



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*January 22, 2021*

## **Washington hosts Buffalo after Wilson's 2-goal game**

Associated Press

January 21, 2021

Buffalo Sabres (1-3-0, eighth in the East Division) vs. Washington Capitals (2-0-2, second in the East Division)

Washington; Friday, 7 p.m. EST

**BOTTOM LINE:** Washington hosts the Buffalo Sabres after Tom Wilson scored two goals in the Capitals' 5-4 overtime loss to the Penguins.

Washington went 11-12-2 in division play and 18-10-5 at home a season ago. Goalies for the Capitals compiled an .898 save percentage while allowing 2.9 goals on 30.1 shots per game last season.

Buffalo finished 10-12-2 in division action and 10-20-4 on the road in the 2019-20 season. The Sabres averaged 3.1 penalties and 6.9 penalty minutes per game.

In their last meeting on Jan. 15, Washington won 2-1.

**INJURIES:** Capitals: Michal Kempny: out (lower body).

Sabres: None listed.

## **Mike Harrington: As Linus Ullmark mourns, Jack Eichel's small gesture feels big**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 22, 2021

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel looks to pass against the Capitals.

Being captain requires more than just playing like a star on the ice. Jack Eichel's evolution in the role continues.

A pretty big moment from late Monday night in Philadelphia made the rounds in KeyBank Center on Thursday.

Nobody knew about the behind-the-scenes drama the team was going through before and during its 6-1 grounding of the Philadelphia Flyers. Just after the morning skate of a game he was scheduled to start, goaltender Linus Ullmark got the call from his mother in Sweden that his father had passed away at age 63.

Tough news to get any day. Especially a few hours before a game when you're thousands of miles from home. The Sabres knew one of their own was hurting and were rock-solid in support of him.

Coach Ralph Krueger isn't always in the room immediately after the final horn, preferring to make his messages resonate more by taking the pulpit only when he has something to say.

But the first win of any season is significant and for the Sabres to produce the kind of pounding they did Monday was a worthwhile moment for him to chime in.

After he spoke, Krueger said he turned the floor over to Eichel and things got "extremely emotional" as Eichel presented the game puck to Ullmark in a gesture of solidarity within the group.

"It's tough. You really can't come up with the words that make someone feel better in that situation," Eichel said Thursday. "It's a little bit tougher, even with the way things are currently in our world and not being able to be with his family.

"Linus is a big part of our team. I think everyone knows that. I think his play speaks for itself when he's in our net. More than anything, he's a part of our family here. And that's what we are. We're one group, one big family in that locker room. We care about each other. It's one of the guys going through a tough time and you just want to be there and supportive."

Ullmark felt the support.

"It was a very nice gesture," he told Sabres.com in a story published Thursday. "Everybody reached out to me and has been giving me their condolences. When they gave me the puck, it took all my might and my power to not break down completely in the locker room."

Krueger felt that power as well.

"When Linus came to the locker room as the guys came off the ice, there wasn't a guy that didn't just give him a little hug – or whatever we're allowed to do to give him some contact – and show we're there for him," the coach said. "It was an emotional moment. Definitely, you can see we are a club built on good people and it means a lot to us. I think these situations test our mettle. And thus far, I'm really proud of the way the team and Linus have been dealing with it."

NHL captains have a lot to deal with these days. The schedule is brutal and Covid-19 protocols put a crimp on the day-to-day hockey grind more than any time in their lives. The Sabres left Thursday afternoon for a three-day trip in which they will all be isolated in their hotel rooms, only allowed to leave the building for the arena or take exercise walks.

"It's definitely different. You need to find ways to occupy your time because a lot of it is by yourself and you obviously don't want to put yourself or your team in a bad situation," Eichel said. "We're gonna have a day where we're not playing a game. It makes it a little tougher, but you just got to find five things to do and keep busy."

Eichel doesn't have a goal yet but entered Thursday's play leading the NHL with six assists and one point off the scoring lead of Vegas' Mark Stone.

Eichel labored through the Sabres' 6-4 season-opening loss to the Capitals last week with only one shot on goal and a 40.6% Corsi rating though he still picked up two points. Since then, he's been markedly better.

Eichel had a season-high four shots on goal in Tuesday's 3-0 loss in Philly but fretted over being on the ice for two of the goals. He won only 40.4% of his faceoffs and was at a 52.4% Corsi at even strength against the Caps but spiked those numbers to 54.3 and 61.8 against the Flyers.

