



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*January 15, 2021*

## **Buffalo plays Washington in division showdown**

Associated Press

January 15, 2021

Washington Capitals (1-0-0, third in the East Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (0-1-0, sixth in the East Division)

Buffalo, New York; Friday, 7 p.m. EST

**BOTTOM LINE:** East Division foes Buffalo and Washington hit the ice.

Buffalo finished 10-12-2 in division action and 20-11-4 at home in the 2019-20 season. The Sabres scored 193 total goals last season while collecting 315 assists.

Washington finished 41-20-8 overall and 11-12-2 in division play during the 2019-20 season. The Capitals averaged 4.3 penalties and 10.1 penalty minutes per game.

The teams square off for the second game in a row.

**INJURIES:** Sabres: None listed.

Capitals: Michal Kempny: out (lower body).

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## **Oshie has 3 points, Capitals open with 6-4 win at Buffalo**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

January 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Pete Laviolette was more pleased for his players — young and old — for kicking off the season on the right foot than he was getting a win in his debut as Washington's coach.

"It is a lot more than just me," Laviolette said after earning his 638th career win and first in Washington, a 6-4 season-opening victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night.

"There is a lot more than just me that got changed over and and a lot of new pieces in there, and I think it is really important for our team," he added. "It's the start of the season or the start of a new direction and I think guys can really enjoy that."

T.J. Oshie had a goal and two assists in a game the Capitals never trailed but were in jeopardy of squandering a 4-1 lead before Jakub Vrana scored 46 seconds into the third period.

Vrana stripped Eric Staal of the puck in front of Buffalo's net and beat Carter Hutton on the glove side with a goal that came 26 seconds after Jake McCabe cut Buffalo's deficit to 4-3 by roofing a shot from the right point.

"It could happen to anyone and it just ended up on my stick," Vrana said of Staal's turnover. "I felt like it gave us a little energy for the rest of the game."

The Capitals are coming off an unsettling offseason in which Todd Reirden was fired after the Metropolitan Division-winning team was eliminated in five games by the New York Islanders in the first round of the playoffs. It marked Washington's second first-round exit in two years under Reirden.

The Capitals hired Laviolette, who won a Stanley Cup in 2006 with Carolina and is coaching his fifth team. He ranks second in career wins among American-born NHL coaches, behind the Columbus Blue Jackets' John Tortorella (655).

"I think it was huge," defenseman John Carlson said of winning the opener under Laviolette. "When we were playing bad, it was almost like we were resorting back to plays from the past and maybe trying to do too much. I think since he's been here, we've simplified a lot."

John Carlson and Nicklas Backstrom had a goal and assist each and Brenden Dillon also scored for the Capitals. Alex Ovechkin set up the first two goals.

Ilya Samsonov stopped 22 shots in his first game as the Capitals' starter following Braden Holtby's offseason departure. Samsonov snapped an 0-4-1 skid to win his first game since a 25-save outing in a 5-3 victory at Ottawa on Jan. 31.

Sabres high-profile offseason free-agent addition Taylor Hall scored Buffalo's first goal and added an assist. McCabe and Victor Olofsson also had a goal and assist while captain Jack Eichel set up two goals.

Staal did not return after being struck in the head by Washington's Nic Dowd midway through the third period. Dowd was issued a two-minute minor penalty. Coach Ralph Krueger said Staal is day to day.

Buffalo dropped to 1-6-1 in its past eight season-opening games, and came out flat for two periods against Washington.

"It seemed like we were playing catchup all night, which is a tough way to play against any team," Hall said.

"We were behind the eight-ball kind of from the start of the game and we weren't able to get out in front of things," he added. "I think you take solace in the fact that we were able to come back and make it close."

Hutton finished with 22 saves.

The teams closed last regular season with Buffalo beating Washington in a 3-2 shootout on March 9, three days before the NHL paused play because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Sabres finished less than a winning percentage point shy of advancing to the expanded playoffs, stretching their postseason drought to nine years, one short of the NHL's longest streak.

#### MILESTONES

Capitals: Ovechkin upped his career total to 1,280 points, moving one behind former Red Wings star Alex Delvecchio for 35th on the NHL list. Former Bruins captain Zdeno Chara also made his debut with Washington after signing a one-year contract last month.

Sabres: Center Dylan Cozens, the team's 2019 rookie first-round pick, assisted on Rieder's goal.

#### LINEUP INTRODUCTION

With no fans allowed, the Sabres filmed local front-line coronavirus pandemic workers to introduce the team's opening-night lineup over the video scoreboard.

#### SCRATCHES

Capitals: Offseason additions RW Daniel Sprong and D Trevor van Riemsdyk were healthy scratches.

Sabres: RW Kyle Okposo (lower body) and D Matt Irwin were scratched.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

The teams meet again in Buffalo on Friday night.

## **Eric Staal's status uncertain after taking elbow to the jaw in Sabres' loss**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 14, 2021

A season-opening loss was likely the least of coach Ralph Krueger's concerns late Thursday night.

Amid the 6-4 defeat inside KeyBank Center, the Sabres lost center Eric Staal to a hit to the head in the third period. Staal, a 36-year-old former Stanley Cup champion, did not return to the game after taking an elbow from Washington Capitals forward Nic Dowd with 9:56 remaining.

Dowd received only a two-minute penalty, despite the potential severity of the hit. Staal was carrying the puck through the neutral zone and released a backhanded pass to the left boards when Dowd's elbow connected with Staal's jaw.

Krueger told reporters following the game Staal is day to day and will be evaluated Friday morning.

"Quite surprised that a hit to the head gets two minutes, but it is what it is and we're disappointed with that finish stretch there for sure," said Krueger.

Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe, who was near Staal when the hit occurred, called the hit "pretty dirty." Staal, who was acquired from Minnesota this offseason in exchange for Marcus Johansson, centered the Sabres' second forward line Thursday against Washington and played on the second power-play unit.

"Yeah, that's a tough hit," said Sabres winger Taylor Hall. "He's not even a really dangerous player at that point when he has the puck. So, for the guy to go after him and make contact with his jaw like that, it's not something that you want to see. Hopefully he's OK. I haven't been able to check on him yet. But he's a big part of our team not only on the ice but off the ice. He's been around, he's played over 1,000 games. He's made a huge impact in this league and on our team already, so hopefully he's OK."

Across 18 shifts Thursday, Staal recorded one shot on goal and was on the ice for two goals against, including one in which he turned the puck over deep in his own zone.

Staal is the most accomplished player on the Sabres' roster. Since being drafted second overall by Carolina in 2003, Staal has played 1,241 regular-season games. He has totaled 436 goals and 585 assists. He has also appeared in 62 playoff games and won a Stanley Cup in Carolina with Sabres General Manager Kevyn Adams in 2006.

With Staal out in the third period Thursday, Cody Eakin moved to the second line and Dylan Cozens made an appearance at center. The Sabres host the Capitals again Friday night in Buffalo.

## **Sabres can't overcome 'very disappointing start,' drop season opener to Capitals**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 14, 2021

The shift late in the second period Thursday night was everything Ralph Krueger wanted to see from the Buffalo Sabres following a 10-month break.

Cody Eakin, a playoff-hardened center signed in October, and Dylan Cozens, the top prospect who starred at the IIHF World Junior Championship for Canada, battled with Washington Capitals defenders to pry away a loose puck in the offensive zone.

Tobias Rieder, the veteran winger added this offseason to fix the penalty kill, out-muscled Norris Trophy-caliber defenseman John Carlson to gather the puck in the crease, carried it around the back of the net and scored on a wraparound to cut the deficit to two goals. The tenacity and attention to detail came far too late for the Sabres, though.

A sluggish start to the team's first game in Buffalo since last March, and an ugly turnover early in the third period, resulted in a 6-4 loss to the Washington Capitals to open this 56-game season amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The passing wasn't crisp. Defensemen struggled to prevent the Capitals' dynamic forwards from driving to the net. Even the Sabres' stars, most notably Jack Eichel, appeared out of sorts in the early moments. But Krueger and his players saw glimpses of how this team needs to play to have success in the rugged East Division.

"We had a very disappointing start," Krueger said. "They came with a lot of speed. We had trouble adapting after the break. ... They did a very good job of getting on us and taking away space and time and the pressure. I thought it took us at least a period and a bit to finally see our legs coming."

Black officer hailed as hero for protecting Capitol during siege remains silent since attack

There were positives to cull from what could have been a one-sided game. Taylor Hall, the former Hart Trophy winner who signed a one-year contract to join forces with Eichel in Buffalo, scored his first goal as a Sabre on a power-play redirect to tie the score 1-1 in the first period.

Cozens, a first-round draft pick in 2019, had what Krueger called a "very good" first game. And following a disjointed start to the game, Eichel found his legs and rediscovered his timing. The 24-year-old captain had two assists, including a cross-ice pass that Jake McCabe one-timed from the point for a goal 20 seconds into the third period, cutting the deficit to 4-3.

The Sabres' power play, which was among the worst in the league from last December to the end of the 2019-20 season, showed it could be a significant strength. In addition to Hall's goal, the second unit created some promising chances.

The penalty kill, which ranked 30th in the NHL last season, also rebounded following an ugly start. After allowing a goal on a rebound in the first period, the Sabres' shorthanded unit had an impressive penalty kill with Brandon Montour, Curtis Lazar and Riley Sheahan applying pressure on the Capitals.

With an extra attacker on the ice, Victor Olofsson scored on a shot from below the right faceoff dot to make it 5-4 at 18:06 into the third period. Olofsson, a 20-goal scorer as a rookie, also assisted on Hall's goal and had a sound two-way game. The Capitals added an empty-net goal moments later.

"I think you can take solace in the fact that we were able to come back and make it close," Hall said. "Obviously, we've got some guys offensively who can put it in the back of the net and force the issue that way. But it seemed like we were playing catchup all night, which is a tough way to play against any team, but a team like Washington, a veteran team, that's going to be a tough night. So, we were behind the eight-ball kind of right from the start of the game and weren't able to get out in front of things."

Krueger will need to make corrections quickly ahead of the Sabres' game against Washington on Friday. Though the forwards improved their passing as the game went on, the defensemen mostly struggled with alleviating pressure on the breakout and could not contain the Capitals' forwards.

Nicklas Backstrom opened the scoring when he was left wide-open backdoor and received a pass from Alex Ovechkin, who fought his way through traffic, past Montour, to create space. T.J. Oshie scored on the power-play for a 2-1 lead when Ovechkin's shot created a rebound atop the crease and no Sabres defenseman was there to clear the puck.

As the Sabres' defensemen were changing, Eichel could not corral the puck in the offensive zone and Carlson bolted down the right side of the ice. Without a defender to contest the shot, Carlson rifled the puck to the far post and into the net for a 3-1 lead at 7:05 into the second period.

"The D that were under pressure and/or having difficulty to solve the pressure, but I thought the forwards weren't holding up properly," Krueger said. "We weren't coming back hard enough to support the defensemen. I thought they were exposed at times. ... You can't simulate this in practice and we just have to take what we were doing in the last period and start that way tomorrow, but I'd say all of us as a group just needed an adjustment period."

Brenden Dillon added a second-period goal for a 4-1 Washington lead. And although McCabe's one-timer gave the Sabres momentum early in the third, the Capitals scored 26 seconds later when Eric Staal turned the puck over in front of his own net and Jakub Vrana beat Carter Hutton to make it 5-3.

Hutton, who started his third consecutive season opener since joining the Sabres, made 22 saves. The biggest loss of the night, though, could be Staal, who left the game in the third period after taking an elbow to the head from Nic Dowd. Krueger said Staal is day to day and will be evaluated in the morning.

"He's a big part of our team not only on the ice but off the ice," Hall said. "He's been around, he's played over 1,000 games. He's made a huge impact in this league and on our team already so hopefully he's OK."

## **Mike Harrington: A weird backdrop was fitting for slipshod Sabres opener**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 14, 2015

A News staffer since 1987, I'm a Baseball Hall of Fame voter, a 2013 inductee into the Buffalo Baseball HOF and the Buffalo chapter chair of the Professional Hockey Writers Association. And I insist only Chicago & New York can come close to Buffalo pizza.

Life itself is just weird. Has been for months. So no reason to think the first game of the Sabres' new season – 10 months after we last saw them on the ice for real – should be any different.

