



Buffalo Sabres

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Jack Eichel, Ralph Krueger hope NHL participates in 2022 Winter Olympics

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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Jack Eichel treasures every moment that he's represented the United States on the international stage.

The Buffalo Sabres' 23-year-old captain competed in the USA Hockey National Team Development Program, won a gold medal at the Under-18s, captained the country at the Under-20 world juniors and has competed in three world championships.

Eichel, however, has yet to realize his dream of competing in the Winter Olympics.

The National Hockey League remains reluctant to have its athletes compete in the 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing, despite receiving verbal assurances from the International Ice Hockey Federation that address some of the issues that prevented the league from participating in 2018.

During his news conference with reporters at the NHL All-Star Game in St. Louis, Commissioner Gary Bettman called the event "extraordinarily disruptive" because the league must shut down for two weeks every four years. While he and Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly have expressed pessimism, players around the league are hoping for a solution.

"I would love to," Eichel said. "Obviously, not going in 2018, but I take a lot of pride in playing for the United States and representing the country. It's the only stage I haven't represented the United States and USA Hockey on.

"It's a dream of mine. I'm sure it's a dream of anybody's who has a lot of pride in where they're from. I think it would be great."

According to the Associated Press, the NHL and its players' association attended a January meeting in New York where IIHF president Rene Fasel addressed a number of concerns, including players' travel and insurance costs.

While the verbal concessions appeared to be a significant step toward a solution, the NHL's scheduling concerns remain.

The NHL participated in five consecutive Olympic Games until 2018, when owners opposed having their players go to PyeongChang because of the 17-day break and injury risk. An average of 141 players attended the previous events. John Tavares, Aleksander Barkov and Henrik Zetterberg suffered significant injuries at the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee also informed the NHL it would no longer pay for the league's participation costs associated with travel, insurance and accommodations for the players and their guests.

Though Fasel insisted the IIHF would cover those costs in 2018, Bettman balked at the idea because that could take funds away from important grassroots programs.

The Beijing Olympics present the league with an opportunity to grow the game's popularity in China.

Last April, the NHL opened a satellite office in Beijing as it works to expand its presence in the country, and the league held two preseason games in the country over each of the previous two seasons. Washington Capitals winger Alex Ovechkin was dispatched to the country in August to serve as an ambassador for the league.

"I don't think there's a better opportunity to market this game internationally than that stage," Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe, the team's NHLPA representative, said. "It's obviously a tough thing. I do understand where the owners are coming from, not wanting your players going over there midseason, but we always talk about growing the game.

"I do get it. I don't want Jack going over there getting hurt, so for our team, you are selfish that you don't want your best players going over there and possibly having an injury. But on a global scale – and I'm sure Jack would say this – if you can play in the Olympics, you're going to play in the Olympics. It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing. ... I am definitely rooting for us to go back over there because it's going to help grow our game and you want to see a best-on-best tournament."

The NHL does not plan to schedule preseason games in China next season because of the novel coronavirus outbreak. Additionally, the health crisis caused the IIHF to cancel six world championship tournaments scheduled for this month and April.

Its top annual events – the men's world championship scheduled for May in Switzerland and women's world championship in Canada next month – have not been affected.

Switzerland's top professional league has postponed its playoffs after its final regular-season qualifying rounds were held in empty arenas. It's likely too soon for the coronavirus outbreak to have an impact on the NHL's potential participation at the 2022 Winter Olympics.

Michael Frolik was only 10 years old when the NHL first participated in the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, yet the Sabres winger recently recalled in vivid detail how 70,000 people gathered in Prague's Old Town Square to watch former Sabres goalie Dominik Hasek lead the Czech Republic to a gold medal.

Frolik, who later earned the nickname "Baby Jagr" because he grew up in the same Czech town as Jaromir Jagr, idolized players and was inspired by their magical run that included a championship win over Russia.

Frolik represented the Czech Republic at the Sochi Olympics in 2014, when they lost in the quarterfinals.