Eichel and Taylor Hall each has six points in the four games, but they have combined for one goal. If they keep controlling the puck like they have, that will come quickly. This weekend, against a Washington team missing several big names due to Covid-19, would be a good starting point.

"Obviously, it's part of my job to score so I would like to contribute with putting pucks in the back of the net," Eichel said. "That's one of the things that pay me for. But as a line, we've been productive. ... A lot of it's just about keeping it simple, letting our skill take over."

Eichel said he's been focused on attacking the net more to get more shots. After the rusty opener, the Sabres' crispness has returned faster than you might have expected. They have to finish better around the net.

In Eichel's case, it's easy to forget he got on the ice for training camp five days later than his teammates due to an upper-body injury.

"We expected him to take longer to get up to speed and I've actually been positively surprised at how he dealt with the injury, how he's come back," Krueger said. "I'm expecting within the next few games that he'll have the level that he wants. He's still, as everybody is, working for these final few percentage points but when they come it's gonna be exciting."

Krueger has to be happy about the vibe in the room as well. Eichel's small gesture Monday can go a long way.

"He loves the feel of the team," Krueger said. "He's been a terrific leader on and off the ice. You can feel the belief in our potential, which is truly coming out of his heart and gives everybody else confidence."

## **Russ Brandon, former Bills and Sabres president, said to be serving as XFL adviser**

By Derek Gee  
The Buffalo News  
January 21, 2021

Former Buffalo Bills and Sabres President Russ Brandon is serving as an adviser to one of the new owners of the XFL, Sports Business Journal reported Thursday.

The XFL 3.0 was purchased by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, ex-wife and business partner Dany Garcia and RedBird Capital Partners for \$15 million in August.

Brandon is said to be serving as an adviser to RedBird Capital on XFL matters, the report said. The report does not identify specifics related to Brandon's role.

RedBird was founded by former Goldman Sachs partner Gerry Cardinale and has been involved in sports deals, including the Dallas Cowboys, New York Yankees and the NFL.

In July, RedBird filed with the SEC to create a special purpose acquisition company, or SPAC, with hopes of raising \$500 million for investments in sports data firms. RedBird also owns a French football team and has invested in a licensing company involved with the NFLPA and Major League Baseball.

Browns President Alec Scheiner is also "heavily involved," according to the report. The XFL is searching for a football operations executive who will serve in a role similar to a commissioner but with less authority. The XFL has failed twice, once in 2001 and once last year, under the leadership of WWE Chairman Vince McMahon.

Brandon resigned as president and managing partner of Pegula Sports and Entertainment in May 2018 following an internal investigation into Brandon's workplace behavior and allegations of personal misconduct, two sources told The Buffalo News at the time.

## **Sabres' Linus Ullmark opens up about mourning his father's death**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

January 21, 2021

Goaltender Linus Ullmark revealed to the Buffalo Sabres' team website that he missed two games in Philadelphia after learning Monday that his 63-year-old father died.

Ullmark, 27, was expected to start for the Sabres on Monday night against the Flyers at Wells Fargo Center. However, he received a call from his mother telling him the devastating news shortly after the morning skate.

Ullmark revealed the emotional details of the loss to Sabres.com, including that he was able to say goodbye shortly after his father entered the hospital. Consumed by grief in the hours leading up to puck drop Monday, Ullmark informed the coaching staff that he needed time away from hockey.

"There was no question about it for me, personally," Ullmark said. "... I just told them that hockey's not a priority at the time. From there, it was basically just trying to deal with all the emotions that came. I've been kind of holding back."

Ullmark, who emerged as the team's starter while playing 34 games last season, skated with a small group in Philadelphia prior to the game Tuesday, but he did not feel ready to focus on competition. He plans to practice Thursday and travel with the team to Washington D.C., where the Sabres are scheduled to play the Capitals on Friday and Sunday.

"Same thing for (Tuesday's) game as well," Ullmark said. "I was in a better place, but not in the state of mind that I felt that I could go out there and perform the way I wanted to. And, also, that I wasn't done dealing with the emotions and the thoughts that I had – still have – regarding all this."

"It's not two separate entities where you have your taxi guys and you have your roster guys. The players are involved in the day to day," said Matt Ellis, the Sabres' director of player development.