But to give this night a framework, you have to start before even entering KeyBank Center. It was hard to believe what you saw on Washington Street around 5:30 Thursday night. There was a whole lot of nothing.

(Cue the joke that the 6-4 loss to the Washington Capitals was a whole lot of the same much of the night as well, but just roll with me here).

Turning left off Swan Street, there was nary a car or pedestrian around the darkened Sahlen Field. It felt like those September nights when the Yankees were here to meet the Blue Jays and the only way you knew something was going on inside was that the light towers were blazing.

You headed south and there were no pedestrians anywhere wearing the Sabres' stupendous new royal blue sweaters. No requisite numbers of Caps fans rocking Alex Ovechkin's red. No stream of folks down the street past The Buffalo News building or the Courtyard Marriott. No one coming in and out of (716) Food and Sport, darkened and shuttered since early in the pandemic. No police waving people on or ordering them back to the corner. No hot dog or peanut vendors on the street. No one streaming into the iconic arena atrium or taking pictures by the French Connection statue on Alumni Plaza.

You get the point. There was nothing. Just eerie quiet.

Sitting in the arena was more of the same. Not a soul. One mall victory was the long-overdue absence of D.J. Milk's howling during warmups and intermissions. What we need, of course, was the howling of the fans and we know that's not happening any time soon. The piped-in crowd noise was ultra annoying.

"It's definitely strange," said defenseman Jake McCabe. "You think of an opening night and it's exciting. After a long layoff, you look forward to getting in front of your hometown fans and hear their noise rooting you on in a loud building. It was definitely interesting, I guess, lining up for starting lineups and anthems in an empty building. But once the game starts, you're right back into it. All of us like to compete."

The biggest theme to this one was simply that the Sabres' best players weren't very good. Jack Eichel's line passed out so many turnovers in the neutral zone that it should have spent the night in a bakery. Eichel had two assists, but only one shot on goal in the game. One of Taylor Hall's giveaways left his defense out to dry on a line change and Caps defenseman John Carlson burned Carter Hutton on a breakaway.

"That's an area we talk about. Managing the puck," Hall said. "Any team is going to make you pay for that, especially a team like Washington. Puck management wasn't doing us any favors."

Rasmus Ristolainen was on the ice for two goals against in the first 10 1/2 minutes, allowing the frothing-at-the-mouth analytics crowd to get some quick ammunition for the new season. On a rough night for the defense, Rasmus Dahlin was mostly invisible over the first 30 minutes and Brandon Montour was scattershot in his own end. The Buffalo penalty kill looked like the Generals vs. the Globetrotters a couple of times. Hutton was pedestrian in net, allowing no real bad goals, but making no bailout saves to help the cause.

Except for one rush in the third period where he got his only two shots on goal, didn't notice Jeff Skinner after the first period. Didn't notice Sam Reinhart or Victor Olofsson at all until Olofsson's goal with 1:54 left got the Sabres within one.

McCabe made it 4-3 just 20 seconds into the third period with a nifty one-timer off an Eichel feed, but Buffalo gave it right back 26 seconds later on Jakub Vrana's goal that came courtesy of a Pee Wee-level giveaway in front of the net by Eric Staal. The 36-year-old looked to the rafters after that strip, which has to be one of the most grievous turnovers in his career.

Good thing the paying customers weren't in the house for that one. Staal would have heard about it.

Staal's lousy night ended with he took a shot to the head from Caps center Nic Dowd, who could be hearing from NHL Player Safety. Staal didn't return and coach Ralph Krueger made it sound unlikely we would see the veteran in the teams' rematch here Friday night.

I hate preseason games, but this opener made the point clear teams probably need a couple. Just not six, seven or eight like they often play. It's not like the Caps set the world on fire for large stretches of this one, either, in getting Peter Laviolette a win in his first game as coach. The puck was often a hot potato.

"We expected rust and there was rust," Krueger said. "We expected an adjustment to the physicality and the speed. ... There were some breakdowns, too, on their part. It wasn't just us. They gave us some chances even the first period. We had six or seven pretty good chances. It seems like it might be that way for the next few games."

Sure could. As advertised, the Sabres will score this year and will struggle to keep the puck out of their net. And in this bizarre 2021 schedule, they get another chance here against the Caps Friday. Hope you'll all be by your televisions. We miss you. It's too quiet.

## **Wraparound: Sabres lose season opener to Washington Capitals, 6-4**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 14, 2021

This wasn't how Dylan Cozens imagined he would make his debut in the National Hockey League.

There weren't fans inside KeyBank Center when the Buffalo Sabres' former first-round draft pick stepped onto the ice wearing royal and gold. There wasn't a round of applause when it was announced that the 19-year-old was playing his first game in the NHL.

Yet, the unusual circumstances surrounding his debut – from the Sabres' first game taking place in mid-January to his late arrival for training camp following the IIHF World Junior Championship – only made Cozens' first game with the Sabres more impressive.

Cozens' primary assist on Tobias Rieder's second-period goal kept the Sabres within striking distance during their season opener, but the Washington Capitals held on for a 6-4 win Thursday night.

Cozens, who was drafted seventh overall by the Sabres in 2019, took his first shift 1:10 into the game and wisely chipped the puck in as the Capitals applied pressure in the neutral zone. Cozens, now wearing No. 24, has developed instant chemistry with Cody Eakin and Rieder, whose wraparound with 1:14 remaining in the second period cut Buffalo's deficit to 4-2.

Cozens logged 11:12 of ice time across 17 shifts while recording one shot on goal and a plus-1 rating.

The goal gave the Sabres momentum following an ugly stretch in which they struggled to contain Washington's forwards. Jake McCabe scored with a one-timer only 20 seconds into the third period – Jack Eichel recorded his second assist of the game on the play – but the Capitals again pushed their lead to two goals when Jakub Vrana capitalized on an Eric Staal turnover.

With the Sabres having an extra attacker on the ice, Victor Olofsson scored with 1:54 remaining to make it 5-4, but the Capitals added an empty-net goal from Garnet Hathaway.

Taylor Hall scored the Sabres' first goal of the season, a power-play marker to tie the score in the first period. Carter Hutton made 22 saves while receiving the team's first start in goal.

Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie, John Carlson and Brenden Dillon also had goals for Washington.

Early breakdown: The Capitals took a 1-0 lead at 5:43 into the first period, when Alex Ovechkin fought his way through traffic, past Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour, and passed backdoor to Backstrom, who chipped the puck into the net.

Dynamic debut: Hall needed only 8:48 to remind Sabres fans why he was the top free agent on the market back in October. The 29-year-old wing redirected a Olofsson pass from the slot on the power play between Ilya Samsonov's legs for a goal, tying the score in the first period.

The Sabres have had a newly acquired player score in six of their last 10 openers, as Hall joined Jason Pominville, Eichel, Zemgus Girgensons, Steve Ott and Ville Leino. Aside from Eichel, each scored on their first shot.

Loose puck: Oshie gave the Capitals a 2-1 lead at 10:33 into the first period by capitalizing on a rebound atop the crease after a power-play shot by Ovechkin. Washington out-shot Buffalo 14-8 during the first period.

Bad timing: An untimely turnover by the Sabres at the opposing blue line gave the Capitals position while the Buffalo defensemen were in the middle of a line change. Carlson bolted down the right wing and rifled a shot to the far post that beat Hutton for a 3-1 lead at 7:05 into the second period.

Another one: Immediately following a successful Sabres penalty kill, Dillon's wrist shot off a Capitals faceoff win went through traffic and under Hutton's blocker for a 4-1 Capitals advantage at 13:23 into the second.

Sign of life: When the Sabres seemed on the brink of falling apart, Rieder out-muscled Carlson for a loose puck and scored on a wraparound to trim the deficit to 4-2 with 1:14 remaining in the second period. Rieder, who was signed by the Sabres in October, had zero goals in 67 games with Edmonton two seasons ago.

Early exit: Staal left the game and did not return after taking an elbow to the head from Washington forward Nic Dowd, who received a two-minute penalty.

Opening ceremonies: The Sabres had frontline workers – including teachers in Western New York – introduce the roster via video message before puck drop Thursday night. The team also played a video to commemorate Rick Jeanneret's 50th season as the play-by-play announcer.

Amherst resident Cami Clune, a recent contestant on "The Voice," sang both anthems on a video recording.

Roster notes: Of the 22 players on the Sabres' roster for opening night, five were first-round draft picks of the team. Additionally, six of the players were acquired via trade and eight were free-agent signings.

Lineup: The Sabres' lone healthy scratch was defenseman Matt Irwin, a 33-year-old who joined the team on a one-year contract in October. Right wing Kyle Okposo remains day to day with a lower-body injury and was replaced in the lineup by Riley Sheahan.

Next: The Sabres host the Capitals again Friday night at 7 p.m., completing the first of eight back-to-back series this season.

## **Sabres taking precautions to protect goalies from worst-case scenario outbreak**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 14, 2021

Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark will be spending less time together off the ice as the Buffalo Sabres adjust to playing an NHL season during the coronavirus pandemic.

Out of an abundance of caution, the Sabres are limiting off-ice interactions between their two top goalies to prevent a positive Covid-19 test from making the entire position group ineligible to play. Coach Ralph Krueger is following a trend across the NHL, as teams try to avoid the worst-case scenarios that happened during the NFL season.

"We are definitely keeping an eye on the different positions, the centermen, the goalies especially," Krueger said. "We just need to keep all the precautions in place. We're very good with the mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing when we eat and so on and so forth. We've got excellent protocols in place and when it comes to position-specific, we also have an added plan already to the strict protocols everyone is sticking to."

Every quarterback on the Denver Broncos' roster was ruled ineligible to play a game against New Orleans Saints this season, forcing practice-squad wide receiver Kendall Hinton into the job. The Saints did not have a running back available for their regular-season finale because most of the team's position group was deemed high-risk after coming into contact with Alvin Kamara, who tested positive for the virus.

The Buffalo Bills have isolated quarterback Jake Fromm from the rest of the team to avoid a similar situation from unfolding in Orchard Park.

Black officer hailed as hero for protecting Capitol during siege remains silent since attack

Hutton and Ullmark are sitting across from each other in the dressing room, and they are avoiding close contact with each other during practices and morning skates.

Every NHL team has an added layer of protection with the adoption of the four-to-six-man taxi squad, a group of players that are eligible to practice and travel with the team.

One of those spots must be filled by a goaltender. The Sabres have Jonas Johansson as their taxi-squad goalie and the 25-year-old has split his practice time in recent days between the NHL roster and a small group. Johansson, or whoever fills that role throughout the season, will travel with the team and can be recalled on a game day if he tests negative for Covid-19 and is not deemed a close contact of anyone who tested positive.

Johansson has been changing in a separate locker room from the rest of the team and is also limiting his interactions with the Sabres' other goalies.

The team plans to rotate which goalie is on the taxi squad because Krueger does not want any player to go too long without playing a game. Goalies Dustin Tokarski and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen are also under contract this season, though both are expected to be on Rochester's roster when the American Hockey League season starts next month.

This is one of the many changes Krueger, General Manager Kevyn Adams and the players must navigate during this unprecedented season in which fans won't be attending games in most arenas. Krueger and his coaching staff must also wear masks on the bench during games.

"I'm a big, big fan of supporting the players, moving forward and reinforcing positive energy on the bench during a game," Krueger said when asked about wearing a mask during games. "Between periods, the days between games and/or the morning of games is when I like to focus on the teaching and learning process. It's not going to affect very much for me personally. We as a coaching staff like to have a calm bench, a bench focused on the next situation versus holding the players in the past. It's not really an issue. From a health perspective, we completely understand it and will have no problem with it."

Injury update

Right wing Kyle Okposo, who left practice early Tuesday with a lower-body injury, was not available to play the season opener against Washington. Okposo did not participate in the morning skate and has not finished a full on-ice session with the team since the intrasquad scrimmage last Saturday.

With Okposo out, Rasmus Asplund, a member of the team's taxi squad, skated with the team Thursday morning. Okposo was replaced in the lineup by Riley Sheahan, a 29-year-old forward with a strong track record on the penalty kill.

