will be nine straight seasons without making the postseason for the NHL's longest active playoff drought.

The latest loss came in a 4-3 shootout loss to the worst team in the league, the Detroit Red Wings.

During this stretch since the All-Star Break, fans have expressed their frustration with the team in many different ways, whether it was a viral rant on WGR Radio (Duane Steinel) or through songs (Melody Martin), and now some fans want to take it a step further.

Peter Tripi organized a peaceful protest Saturday morning outside of the arena in the hopes of getting their message across to owners Kim and Terry Pegula. The rally was called Pack the Plaza and started outside the arena.

"We want to be heard by management, and we want to be heard by the ownership, and we want some sort of acknowledgment that they see what's going on and that they realize it's unacceptable," Tripi said.

The Pegulas have not spoken publicly at this point, but 2 On Your Side is working to get an interview.

After Thursday's loss to Detroit, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger acknowledged the frustration of the fans when 2 On Your Side's Stu Boyar asked him about hearing the boos inside the arena and seeing all the empty seats.

"They're not happy with what we're doing, but they're supporting us and they're giving me, personally, a lot of energy. So if they boo during a game when they're unhappy, that's their right. If we're not winning, that's their right. But I don't feel it in this city. They love the Sabres, and they're hungry for this to turn, and we are fighting and working hard to get the habits here to be a competitive team on a regular basis, and we will continue to fight and we will continue to work hard," Krueger said.

Sabres Earn Big 3-2 Road Win Against Rangers

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

February 7, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres bounced back in a big way Friday night, defeating New York 3-2 on the road. The Sabres snapped their two game skid after losses to Detroit and Colorado earlier in the week.

Zemgus Girgensons opened up the scoring for Buffalo on a gorgeous sequence with Colin Miller. Miller pulled the fake on a slew of Rangers defensemen, and dished the puck to Girgensons who finished things off with a quick move in front.

Buffalo added to their lead in the second when Jimmy Vesey created a turnover and hit Jack Eichel on the breakout. Eichel fed Sam Reinhart, who finessed a backhand past Alexandar Georgiev.

Eichel and Vesey both added to their point total on the night in the third period when Eichel hit his winger with a long pass down the ice. Vesey beat Georgiev with the second backhand of the night to give Buffalo the 3-0 lead.

The Rangers scored two late goals in just over a minute, but the Sabres would hang on to earn a much needed two points. Buffalo plays host to Anaheim Sunday afternoon.

Sabres pick up 3-2 road win over Rangers

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

February 7, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres are back in the win column. With a 3-2 win over the New York Rangers Friday night, the team snapped a two-game losing streak and picked up two much-needed points. The Sabres are now 24-23-8 on the season. Three different players scored while Carter Hutton gets the win in net. The Sabres will be back at home for a four-game homestand beginning on Sunday when they host Anaheim at 3 p.m.

3 observations from tonight's game

Reinhart responds

In last night's game, Sam Reinhart attempted to tie the game before the first period was up and instead, the Red Wings went the other way and scored with .2 seconds on the clock to take a 2-0 lead into the locker room. Following the game, Reinhart was asked about whether he gave up on the Red Wings second goal. He didn't sound happy with the question or being called out and responded by not answering the question. How did Reinhart respond? In the second period, Jack Eichel sent a nice pass to Reinhart as he followed it up with a backhand beauty. It was his 20th goal of the season, second on the team behind Jack Eichel.

1:13

One minute and thirteen seconds. That's how long it took for the Sabres to nearly blow a three-goal lead. With 2:53 left on the clock, the Rangers got their first goal of the game and at 1:40, got their second cutting the deficit to one. It was an ugly performance during that time and nearly cost the Sabres two points. Yes Carter Hutton allowed those two goals but for the most part, he played really well which is big considering his last start a few nights ago. If the Sabres need to learn anything from those final few minutes, it's about closing out games. They can't afford to give up quick goals like that against some of the others teams in this league.

Still a long way to go

Yes the Sabres are back in the win column but they've still got a long way to go. Winning a game here and there isn't going to cut it and the Sabres need to put together a nice multi-game win streak if they want to really get back into the playoff picture. They haven't been eliminated mathematically but with the way things have been going, playing in the postseason doesn't look too good. After tonight, 28 regular-season games remain. This team really needs to give its best effort every night and instill a little bit of optimism back into their fans.

Sabres Fans Express Concerns During Protest at KeyBank

By Katherine Chloé Cahoon

Spectrum News

February 8, 2020

Freezing temperatures didn't stop some Sabres fans from protesting outside KeyBank Center to express what they describe as "mediocrity on ice."

"To protest management I would say as far as getting the Sabres on track and giving us a winning team," says Bret Simpson, of Hamburg.

Some fans at the protest vocalized their frustration with the organization, particularly with the lack of a playoff appearance in the past nine seasons.

"I think they should be addressing the media more, addressing the fans more," said Johnathon Warthling, of Amherst, addressing Sabres owners Terry and Kim Pegula.

"They need to make moves to get better players around Jack Eichel to be specific. I mean, we have this generational awesome player who's carrying the team most nights. And we've got, to be honest with you, players, that in my opinion... should maybe be in the AHL," said Simpson.