When Ullmark informed the Sabres on Monday, the team recalled Jonas Johansson from the taxi squad and Carter Hutton started in goal. Hutton stopped 21 of 22 shots during a 6-1 win in which Buffalo scored two third-period goals.

Sam Reinhart and Curtis Lazar both scored twice. Jack Eichel and Taylor Hall each had three assists. Yet, it was Ullmark who received the game puck from Eichel, who is in his third season as the Sabres' captain.

"Obviously, you don't see it coming," Ullmark said. "It was a very nice gesture. Everybody reached out to me and have been giving me their condolences."

"When they gave me the puck, it took all my might and my power to not break down completely in the locker room."

## **Alex Ovechkin among four Caps in quarantine who will miss games vs. Sabres**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 21, 2021

Washington Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin is among four players in quarantine due to Covid-19 protocols who will miss games this weekend against the Buffalo Sabres in Capital One Arena.

Capitals coach Peter Laviolette announced after practice Thursday that the team's four prominent Russians – Ovechkin, second-line center Evgeny Kuznetsov, shutdown defenseman Dmitry Orlov and starting goalie Ilya Samsonov – would be out for the next four games while they quarantine.

After hosting the Sabres on Friday night and Sunday afternoon, the Caps entertain the New York Islanders on Tuesday and Thursday.

Laviolette acknowledged one positive case, with the others considered close contacts, and the Washington Post reported Thursday that an asymptomatic Samsonov had the positive test. The team called up several players from its taxi squad, including former Ottawa goalie Craig Anderson, and will insert former Sabres winger Conor Sheary into the lineup after he's been a healthy scratch for two of the four games.

The NHL fined the Capitals \$100,000 on Wednesday and the team issued a statement admonishing its players for not following protocols. Ovechkin then issued a statement apologizing for the group's maskless gathering in their Pittsburgh hotel, where the Post reported they played video games and watched sports on television.

"It's hard. Those are four big pieces for us and important pieces, so they'll be missed," Laviolette said. "It's a difficult thing. We totally understand why the rules are in place and there's no arguing with that. We want to be compliant. We made a mistake and we need to do a better job."

Ovechkin, the NHL's reigning Rocket Richard Trophy winner as the league's top goal scorer, has one goal and four assists in the Caps' first four games. He has not missed as many as four games in a season since 2013-14. He has 33 goals and 53 points in 52 career games against Buffalo.

The Capitals (2-0-2) posted 6-4 and 2-1 victories over the Sabres in KeyBank Center to open the season, then lost in Pittsburgh in a shootout and in overtime. They have won seven straight against Buffalo in D.C. heading into their home opener.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel didn't know specifics on the Washington situation so he wouldn't comment on it directly, but said all NHL players knew what they signed up for this season.

"The onus is on the guys. We've had conversations internally within the locker room with the staff and management and a lot of it obviously lies on us," Eichel said. "Obviously, those are some really good players on their team. It's going to be a weird season where things like this happen. For us, that's really all I can speak of. In our situation, we just need to take those things out of the league's hands, obey the rules and do the things with the protocols that have been set in place for us."

Under the NHL's lengthy Covid-19 rules, all players have single rooms on the road and gatherings in individual rooms are not allowed. Ovechkin's wife, Nastya, harshly criticized the protocols on Instagram Thursday

"Of course, you can't catch the virus when you and your teammates sit together on the bench, hug each other when they score a goal, or when they are all together in the lounge or locker room," she wrote. "Players can't get infected when they are at the restaurants, supermarkets, malls, etc. Virus only works in a hotel room. The one who came up with this rule obviously is very logical!"

Nastya Ovechkin also revealed that her husband and Orlov have Covid-19 antibodies, indicating they have already been infected by the virus at some point prior to training camp.

"We knew the rules. We're not sitting here saying that we were uninformed or we weren't aware," Laviolette said. "We need to do a better job. The players, I think, being on their first road trip and being inside of the hotel for

that long a time and wanting to be near each other, I get it. But at the end of the day, it is about staying safe and those were the messages that we passed along to the players.

"It's a learning lesson for everybody because it is real stuff that we're talking about, we don't take it lightly and we're trying to be 100% compliant and yet when you make a mistake, it can be costly."

#### Okposo returns

Kyle Okposo's absence from the Sabres' lineup is expected to end soon.