#### Taxi squad

Jack Quinn did not remain on the Sabres' active roster for long. The 19-year-old right wing was officially assigned to the taxi squad Thursday morning, the second consecutive day he did not skate with the team's main roster of players.

Quinn, the Sabres' recent first-round draft pick, will focus on skill development during small group skates, which will be led by Matt Ellis, the team's director of player development. It's unclear where Quinn will play this season, as the Ontario Hockey League does not have a start date to its season and it's unlikely he's ready for the NHL.

#### Amerks camp

The Rochester Americans open training camp at Blue Cross Arena on Friday with the first of 13 practices scheduled in January. New coach Seth Appert and his assistants – former Sabres Mike Weber and Adam Mair – have ample time to prepare the Amerks for their first possible play date of Feb. 5.

The AHL has yet to release its schedule for the shortened season, though every team reportedly must play a minimum of 24 games. A playoff format has yet to be determined.

## **OPINION: Sabres have rough first game in 10 months**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 15, 2021

It was strange attending the Buffalo Sabres' season opener against the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center. Buffalo certainly looked like a team that hadn't played a game in 10 months, but I'll get to that later.

Western New York native Cami Clune made her hometown proud when she appeared on "The Voice" this fall, and she couldn't even be in the building to sing the anthems. Instead, they filmed it outside, and it's a shame the fans weren't there to see it. She was phenomenal.

The arena had piped-in crowd noise that's extremely annoying, but they're not doing it for me or the media. It's done for radio and TV.

Another thing that was very strange was when goals were scored. There's no noise other than from the players, and you almost had to do a double take to make sure there was a goal.

I thought as the game went on, I would get used to not having fans, but I really didn't. The Sabres were pretty lucky there weren't fans, because they would've heard a lot of booing in route to a 6-4 loss.

The Sabres looked as rusty as you could possibly look after 10 months off and no preseason games. Washington got on the Sabres at every turn, taking away their space and controlling the puck.

Buffalo couldn't get the puck away from the line of Nicklas Backstrom, Alex Ovechkin and T.J. Oshie and they totaled seven points.

The Sabres had some awful turnovers led by Jack Eichel's line.

On Washington's third goal, Eichel came through center ice and turned the puck over just inside the blue line. The Buffalo defense was right in thinking that was a good time to change, but Capitals defenseman John Carlson came the other way, and there was no way Colin Miller or Henri Jokiharju could get back into the play from the bench. Carlson walked in on Carter Hutton alone and Washington had a two-goal lead.

Buffalo played a good third period, and started it well when Jake McCabe ripped a one-timer from the right point that pulled the Sabres to within a goal just 20 seconds in. It looked, to me, like Taylor Hall tipped it in front, but that doesn't matter.

The Sabres acquired Eric Staal to provide a calming veteran presence in situations like this, but just 26 seconds later, Staal was stripped of the puck in front of Hutton and Jakub Vrana made no mistake. That gave Washington its two-goal lead back again.

With just 1:54 left, Krueger pulled Hutton and put five forwards and a defenseman out there and sure enough, Victor Olofsson scored to make it 5-4. Just 51 seconds later, Garnet Hathaway scored the empty-netter and Buffalo lost.

That's two different times that the Sabres couldn't hold the momentum. Did not having fans there matter?

In the third period, Staal was hit in the head by a Nic Dowd check and had to leave the game. That likely will leave a hole at center for the rematch on Friday night.

In my mind, Dowd should be suspended, and Krueger was understandably upset Dowd didn't get a major penalty.

Dylan Cozens played his first NHL game on the right wing with Tobias Rieder and Cody Eakin. When Staal got hurt, Cozens took a few shifts at center and didn't look bad.

I know they want to bring him along slowly, but if Staal can't play, it might not be a bad idea to let Cozens play center, which is his natural position. I think I'd like that better than bringing Casey Mittelstadt up from the taxi squad.

Cozens registered his first-career point with an assist in the second period, while also picking up a hit and a shot on goal in 12:09 of total ice-time.

I know Hall had a goal and an assist, and Eichel had two assists with Tage Thompson picking up one helper, but that line did not play well and it has to be changed. I think I'd put Olofsson back with Eichel on right wing and let Cozens center Jeff Skinner and Thompson. If Kyle Okposo is ready to play, I might even consider him instead of Thompson.

Hutton made 22 saves on 27 shots faced in the loss, with the plan likely to use Linus Ullmark on Friday.

I think what should bother the Sabres the most is Washington goalie Ilya Samsonov was shaky. The Sabres had four shots on him through most of the first period with one by Eichel trying to finish a 2-on-1 rush. Samsonov was actually falling over when Hall made the perfect pass to Eichel, who basically hit the goaltender with the puck.

It was one of the few chances Eichel had all night.

The good news in this game is Buffalo did score a power play goal by Hall, going 1-for-3 overall on the night. The bad news is the penalty killing gave up one goal on just two attempts.

Buffalo's penalty killers were Eakin, Curtis Lazar, Rieder and Riley Sheahan up front, with McCabe, Rasmus Ristolainen, Jokiharju and Brandon Montour on defense. Lazar and Sheahan both had chances to score a shorthanded goal.

Buffalo started to get a little more in sync in the third period, out-shooting the Capitals, 9-5. If I'm being honest with you, I didn't like three of the team's four lines. The only one that was OK was Cozens, Rieder and Eakin.

Krueger used the same three pairs on defense all through training camp, and they weren't very good in this game at all. I think it was short-sighted not to try some different things, especially in the scrimmages.

Ristolainen picked up right where he left off last season, and I don't get why Krueger is such a fan of his. Once again, in the first 40 minutes, his defensive zone coverages were horrendous.

With back-to-back games, we'll have to see if the Sabres can pick up where they left off in the third period. Losing back-to-back games to Washington to start the season would, in my mind, be an early disaster for this team.

## Slow start dampers Sabres' opener against Washington

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

January 14, 2021

In their first game in more than 10 months, the Buffalo Sabres got the 2020-21 season off to a sluggish start with a 6-4 loss to the Washington Capitals on Thursday night at KeyBank Center.

The Capitals struck twice in the opening period to enjoy a 2-1 lead over Buffalo. Nicklas Backstrom scored the season's first goal that gave Washington a 1-0 lead, and after Buffalo tied the score, T.J. Oshie answered on the power play for the visitors.

Taylor Hall scored the Sabres first goal of the season that, at the time, tied the score at 1-1 midway through the first. Hall's first goal as a member of the blue and gold came on the power play thanks to tic-tac-toe passing from Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson.

Washington added to its lead thanks to a pair of second period goals.

John Carlson's first of the season came as he was able to break in 1-on-1 against Carter Hutton and wire a wrist shot to make it 3-1. Washington's fourth goal of the night came from defenseman Brendan Dillon, just after the Sabres killed off a Colin Miller minor penalty and were back at full strength.

Tobias Rieder brought the blue and gold within a pair late in the middle frame as his wrap-around attempt found its way through Capitals goalie Ilya Samsonov and in. Dylan Cozens recorded the primary assist for his first NHL point in his first NHL game.

The Sabres looked to be back in sync to start the third period, scoring less than a minute into the third period. Jake McCabe's first goal of the season came 20 seconds into the final frame and brought Buffalo within a goal, 4-3.

However, Eric Staal turned the puck over in the defensive zone seconds later that led to a Jakub Vrana goal and 5-3 Capitals lead.

A late goal by Victor Olofsson, once again, brought Buffalo to within a goal, 5-4. The second-year NHLer scored with less than two minutes remaining in regulation.

In the end, Garnet Hathaway scored an empty net goal with just 1:03 left on the clock from the neutral zone to help preserve the Washington victory.

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### GAME SUMMARY

#### Goal Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: 8:48 - Taylor Hall (1) PPG (Victor Olofsson, Jack Eichel)

WAS: 5:43 - Nicklas Backstrom (1) (Alexander Ovechkin, T.J. Oshie); 10:33 - T.J. Oshie (1) PPG (Alexander Ovechkin, John Carlson)

##### Second Period:

BUF: 18:46 - Tobias Rieder (1) (Dylan Cozens, Jake McCabe)

WAS: 7:05 - John Carlson (1) (T.J. Oshie, Nicklas Backstrom); 13:23 - Brendan Dillon (1) (Conor Sheary, Lars Eller)

##### Third Period:

BUF: 0:20 - Jake McCabe (1) (Jack Eichel, Tage Thompson); 18:06 - Victor Olofsson (1) (Taylor Hall, Sam Reinhart)

WAS: 0:46 - Jakub Vrana (1) (unassisted); 18:57 - Garnet Hathaway (1) ENG (Nick Jensen)

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#### Penalty Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: 9:34 - Rasmus Dahlin (Holding - 2 min.)

WAS: 8:30 - T.J. Oshie (Elbowing - 2 min.)

##### Second Period:

BUF: 11:19 - Colin Miller (Cross checking - 2 min.)

WAS: 2:40 - Nic Dowd (Holding - 2 min.)

##### Third Period:

BUF: 15:27 - Jake McCabe (Fighting - 5 min.)

WAS: 10:04 - Nic Dowd (Hit to the head - 2 min.); 15:27 - Brendan Dillon (Fighting - 5 min.)

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#### STATS OF THE GAME

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#### Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) T.J. Oshie - WSH
- 2.) Nicklas Backstrom - WSH
- 3.) Alexander Ovechkin - WSH

#### Two items of note:

- 1.) Frontline workers and first responders helped introduce the Sabres during pregame ceremonies before the season opener
- 2.) Taylor Hall logged 18:02 of ice time in his Sabres' debut.

#### What's Next:

The Sabres and Capitals will meet again on Friday night at KeyBank Center to complete their two-game series. Pregame coverage on the Paul William Beltz Pregame show starts at 6 p.m. EST with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. EST with Rick Jeanneret and Rob Ray on the call along the Sabres Radio Network.

## **Sabres kick off 2020-21 season against Washington**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 14, 2021

The Washington Capitals are in town, and it's time for the Buffalo Sabres to play their first game since they beat the Capitals in a shootout on March 9, 2020.

Washington is here on back-to-back nights as the condensed schedule gets going. Ralph Krueger wouldn't confirm that Carter Hutton is starting in goal, but Hutton was the first goalie off the ice at the morning skate.

Krueger has liked what he's seen from Hutton in training camp.

"We've really liked Carter Hutton's camp. He's come in here extremely confident, very fit and he's in a good place," Krueger said.

However, Krueger cautioned that Hutton must maintain where he is right now.

"We had him in a good place at the start of last year, and now the key will be to maintain that right through the whole season," he said.

Hutton spoke about the team improving its penalty killing, which was 30th overall last season. He said both he and Linus Ullmark have to make big saves when shorthanded, knowing that your goalie is usually your best penalty killer.

Kyle Okposo didn't take part in the morning skate and likely won't play. Jack Quinn was placed on the taxi squad before practice, and Riley Sheahan was back on a line, so he likely has been activated off the NHL Non-Roster list.

Dylan Cozens will play in his first NHL game in place of Okposo. Others making their first appearances in a Sabres uniform will be Taylor Hall, Eric Staal, Cody Eakin, Tobias Rieder and Sheahan.

Thursday's lines:

Forwards:

Hall - Eichel - Thompson  
Olofsson - Staal - Reinhart  
Rieder - Eakin - Cozens  
Skinner - Lazar - Sheahan

Defense:

McCabe - Ristolainen  
Dahlin - Montour  
Miller - Jokiharju

Washington comes in with a new head coach in Peter Laviolette. The Capitals have also added Zdeno Chara and Justin Schultz to a defense that already includes John Carlson and Dmitri Orlov.

Up front, the firepower remains with Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie and Evgeny Kuznetsov.

The problem for Washington could be in goal.

Braden Holtby left in free agency for the Vancouver Canucks, leaving Ilya Samsonov, who has just 26 NHL games under his belt. Vitek Vaenecik has never played in an NHL game, but has four years of work with the Hershey Bears in the American Hockey League.

Join Mike Schopp and the Bulldog for pregame coverage starting at 6 p.m. EST, when they'll be joined by Krueger, Jack Eichel, Hutton and Colin Miller.

## **A slow start for the Sabres as hockey makes a low-key return to Buffalo**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Jack Eichel played along. As a nurse from Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center introduced him on opening night, synthetic crowd noise accompanied her call from the scoreboard.