"To be able to be there with all the athletes in the same area, you can meet them, it was a very cool experience," said Frolik, now 32. "Growing up, I was obviously watching Nagano when we won. It was something special. It's a big deal back home. For me, I would definitely like to play in that tournament. Hopefully they figure out a way to do that."

Frolik, though, acknowledged the challenges that come with an extended NHL break, even for those who compete in the Olympic Games.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger brings a different perspective. He participated in four Olympic Games, three as coach of Switzerland and one as a consultant for Canada in Sochi. Success at those tournaments helped grow the game at a grassroots level in Switzerland, which did not have a player in the NHL when Krueger became its coach in 1997.

Krueger said it is important to have the world's best players at the event, despite the obstacles.

"First and foremost, anything that develops the game internationally, for me, is a win," Krueger said. "The game of hockey has come so far in the last decade that it would be nice to show the world. Because you get so many eyes on you that you'll never get outside of the Olympic Games. ... It's amazing to be a part of that and to see what's possible through the vehicle of sports and how people can work together no matter backgrounds and all of that enriches and deepens the way a player approaches."

"Would I love to see our top players there? Of course, because I know it's a great experience. But I know there are business decisions to be made, too, and it's going to fall with everything being weighed. I'm weighing more the sports and the emotional side of it, where I see nothing but wins."

Dave Schofield's picture-perfect shot captured iconic moment in Sabres history

By Erik Brady

The Buffalo News

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Dave Schofield remembers the precise moment. Photographers always do.

He was standing where the Buffalo Sabres would come out of their locker room at the Aud in the early 1970s when he spotted a small boy in a Sabres uniform standing inside the players' gate. Just then, Sabres captain Gerry Meehan emerged from the locker room and walked over to the boy. Meehan said a quick hello, then headed off to the ice.

"I shot two frames," Schofield says, "and right away I thought I had something."

Yes, he did. The Sabres now are in the midst of their 50th season, and Schofield's photo remains among the most famous in franchise history.

"That delights me," he says, "but always surprises me."

Schofield, who's 72, couldn't be sure he had something until the next day. He worked the game that night for the Sabres and then drove to the darkroom at Canisius College to develop the negatives.

"I left them to dry and went home. The next day I came back to do the contact sheets. I looked at what I had and thought, 'Hey, that's pretty cool. I like that.' "

His photograph resonates across half a century because it captures something universal about the mythic pull of heroes.

The boy looks wonderingly up. The captain looks benevolently down. And a security officer – the late Art Starks as a one-man Greek chorus, standing in for all of us – smiles serenely behind them.

Coke would later sell pop with a similar scenario. Mean Joe Greene sees a kid in the tunnel on the way to the Pittsburgh Steelers' locker room. "Hey, kid ... catch," Greene says as he tosses the kid his jersey. The ad remains a classic 40 years later.

People often tell Schofield his photo reminds them of that commercial.

"I've heard it a million times," he says, laughing. "Maybe I'm owed royalties."

The Meehan photo was taken during the 1972-73 season and appears in the Sabres' 1973-74 media guide. Schofield was in his first full season shooting freelance photos for the Sabres during that 1972-73 season. He had started shooting games a year earlier, when he was still a student at Canisius College. And how a college kid ended up shooting Sabres games is a feel-good story from an era when the Braves and Sabres were expansion babies.

Schofield played soccer at Canisius and injured his knee. The newborn Braves were practicing at the Koessler Athletic Center, and their trainer, Ray Melchiorre, saw Schofield limping. Melchiorre invited him downtown for treatment. When Schofield got to the Aud, he took his Nikon FTn inside with him because he didn't want to leave a new camera in his car.

By the time Schofield's treatment was done, he realized the Sabres were playing. So he stopped to watch from a perch behind the red seats and decided to shoot the three rolls of film he had in his bag. The next day, he dropped them off for Paul Wieland, the Sabres' director of public relations, with a note asking if he would critique the photos.

Wieland called back a few days later. He wanted to buy five photos at \$20 a pop, and he invited Schofield to work with Bob Shaver, the legendary photographer, who also shot for the Sabres.