The 32-year-old right wing practiced with team Thursday at KeyBank Center after missing the first four games of the season with a lower-body injury. Okposo is traveling with the Sabres to Washington, but it's unclear if he'll be in the lineup Friday and/or Sunday.

Okposo sustained the injury during the team's second preseason intrasquad scrimmage Jan. 11, and he reagravated the issue in practice the following day.

"To come to the realization that after 10 months of not playing hockey I wouldn't be ready to start the year, that was hard," said Okposo. "But I guess you have to take a macro view and it's a long sprint basically, so I wanted to make sure I took care of it and got to where I needed to be where I can help my team. Definitely a hard thing to not be there at the beginning, but looking forward to getting back out there soon."

#### Roster moves

Forward Rasmus Asplund was assigned to the taxi squad Thursday after playing 7:20 during the Sabres' 3-0 loss to Philadelphia.

Buffalo also promoted goalie Dustin Tokarski from Rochester to the taxi squad, and the 31-year-old will travel with the Sabres to Washington. Carter Hutton is day to day after not finishing the game Tuesday, the result of the goalie taking an elbow to the head during a collision with Flyers defenseman Ivan Provorov.

## **Mike Harrington: Sabres' Jason Pominville knows the feeling of Taron Johnson's big Bills moment**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
January 21, 2021

Taron Johnson, meet Jason Pominville.

Make a huge play in a big spot under the bright glare of the postseason and you're forever a hero in Buffalo.

There's been a good number of them around here over the years for the Bills and Sabres. Not to mention the Braves, Bandits and local colleges. The sudden nature of Johnson's 101-yard interception return Saturday night against the Baltimore Ravens conjured memories of Pominville, whose iconic overtime goal in Ottawa similarly sent the Sabres to a conference final in 2006.

The '06 Sabres were a total surprise, a team whose momentum built during the season and through the playoffs. The Bills of 2021 were expected to be a playoff-caliber outfit but have surprised observers by pushing into the NFL's elite.

And each one got to their league's final four by virtue of a quick strike we'll never forget.

"That's funny you bring that up. What a way to compare it," Pominville said when reached by phone Wednesday in Repentigny, Quebec. "He makes a big play like that and the team hasn't advanced in the playoffs this far in something like 25 years. And this play helps them advance basically to the conference finals, like what we did when we advanced in Ottawa.

"Just too bad that it wasn't in front of 70 plus-thousand people for them. How great would that have been?"

Pominville said he only caught part of the game against the Ravens, and missed the Johnson interception live. But he's seen it more than a few times. And he knows how Johnson's life in Buffalo is forever changed.

"Oh my God," he said with a laugh. "You have no idea how many times people came up to me after that for a drink or a round. They were like, 'You should never have to pay in the city again.' It was pretty surreal. That would happen all the time. Surreal for sure."

Most Bills fans had probably given negligible thoughts to Johnson, a 2018 fourth-round pick out of Weber State, until his pick-six against Pittsburgh on Dec. 13. In 2006, Pominville started the season in Rochester and was a bottom-line player hoping to crawl his way up the lineup. He didn't get a whole lot of attention, either, with bigger names all over the roster.

Pominville was 23 at the time and had already played three full years in Rochester. Still, he scored 18 goals with the Sabres that season in a career that would eventually lead to seven 20-goal campaigns, more than 1,000 games with Buffalo and Minnesota and stints as the Sabres' captain.

But that night, people wondered if coach Lindy Ruff had lost his mind when he put Pominville on the ice with fellow rookie Derek Roy to kill a Jay McKee penalty in a 2-2 game with the Sabres a goal away from clinching the series.

"Not that we hadn't killed penalties in the playoffs or during that season, but we're in the playoffs," Pominville said. "We're in overtime, faceoff in our zone. And he gives me and 'Roysie' the tap to go out. Two rookies in 'D' zone. Goes to show you I guess how much trust he had in us at the time."

You know what happened. Pominville got the puck through the neutral zone with teammates yelling "forward, forward" at him from the bench to tell him that he was working against Senators winger Daniel Alfredsson. He beat Alfredsson wide, cut in front of Ray Emery and tucked the puck home to end the series.

It was the first overtime shorthanded goal to clinch a series in NHL history.

Rick Jeanneret called the Sabres "scary good" as they celebrated on the ice below him and the goal was destined to live forever in team lore.