Eichel burst out of the Sabres' tunnel, sped to the blue line and waved ...

To no one. The captain raised his arm, smiled and gave a nod to 19,070 empty seats, his attempt to create a bit of normalcy.

Buffalo's first game since March, of course, was anything but normal.

The streets surrounding KeyBank Center were barren. No fans in royal blue jerseys. No cars honking the tune of "Let's go, Buffalo."

Aside from a couple of jacket- and toque-wearing security guards at the side entrances, there was no sign that the NHL had finally returned to town after a 311-day layoff.

A huge neon sign in the atrium, normally beckoning fans to buy a cold brew, failed to shine. One empty beer cooler in the 300 Level was sealed shut with blue painter's tape, the words "Don't touch" written in all caps with a Sharpie.

Other coolers still contained 24-ounce tallboys from the Sabres' previous game on March 9, 2020, reminders that fans once roamed the concrete concourse. Those beers were probably as flat as the Sabres' start in a 6-4 loss to the Capitals.

Buffalo fell into a 4-1 hole during the second period and had just 11 shots at that point.

"We expected rust, and there was rust," coach Ralph Krueger said. "We had a very disappointing start. They came with a lot of speed, and we had trouble adapting after the break.

"Too little, too late, but the push at the end and not giving up is an important thing to take forward."

As will be the case for an entire season of intradivision play, the Sabres have to wait only a few hours for revenge. Buffalo hosts the Capitals again Friday. Though the game will be different, the scene will be similar.

Ropes and barricades blocked off most of the arena's interior. Metal shutters were pulled down in front of pizza stands and sushi markets. There was no way to get near the new bar area added to the building last season.

Despite the obvious effects of COVID-19 on the landscape, others joined Eichel in attempting normalcy.

The game presentation crew played hype videos on the scoreboard. The public address announcer yelled "Welcome to the ice, your Buffalo Sabres!" when the pregame warmups began.

The one-by-one introduction of players, a long-held tradition for season openers, felt clunky and odd with no fans to cheer their arrival. But the use of frontline workers and first responders as announcers rather than the PA guy made for a nice touch.

The prerecorded U.S. and Canadian national anthems were a slick, made-for-TV production. Buffalo native Cami Clune, recently a contestant on "The Voice," belted out the songs from nearby Canalside with Christmas lights and water dancing in the background. The players even tapped their sticks in appreciation, though Clune wasn't there to hear them.

"You think about opening night, it's exciting," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "After a long layoff, you can't wait to get in front of your hometown fans and hear their noise and have a loud building. It was definitely interesting lining up for starting lineups and the anthem in an empty building."

The building was never quiet despite the acres of vacant blue seats. The NHL has required the programming of synthetic fan noise, which sizzled through the speakers from puck drop to postgame interviews.

Alas, it was clearly synthetic sound more than fan revelry, an indiscernible din that could be likened to a vacuum cleaner or a white noise machine. When the Sabres had a scoring chance just two minutes in, an "oooooh" burst through the speakers about six seconds too late, long after the diehards would have expressed similar gasps.

Most of the Sabres' new additions would have lifted fans from the seats. Taylor Hall, the marquee free agent, scored Buffalo's first goal and added an assist while skating for nearly 20 minutes.

Tobias Rieder, signed on the opening day of free agency, cut the Sabres' deficit to 4-2 late in the second period with a nifty wraparound. Dylan Cozens, the 2019 first-round pick who was making his NHL debut, earned an assist.

When McCabe made it 4-3 just 20 seconds into the third period, it seemed the goal-horn operator might be getting warmed up for a long, postgame blast.

But the Capitals answered just 26 seconds after McCabe to turn back the onslaught.

"It seemed like we were playing catch-up all night, which is a tough way to play," Hall said.

There was a tough moment, too. Eric Staal left the game with an apparent head injury with 10 minutes to play, the result of a cheap shot from Washington center Nic Dowd.

"That's a tough hit," Hall said. "He's not even a really dangerous player at that point when he has the puck, so for their guy to go after him and make contact with his jaw like that, it's not something that you want to see."

McCabe immediately went after Dowd, cross-checking him in the back to start a scrum.

"I didn't see the hit itself. I just saw Eric kind of do a helicopter, which is usually a sign of a hit to the head," McCabe said. "As we all saw on the replay, it was definitely to the head and pretty dirty."

There was no word on Staal's condition or whether he'd be available for the rematch Friday.

The empty streets, arena and concourses will be back. Though they've made their debut, it'll take more than one game for them to feel normal. It likely won't happen all year.

But at least hockey has returned to Buffalo.

## **One key fact about every player on the Sabres' opening night roster**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

January 14, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres' opening night roster features 23 players, two superstars on the top line and two prized rookie forwards.

The team also has less than \$1 million in cap space.

Buffalo opens the season with this official roster:

Forwards (14): Jack Eichel, Taylor Hall, Eric Staal, Sam Reinhart, Victor Olofsson, Jeff Skinner, Kyle Okposo, Tage Thompson, Cody Eakin, Tobias Rieder, Dylan Cozens, Jack Quinn, Curtis Lazar and Riley Sheahan.

Defense (7): Rasmus Dahlin, Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe, Brandon Montour, Colin Miller, Henri Jokiharju and Matt Irwin.

Goalies (2): Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton.

Injured reserve (1): Zemgus Girgensons.

Taxi squad (5): forwards Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Asplund, defensemen Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson, and goalie Jonas Johansson.

While Cozens was expected to make the team, the inclusion of Quinn was a bit of a surprise. The 2020 first-round pick will likely join the taxi squad or report to Rochester when it begins play in February, but he can always say he made the opening-night roster in 2021.

The cap hit for the 23 roster players totals \$76.04 million. Last season's penalty for going over the cap is \$1.49 million. The buyout of Cody Hodgson, which is on the books through 2022-23, adds \$791,667.

The cap hit of Girgensons (\$2.2 million) remains on the Sabres' ledger. Long-term injured reserve, which offers cap relief, isn't an option until teams need to go above the ceiling of \$81.5 million. Because the Sabres are under the cap, long-term injured reserve isn't available or needed.

So the Sabres' opening-night cap hit is \$80,523,334, less than a million from the ceiling.

Buffalo would like to lower its total because Dahlin, Cozens, Quinn and Jokiharju are eligible for \$5.19 million in entry-level bonuses. Whatever they earn will be tacked on the Sabres' year-end cap totals. If that pushes Buffalo over \$81.5 million, then a cap penalty would be issued for the following season, which is what happened last year.

Taxi squad players do not count against the cap. They can practice and travel with the regular roster and can be added to the lineup before 5 p.m. on game days.

Here's a quick look at everyone who made the team and taxi squad.

### Roster

Cozens: His shooting percentage was above 15 percent for each of the past three seasons with Lethbridge of the Western Hockey League.

Dahlin: He and Phil Housley are the only defensemen in franchise history with at least 30 assists in their first two NHL seasons.

Eakin: After 10 points in 41 games with Vegas last season, he was traded to Winnipeg and finished with five points in eight games.

Eichel: The captain averaged 1.4 points per home game last season, the Sabres' highest total since Pat LaFontaine averaged 1.46 in 1994-95.

Hall: Except for his injury-shortened 2018-19 season, Hall has finished in the top three in team scoring every year and has led his team in points six times in 10 seasons.

Hutton: The goalie is 23-13-12 with a .932 save percentage when facing at least 35 shots.

Irwin: After being traded to Anaheim, he led the Ducks in average ice time (22:27), hits (27) and blocked shots (24) during his nine games.

Jokiharju: In his first full NHL season, the defenseman was one of four players to appear in all 69 of Buffalo's games.

Lazar: He set or tied career records in faceoff percentage (51.3 percent), goals per game (.13) and points per game (.26).

McCabe: He had a career-best Corsi of 50.4 despite the lowest offensive-zone start percentage among Buffalo blueliners at 44 percent.

Miller: The Sabres are 8-0-2 when the defenseman records at least a point.

Montour: Since making his Sabres debut on Feb. 26, 2019, he leads Buffalo defensemen with eight goals and a plus-9 rating.

Okposo: The right winger has served as an alternate captain in nine of his 11 NHL seasons.

Olofsson: He recorded .78 points per game, the highest for a Sabres rookie since Ray Sheppard had a .88 in 1987-88.

Quinn: He is one of four Ontario Hockey League players to score 50 goals in their first season of draft eligibility during the past decade, joining Skinner, Alex DeBrincat and Arthur Kaliyev.

Reinhart: He scored his 20th goal in his 55th game last season, reaching the milestone 14 games quicker than his previous best in 2015-16.

Rieder: His three short-handed goals in the playoffs tied an NHL record as he joined Derek Sanderson, Bill Barber, Lorne Henning, Wayne Gretzky, Wayne Presley and Todd Marchant in accomplishing the feat.

Ristolainen: The 26-year-old ranks among the franchise's top 10 defensemen in goals (10th), assists (seventh), points (eighth), shots (sixth), game-winning goals (ninth) and overtime goals (first).

Sheahan: The center led the Oilers in defensive-zone faceoffs, short-handed faceoffs and short-handed ice time, helping Edmonton rank second in penalty killing.

Skinner: The winger is eighth in the NHL with 120 even-strength goals during the last five seasons.

Staal: The 36-year-old is one of four active players to score 40 goals at least three times, joining Evgeni Malkin, Alex Ovechkin and Steven Stamkos.

Thompson: Before being recalled to Buffalo and suffering a season-ending injury, Thompson led the Amerks with 12 points in 16 games and was second in the AHL with 67 shots, an average of 4.2 per game.

Ullmark: His .840 save percentage in shootouts is fourth in NHL history among goalies who've faced at least 20 shots, trailing only Johan Holmqvist, Marc Denis and Andrei Vasilevskiy.

Taxi squad

Asplund: His 7:36 of short-handed ice time against Minnesota last season was the most by an NHL rookie since 2010-11.

Borgen: The 24-year-old led Rochester with 76 penalty minutes in 61 games.

Davidson: The 29-year-old won the Fred T. Hunt Memorial Award in 2013 as the AHL player who best exemplifies sportsmanship, determination and dedication to hockey.

Johansson: He was the Amerks' MVP last season while going 14-4-3 with a .921 save percentage.

Mittelstadt: After arriving in Rochester, he recorded a point in 22 of his 36 games, putting up two four-game point streaks.

## **Sabres look rusty early, fall to Capitals in season opener after late comeback**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 14, 2021

**BUFFALO** – If Thursday's disjointed performance against the Washington Capitals turns out to be a harbinger, the Sabres could be in for another long season.

In their highly anticipated season opener, the Sabres, who had six new faces in the lineup, looked like the same old team, losing 6-4 inside KeyBank Center.

If fans had been allowed to attend the game, you can bet they would've voiced their frustration a few times.

After a 10-month layoff because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sabres, not surprisingly, looked out of sync, especially early. They struggled to defend, played too timid and committed some awful gaffes.

"We expected rust and there was rust, and we expected an adjustment to the physicality and the speed," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said on a Zoom call.

Still, the Sabres, who received an early power-play goal from \$8 million newcomer Taylor Hall, roared back.

Jake McCabe's goal 16 seconds into the third period narrowed it to 4-3 and seemingly seized the momentum. Then 26 seconds later, Washington's Jakub Vrana scored, capitalizing on veteran Eric Staal's giveaway deep in his own zone.

Staal, who was making his Sabres debut, left the game about halfway through the third period after Washington's Nic Dowd hit him in the head at center ice. Dowd received only a two-minute penalty.

Krueger had no update on Staal and said the Sabres will know more in the morning. Right now, Staal is day-to-day.

"Quite surprised that a hit to the head gets two minutes but it is what it is and we're disappointed with that finish stretch there for sure," Krueger said.

Victor Olofsson scored at 18:06, narrowing the margin to 5-4 before Washington's Garnet Hathaway scored an empty-net goal.

"You saw in the first 10 minutes both sides there were a lot of turnovers and some sloppy play, which we kind of expected after a 10-month layoff," McCabe said. "We knew going into a regular-season game was going to be tough, but as the game progressed we found our game and found our legs a little bit better. We started making better plays and executing."

The outing won't do anything to dispel the belief the Sabres' defensemen must defend better to help their suspect goaltending. Carter Hutton, who made 22 saves, received little help much of the night. Still, he never bailed out his teammates by making a huge stop.