"I could not have asked for anything in the world better than that," Schofield says. "Bob Shaver is the best there ever was, and he took me under his wing."

The Hockey Hall of Fame holds 100,000 of Shaver's photos in its collection. Schofield had one hanging in the Hall for a while. It is of the Dryden brothers trading sticks in the handshake line after Ken Dryden's Montreal Canadiens eliminated Dave Dryden's Sabres in the 1973 Stanley Cup playoffs.

Schofield credits Wieland with opening a door to his career. Wieland, who went on to teach journalism at St. Bonaventure, is known for a generous spirit and for giving young people a start in the sports biz.

"Look, I'm no hero here," Wieland says. "I'm a visual guy. I understand good composition. And I could see right away that Dave had the eye."

As it happens, Schofield also had an eye for a student at D'Youville College. He met Pat – now his wife of 48 years – at the Armory tavern on the day the Miracle Mets won the 1969 World Series. They moved in the mid-1970s to the Jersey Shore, where he taught English and coached soccer at St. Rose High School in Belmar, while still shooting photos on the side.

In the mid-1980s, Schofield went into photography full time and was team photographer for a pair of minor-league ballclubs, the Lakewood BlueClaws and the Trenton Thunder, in New Jersey, until he retired in 2016. It was in Lakewood that he snapped a photo of a small girl staring up into the beak of the San Diego Chicken, a shot that offers echoes of the one he took at the Aud all those years earlier.

Schofield was a frequent visitor to Buffalo over the decades as the color commentator on radio broadcasts of Canisius men's basketball games. The drive to Buffalo was 400 miles – and 10 miles to conference rival Monmouth – and he figures he pounded two Toyotas and a pair of Hondas into submission while he patrolled the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference for 25 years.

When Canisius earned an NCAA Tournament bid by winning the conference tourney in 1996, Schofield called the game on radio and then took a shot of Mickey Frazier sitting triumphantly on the rim. It remains a signature photo of the John Beilein era.

On Saturday, Canisius honored Schofield and his brother, Jim, who lives in Syracuse and rarely misses Canisius men's basketball games in Buffalo. The brothers were dual recipients of the Rev. Paul J. Dugan Award, which is given to individuals who aren't eligible for the college's Sports Hall of Fame, but whose efforts have significantly benefited Canisius athletics.

"Doesn't qualify for the Sports Hall of Fame – that's me in a nutshell," Schofield says.

Ah, but he does qualify for the Irish American Baseball Hall of Fame, which is housed in Foley's Pub in midtown Manhattan, across the street from the Empire State Building. He is that hall's official photographer – and in 2014 was inducted as a member of the class that included David Cone, who once pitched a perfect game for the New York Yankees.

Dave Schofield once snapped a perfect photo. And chances are it will still be remembered 50 years from now, when the Sabres celebrate their centennial season.

Who is this little Sabres fan? Is it you?

By Erik Brady
The Buffalo News
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Who is the little boy in this photo?

Dave Schofield took this picture five decades ago in the moments before the boy would have a chance encounter with Sabres captain Gerry Meehan.

The Meehan photo is among the most famous in Sabres history. This one has never been published before now. Schofield offers it here in hopes maybe someone will recognize the boy, who probably would be in his early 50s now.

"I'd like to meet him," Schofield says. "I've been looking at him for, what, almost 50 years now. It's almost like he's a member of the family."

John Boutet, site and exhibit chair for the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame, thought he'd found the boy a few years ago. Boutet displayed the Meehan photo in an exhibit on the history of Memorial Auditorium that he put on at Coca-Cola Field in 2017. He included a note under the photo asking if anyone could identify the boy.

That's when Boutet overheard a man telling some of his friends that he was the boy. Doug Thurlow had good reason to think it was him. His late grandfather worked security for the NHL in Buffalo, which would explain how this kid got inside the gate where the Sabres would go to and from the ice at the Aud.