"The play develops, the goal happens and you're excited, but you're just living the moment at the time," Pominville said. "And we were all hoping to move on and to keep going in our playoff journey.

"We were basically kind of rock stars in the city at the time, right? So everyone was hopping on board with the Sabres. As time went by, you realized how important the goal was, and people still bring it up to me. Even when I came back to Buffalo (2017), it was pretty crazy. I never even thought that they would still be talking about that goal. Every time I see people in Buffalo, that's one of the first things they bring up."

Pominville moved his family back to suburban Montreal in June. He's working as a skills advisor and youth coach for the Pioneers of Lanaudiere, the organization that he played in as a child.

Pominville said Johnson is forever a hero now, no matter where the Bills' Super Bowl run ends. Remember, the '06 Sabres didn't even get to the Stanley Cup final, as they lost Game 7 of the East final in Carolina.

"It's unbelievable how they've waited this long to be in the situation they're in and now that they're there, there's only 6,000 fans in the stadium," Pominville said. "What are the odds of this all happening with no one there? With how football crazy the city is going right now. I've seen the videos of Bills Mafia smashing tables downtown. Let's say it's very intriguing, it's too bad that it wasn't packed."

This season is a magic carpet ride for the Bills. But next season for them will be like the 2006-07 campaign for the Sabres: There will be expectations from Day One of training camp. That's a different game entirely.

Picked by many to win the Stanley Cup, the Sabres started 10-0, but there was pressure all season. Even though they won the Presidents' Trophy for the league's best record, it never seemed as much fun and they lost in the conference final in a rematch with Ottawa. Chris Drury and Daniel Briere left that summer and you know what's gone on since.

There can only be one spring of 2006. Think back on the '90s Bills. There was only one 51-3 romp to get to the Super Bowl. It got harder and harder each succeeding season.

"With us I felt it was almost like, 'OK, we know we're gonna be there. We know. It's almost like we know we're gonna get to that spot in the playoffs again. We've just got to make sure that we win the conference finals this time,' " he said. "And unfortunately, we weren't able to.

"But yeah, I can see them having the expectations skyrocket next year, especially if they're able to make a couple more acquisitions. It could be awesome to have fans back. It should be a fun time to be a Bills fan."

## **Hutton to miss at least two games with a head injury**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 21, 2021

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Buffalo Sabres didn't have goalie Carter Hutton at practice on Thursday. He left Tuesday's game against the Philadelphia Flyers after two periods due to a head injury. Hutton's head went into the post after Brandon Montour pushed Ivan Provorov into his goaltender.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said on Thursday his goalie needs rest.

"Carter is day-to-day, and he won't be on this trip. We'll assess him when we get back, because it's important that he gets some rest."

Linus Ullmark returned to practice after the death of his father, and had Jonas Johansson at the other end. Dustin Tokarski was called up from Rochester to be on the taxi squad, while Rasmus Asplund was sent back to the taxi squad from the active roster.

With no goals and six assists, Jack Eichel is second in league scoring behind Mark Stone of the Vegas Golden Knights.

Eichel missed the first part of training camp with an upper-body injury, and Krueger said it got him behind.

"He had a pause just prior to training camp and entered camp five days later than everybody else, so we expected him to take longer to get up to speed," Krueger said of his captain. "I've been positively surprised with how he dealt with the injury, and I'm expecting in the next few games he'll have the level that he wants."

Taylor Hall is tied with Eichel for second in the NHL with six points. The line with Sam Reinhart has had success until the Sabres were shut out in Philadelphia on Tuesday. Eichel doesn't dwell on not having a goal, because he knows his line is producing.

"I don't really care who scores. It's part of my job to score, so I would like to contribute with putting pucks into the back of the net because that's one of the things that they pay me for," Eichel said. "As a line, we've been productive. The other night, we weren't productive because we were on the ice for two goals against, and that's on Sam, myself and Taylor."

Eichel's line will usually be up against the opponent's top line.

"We know we're going to get the other teams best, so we keep it simple and try to outwork teams letting our skill take over after that," Eichel said.

Eichel thinks he just needs to attack the net and pucks will start going in for him.

Kyle Okposo has missed all four games after getting hurt at the end of the Sabres' second scrimmage. Okposo did practice for about 40 minutes on Jan. 12, but re-injured himself. The winger said he's very close to, if not, being at 100%, and he is traveling to Washington for this weekend's series against the Capitals. He said if he doesn't play Friday, he hopes to be in the lineup Sunday.