Krueger said the defensemen and forwards contributed to the porous defense.

"We weren't holding up properly early on coming back hard enough to support the defenseman," he said. "They were exposed at times. It was a group needing a period and a half to really find out what it's all about again. You can't simulate this in practice. I'd say all of us as a group just needed an adjustment period. The result isn't pleasing but we saw how we needed to play at the end."

He added: "Our defensive game needs to take away the gaps and we need to attack quicker. I thought we were a little bit soft defensively as a group. We kind of fell back."

Hall said: "Our puck management wasn't doing us any favors all night."

Newcomer Tobias Rieder scored the Sabres' other goal. Sabres rookie winger Dylan Cozens recorded an assist in his NHL debut. Hall, McCabe and Olofsson also added an assist.

Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie, John Carlson and Brenden Dillon scored Washington's other goals.

The Sabres host the Capitals again tonight.

## **Sabres' Eric Staal leaves loss to Capitals after hit to jaw**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO – Sabres center Eric Staal left Thursday's 6-4 season-opening loss to the Washington Capitals after Nic Dowd elbowed him in the jaw.

Coach Ralph Krueger had no update following the game on Staal, who was acquired from the Minnesota Wild on Sept. 16 to center the second line.

"I saw what you saw," Krueger said on a Zoom call. "We're just assessing him. It's one of those where it's definitely in a day-to-day status and we'll see how he is in the morning."

Halfway through the third period, after Staal backhanded the puck into the Washington zone at center ice, Dowd hit him high.

"I just saw Eric do a helicopter, which is usually a sign of a hit to the head," Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe said. "As we all saw on the replay, it was definitely to the head and pretty dirty."

Dowd was only penalized two minutes for an illegal check to the head.

"Quite surprised that a hit to the head gets two minutes," Krueger said. Replacing Staal, 36, would be difficult. The veteran gives the Sabres their first legitimate No. 2 center to play behind Jack Eichel since they traded Ryan O'Reilly in 2018.

The Sabres could promote third-line center Cody Eakin or shift Dylan Cozens, a natural center, back to the middle. Cozens, 19, played right wing Thursday in his NHL debut.

Meanwhile, Staal played his 1,241st NHL game.

"He's a big part of our team not only on the ice but off the ice," Sabres winger Taylor Hall said. "He's been around, he's played over 1,000 games. He's made a huge impact in this league and on our team already."

The Sabres host the Capitals again tonight at KeyBank Center.

## **Sabres notes: Colin Miller rebounds to earn spot among top-six defensemen**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO – Last year, his first with the Sabres, defenseman Colin Miller sat out 18 times – more than one-quarter of the season – as a healthy scratch.

The Sabres, who possessed a surfeit of defensemen, often dressed an extra one. Still, Miller regularly ranked eighth on the depth chart and was the odd man out.

This year, however, Miller, 28, has quickly earned a spot among the top-six defensemen. He skated beside Henri Jokiharju throughout training camp and was paired with the Finn for Thursday's 6-4 loss to the Washington Capitals in the season opener at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres, of course, expected Miller would be a significant contributor a year ago. Fresh off two standout seasons, they traded second- and fifth-round picks to the Vegas Golden Knights in exchange for Miller, who enjoyed a 10-goal, 41-point campaign in 2017-18.

But Miller had trouble adjusting to the Sabres and coach Ralph Krueger's system, and he started getting scratched six weeks into the season.

"He has adjusted and acclimatized completely to not only the area of Buffalo but also on the ice to the way we want to play," Krueger said on a Zoom call prior to the game. "He's getting used to the aggressive gapping style we expect from our defensemen while still adding to the offense, which he's very good at.

"He's got some upside on the attacking game, so what we like is his defensive commitment has continued to improve and his ability to understand what we need him to do within our group. He has earned this top-six start here and we look forward to seeing this next level of Colin Miller."

Miller found a groove almost a year ago shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic ended the season, playing 16 straight games before getting scratched again.

When asked about that run, most of which he played beside Rasmus Dahlin, he couldn't remember much.

"I don't know, maybe a little more consistency playing with Ras," Miller said prior to the game. "It was a long ways back now. ... I'm more focused on this year now."

This year, Krueger has switched Miller, a right-handed shot, to the left side. They have four righties, including Jokiharju, among their top-six defensemen, so one will have to play on his off side.

Miller played on the left side a little last season and before he arrived in Buffalo.

"It's just some scenarios are a little bit different, going back for pucks and on the other can be a little bit different," he said. "But there's good things about it, too, being on your off side on the far blue line, stuff like that. So there's pros and cons."

One pro has been an opportunity to stay beside Jokiharju, perhaps the Sabres' biggest surprise last season, for the past two weeks.

"He's definitely more sure of himself than he was last year," Miller said.

Six of the seven defensemen on the roster played for the Sabres last season, with Matt Irwin, who was scratched Thursday, the only new addition. The stability and familiarity should help the defense corps.

"The more reps and the more time you get, obviously, the more comfortable you're going to feel," Miller said. "Last year, I think we had so many moving parts, and I'm sure it'll be the same this year, because we have seven, eight defensemen on this team that can all play."

–

Expect goalies Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark to each play one game in the Sabres' first two series.

Hutton started Thursday. The Sabres also host Washington again Friday. They play road games Monday and Tuesday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

"With the two back-to-backs coming up here, we are trending toward split games between the two of them," Krueger said.

Sabres winger Kyle Okposo, who left Tuesday's practice with an undisclosed injury, missed Thursday's game. In his spot at right wing beside center Cody Eakin, Dylan Cozens made his NHL debut. Cozens also skated on the second power-play unit.

The Sabres drafted Cozens, 19, seventh overall in 2019.

Meanwhile, the Sabres assigned winger Jack Quinn, 19, to the taxi squad Thursday. They selected Quinn, 19, eighth overall in October.

Notes: The Sabres played a video tribute prior to the game to honor legendary play-by-play man Rick Jeanneret's 50 years broadcasting for the team. ... With Okposo out, Sabres winger Sam Reinhart served as an alternate captain. ... The Sabres had frontline workers introduce each player via video before the game.

## **Sabres goalie Carter Hutton earns opening night start**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 14, 2021

**BUFFALO** – Sabres coach Ralph Krueger's decision to award goalie Carter Hutton the opening night start against the Washington Capitals wasn't surprising.

Yes, Hutton, 35, struggled most of last season, losing 12 straight decisions at one point. But his turnaround started at the end of 2019-20, when he enjoyed a 6-2-0 run in February.

Hutton performed strongly throughout training camp this year, quickly morphing into one of the Sabres' standouts. Meanwhile, goalie Linus Ullmark missed the first four sessions of camp as he quarantined at home.

So Hutton stood out as the logical choice for tonight's game at KeyBank Center, the first of a back-to-back set.

"We've really liked Carter Hutton's camp and he's come in here extremely confident, very fit, and he's in a good place," Krueger said on a Zoom call this morning. "We're excited about that."

Ullmark will likely play Friday's game.

Hutton said "everyone's pumped up for the Sabres' first game since March 9.

"Getting to start at home here is nice," he said. "Just as a team, being able to not be in a hotel and stuff and be in our homes and stuff. So it's exciting. It's been a long break."

In other news, winger Kyle Okposo, who left Tuesday's practice with an undisclosed injury, did not skate this morning. In his spot at right wing beside center Cody Eakin, Dylan Cozens will be making his NHL debut tonight.

The Sabres drafted Cozens, 19, seventh overall in 2019.

Meanwhile, the Sabres assigned rookie winger Jack Quinn, 19, to the taxi squad this morning. They selected Quinn, 19, eighth overall in October.

Here are tonight's lines and defense pairs:

- Taylor Hall, Jack Eichel and Tage Thompson
- Victor Olofsson, Eric Staal and Sam Reinhart
- Tobias Rieder, Eakin and Cozens
- Jeff Skinner, Curtis Lazar and Riley Sheahan
- Rasmus Dahlin and Brandon Montour
- Jake McCabe and Rasmus Ristolainen
- Colin Miller and Henri Jokiharju

## **5 Observations: Sabres drop season opener with 6-4 loss to Capitals**

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) — Playing their first game in a newly realigned East Division, the Buffalo Sabres began the 2021 season in the loss column. The Sabres fell to the Washington Capitals 6-4 Thursday night, exactly two weeks after hitting the ice for the first time as a team since March.

Taylor Hall and Tobias Rieder scored the team's first two goals of the season. The Sabres will be back on the ice Friday for another match-up with the Capitals. Puck drops at 7pm.

5 observations Thursday's season opener:

Difficulty against the top line

It was the BOO show to kick things off as the Washington Capitals top line proved to be an issue all night. Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie, and Alex Ovechkin were primarily responsible for the team's first three goals [they finished with a total of seven points between the three] and it looked as if the Sabres had no solution for them whatsoever. You can't allow a top line to take control that much, that early, and completely dominate.

Night of the newbies

The Sabres made a few additions this offseason and in the team's opener, it was the night of the newbies.

When the Sabres acquired former Hart Trophy winner Taylor Hall, fans were excited to see what he could bring to the table and he didn't disappoint in the opener. Trailing 1-0, the Sabres went on the power play and it only seemed fitting to see Hall score the team's first goal of the season. Off a pass from Jack Eichel, Victor Olofsson faked a shot and slid it right to Hall who then notched his first goal as a Sabre. Trailing 4-2 in the second, it was Tobias Rieder's turn. He took a pass from Dylan Cozens [who picked up his first NHL point] and completed the wraparound to cut the team's deficit in half.

Hall and Rieder became the sixth and seventh newly acquired Sabre to score in the team's season opener in the last 10 years.

Hot, then quiet special teams

When we got our first look at the top power play line during Training Camp, we liked what we saw. We got our first game-time glimpse of it in the first period and it didn't disappoint with Hall capitalizing for his first goal of the season [see above]. After that, there was minimal excitement with the team immediately giving up a power play goal and then failing to capitalize on their next two extra man opportunities.

Last season the Sabres were ranked 20th in the NHL when it came to taking advantage of the extra man. Through one game, the power play unit is 1-for-3. We'll see how long it holds up and what they can do Friday night.

Empty and Eerie

Ask any athlete and they'll agree, there's nothing like the atmosphere of playing at home. Well, that was until this season. The Sabres opened things up without a crowd and it was just weird and eerie. The team personnel did their best, playing fan videos and pumping in crowd noise, but it just wasn't the same. I think it's going to take a bit to get used to this new "normal" for however long it lasts.

Time will soon tell

Over the last decade or so, we've seen the Sabres start off hot and we've seen them start off struggling. Each scenario has ended the same - missing the postseason. Thursday's performance is certainly not how you want to start a season and it was hard to ignore all of the woes from Sabres fans already circulating on social media.

In a shortened 56-game season, every game is going to be important, especially when you're playing in arguably the best division in the league. Is all hope lost? Absolutely not. It's just one game. Things can turn around. Only time will tell which team we'll see as they continue to figure things out and get the puck rolling.

## **Sabres start slow in 6-4 loss to Capitals**

WIVB

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Thursday's season opener didn't go the way the Buffalo Sabres hoped, as the Washington Capitals used a fast start and a strong second period to pull away from Buffalo and pick up the win.

Buffalo's defense struggled to keep pace with the Capitals all night, allowing two goals in each of the first two periods. Washington needed just 23 shots in the first 40 minutes to put up the four goals.

"I think you saw it in the first ten minutes," Jake McCabe said. "There was, both sides, there was a lot of turnovers and just kind of some sloppy play which we kind of expected and after a 10-month layoff you knew going into a regular season game it was going to be tough, but as the game went on and the game progressed, we found our game and found our legs a little better and started making a little better plays."

Washington opened the scoring early in the 1st period when Alex Ovechkin found Nicklas Backstrom for the goal to put the Capitals up 1-0.

Buffalo responded quickly after that with a power play goal. Taylor Hall, one of the newcomers, put one in the back of the net to tie it up.

Less than two minutes later, TJ Oshie took advantage of a Capitals power play after a Rasmus Dahlin penalty. His goal made it 2-1, and that's how the first period ended.

Washington added two more goals in the second period, first when John Carlson put one past goaltender Carter Hutton. Later in the period, Brenden Dillon scored to make the deficit three.