But Thurlow was born in 1971. The math didn't quite add up: The Meehan photo was taken during the 1972-73 season, and Schofield thinks it was taken early in that season. The boy looks older than that, so we sent Thurlow this previously unpublished photo because it shows the boy's face more clearly than does the famous photo. Thurlow showed this photo to his parents – and they told him it wasn't him.

"For so many years, I always thought it was me," Thurlow says. "I have so many great memories of being in the locker room and meeting all the players. I hope they do find the kid in the photo. I feel like we have a lot in common."

So who is the boy looking up at Gerry Meehan? Does he still live in Western New York? Is he still a Sabres fan? Is it you?

If you know who it is, please contact The Buffalo News at sports@buffnews.com. Schofield has an 18-by-12 print that he'd like to give the kid who isn't a kid anymore.

"People ask me all the time what's my favorite photo I've ever taken," Schofield says. "And I always say, 'I don't know, but this – this one right here – is definitely one of them.' "

The NHL salary cap may change a lot for next season

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

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(WGR 550) - NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly spoke at the NHL general manager's meeting in Florida on Wednesday. The biggest news was where the salary cap may be going. Daly said next year's cap is projected to be between \$84 million and \$88.2 million. That could be quite an increase from this year's \$81.5 million. Before we know exactly what the number will be, the NHL needs to negotiate it with the NHLPA.

Daly also told reporters in attendance that they are talking to the players about multi-year salary cap numbers which would help for team planning.

In other news from Florida the NHL GM's voted to change the offsides rule. A player would be ruled legal if he has one skate vertical and above the blue line.

In order for this to become an official rule change, it must be approved by the NHL Competition Committee and the NHL's board of governors.

The Sabres got back to Buffalo late on Wednesday morning so Ralph Krueger canceled practice. Buffalo will host Pittsburgh on Thursday.

How the performances of Sabres defensemen have changed under Ralph Krueger

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

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When we looked at the Sabres before the season started, the defense was a major concern. Even with an overload of defensemen, how they would handle things in another new system under another new coach was a worry. Poor defensive play and stacked up chances against were an earmark of the Sabres the past few seasons.

If there is one area where this year's team has done particularly well at 5-on-5, it is in limiting opportunities against. Via NaturalStatTrick.com, the Sabres are ninth in the NHL in high-danger chances against. The other side of that, however, is that they've allowed 80 high-danger goals against, which ties them with Vegas for 20th place. Their high-danger save percentage is fifth-worst in the NHL. The defense has mostly done its job, while goaltending has not. We saw plenty of that during their 0-4-0 disaster of a four-game road trip that ended with a 3-1 loss in Winnipeg Tuesday.

It may seem hard to believe at times, but the defense has been better, particularly compared to last season under Phil Housley.

Let's take a look at shot attempts-for (CorsiFor percentage), expected goals-for percentage (xGF%), high-danger chances against (HDCA) and high-danger goals against (HDGA) per 60 minutes. I'm using these because the numbers will paint a picture of the individual play in their own end and how it helps contribute (or doesn't) to team success. It also (mostly) helps alleviate average time on-ice disparities, although Lawrence Pilut's body of work this season hasn't been much.

I know advanced stats may turn you some of you off and make you want to scream "Watch the game, dork!" at me. Trust me, I'm watching the games same as you are, but taking a deeper look at what makes a team function (or malfunction) is part of the forensics needed to see what the hell is going on here. If you're unfamiliar, our Charlie O'Connor has an excellent primer to check out.

Since I'm looking at who has (or hasn't) improved, we'll stick to the players who have been here both seasons. That means you won't see Henri Jokiharju and Colin Miller on here or Nathan Beaulieu. Zach Bogosian and Marco Scandella will be part of this even though they've since moved on.

Shots

Shot attempts while the player on ice helps show who is staying busy controlling the puck in their end. After all, the best way to play defense is make sure the opponent doesn't have it. If your team is firing more shots at the opponent when you're out there, that would indicate you're helping do your part to make it happen. One thing that definitely happened under Phil Housley was the team shot the puck more. The CF% shows that.