The Sabres are currently in sixth place in the Atlantic Division.

"It's just the fact that the Pegulas, the management, have neglected the team for nine years. Terry Pegula hasn't showed up in public, behind the microphone for the news, for anybody to talk about the Sabres in three years. What's been going on, it's sad. It's disappointing, and the worst part about it is that management refuses to acknowledge the fans and how upset we are," said Peter Tripi, of Getzville.

Spectrum News reached out to a spokesperson for Pegula Sports and Entertainment; however, were told that they're not planning to issue a formal response.

Where are the Pegulas?

By Andrew Kulyk and Peter Farrell

Artvoice

February 7, 2020

Years from now, when this franchise is again celebrating a decade by decade commemoration as it is doing this season, it will be almost impossible to envision how this team writes a glowing commemoration of these past ten years.

This past week, things around here got ugly, Down right ugly. And there have been past ugly moments that have outraged the fan base... Coach Ted Nolan getting disrespected and shown the door following the 1997 Northeast division title; the franchise bankruptcy following the collapse of Adelphia and subsequent criminal prosecutions; the black day when Danny Briere and Chris Drury both were allowed to leave via free agency. And the restlessness of the fan base these entire past years since Terry and Kim Pegula assumed ownership of the franchise in February of 2011.

This. This moment in time. Worse than any of the above inglorious events. Not even close.

After a lengthy time off for the All Star break, play resumed and this was the moment for the team to capture. A ten game set with nine games at home. A wild card playoff berth well within reach. Players rested and focused and ready to seize the opportunity.

It's been anything but. The team has gone 1-3-1 in their five home games. The losses have been ugly and virtually unwatchable. Tempers are flaring on the ice, with players Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart slamming their sticks and showing frustrations for all to see. The team is still without two key players – Winger Victor Olofsson and goaltender Linus Ullmark nursing injuries. Putative superstar Jeff Skinner has gone 16 games without scoring a goal. His dazzling performance of last season is just a fading memory. His box car salary is front and center for all to see.

The things happening off ice are just as jarring, and not indicative of what a top tier professional sports organization should be doing. In past weeks, no fewer than two former players have been presented jerseys with their names misspelled, and keen eyed fans also noticed that those same jerseys worn by all the alumni players were cheap knock offs, with logo placement, stitching and embroidery severely lacking.

The arena experience continues to get failing marks, a building turning 25 years old and showing its wear and tear, and not in a good way. Around the NHL and the NBA, peer venues are getting dazzling facelifts and additions of new electronics, technological marvels, and fan comforts. New arenas in Edmonton, Detroit, Sacramento, Milwaukee and San Francisco have raised the bar tremendously for the NHL/NBA patron experience.

In Buffalo it's just more of the execrable DJ Milk, screeching and slamming his way through hideous pregame shows and intermissions that send most patrons into the concourses to escape the din and clatter of the noise.

And while all this swirls, we have to ask, where are Kim and Terry Pegula?

The Pegulas still enjoy tremendous goodwill and political capital around these parts, despite the on field and on ice failings of their two flagship sports franchises the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres.

There is still a common consensus that had it not been for Terry Pegula stepping up to buy the Bills franchise in 2014, that the team would be gone by now. Other than the Bon Jovi bid which was the cruel target of a well orchestrated disinformation campaign, the teams future in Buffalo through the other ownership bids would most likely be over by now.

As for the Sabres? No doubt that another suitor would have come along to buy the team from the Golisano interests.

But both franchise ownership transfers are interesting fodder for speculation.

Sabres owners have always been known for their definitive presence around the Sabres front office, in the community, and at Sabres games. Founding owners Seymour Knox III and brother Northrup Knox rarely missed a home game, visibly ensconced in their lower gold seats at the Aud right between the two players benches.

During the Adelphia era owner John Rigas, diminutive in size but easily recognizable with that shock of white hair, could often be seen at games, walking the concourse of the arena, glad handing with fans, participating in photos, even passing out his cell phone number to patrons having any issues with the arena experience or food quality.

If anyone could be credited with "saving" the franchise it was Tom Golisano, who waved his checkbook at TV cameras while a lengthy bankruptcy saga unfolded at the foot of Main Street. Golisano was a folk hero of sort, wiping out the team's and arena's debts with one fell swoop, and then his rag tag franchise came out of a lockout with their best three season run in franchise history.

Golisano was also a regular at home games, until his love interest with former tennis star Monica Seles carried his interests in other directions. He sold the team in 2011 to the Pegulas, almost tripling his investment in 8 years.

With the Pegulas, that sort of face to face interaction has been scarce, and always well scripted. Since assuming presidency of the Sabres in 2017, Kim Pegula has yet to hold a news conference with the media. The two own an estate in East Aurora, but like most people in their net worth class, have legal residency in Florida, which requires that they not be physically on New York soil for more than 182 calendar days in a given year.

Kim Pegula is known to be a very hands on executive, but according to sources within the organization, runs the day to day operation from her location in Florida and by teleconference. Her husband Terry is known to be somewhat shy and introverted, not at all like his predecessors who were each larger than life personalities in their own rights.

Does this make them bad people? Not at all. Their passion for Buffalo, their contributions and investment in the community, their ownership of Buffalo's two major franchises, have made them the most recognizable, albeit controversial, amongst Buffalo's most noted citizens.