Washington's coach Peter Laviolette said Alex Ovechkin, Evgeny Kuznetsov, Dmitry Orlov and Ilya Samsonov won't play against Buffalo or in the two games after that because of COVID-19 protocols.

Laviolette said there was a positive test, and numerous reports say it was Samsonov. The four Russian players were all in a small hotel room together without masks which puts them all under quarantine. The team was also fined \$100,000 because players are not allowed to gather in hotel rooms.

Thursday's Lines:

Forwards:

Hall - Eichel - Reinhart

Olofsson - Staal - Thompson  
Rieder - Eakin - Cozens (Okposo)  
Skinner - Lazar - Sheahan

Defense:

Montour - Jokiharju  
McCabe - Ristolainen  
Dahlin - Miller

Faceoff on Friday is set for 7 p.m. EST with pregame coverage on WGR starting at 6 p.m. EST with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog.

## **Ullmark opens up about absence from Sabres**

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

January 21, 2021

Shortly before Monday night's game against the Philadelphia Flyers at Wells Fargo Center, the Buffalo Sabres announced that goalie Jonas Johansson had been called up from the taxi squad as scheduled starter Linus Ullmark was going to miss the game due to personal reasons. Carter Hutton ended up starting the game on Monday, and helped Buffalo earn a 6-1 win over the Flyers.

Following the game, head coach Ralph Krueger said that it would be up to Ullmark when he wants to speak on the matter.

On Thursday, Ullmark opened up to Sabres.com about his recent absence, revealing that his father had passed away in Sweden.

"I had my worst pregame skate in my whole life, probably," Ullmark recalled. "Usually when these things sort of happen, with me, there's always been a common theme, and that's been that my dad has either been very sick or that something bad has happened back home. I sensed that something was wrong."

Ullmark told Sabres.com that he had been checking his phone a lot since his father had entered a hospital in Sweden last week. When he got off the ice on Monday, he said he had gotten a missed call from his mother bearing the sad news.

At that point, Ullmark talked with the coaching staff and support staff, asking to take some time away from hockey.

"There was no question about it for me, personally," Ullmark said. "...I just told them that hockey's not a priority at the time. From there, it was basically just trying to deal with all the emotions that came. I've been kind of holding back."

According to Sabres.com, Ullmark's father was 63. The team also said that Ullmark's father was never able to get to see Linus play in North America, but he followed his son's career very closely.

The team also wrote that Ullmark is planning to practice with his teammates on Thursday in Buffalo, and will then travel with the team for their upcoming two-game series against the Washington Capitals.

"You never know about these things, how you're going to feel and how you're going to handle it. But I feel a lot of gratitude towards the boys, towards the organization and everyone around it," Ullmark said in closing. "It's been very supportive ever since they found out so a lot of love to them."

Our thoughts are with Ullmark and his famil

The Sabres will face the Capitals for Game 1 of their two-game set on Friday at 7 p.m. EST at Capital One Arena. You can hear all of the action on the Radio Home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## **'The onus is on the guys' as Sabres prepare to face short-handed Caps**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

January 21, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Taylor Hall had seen baseball and football teams play without their stars. He knew how being short-handed could negatively impact a team.

So, along with wanting to fit in with Jack Eichel and the Sabres, he wanted to make sure they all stayed on the ice.

"It's important for us to stay healthy, to stay ahead of COVID, to use that as an advantage for us," Hall said just before the season started.

Less than two weeks in, the Sabres have an advantage.

Buffalo will head to Washington for two games against a depleted Capitals squad that has seen four players enter the COVID-19 protocols, including superstar Alex Ovechkin, No. 2 center Evgeny Kuznetsov, first-pair defenseman Dmitry Orlov and No. 1 goalie Ilya Samsonov.

The Capitals say one of the players has tested positive, so the top concern is his health. But the other three broke NHL rules by hanging out with him in a hotel room without masks. It's a huge no-no that cost the organization a \$100,000 fine and at least four games without its top players.

"The protocols are in place for a reason," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said Thursday. "Yeah, you look at some of them and say, 'Oh, that probably doesn't make a lot of sense and you could probably use some common sense there,' but they're in place for a reason."

The case involving the Capitals shows why. No one knew the positive player had coronavirus, which could have spread to the others and then the rest of the team. The four players are in quarantine.