Sabres CorsiFor Percentage

Player	'18-19 CF%	'19-20 CF%
Rasmus Ristolainen	47.9	45.9
Rasmus Dahlin	51.9	50.4
Jake McCabe	48.9	50.6
Brandon Montour	54.5	47.6
Lawrence Pilut	53.2	42.1
Zach Bogosian	48.9	45.8
Marco Scandella	46.4	52.9

What sticks out hardest is how much Pilut and Brandon Montour have struggled to be on the right side of the shot attempt counter. Pilut has been tasked with more defensive zone starts and Montour has played a lot of games on the left-hand side (he's a righty shot). It would be distressing about Ristolainen's numbers except he's often counted upon to help defend leads late. Still, a two percent drop is alarming.

Even though he's often a fan pariah, McCabe has improved a bit on the shot differential, although part of that is thanks to Jokiharju's arrival. That's also a reason for Scandella's improvement year to year, although he's continued on that road with Montreal and now St. Louis. We all know how tough the beginning of the season was

for Dahlin, but the fact he's over 50 percent and earning more ice time as the season goes says whatever was causing him to struggle early is for the most part gone.

Expected goals

I get that this is a stat that seems philosophical in nature. "If a goal is expected, why doesn't it go in, genius," you might ask. Goalies still play a part, as does dumb and bad luck, but basically it's a measure of the quality of chances. The better the chances – which in this case also factor in shot quality and distance to the net – the higher the expectation of a goal.

Sabres Expected Goals For Percentage

Player	'18-19 XGF%	'19-20 XGF%
Rasmus Ristolainen	48.1	45.3
Rasmus Dahlin	51.1	46.6
Jake McCabe	48.5	50.3
Brandon Montour	52.6	45.7
Lawrence Pilut	52.5	39.9
Zach Bogosian	47.6	42.8
Marco Scandella	41.3	53.6

Much like with shots, expected goals results have mostly been a bit worse off. Dahlin and Pilut, for example, are on ice for better opportunities against them compared to the shot attempts. The Sabres haven't created a lot of offense this season as a whole and that bears out in how the defense starts things up. Once again, it's McCabe standing out as one of the guys who has improved in areas under Krueger. That's interesting because Housley leaned on McCabe due to their history dating back to the World Junior Championships.

High danger chances and goals

Goaltending plays a major part in this in respect to goals, but the Sabres defense under Housley always seemed to be under fire and often in disarray thanks to the man-to-man and zone hybrid Housley employed. Krueger's concepts have calmed things down:

Sabres HD Chances Against per 60 minutes

Player	'18-19 HDCA/60	'19-20 HDCA/60
Rasmus Ristolainen	11.2	10.6
Rasmus Dahlin	10.5	10.6
Jake McCabe	10.5	9.4
Brandon Montour	10.0	10.6
Lawrence Pilut	8.64	7.4
Zach Bogosian	11.3	10.4
Marco Scandella	12.4	9.1

The high-danger chances are down for nearly every returning player. We've gotten a big sample of Montour's work this season but it's a good question whether playing off his strong side has had more of an effect on that. Pilut's numbers are affected by the fewer games and minutes so take those with the proper grain of salt. It's in this area where McCabe and Scandella stand out. When they've been on the ice, chances in the high-danger areas have been fewer. But when it comes to goals, things get funky:

Sabres HD Goals-Against per 60 minutes

Player	'18-19 HDGA/60	'19-20 HDGA/60
Rasmus Ristolainen	1.56	1.33
Rasmus Dahlin	1.32	1.35
Jake McCabe	1.49	1.62
Brandon Montour	1.61	1.32
Lawrence Pilut	1.35	0.71
Zach Bogosian	1.50	1.56
Marco Scandella	1.58	1.50

Everyone but Dahlin and Pilut had issues keeping the goals down per-60 last season, but this year it's McCabe standing out poorly. Comparing that with the few chances allowed is a fascinating difference and probably a good

reason why fans get the knives out for him quickly. Same could've been said for Scandella this season as well, but he's gone and likely forgotten.