Buffalo got a goal from Tobias Rieder, another newcomer, just outside of a minute remaining in the second period. That allowed them to go into the second intermission trailing just 4-2.

They opened the 3rd with a goal to cut the lead to 4-3, but it was answered almost immediately, bringing that deficit back to two. Both teams traded goals from that point forward, and the Sabres fell 6-4.

"I thought it took at least a period and a bit to finally see our legs coming and we did continue to be too complicated through the neutral zone until the third period where we really felt we were getting some momentum, but we gave them one back and too little too late at the end," head coach Ralph Krueger said.

Eric Staal took a hard hit late in the game and had to leave. No word on his injury yet. Ralph Krueger said he was day-to-day.

Both teams meet again Friday at 7 p.m.

## **Sabres Open Their 2021 Season Against Washington Capitals**

Spectrum News

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Bills aren't the only game in town. Thursday night marks the opening night for the Buffalo Sabres.

The Sabres will host the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center at 7 p.m.

No fans are allowed in the arena at the time, although there is hope they will be at some point during the season.

## **Sabres Put High Expectations on Dylan Cozens' Rookie Year**

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

January 13, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Some 19-year-olds would be thrilled just to make an NHL roster on opening night.

Dylan Cozens has loftier expectations.

### What You Need To Know

- A year and a half after he was drafted by the Sabres, Dylan Cozens has made the NHL roster and projects to begin the season with a sizable role
- Head Coach Ralph Krueger says Cozens is responsible and smart enough to merit early playing time, and he's in the best game shape of anyone in camp
- Cozens has skated with 40-goal scorer Jeff Skinner throughout camp, and now is slated to play with veterans Cody Eakin and Tobias Rieder

"I want to prove that I can play in the NHL, and I want to help this team win," says the Sabres rookie. "I think the biggest thing for me is just to be ready whenever. Whenever they want me to play, just be ready. Could be any day."

It looks more and more likely that "any day" will be opening night — Cozens has spent most of this year's training camp skating with NHL regulars, and has even secured a spot on the team's second power-play unit.

"It's pretty awesome for me to be out there," he says. "I've played that position before a few times as a young guy in the WHL. I've learned how to play that spot. Everyone else on the unit, they're all great players so that definitely helps. Helps me do my job, which is just hang around there and hopefully bury some rebounds."

Head Coach Ralph Krueger says Cozens is in better shape than any other skater in camp. Cozens is coming off a silver-medal performance with Team Canada at World Juniors, where he impressed Krueger and fans watching at home.

"We think he's ready for a pretty big load right off the hop, but only time will tell for all of us," says Krueger. "It'll be the first game in a long time. There are a lot of unknowns going into this game. We're excited to finally get going. Dylan is one of the many pieces we're looking forward to seeing in action."

The Sabres start the season Thursday when they host Washington at 7 p.m.

## **Cozens fares well as Sabres struggle in opening night loss to Capitals**

By Alex Brasky

Batavia Daily News

January 14, 2021

BUFFALO — There was a bit of good and plenty of bad during the Sabres' 6-4 loss to the Washington Capitals on opening night. Wrapped in with the good was the production the Sabres received from their third line, specifically rookie Dylan Cozens, who performed well in his first career NHL game.

"Dylan played a very good first game," said Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger of the team's prized rookie. "Very calm. He never looked overwhelmed."

Cozens logged nearly 12 minutes of ice time and came away with an assist on a second-period goal from Tobias Rieder. He appeared to belong amongst the NHL's physical nature, even when it came to going up against one of the league's most infamous tough guys.

"I saw even a situation in that third period he got hit by (Capitals defenseman Zdeno Chára) and no problem. He bounced right back at it," said Krueger of the rookie's encounter with Washington's six-foot, nine-inch bruiser. "So it was definitely an excellent debut from Dylan Cozens coming from junior hockey to the pace that was played here today. We're really pleased with his game."

Not only were the Sabres pleased with their rookie's performance, but Cozens also seemed happy with the way he fared on Thursday night.

"I put in a lot of work this offseason to gain weight, get stronger so I can battle with guys at this level," said Cozens. "I think I did pretty good out there. Obviously, these guys are bigger, stronger, but I think I held my own out there."

Cozens said some nerves came with his first NHL game, but he was able to push through them and record a productive night.

"There's a lot of excitement - you know, playing your first NHL game. It's something you dream about since you're a kid. So obviously, I was very excited, but there was some nerves," said Cozens. "I think after I got that first shift out of the way, I got my legs under myself and that's when I started to settle down there - after that first shift."

Cozens played alongside Cody Eakin and Rieder on what was one of the Sabres' most productive lines on Thursday night. Near the end of the third period, Rieder came through with a goal off an assist from defenseman Jake McCabe and Cozens, following what Krueger termed one of the Sabres' better shifts of the night.

"Yeah, they had a really good shift there. I thought that was an example of how we need to play. They got on it. They had two or three retrievals. Both Eakin and Cozens participated before Rieder actually showed that gem and the character goal," said Krueger. "So that's something we're definitely going to take with (us). It was one of the better shifts of the night and it's the kind of hockey we need to play to have success against teams like Washington."

Along with linemates Eakin and Rieder, Cozens was a bright light for Buffalo in an otherwise rocky evening at Key Bank Center. Coming off an impressive tournament at the World Championships, it's nice to see Cozens translating the success he found at the junior level to the professional ice.

The Sabres (0-1) and Capitals (1-0) get right back at it tomorrow night.

## **Buffalo Sabre Jake McCabe Fights Brenden Dillon In Opener**

By Clay Moden

WYRK

January 15, 2021

The 2021 season is underway for the Buffalo Sabres! In their first game in 311 days, the Sabres got off to a slow start as they dropped the opener to the Washington Capitals, 6-4.

But the game wasn't without highlights and frustrations. The Sabres were down 5-3 when Jake McCabe and Capitals, Brenden Dillon squared off.

Key Bank Arena would normally be buzzing with fans of the Royal-Blue and Gold but COVID is still preventing fans from being allowed in the stands. With the Buffalo Bills in the playoffs and hockey underway again, it is a good time to be a sports fan in Buffalo.

The best part about watching sports in Buffalo is that the time seems to move quickly. It is already mid January and with the lack of snow, this hasn't really felt like winter at all. Seeing the signs people have placed in their front yards and the support on social media, it is not hard to get caught up in the hype for our local professional sports, even if you don't know the difference between a face-off and a kickoff.

The pride that the Western New York has in its sports is incredible and, in many cases, unique. How many other areas end their conversation with a chant for their team? Saying "Go Bills" has become the new "see ya later" or "goodbye."

Even if the Buffalo Sabres don't have the success over the season we would hope for, we can still get excited for a few moments like this one on Thursday night.

## **Sabres lose in Taylor Hall's first game; Painful debut for Eric Staal**

By James O'Brien

NBC Sports

January 14, 2021

Taylor Hall's Buffalo Sabres debut produced mixed results, but he can't say he had a worse night than Eric Staal. While Hall produced alongside Jack Eichel, Eric Staal left the game after a hard hit, and the Sabres fell to the Washington Capitals by a score of 6-4.

Eric Staal leaves Sabres game after Dowd hit, bad turnover

In a moment that inspired a fracas, Nic Dowd caught Eric Staal up high with an ugly-looking hit. You can watch that all unfold in the video above this post's headline.

After the game, Jake McCabe provided this interesting take on the hit to John Vogl of The Athletic:

"I didn't see the hit itself. I just saw Eric kind of do a helicopter, which is usually a sign of a hit to the head," McCabe said. "As we all saw on the replay, it was definitely to the head and pretty dirty."

While Eric Staal did not return to the Sabres' loss, it happened late enough that it's even murkier than usual if it was mainly precautionary, or if the veteran forward will miss some time.

That was the roughest part of Eric Staal's Buffalo Sabres debut, but not the only tough moment. Staal coughed up an ugly turnover to Jakub Vrana, who quickly scored:

Not ideal. Hopefully Staal will be healthy enough to have better nights with his new team very soon. We'll see.

Hall, Eichel productive, but not enough for Sabres vs. Capitals

It took Taylor Hall less than nine minutes to score a goal in his first Sabres game. He connected on the power play to tie the game up 1-1.

Overall, Hall (1G, 1A) and Jack Eichel (two assists) both enjoyed two-point nights. Victor Olofsson and Jake McCabe also contributed one-goal, one-assist performances as Buffalo tried to hang with Washington.

Ultimately, the Capitals' top stars Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie, and John Carlson proved too much for the Sabres.

## **Sabres' Staal day-to-day after taking headshot**

By Josh Wegman

The Score

January 14, 2021

Buffalo Sabres pivot Eric Staal left Thursday's game against the Washington Capitals midway through the third period after taking a hit to the head. He's considered day-to-day, head coach Ralph Krueger told WGR's Paul Hamilton.

Capitals forward Nic Dowd delivered the hit.

Dowd was given a two-minute minor on the play. Krueger said he was surprised it wasn't more.

Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe, who went after Dowd following the hit, classified it as a dirty play.

"I didn't see the hit itself. I just saw Eric kind of do a helicopter, which is usually a sign of a hit to the head," McCabe told The Athletic's John Vogl postgame. "As we all saw on the replay, it was definitely to the head and pretty dirty."

Sabres forward Taylor Hall agreed.

"That's a tough hit," Hall told Vogl. "He's not even a really dangerous player at that point when he has the puck, so for their guy to go after him and make contact with his jaw like that, it's not something that you want to see."

Buffalo acquired Staal in an offseason trade with the Minnesota Wild for Marcus Johansson. The team brought in the veteran to fill a massive void as its second-line center behind Jack Eichel.

The Sabres lost 6-4 to open their season.

## **Cozens to suit up this evening**

The Whitehorse Daily Star

January 14, 2021

National Hockey League sources say Whitehorse's Dylan Cozens will be in the lineup tonight for the Buffalo Sabres.

Cozens is set to make his NHL debut on the third line for the Sabres as they play the Washington Capitals.

He recently was an alternate captain with Canada's World Junior Team, which captured the silver medal.

He has also played with the Lethbridge Hurricanes and served a co-captain.

## Hall, Cozens make debuts | 5 takeaways from the Sabres' season opener

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 14, 2021

Taylor Hall and Tobias Rieder scored goals in their Sabres debuts, but early rust proved insurmountable in a 6-4 loss to the Washington Capitals inside KeyBank Center on Thursday.

The Sabres played their first game in 312 days, after the COVID-19 pandemic brought the 2019-20 season to an abrupt halt following a shootout win over the Capitals on March 9 of last year. They did their best to simulate game action with a pair of intrasquad scrimmages, but coach Ralph Krueger was expecting an acclimation period in their first experience against a true opponent.

"We expected rust and there was rust, and we expected an adjustment to the physicality and the speed," Krueger said. "For me, actually, the compete level as it evolved and then the way we competed from the third, there was some breakdowns on their part, too.

"They gave us chances. Even in the first period, we had six or seven pretty good chances. It just seems like it might be like that for the next few games. But we need to simplify with the puck. We need to make sure that are more compact defensively. We were a little hesitant. Our defensive game needs to take away the gaps and we need to attack quicker. I thought we were a little bit soft defensively as a group. We kind of fell back. We need to get back on our toes tomorrow."

Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie, John Carlson, and Brenden Dillon scored goals to give the Capitals a 4-1 lead in the second period. The Sabres twice cut the deficit to one goal in the third but were met with a quick response from the Capitals on both occasions, including an empty-net goal from Garnet Hathaway with 1:03 remaining.

In addition to Hall and Rieder, Jake McCabe and Victor Olofsson scored goals for the Sabres. Carter Hutton made 22 saves.

"I think you can take solace in the fact that we were able to come back and make it close," Hall said. "Obviously, we've got some guys offensively who can put it in the back of the net and force the issue that way.

"But it seemed like we were playing catchup all night, which is a tough way to play against any team but a team like Washington, a veteran team, that's going to be a tough night. So, we were behind the eight ball kind of right from the start of the game and weren't able to get out in front of things."

Here are five takeaways from the game.

### Staal exits with injury

Eric Staal left the game in the third period after he took an elbow to the head from Capitals forward Nic Dowd in the neutral zone. Dowd was given a two-minute minor for an illegal check to the head.