Pegula Sports and Entertainment is a vast and multi faceted organization which not only owns the Bills and Sabres, but two indoor lacrosse franchises, the sprawling HarborCenter and all the entities that comprise it, other food service establishments both here and in Florida, a record label, and other ancillary marketing and advertising entities. It is no small task for someone like a Kim Pegula, given her humble roots, to oversee such a sprawling empire.

Yet in the wake of this growing business lies many top tier names of on ice and off ice executives who are no longer with the team. Lindy Ruff, Darcy Regier, Ron Rolston, Pat Lafontaine, Tim Murray, Russ Brandon, Phil Housley, Ted Nolan, Ted Black, Mike Gilbert, Bruce Popko, John Koelmel, Erica Muhleman. Did we miss anybody?

Talk to most anyone working at PSE and they will tell you in no uncertain terms that their organization is a great one to work for and one of the happiest corporate cultures to be a part of.

See the dichotomy? What are we missing here?

What we are missing here is a face to face presence with the owners. We need Terry Pegula, and Kim Pegula, here in Buffalo. We need them now. We need them in that locker room, letting their well paid players and coaches know right from their lips that their performance is unacceptable, and that they will be shown the door in a hurry if things persist. We need them in the arena, to face their ticket buying public and assure them that help is on the way and better days are ahead. We need them at the podium at media press conferences, answering the tough questions and assuring the public that they are very much in charge.

Then we need the hiring and seating of a new team president. A guy or gal who understands the hockey department and the marketing department. An individual who will put an end to screeching DJs and appalling number retirement ceremonies (ref Dominik Hasek) and misspelled jerseys. Who can command respect around the league and bring to Buffalo the best in coaches and scouts and hockey geniuses.

The media are not the adversary here. Every one of those individuals who cover the team are fans too. They want this franchise to succeed. They want to write or televise happy stories. They want to keep working through a long playoff run into June. They want to hit the road with the team and bring the story of glory to the winning-starved fans here in Buffalo.

There is talk of a fan protest this weekend .The "#WeAreDuane" hashtag is a prominent one these days, honoring a fan caller to WGR radio who injected his own passion filled remarks about the failings of the team. Oceans of resale game tickets have now hit the \$6 floor on Stubhub once again.

Jack Eichel's stick slamming will not turn this around. Coach Ralph Krueger's peppy speeches following the games will not turn this around. General Manager Jason Botterill's report that the owners are "frustrated" will not turn this around.

We need the Pegulas, in Buffalo, stat.

TARO SEZ...

With "2000s night" scheduled for this coming Thursday, February 13 at KeyBank Center, will former owner Tom Golisano be in the building? If so, look for a tremendous ovation to the man that delivered the Sabres from bankruptcy and possible relocation when all seemed lost. Imagine if Golisano and his management team had spent to the cap and gone for broke in that magical 2005-06 season. Sigh.....

Ducks at Sabres preview

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

February 8, 2020

DUCKS (22-26-7) at SABRES (24-23-8)

3 p.m. ET; TVAS, MSG-B, PRIME, NHL.TV

The Game

The Anaheim Ducks will conclude a five-game road trip when they visit the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Sunday.

Anaheim, which is 2-0-2 on the road trip and 5-2-2 in its past nine games, could be without forward Ondrej Kase and defenseman Erik Gudbranson after each sustained an upper-body injury in a 5-4 overtime loss at the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday.

Buffalo is coming off a 3-2 win at the New York Rangers on Friday and is 2-1-1 in its past four games after losing its previous three.

Players to watch

Ducks forward Rickard Rakell has five points (one goal, four assists) in his past five games.

Sabres center Jack Eichel has six points (three goals, three assists) in his past six games and nine points (three goals, six assists) in nine games against Anaheim.

They said it

"I think we learned from our mistakes and that third period (against Toronto) is what we need to base our game off of. It's a template for us to use for a full 60 minutes. Our puck management was simple, and it led to turnovers on their part. It's the type of play we need to keep on showing." -- Ducks forward Max Jones

"We've seen him in and out of different opportunities this season, but to be able to play with Jack [Eichel] and Sam [Reinhart] the way he is and the way he's supplementing that line ... when you play with them, you have to understand you're going to go up against top lines in the League and you're going to play 20 minutes. It's a grind in both directions and I think Jimmy's really taken on that side of the responsibility with them, too, which we really like. His complete game is going to a new level." -- Sabres coach Ralph Krueger on Jimmy Vesey

Ducks projected lineup

Rickard Rakell -- Ryan Getzlaf -- Jakob Silfverberg
Max Jones -- Sam Steel -- Kiefer Sherwood
Nick Ritchie -- Adam Henrique -- Troy Terry
Nicolas Deslauriers -- Derek Grant -- Carter Rowney

Hampus Lindholm -- Michael Del Zotto
Cam Fowler -- Josh Manson
Jacob Larsson -- Korbinian Holzer

Ryan Miller
John Gibson

Scratched: Devin Shore

Injured: Erik Gudbranson (upper body), Ondrej Kase (upper body)

Sabres projected lineup

Jimmy Vesey -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart
Jeff Skinner -- Evan Rodrigues -- Conor Sheary
Marcus Johansson -- Curtis Lazar -- Michael Frolik
Zemgus Girgensons -- Johan Larsson -- Scott Wilson

Brandon Montour -- Rasmus Ristolainen
Rasmus Dahlin -- Colin Miller
Jake McCabe -- Henri Jokiharju

Carter Hutton
Jonas Johansson

Scratched: Zach Bogosian

Injured: Kyle Okposo (upper body), Linus Ullmark (lower body), Victor Olofsson (lower body), Tage Thompson (upper body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body)

Status report

Olofsson practiced with the Sabres on Saturday but is still at least a week away from returning. ... The Ducks did not practice Saturday.