How Ristolainen's numbers have improved in regards to goals against helps lean into the belief he's tough to deal with down low. It'd be curious to see how these numbers would shake out differently if the goaltending in these situations hasn't been so poor, but I digress.

Summary

It's wild to see how different things are compared to last year and there are so many asterisks (read: excuses) to be thrown around. Players learning yet another new system, injuries, lack of consistent pairings, players not playing their strong side, etc. But if there's a strong take from this it's that the defense is improving in the actual defense part of the job. The sacrifices to the offense are clear, but that becomes an argument over whether that's because of the lack of scoring talent up front or not.

The Sabres' season motto has been to "play connected" and when they are connected things click well. But once something is disjointed...well, we've seen plenty of that. The defensemen you can work with do stick out and the ones that struggle do as well. Addressing those areas will be vital in the offseason.

(Statistics courtesy of NaturalStatTrick.com)

Former Sabres Conor Sheary, Evan Rodrigues fitting in with Penguins

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

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BUFFALO – In a little less than two seasons with the Sabres, Conor Sheary rarely played beside top center Jack Eichel. Instead, the winger often shuffled between the second and third lines as he struggled to score goals.

But in the four games since the Sabres traded him back to the Pittsburgh Penguins with forward Evan Rodrigues on Feb. 24, Sheary has received a plum assignment, skating beside superstar Sidney Crosby.

Sheary has gone from skating short minutes with the Sabres to playing beside perhaps the greatest center of his generation.

Meanwhile, Rodrigues, who struggled to stay in Buffalo's lineup and wanted to be traded, has earned regular duty on the Penguins' fourth line, playing in all three spots.

Joining the Penguins has offered Sheary, 27, and Rodrigues, 26, fresh opportunities.

Not only have they quickly carved out roles, they're playing for a legitimate Stanley Cup contender. While the Penguins lost six straight games before Tuesday's 7-3 win over the Ottawa Senators, they're still in third place in the Metropolitan Division.

Right now, the Sabres, who host the Penguins on Thursday at KeyBank Center, are 12 points out of third place in the Atlantic Division and the final wild card spot. They've fallen apart since the trade they dished Sheary and Rodrigues in exchange for winger Dominik Kahun.

Few expected the Sabres would roar back and snare the final playoff spot. But considering how long they've ranked among the NHL's bottom-feeders, creeping within six points before the trade deadline was significant.

They hadn't played meaningful late-season games in eight years.

Well, barely a week later, the Sabres are finished. They quickly imploded, losing all four games on their road trip. The excitement they generated before the deadline has vanished.

"Tough road trip, real tough," Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe told reporters following Tuesday's 3-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets.

Sixteen games are left this season. The Sabres are playing for pride again.

"We are a group in growth, we are a group with an amazing fightback," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Tuesday. "These guys just don't quit, which I'm pleased about."

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said: "Every time you put the jersey on, you represent the organization and the city and the fans. So you at least got to play for them."

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Eichel, who has been battling an undisclosed injury, clearly isn't himself. The captain has a season-long five-game point drought and compiled an ugly minus-7 rating on the road trip.

In Tuesday's loss, Eichel registered zero shots on goal for only the third time this season.

The slick center, of course, is the Sabres' catalyst. Not surprisingly, his linemates, Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart, also went pointless during the trip.

In the second period Tuesday, Krueger moved newcomer Wayne Simmonds to Reinhart's spot at right wing on the top line. Reinhart replaced Simmonds beside center Marcus Johansson and Jeff Skinner.

"We got some energy out of the line changes," Krueger said. "There was a push there. Everybody seemed to be skating better and the freshness just brought energy into the group."

Notes: The Sabres had Wednesday off. ... Sheary to Pittsburgh reporters Wednesday on playing the Sabres so soon following the trade: "It'll be good to get it out of the way." Sheary, who scored Tuesday, spent some of his first stint with the Penguins playing with Crosby. ... Sabres winger Michael Frolik sat out the last three games of the road trip as a healthy scratch.