"We're just assessing him," Krueger said. "It's one of those where it's definitely in a day-to-day status and we'll see how he is in the morning. No update at the moment. Quite surprised that a hit to the head gets two minutes but it is what it is, and we're disappointed with that finish stretch there for sure."

The hit prompted post-whistle activity between the two teams, with McCabe fighting Dillon later in the period.

"I didn't see the hit itself," McCabe said. "I just saw Eric do a helicopter, which is usually a sign of a hit to the head. As we all saw on the replay, it was definitely to the head and pretty dirty."

### Cozens impresses in NHL debut

Dylan Cozens skated 12:09 and tallied the first point of his NHL career on Rieder's goal in the second period. Cozens was involved in a scrum in front of the net and helped free the puck to Rieder, who evaded a defenseman to score on a wrap-around shot.

"Dylan played a very good first game, very calm," Krueger said. "He never looked overwhelmed. I saw even a situation in the third period, he got hit by (defenseman Zdeno) Chara, no problem, he bounced right back at it.

"It was definitely an excellent debut from Dylan Cozens coming from junior hockey to the pace that was played here today. We're really pleased with his game."

The 19-year-old Cozens, Buffalo's first-round pick in 2019, spent the elongated offseason adding muscle after a prolific season with Lethbridge of the Western Hockey League. He felt the difference during his recent stint at the World Junior Championship, where he led Team Canada with 16 points.

In his first regular-season game against NHL players, he felt he was able to hold his own.

"I put in a lot of work this offseason to gain weight, get stronger so I can battle with guys at this level," Cozens said. "I think I did pretty good out there. Obviously, guys are bigger, stronger. But I think I held my own in battles."

The trio of Rieder, Cody Eakin and Cozens was Buffalo's best in terms of 5-on-5 shot attempt differential. The count was in Buffalo's favor, 9-4, with Cozens on the ice according to Natural Stat Trick.

An early strike for the power play

The Sabres finished the game 1-for-3 on the power play but showed a glimpse of their potential on the first attempt of the night, which ended with Hall's goal.

Hall joined a top unit consisting of Rasmus Dahlin at the point, Jack Eichel and Olofsson on the half walls, and Sam Reinhart in front of the net.

"There's guys that are really comfortable in their places and I'm there to add support all over the ice and when I can, it's time to strike and put pucks in the back of the net," Hall said.

The goal, scored just 18 seconds into the power play, began with a feed through traffic from Eichel to Olofsson. Olofsson pump faked from the right circle and stepped up, seemingly with a passing lane to Reinhart at the back door. Hall jumped on the pass in the slot and buried it.

"That was a good first night with our power play," Hall said. "Even our second unit had some really good zone time, some good chances when they were out there so we got to keep that going."

The new normal

The game was played without fans in attendance, a new experience for the majority of Sabres players. Artificial crowd noise was played in the arena and frontline workers introduced the team on the videoboard.

"It's definitely strange," McCabe said. "When you think of opening night, it's exciting. After a long layoff you can't wait to get in front of your hometown fans and hear their noise and have them rooting you on, having a loud building. It's definitely interesting with starting lineups and the anthems in an empty building. However, once the game starts, you're right back into it."

Right back at it

The Sabres and Capitals play again Friday night, another new normal for 2020-21. The 56-game schedule is broken up into two-game series, with the exception of a three-game series with New Jersey in March.

Buffalo will seek to simplify its game after puck mismanagement through the neutral zone led to time spent in its own end Thursday.

"I thought we were too complicated in the neutral zone and that gave them opportunities, and they kept it very simple," Krueger said. "They made very experienced simple plays early and then they came with two-man hard pressure."

"I would say that part of that was us setting it up but with the puck, we just didn't have our timing early. Like I said, everything came at us quickly, we needed to make quicker plays. What I was pleased with ... is that we started adjusting to it as the game progressed."

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. with puck drop set for 7.

## **At The Final Horn: Capitals 6 - Sabres 4**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 14, 2021

After an intense two weeks of training camp, the Buffalo Sabres hit the ice against the Washington Capitals on Thursday for their first game of the 2020-21 season - and their first since March 9 of last year.

In the first of a two-game set at KeyBank Center, the Capitals skated away with a 6-4 victory.

Taylor Hall, Tobias Rieder, Jake McCabe and Victor Olofsson scored for Buffalo while Washington's top line of Alex Ovechkin (0+2), Nicklas Backstrom (1+1) and T.J. Oshie (1+2) along with defenseman John Carlson (1+1) found their way onto the scoresheet with multi-point efforts.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel picked up a pair of assists. He recorded 20 multi-point games last season. McCabe, Hall and Olofsson had two-point nights as well, as each recorded a goal and an assist.

Carter Hutton made 22 saves while Ilya Samsonov also stopped 22 shots for Washington.

What happened

Washington got on the board early when Backstrom tallied 5:43 into the contest.

Hall made his presence known right away, scoring his first as a member of the Sabres 8:48 into the opening period on the power play to tie the game.

Oshie scored at the 10:33 mark on the man advantage and then at the 7:05 mark of the second period, Carlson skated in alone to make it 4-1.

Rieder cut the lead in half on a wraparound goal with 1:14 remaining in the second. The goal was also his first as a Sabre after signing as a free agent in the offseason.

With those goals from Hall and Rieder, Buffalo has now had a newly acquired player score in six of their last 10 season-openers: Hall, Jason Pominville, Eichel, Zengus Girgensons, Steve Ott and Ville Leino.

Each scored on his first shot, except for Eichel, who scored on his second, and Rieder, who scored on his third.

Buffalo got off to a very fast start in the third period when McCabe scored 20 seconds in, but the Capitals responded on the next shift to regain their two-goal lead on tally from Jakub Vrana.

Olofsson got Buffalo within one when he roofed a shot over Ilya Samsonov with 1:54 to play.

With 1:03 left, Garnet Hathaway put one into Buffalo's empty net.

The big takeaway

Buffalo starts the season 0-1-0 and while some of new additions made an impact on the scoresheet, the firepower of Washington's veterans proved to be too much.

Washington scored one on the power play and the other five at even strength with, as mentioned, their top line proving to be tough to contain.

With 9:56 remaining in the third period, newly acquired center Eric Staal left the game after being hit in the head by Capitals center Nic Dowd.

Roll the highlight film

We'll go split screen for this one.

And before the game, local frontline workers introduced the opening night roster:

Worthy of a mention

Dylan Cozens, Buffalo's first-round pick in 2019, made his NHL debut and recorded his first NHL point - a primary assist - on Rieder's goal.

Up next

The Sabres and Capitals will go at it again tomorrow night. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. but coverage begins with the pregame show at 6:30 on MSG.

## **'Return to Royal' hoodie available as part of Game Night to Go pack**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 14, 2021

With the 2020-21 campaign opening without an audience inside KeyBank Center, fans can enhance their Sabres experience at home with Game Night to Go packs, available throughout the season.

The first pack includes a "Return to Royal" hoodie featuring logos from throughout Sabres history, a Sabres drawstring bag, a magnet schedule, a Sabres facemask, and a puck autographed by a current or former Sabres player.

Fans can purchase now through Jan. 28 or while supplies last at [sabresgamenight.com](http://sabresgamenight.com).

A portion of proceeds from the first Game Night to Go pack will benefit FeedMore WNY, a program that provides meals to those in need throughout Western New York.

## **Breaking down the Sabres' season-opening roster**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 14, 2021

Kevyn Adams and Ralph Krueger are aligned in their thinking when it comes to what makes a successful roster. Upon taking over as general manager in June, Adams described the NHL as a "matchup league" and spoke of constructing a lineup with the versatility to compete against the league's deeper teams.

The Sabres won 20 games at home in 2019-20 compared to just 10 on the road. Home teams are given the second line change prior to faceoffs, giving coaches the ability to pick and choose their matchups. On the road, the opposite is true.

"With the additions in our lineup right now that consistency which we were missing last year has a much higher chance of happening," Krueger said. "We were often picked apart on the road because of a lack of depth. We have an excellent home record where we have more control over our matchups.

"With this lineup ... just rolling the lines on the road will be much more realistic and possible and still give us a chance to be very successful."

Matchup capability was one influence on Buffalo's offseason. Others were adding specialists to reinforce special teams and acquiring depth that will be crucial during a condensed 56-game schedule.

The Sabres' season-opening roster consists of 13 forwards, seven defensemen, and two goalies for a total of 22 players. They will start the season carrying the full six players on their taxi squad, a new addition for the pandemic-shortened campaign.

Here is a breakdown of the personnel and the roles they are expected to play.

### Forwards (13)

Krueger's philosophy when it comes to his forward lines is to strike balance through the lineup, with each line containing a mix of offensive and defensive strengths.

Let's go line by line based on Thursday's morning skate to see how they were constructed. (Keep in mind that Kyle Okposo is day-to-day and will miss Thursday's opener.)

4 Taylor Hall - 9 Jack Eichel - 72 Tage Thompson

Krueger said upon acquiring Hall in the offseason that he envisioned the 2018 Hart Trophy winner skating alongside Eichel. True to his word, we've seen the duo play as linemates ever since Eichel joined his first practice last Wednesday.

Eichel, having averaged over a point per game the past two seasons, will be the most productive centerman Hall has skated with regularly. None of Hall's previous primary centermen - Jordan Eberle, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Travis Zajac, Nico Hischier, and Christian Dvorak - had averaged a point per game in a season during their careers. Hall did spend 2015-16 on a line with Leon Draisaitl, but it was years before Draisaitl developed into the Hart Trophy winner he is today.

Thompson earned the first shot on the duo's right wing thanks to an excellent camp, including standout performances in both scrimmages. Read about his ascension [here](#).

68 Victor Olofsson - 12 Eric Staal - 23 Sam Reinhart

The addition of the veteran Staal gives the Sabres a bonafide No. 2 center who was an All-Star just last season with the Minnesota Wild. He has skated alongside Reinhart since the start of camp, with the duo showing some immediate signs of chemistry. Olofsson joined them during the latter half of camp.

"We feel there's been a real synergy there," Krueger said. "They find each other. Sam being on the right side and Eric being a lefty, they just seem to be really feeding off each other and continually finding each other all over the ice.

"We like that look with Olie there with his finishing ability. We know now Olie can play the right or left side, so that versatility helps us. Sam and Eric have synched right from day one here. I feel there's definitely a tandem in the making for us."

53 Jeff Skinner - 27 Curtis Lazar - 15 Riley Sheahan

Skinner is looking to rebound from a season in which he scored 14 goals in 59 games despite generating 5-on-5 scoring chances at a rate that placed him alongside some of the game's premier forwards.

Krueger spoke highly of his offseason conversations with Skinner and said the forward has worked hard to find his game within the team's principles away from the puck. Once he does, his presence gives any line a natural scoring threat around the net.

"He's worked hard in the offseason," Krueger said. "He's coming in here and for us, what's important no matter your role, no matter your skill level is that in general you play within the principles. He's continuing to work on that together with the coaching staff.

"I think once he lets that go and relaxes and trusts his instincts, he's going to give us what we need, which is we need scoring right through the lineup, and the present setup will give that line opportunity to add to our offense. And it'll be important for Jeff to just keep working hard."

Lazar carved out a consistent role with the Sabres after beginning last season in Rochester, establishing himself as a physical checking presence at 5-on-5 who also killed penalties and took high-pressure faceoffs, including at the start of overtime.

The Sabres had a positive share of shot attempts (51.06) in 82:46 with Skinner and Lazar on the ice together at 5-on-5 last season, according to Natural Stat Trick.

Rounding out the line on Thursday was Sheahan, who arrived at camp on a professional tryout but earned a one-year contract following an injury to Zemgus Girgensons. Read more about his "specialist role" here.

13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 24 Dylan Cozens

This line was originally constructed to have a similar personality to the trio of Girgensons, Johan Larsson, and Okposo last season. That group grinded out long shifts in the offensive zone, often setting the table for Buffalo's scoring lines.

"Our job will be to provide energy, to be safe, to be reliable," Eakin said. "Chip in and just be steady."

Eakin replaces Larsson, who signed with Arizona during the offseason. The Sabres like Eakin for his physical style along with his potential for offense, just one season removed from a 22-goal, 41-point campaign with Vegas in 2018-19.