Stat pack

Reinhart has eight points (one goal, seven assists) in his past five games against Anaheim. ... Skinner hasn't scored since Dec. 2 (17 games). ... The Ducks are 3-for-29 (10.3 percent) on the power play in their past 13 games.

Olofsson back at practice with Sabres, won't play against Ducks

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

February 8, 2020

BUFFALO -- Victor Olofsson returned to practice with the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday for the first time since sustaining a lower-body injury on Jan. 2, but the rookie forward is at least one week from returning to the lineup.

"It's a huge step. It's great to be back with the guys," Olofsson said. "I'm not quite there yet but it was nice to kind of get out there and get the feel of the game again. It's good to have a little bit of contact; a few guys around you, you have to kind of be aware where you have your teammates and opponents."

Olofsson has 35 points (16 goals, 19 assists) in 42 games, second in the NHL among rookies in goals behind Chicago Blackhawks forward Dominik Kubalik (21) and third in points behind Vancouver Canucks defenseman Quinn Hughes and Colorado Avalanche defenseman Cale Makar.

Despite Olofsson having missed 13 games, he is third on Buffalo in scoring behind forwards Jack Eichel (68 points; 31 goals, 37 assists) and Sam Reinhart (45 points; 20 goals, 25 assists).

"When you see a player back from an injury from this time period, then you know that we're nearing a reentry, but I would definitely say it will be a week or more still," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "It's the first step of reintegrating him into the game, but we're really pleased to see him back out there today."

The Sabres (24-23-8), who have gone 6-6-1 in Olofsson's absence, play the Anaheim Ducks at KeyBank Center on Sunday (3 p.m. ET; TVAS, MSG-B, PRIME, NHL.TV).

Olofsson had been skating for a few weeks before rejoining his teammates and said he feels "better and better every day." But neither he nor the Sabres plan to rush his return; he had an initial recovery time of 5-6 weeks and did not take line rushes Saturday.

"We'll take it kind of step by step," he said. "This was kind of the first step to just get out on the ice with the other guys. I'm going to continue working very hard here, especially on game days, put in some extra work, and we'll see how fast I can get back."

"Obviously, you want to be out there and help the team, but like I said, I've got to stay positive and I've got to stay calm and not really rush it either. That's when you can have those setbacks as well. Obviously, you get really eager to get back into it when you're watching it."

Forced into a spectator's role has allowed Olofsson to get a different perspective of the game.

"We're pleased with the way the injury's evolved and we also think it's a time where he's been able to do some reflection and some more mental growth," Krueger said. "He's been able to observe the game from the outside. We've been interacting with him quite a bit, and I think it's going to take him even to another level of maturity."

"Having a bit of a pause in a season which was truly rookie of the year NHL-caliber, we're confident he'll be able to get back to that level but even with a higher feeling of confidence, having looked at the game outside now."

Vesey has goal, assist in Sabres win against Rangers

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

February 7, 2020

NEW YORK -- Carter Hutton made 37 saves, and the Buffalo Sabres hung on for a 3-2 win against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Friday.

Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider scored for the Rangers in the final three minutes, but Hutton made one more save to preserve the win.

Jimmy Vesey had a goal and an assist, Zemus Girgensons and Sam Reinhart scored, and Jack Eichel had two assists for the Sabres (24-23-8), who had lost five of six but are nine points behind the Toronto Maple Leafs for third place in the Atlantic Division.

"I think we'd like to play a little tighter there when it's 3-0, but it is what it is," Hutton said. "At this point we've just got to win games and that's what we did tonight."

Alexandar Georgiev made 25 saves for the Rangers (26-23-4), who are 5-5-0 in their past 10 games. New York is nine points out of the second wild card into the playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

"I'm surprised about tonight," Rangers coach David Quinn said. "I'm going to be honest with you, I didn't see this coming. It's something that I didn't expect. At the end of the day our top players have to be way better than they were tonight."

Girgensons gave Buffalo a 1-0 lead at 10:26 of the first period, capitalizing seconds after a strong shift in the offensive zone that led to an ill-timed change by the Rangers after getting the puck out.

Colin Miller got the puck back in with the Rangers changing and found Girgensons on the right side. He cut through the right circle, deked to his forehand and beat Georgiev for his 10th goal of the season.

Girgensons joins Eichel (31), Reinhart (20), injured forward Victor Olofsson (16) and forward Jeff Skinner (11) with at least 10 goals for the Sabres.

"He primarily has a defensive role, he's penalty killing for us all the time, but to have him into the double-digit category is a positive," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "We need to get some more guys there in the next few weeks."

Reinhart made it 2-0 at 15:16 of the second period, with the Sabres capitalizing after a long shift in their defensive zone.

Vesey intercepted Ryan Lindgren's pass from inside the blue line and quickly sent the puck up to Eichel for a 2-on-1 rush with Reinhart. Eichel led Reinhart with a pass that sent him in alone and he scored his 20th goal of the season with a high backhand.

"[Vesey] makes a big play there," Eichel said. "We were in the zone for a while, we were gassed, but we noticed the odd-man rush. They were playing offense, they're obviously tired, and we were able to take advantage of it. It's a big goal in the hockey game for us."

Vesey made it 3-0 at 11:56 of the third period, when Eichel found him with a long stretch pass and he was able to use his backhand to beat Georgiev through his five-hole for his eighth goal of the season and second in as many games.

"He now plays with Jack and Sam instead of trying to give up his game to feed them," Krueger said. "I think more than anything he's really skating right now, adding a lot of speed to that line and profiting offensively, which is nice."

Zibanejad scored at 17:07 to cut it to 3-1, and Kreider scored on the power play at 18:20 for the 3-2 final.

"We just were out of sync," Zibanejad said. "We weren't close for the support. We didn't play fast like we want to. When things are going for us that's how we play. We didn't do close to enough today to be able to win the game."

They said it

"We didn't try to make it an offensive track meet; we tried to bottle up their speed. They're a fast team, they make a lot of plays, so I thought our neutral zone was good and our 'D' did a great job of breaking the puck out with [Hutton]. ... We had some opportunistic goals, and when they did have lengthy shifts in our end we were able to find ways to get the puck out. It's a gritty effort." -- Sabres forward Jack Eichel

"We as a group have to be more consistent. It's just not good enough night in, night out. We have good nights and we have OK nights, and tonight wasn't even an OK night. ... We played slow." -- Rangers coach David Quinn

Need to know

This was Buffalo's only road game in a 10-game stretch from Jan. 28-Feb. 16. ... The Sabres have won three of their past four road games after losing their previous six (0-5-1). ... Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin played 15:18 and had three blocked shots in his return after missing two games with an upper-body injury. ... The Sabres were playing the second of a back to back. They lost to the Detroit Red Wings 4-3 in a shootout on Thursday. ... Kreider has seven points (four goals, three assists) in a five-game point streak. ... Zibanejad has 10 points (four goals, six assists) in the past six games.

What's next

Sabres: Host the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday (3 p.m. ET; TVAS, MSG-B, PRIME, NHL.TV)

Rangers: Host the Los Angeles Kings on Sunday (6 p.m. ET; ESPN+, MSG+, FS-W, NHL.TV)

Sabres at Rangers preview

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

February 7, 2020

SABRES (23-23-8) at RANGERS (26-22-4)
7 p.m. ET; ESPN+, TVAS, MSG, MSG-B, NHL.TV

The Game

Rasmus Dahlin will return to the lineup for the Buffalo Sabres against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Friday.

Dahlin, a 19-year-old defenseman who was the No. 1 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, missed the past two games with an upper-body injury sustained in a 2-1 overtime win against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday. He skated with defenseman Zach Bogosian and forward Rasmus Asplund, two of Buffalo's likely scratches, Friday morning to make sure he felt 100 percent. Dahlin said afterward that he would be in the lineup. Buffalo will dress seven defensemen and 11 forwards.

The Sabres lost 4-3 in a shootout at home to the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday. They are 1-4-1 since Jan. 18 and are 10 points behind the Florida Panthers for third place in the Atlantic Division.

Alexandar Georgiev will make his first start in goal for the Rangers since Jan. 21.

The Rangers have won three of their past four games, and they're coming off a 5-3 victory against the Toronto Maple Leafs at home on Wednesday. They are nine points behind the Carolina Hurricanes, who hold the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

Players to watch

Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues has two goals in his past three games and four in his past seven.

Rangers forward Pavel Buchnevich has scored a goal in four of his past five games.

They said it

"It's pretty weird to say I feel confident when we're losing, but for myself I feel pretty confident. Of course I want to play a bigger role and I want to be a leader, but I'm just 19 so it takes time. But where I'm at now, I feel confident." -- Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin

"You look around the NHL in the last couple of years, a lot of the teams that make the playoffs have one really, really good run, it seems. Whether it's the beginning of the year or the end of the year, whatever. And we haven't had ours yet." -- Rangers forward Ryan Strome

Sabres projected lineup

Jimmy Vesey -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart
Conor Sheary -- Marcus Johansson -- Michael Frolik
Jeff Skinner -- Curtis Lazar -- Evan Rodrigues
Zemgus Girgensons -- Johan Larsson

Lawrence Pilut -- Rasmus Ristolainen
Rasmus Dahlin -- Brandon Montour
Jake McCabe -- Henri Jokiharju
Colin Miller

Carter Hutton
Jonas Johansson

Scratched: Zach Bogosian, Rasmus Asplund, Scott Wilson

Injured: Kyle Okposo (upper body), Linus Ullmark (lower body), Victor Olofsson (lower body), Tage Thompson (upper body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body)

Rangers projected lineup

Chris Kreider -- Mika Zibanejad -- Pavel Buchnevich
Artemi Panarin -- Ryan Strome -- Jesper Fast
Brendan Lemieux -- Filip Chytil -- Kaapo Kakko
Brett Howden -- Greg McKegg -- Phillip Di Giuseppe

Brady Skjei -- Jacob Trouba
Marc Staal -- Tony DeAngelo
Ryan Lindgren -- Adam Fox

Alexandar Georgiev
Henrik Lundqvist

Scratched: Micheal Haley, Igor Shesterkin, Brendan Smith

Injured: None

Status report

Other than Dahlin, none of the Sabres players expected to be in the lineup skated Friday morning. ... The Rangers will dress the same lineup they used in the win against Toronto.