Injuries have changed the makeup of the line, which began with Eakin centering Girgensons and Okposo. Girgensons is expected to miss six months after having surgery to repair a groin injury. Okposo is day-to-day entering the regular season.

Replacing Girgensons is Rieder, another newcomer who the Sabres value for his ability on the penalty kill and his defensively responsible game at 5-on-5. Krueger has also expressed belief that Rieder can contribute offensively in the right situation. (The precedent is Girgensons, who scored his highest goal and point totals since 2014-15 in his first year under Krueger.)

In Okposo's place, it appears the nod will go to the 19-year-old Cozens in what will be his NHL debut. Cozens was a late entrant to camp after dominating the World Junior Championship with 16 points (8+8) in seven games.

"We definitely trust him," Krueger said. "I mean, he's a very responsible player, extremely smart and coachable. ... We think he's ready for a pretty big load off the hop, but only time will tell for all of us."

#### Defensemen (7)

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 62 Brandon Montour

33 Colin Miller - 10 Henri Jokiharju

The top six largely resembles the group from last season, with one caveat: Dahlin has undergone a physical transformation during the long offseason, going from 193 pounds at the start of last season to 207 now. Krueger said a continued evolution for the 20-year-old will be essential to the team's growth.

"He is extremely competitive and wants to be a big part of us taking another step," Krueger said. "I certainly see, with the game pace that we're gonna be on, sharing the minutes through the lineup whether it's rolling your D or rolling your forward lines. You're going to see more of that from all teams just as we try to get ourselves up to speed.

"So, yeah, I definitely see his minutes growing. I also see his hunger to learn the game away from the puck and to take that responsibility defensively that [players] don't usually have as they grow up when they have so much skill. ... In many ways, we need him to grow for us to be able to reach our goals."

Alternate: 44 Matt Irwin

The Sabres added Irwin as another presence who can step in on the bottom two pairs, provide on-ice leadership, and play the penalty kill. He outlined his team-first mentality after signing a one-year deal during the offseason.

#### Goalies (2)

35 Linus Ullmark

40 Carter Hutton

Ullmark returns having set career highs in wins (17) and save percentage (.915) in 2019-20. He took over the net in the process, starting 18 of 20 games before sustaining a lower-body injury that ultimately ended his season on Jan. 28.

Hutton revealed during the offseason that he had repaired sight issues mid-season and felt he finished strong as a result. Together, the two goaltenders will navigate a condensed schedule of 56 games in 113 days.

#### Taxi squad (6)

Forwards: 22 Jack Quinn, 37 Casey Mittelstadt, 74 Rasmus Asplund

Defensemen: 3 William Borgen, 88 Brandon Davidson

Goalies: 34 Jonas Johansson

Five of the six players on this list can move in and out of the taxi squad without having to clear waivers. The exception is the veteran Davidson, who cleared waivers over the weekend.

Asplund and Borgen both started camp with the secondary practice group but earned callups based on their play in practice and in scrimmages. Both are young players with multiple pro seasons and NHL games already under their belt.

Mittelstadt split last season between Buffalo and Rochester, impressing Sabres brass with how he handled his assignment to the AHL. Krueger has referred to him as an option who can step in on any line.

Quinn, the team's first-round pick in this year's draft, can play six games before burning a year of his entry-level contract.

## 'Trust your instincts' | Previewing the Sabres' opener against Washington

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 14, 2021

Ralph Krueger had a few parting words for his players following their morning skate inside KeyBank Center on Thursday.

"Trust your instincts."

The Sabres will host the Washington Capitals tonight, 312 days removed from their last game (which, coincidentally, was a shootout win over the Capitals). The past two weeks have been spent re-acclimating players to game speed and the principles of Sabres hockey, an ongoing process for all teams as the regular-season opens.

Tonight, Krueger wants his talent-laden lineup to not overthink their first game back.

"Everybody knows we've had two weeks here to speak about all the tactical variations that we find important, the way our principles on the ice come into play. But now, we've stopped the teaching. It's time to play and it's time to let their instincts roll and to have fun.

"We're back playing hockey again, playing games, competing - which is what we're all about. It's gonna be an evening where we let them flow, we let them go, we don't over-coach. We don't want to over-correct. Tomorrow morning, we can regroup and go back to some teaching."

The Sabres will have six forwards making their team debuts. One is a first-round pick making his NHL debut in 19-year-old Dylan Cozens. Taylor Hall is a Hart Trophy winner. Eric Staal was an All-Star last season and brings a resume few in the NHL can match.

Goaltender Carter Hutton used one word to describe the revamped forward group: dynamic.

"You think even some of the additions down our lineup," Hutton said. "Like Tobias Rieder's been awesome. He can fly. Cody Eakin. Eric Staal, he's a little bit different. Kind of bigger, methodical. But it's like the puck finds him and he's just so smart, he finds it. He's been doing this a long time. So, it's definitely something to be excited about."

Their first test comes against a Washington team that has a new coach in Peter Laviolette but the same foundational players who have been perennial contenders, headlined by Alexander Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, and John Carlson.

"It's important to know when the energy needs to be focused on what," Krueger said. "Tonight, it needs to be focused on playing, on enjoying it within (the system) as good as possible."

### Projected lineup

Kyle Okposo, who is day-to-day, did not participate in the morning skate. Here's how the Sabres lined up in his absence.

4 Taylor Hall - 9 Jack Eichel - 72 Tage Thompson  
68 Victor Olofsson - 12 Eric Staal - 23 Sam Reinhart  
13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 24 Dylan Cozens  
53 Jeff Skinner - 27 Curtis Lazar - 15 Riley Sheahan

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

Hutton was the first goaltender off the ice, which typically signifies the starter.

"We've really liked Carter Hutton's camp," Krueger said. "He's come in here extremely confident, very fit. He's in a good place. We're excited about that."

#### Scouting the Capitals

So begins a new normal for 2020-21: a regular-season schedule comprised entirely of eight games against each divisional opponent, broken primarily into two-game series. The Sabres host the Capitals again at KeyBank Center on Friday night.

What effect might that have on the games? It's natural to expect more physicality the more teams play each other as familiarity spawns new rivalries. Tactically speaking, Krueger said he does not expect coaches to have much room for surprises as the season wears on, making skill paramount.

"I think as we adjust to this many games in a row against one team with eight, the skill - the upper-end skill - is going to be the difference maker," Krueger said. "I think that keeping the strong players in a good place and not overusing them, keeping them with a sense of freshness but still using them wherever possible to close out games is going to be, probably, more important than in the past."

We've already mentioned the usual suspects in the Capitals lineup. Ovechkin enters his 16th season having led the league with 48 goals in 2019-20. He needs three goals to pass Mike Gartner (708) for seventh place on the all-time list.

So, what's new? In addition to Laviolette, the Capitals have six new players on their opening-night roster, the most notable of which is longtime Bruins captain Zdeno Chara. Ilya Samsonov, 23, will take over starting duties in net after Braden Holtby departed for Vancouver during the offseason.

#### Tune in

Pregame coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. with puck drop set for 7. We'll have plenty postgame here on Sabres.com

## **How communication, sports science played roles in Sabres camp**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 14, 2021

Ralph Krueger was given a unique task as head coach for Team Europe at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. His job was to unite a melting-pot roster comprised of players from eight different countries, many of whom were stars on their NHL teams, and have them buy into a common purpose.

He had less than two weeks to do it.

"He has a really good character," said Sabres forward Tobias Rieder, who was a member of Team Europe. "His speeches are really good. It motivates you. It makes you want to do good for you coach. He just has that charisma."

You might remember the story. Team Europe went from an unproven concept to a tournament finalist, falling 2-1 to superpower Canada in the gold medal game. Years later, upon Krueger's appointment as Sabres head coach, Thomas Vanek would recall the coach's role in their success.

"He's able to really coach the mind," Vanek told The Instigators in 2019. "Not only hockey. Coach the mind of the whole group."

Krueger was presented with a similar task entering this season, with a training camp of just 14 days, an influx of new key players, and a set of COVID-19 protocols that limited off-ice interaction. He and his staff developed a schedule geared toward maximizing players' physical and mental readiness.

The Sabres open the season Thursday against the Washington Capitals, the same team they defeated in a shootout 312 days ago in what would be their last game of 2020.

Here is a look inside the two weeks that prepared the Sabres for the big day.

"Quality over quantity"

Taylor Hall recognized the drills as he took part in his first practice with the Sabres on Jan. 1. He also felt familiar in the atmosphere set by Krueger, his coach for three seasons in Edmonton.

"A lot of the philosophies are the exact same," Hall said. "Our meetings are fast, our meeting are to the point, and that's how our practices are as well. They're filled with pace, they're filled with quickness and high quality."

"I think he's a big quality-over-quantity guy and I think that's a great trait that you want to have in a coach, especially a coach when you're on a new team. To have that, it's to the point. There's not a lot of gray areas with Ralph, and I think that's a great thing."

"Quality" was the word used by Krueger when he addressed the media prior to the start of camp. The Sabres opted to start right off the bat with a practice group that would resemble their NHL roster, separated from a smaller group of young players who would have to push their way to the top. They opened with up-tempo, physically demanding practices to reacclimate players to game speed.

"We definitely want to increase the pace of the Buffalo Sabres this year," Krueger said after the first practice. "So, we need to feel it in sections of practice through drills that are designed for that pace to express itself. And then we will slow it down and speed it up."

Communication was paramount in all directions. Newcomers skated with returning players, prompting teaching moments between teammates as additions familiarized themselves with Krueger's principles. A socially distanced meeting area was set up rink-side for team-wide video instruction.

"It's shorter than usual, so you're getting some stuff given to you on a daily basis," said defenseman Matt Irwin, who signed a one-year deal to join the team during the offseason. "But it certainly wasn't overwhelming in any regards. It was well planned out, I think, by the staff in terms of being able to implement new things or things that they wanted to grow on from last year."

"With that, having that open line of communication, it just makes it that much easier to get the point across, ask questions, and then just go out and execute on the ice and go from there. Everything has been super smooth on and off the ice."

Smart, progressive intensity

No coach can succeed without the support of their staff. Krueger leaned on the expertise of his performance specialists, head strength and conditioning coach Dr. Ed Gannon and lead sports scientist Dr. Dean Higham, to help construct a camp schedule that would optimize physical performance.

They landed on a periodized structure broken into three phases. The Sabres had three practices leading into their first intrasquad scrimmage, followed by a recovery day. That cycle repeated for the second phase. Phase 3 was a pair of practice days leading into the opener against Washington.

Players were constantly monitored along the way. Gannon and Higham stayed in close contact with players and their trainers throughout the long offseason, tailoring individual plans based on each player's training environment, their personal goals, and the goals of the organization. The constant communication assured there would be no surprises when players arrived for the start of camp.

The Sabres have a variety of tools at their disposal to create a picture of how each athlete is reacting physically to the rigors of camp. Off the ice, they measure neuromuscular status and hydration levels. On it, they keep track of heart rates and use accelerometer sensors planted into players' shoulder pads to determine a individual workloads.

"The training camp period is a reconditioning period," Gannon said. "The goal of the training camp period is to bridge the gap, build up the sport-specific intensities to prepare them to play. That's something they just don't get during the offseason."

"There's a time restriction there. But we do have to ensure that we're pushing volume, but pushing intensity in a smart, progressive way to bridge that gap between practice and play. This time around, we had two weeks to do it in, which is shorter than we usually get."

The idea for the first two phases was to build gradual physiological stress and then back off to allow recovery. Measurements over the past two days indicated a positive bounce back in terms of how the players reacted to Saturday's scrimmage.

The monitoring continues throughout the season. Krueger said he expects to begin each day with a conversation with his sports science department to determine players' availability and potential workloads, which becomes more crucial than ever during a condensed 56-game season. It's not only about measuring players' recovery needs; it's about creating the proper plan to ensure taxi squad players remain in game shape so that they're ready to play any number of minutes on a given day.

"That line of communication between the support staff and Ralph and his coaches continues on all season," Higham said. "All of the information to players continues on all season and our monitoring and the tools that we introduced in training camp continue all season."

"... There's constant communication. We're always making adjustments to make sure the guys are getting what they need."