Stat pack

This is Buffalo's only road game in a 10-game stretch from Jan. 28-Feb. 16. ... Kreider has three goals and three assists during a four-game point streak.

Olofsson back at Sabres practice on Saturday

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 8, 2020

On the same day he was named the NHL's Rookie of the Month for December, Buffalo Sabres forward Victor Olofsson found himself on the sidelines with a lower-body injury. The rookie lost an edge and fell into the end boards during the third period of Buffalo's overtime win against the Oilers on Jan. 3, and the next day, Olofsson was ruled out for approximately five to six weeks.

It's now been five weeks since the injury and Olofsson was back on the ice with his teammates for practice on Saturday at KeyBank Center.

"I've been trying to stay really positive and just look at it as an opportunity to get stronger and come back with a fresh start and fresh mind," he said. "I'm looking forward to it."

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger has been optimistic about Olofsson's rehab, but estimates that it still could be approximately another week before the forward is able to lace up again for a game. All parties involved are being cautious with the injury to avoid any setbacks. Getting Olofsson back on the ice with the team was just the next step in the process.

"We're pleased with the way the injury's evolved and we also think it's a time where he's been able to do some reflection and some more mental growth," Krueger said. "I always find these injury situations [as] opportunities for players if they use them properly. He's been able to observe the game from the outside.

"We've been interacting with him quite a bit and I think it's going to take him even to another level of maturity, having a bit of a pause in a season which was truly Rookie of the Year [in the] NHL-caliber. We're confident he'll be able to get back to that level, but even with a higher feeling of confidence, having looked at the game from the outside now."

His season totals of 16 goals and 35 points led NHL rookies at the time of his injury (the play on which he was injured ended with Sam Reinhart's game-tying goal, and Olofsson was credited with the secondary assist).

However, Colorado defenseman Cale Makar (November's Rookie of the Month), Vancouver forward Quinn Hughes, Montreal forward Nick Suzuki and Chicago forward Dominik Kubalik (January's Rookie of the Month), have been piling up points in the meantime to climb the rookie scoring leaderboard.

Makar and Hughes are tied for the League lead with 40 points each, while Kubalik is ahead of all other rookies with 21 goals.

"I haven't really been paying much attention to that," Olofsson, who was also named the NHL's Rookie of the Month for October, said. "I'm just looking forward to get back and I just want to play hockey right now."

The Sabres host the Anaheim Ducks tomorrow afternoon at KeyBank Center. Pregame coverage on MSG will begin at 2:30 p.m. with faceoff set for 3 p.m. Tickets are on sale now.

How they lined up

13 Jimmy Vesey - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 20 Scott Wilson
90 Marcus Johansson - 27 Curtis Lazar - 67 Michael Frolik
53 Jeff Skinner - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 43 Conor Sheary

Defensemen: 4 Zach Bogosian, 10 Henri Jokiharju, 19 Jake McCabe, 26 Rasmus Dahlin, 33 Colin Miller, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 62 Brandon Montour

40 Carter Hutton
34 Jonas Johansson

Olofsson worked in with Larsson's line during rushes.

Power Play Units

Eichel - Dahlin - Ristolainen - Reinhart - Johansson
Montour - Miller - Skinner - Sheary - Vesey

Over the last four games, Vesey has taken advantage of the opportunity to play with Eichel and Reinhart, the team's leading scorers. He scored what turned out to be the game-winning goal in last night's 3-2 road victory against the Rangers.

"We like Jimmy to be skating, we like him to be active, we like him to play confident," Krueger said. "He's really embraced that here the last few weeks.

"...When you play with them, you have to understand you're going to go up against top lines in the league, you're going to play 20 minutes, and it's a grind in both directions. I think Jimmy's really taken on that side of the responsibility with them too, which we really like. His complete game is going to a new level."

Amerks playing today

Rasmus Asplund and Lawrence Pilut were assigned to the Rochester Americans of the AHL this morning and they're expected to be in the lineup for the Amerks this afternoon when they play the Marlies.

"It's a good game in Toronto today and that opportunity to keep their feet moving, to keep active, and they'll be playing some big minutes today," Krueger said. "Then we'll re-evaluate later today, but right now, it's just about getting them a game."

Faceoff from Coca-Cola Coliseum is scheduled for 4 p.m. and will be carried live on The Sports Leader AM 950/95.7 FM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.

Sabres assign Pilut, Asplund to Rochester

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 8, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that forward Rasmus Asplund and defenseman Lawrence Pilut have been assigned to the Rochester Americans (AHL).

Pilut is tied for fifth in scoring in Rochester this season with 22 points (7+16) through 30 games. He's played in 10 NHL games this season.

Asplund has nine points (1+8) in 18 AHL games this year. With Buffalo, he has three points (1+2) in 29 games.

The Amerks saw their six-game winning streak snapped last night in a 5-2 loss to Syracuse. They're in Toronto today to take on the Marlies. It's a 4 p.m. faceoff and the game will be carried live on The Sports Leader AM 950/95.7 FM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.

Buffalo is coming off a 3-2 road win over the New York Rangers on Friday. They'll return to practice today and will host the Anaheim Ducks tomorrow at 3 p.m. at KeyBank Center. Tickets are on sale now.

Sabres turn in strong defensive outing in win over Rangers

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 7, 2020

NEW YORK - Sandwiched between homestands of five and four games, the Buffalo Sabres took to the road for a meeting with the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Friday.

They will look to take their defensive game back home with them.

The Sabres kept the high-scoring Rangers off the board for 57 minutes and fended off a late push to claim a 3-2 victory. Zemgus Girgensons, Sam Reinhart, and Jimmy Vesey scored goals. Jack Eichel tallied two assists and Carter Hutton made 37 saves.

"It was just an unbelievably strong defensive performance by the guys," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "They just really shut down the neutral zone. They're a team that creates a lot through the neutral zone and we were able to neutralize that and that was definitely the centerpiece of the victory today."

Krueger spoke prior to the game about the importance of puck management against the Rangers, who entered the night averaging 3.29 goals per game. He pointed to the Sabres' last visit to MSG, a 6-2 loss in October, as an example how the Rangers turn mistakes into transition offense.

More recently, the Sabres played a similarly high-octane offense when they hosted the Colorado Avalanche last Thursday, a 6-1 loss. They learned from both games and leaned on the details: short shifts, calculated risks, and careful play with the puck.

For all the speed in a Rangers forward group that includes players like Mika Zibanejad and Artemi Panarin, only on rare occasions did they get behind the Buffalo defense. When they did, Hutton was on his game.

"Compared to our last game in New York where we were a turnover machine - we really turned over a lot of pucks here early - we learned from that hard lesson," Krueger said. "They punished us last time and we were able to really take care of the puck well."

The patience paid off as the Sabres were able to strike when their own chances arose. Girgensons found a lane to the net off a shot fake by Colin Miller to open the scoring in the first. Reinhart caught a pass from Eichel at the end of a long shift and got a step on two defenders before burying a backhand in the second.

Vesey, who spent his first three seasons with the Rangers, was on the receiving end of a stretch pass from Eichel in the third. He shielded the puck from Rangers forward Brendan Lemieux and slid a backhand shot between the pads of former teammate Alexandar Georgiev to make it 3-0.

The goal, scored with 8:04 remaining, looked like added cushion at the time. After Zibanejad and Chris Kreider both scored for New York in the last three minutes, it stood as the game-winner. Vesey now has three points (2+1) and eight shots in his last two games alongside Eichel and Reinhart.

"We said it right off the hop that he now plays with Jack and Sam instead of trying to give up his game to feed them," Krueger said. "I think more than anything he's really skating right now and adding a lot of speed to that line and profiting from it offensively, which is nice. We just like the confidence that he's showing right now and he's definitely in the most consistent phase of the season for him."

The Sabres return to KeyBank Center against Anaheim on Sunday. They will be looking to right the ship for the home crowd after dropping four of five contests coming out of the All-Star break. Their road game in New York will be the blueprint.

"I just think we play a real simple game on the road and stick within a very small picture," Krueger said. "We're going shift by shift and you can see everybody's all-in. We're dealing even with some adversity like we did at the end of the game there really well. Everybody stays calm on the bench."

"Yeah, we like our road game. Now let's take it home."

Girgensons hits double digits

Something about MSG brings out the goal scorer in Zemgus Girgensons. His first-period marker was his fifth in eight games at The Garden since the start of the 2015-16 season.

Girgensons laughed that off as a coincidence, though he adhered to the idea that he feels comfortable coming to New York.

"Yeah, definitely," he said. "It's in the back of your mind that it feels easier to play when you know you play good in the building."

Girgensons now has 10 goals in 55 games this season. It's the first time he's reached double digits in the goal column since 2014-15, when he scored a career-high 15 times in 61 contests.

"Z's been really a solid performer for us here," Krueger said. "He primarily has a defensive role, he's penalty killing for us all the time, but to get him into the double-digit category is a positive. We need to get some more guys there in the next few weeks."

Lazar's role

Curtis Lazar's propensity for winning key faceoffs hasn't gone unnoticed in the Sabres' dressing room. After being called upon to take the opening draw in the team's last two overtimes, Lazar took a defensive-zone faceoff after an icing with 9.2 seconds remaining on Friday.

Lazar won the draw, allowing the Sabres to milk the rest of the time off the clock. Hutton brought up the moment unprompted during his postgame session with the media.

"Lazar is doing a heck of a job in the faceoff dot for us," Hutton said. "He keeps doing that, he won't be going back to Rochester anytime. He's really solidifying himself in the faceoff dot and that's been huge for our team."

Dahlin returns

Rasmus Dahlin returned from a two-game absence caused by an upper-body injury. He finished the contest with two shots in 15:18 and reassumed his place at the point on the first power-play unit.

Up next

The Sabres return home for four straight games at KeyBank Center, beginning with a matinee against the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday afternoon. Coverage on MSG begins at 2:30 p.m., or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 3.

At the Horn: Sabres 3 - Rangers 2

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 7, 2020

Led by 37 saves from Carter Hutton, the Buffalo Sabres held off the New York Rangers in a 3-2 victory at Madison Square Garden on Friday.

Zemgus Girgensons, Sam Reinhart and Jimmy Vesey scored for Buffalo to give them a three-goal lead before the Rangers made things interesting right at the end of regulation.

After Mika Zibanejad broke the shutout with 2:53 remaining in the third period, Chris Kreider scored on a 6-on-4 power play with 1:38 left. Buffalo was able to play sound defensively from there on out to earn the two points.

Reinhart's tally gave him 20 goals in 55 games this season. Reinhart's previous quickest season to the 20-goal mark was 2015-16, when he scored his 20th goal in his 69th game of the season. In his fifth full season, he has hit the 20-goal plateau four times (his career high is 25, set in 2017-18).

Girgensons' goal was his 10th of the season and Vesey now has goals in back-to-back games.

What happened

Girgensons made it 1-0 with his goal on Alexandar Georgiev with 9:34 remaining in the first period. Defenseman Colin Miller skated the puck in over the blue line and got the puck to Girgensons, who was able to cut in and score.

Reinhart roofed a backhand shot on a breakaway with 4:44 left in the second to make it 2-0.

Vesey scored against his former club with 8:04 left in regulation to make it 3-0. Vesey accepted a long stretch pass at the offensive blue line from Jack Eichel, who was standing at the top of his defensive faceoff circle. Vesey was then able to break in over the line, split the defense and score.

The Rangers then scored 1:15 apart in the dying minutes to make it a close game.

What it means

The Sabres are now 24-23-8 this season and 9-14-4 on the road.

Hutton had allowed five goals on 13 shots in his last appearance, which came on Tuesday against Colorado. In his two starts before that, he had stopped 49 of the 52 shots he faced (.942), making Friday's start a great bounce-back effort.

He is now 5-2-0 in his career against New York.

Rasmus Dahlin returned to the lineup after missing the past two games with an upper-body injury. He skated 15:18 with two shots on net.

Coming up

Buffalo will return to practice Saturday afternoon. Stay tuned to Sabres.com for full coverage.

Then the Sabres will host the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday at KeyBank Center. It's a 3 p.m. faceoff with the pregame show on MSG starting at 2:30. Check out a special Kids Day offer [here](#).

Dahlin back in lineup against Rangers

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 7, 2020

NEW YORK - Rasmus Dahlin will be back in the lineup for the Sabres when they visit the New York Rangers tonight at Madison Square Garden.

Dahlin has missed the past two games with an upper-body injury. He will step in for Lawrence Pilut, who will be scratched on defense along with Zach Bogosian.

Dahlin recorded nine points in his last 10 games prior to the injury. The 19-year-old has 74 points through his first 126 NHL games, trailing only Phil Housley (132), Ray Bourque (79), and Rick Hampton (76) for most points ever by a teenage defenseman.

"He's really important," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "I mean, that's the genius that you need in the National Hockey League today. It's a game of percentages and again today, it's a game where you need to expect a one-goal game in one way or another.

"To tip it in our favor, it's percentage points, and players like Dahlin can give you those percentage points whether it's on the power play or even 5-on-5 play. What we like about Rasmus is just how much better he has gotten through this season defensively. His game away from the puck is improving game by game so of course it's a nice addition.

The Sabres are looking to rebound from their 4-3 shootout loss to Detroit on Thursday, their fourth loss in five games since returning from the All-Star break. All five of those games were played at KeyBank Center, with four more at home due up after tonight.

Carter Hutton will start in net. He's 4-2-0 in his career against the Rangers with a .928 save percentage and a 2.19 goals-against average.

Scouting the Rangers

The name that immediately pops out in the New York lineup is that of winger Artemi Panarin, who has been every bit the player the Rangers hoped for when they signed him to a seven-year, \$81.5 million contract during the summer. Panarin ranks fifth in the NHL with 71 points.

Beyond Panarin, what sticks out is how much offense the Rangers have generated from their back end. Tony DeAngelo ranks fifth among league defensemen with 41 points and seventh with 12 goals. Jacob Trouba and Brady Skjei have seven goals each; Adam Fox has six.

The Rangers have received more goals (38) and points (142) from their defensemen than any other team. After falling in this building 6-2 back in October, Krueger said limiting turnovers will be crucial to limiting their opponents' attack.

"It's having better puck management to not feed into their really lethal speed and offense," Krueger said. "They really attack you as a group. We're looking forward to this challenge. We feel that we understand what we need to do better than when we were here last time, and now it's just about applying that and reacting to the disappointing loss last night with the right principles."

Alexandar Georgiev will start in net for the Rangers. He's 12-10-1 with a .909 save percentage this season.

Tune in

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. You can also listen to the game on WGR 550, with puck drop scheduled for 7.