It's entirely possible to spread the disease during practice or sitting on the bench, too, but that's a risk the NHL and the players' association were willing to take to have a season. But hanging out maskless while watching TV in a hotel room, which is what contact tracing and the subsequent investigation showed, is an unnecessary threat the league is seeking to avoid.

"We've all been living with the pandemic since March," Okposo said. "I know that there are a lot of people out there that have bent the rules in the past. But for us, now that we are in this dynamic of being around each other, being able to play and able to move this league forward, we have to adhere to the rules. We have to be really vigilant about it and strict about it."

There are 213 pages of protocols in place for this season. Though some rules were implemented by the NHL, others were collectively bargained with the players' association.

"With the P.A., we definitely worked with the league in creating these," Sabres defenseman and union representative Jake McCabe said. "We knew going into this season there was going to be numerous protocols in place."

As expected, there was backlash in Washington. Ovechkin's wife mocked the hotel rule in a since-deleted Instagram post. Even Ovechkin's statement felt slightly dismissive.

"I regret my choice to spend time together with my teammates in our hotel room and away from the locker room areas," he said. "I will learn from this experience."

Yes, it might seem strange that four players can hang out in the faceoff circle but not at a table in a hotel, but that's what everyone signed up for when they agreed to play.

"The onus is on the guys," Eichel said. "We've had conversations internally within the locker room and with the staff and management. A lot of it, obviously, lies on us."

The Capitals' statement about the incident started by praising the work of the training staff to create a safe environment for the players. The Sabres are aware of the steps being taken behind the scenes by athletic trainers, the travel coordinator, equipment guys and off-ice coaches. The players know if they slip up, they're letting those people down.

"Everyone involved has worked a lot of hours and had a lot of phone calls with the league, working through all these protocols and making sure we're doing everything in a safe manner," McCabe said. "I think us guys are doing a pretty damn good job about it, too."

Okposo, for example, sat down for Thursday's Zoom interview while wearing a mask. The media relations staff told him he was allowed to remove it to talk.

"I didn't know," Okposo said. "I didn't want to get in trouble."

The Sabres need to take that attitude on the road. They've already had one trip without incident, skating on back-to-back nights in Philadelphia. The trip to Washington and most of the ensuing journeys are different. The Sabres play Friday and Sunday, which gives them a long Saturday in D.C.

"You're going to have a lot more downtime, and the management of that is a challenge," coach Ralph Krueger said. "But the guys have been doing a good job with it. We have spoken about it openly as a team."

"You want to make sure you're not watching three movies in the afternoon. You've got to get out. We're allowed to get out and get fresh air. We just have to stay out of commercial spaces."

They have to get in the win column. Though the Sabres are just 1-3, they could have won every game but the opener. With the Capitals missing four of their best players, Buffalo could (and probably should) be at .500 when the weekend ends.

The Sabres have been given an early advantage. They've just got to focus on and off the ice.

"All we want to do is play hockey anyway," McCabe said. "Following the rules is the easy part."

## **Sabres' goaltending quickly becomes concern; Jonas Johansson ready to sub**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 21, 2021

**BUFFALO** – After allowing five goals on opening night, Sabres goalie Carter Hutton settled down, letting in just two over the next 100 minutes.

Fresh off a 10-month break, Hutton looked sharp and appeared poised to keep earning playing time. But Hutton left Tuesday's 3-0 road loss to the Philadelphia Flyers early after getting hit in the head.

Hutton, 35, is day to day, coach Ralph Krueger said, and did not accompany the Sabres to Washington, where they begin a two-game series tonight against the Capitals.

Meanwhile, Hutton's goalie partner, Linus Ullmark, missed the last two games following the death of his father. While Ullmark practiced Thursday inside KeyBank Center and traveled with his teammates, his status for the Washington series is unclear.

Goaltending, of course, was arguably the Sabres' biggest question mark heading into the season. Despite some excellent play for stretches, Hutton and Ullmark haven't established themselves as No. 1 NHL goalies.

Now, after just four games, the Sabres' depth is being tested.

Third-string goalie Jonas Johansson, who allowed one goal in relief of Hutton, could play this weekend. The Sabres elevated him from the taxi squad Monday.

They also promoted veteran Dustin Tokarski from the Rochester Americans to the taxi squad Thursday. Tokarski, 31, has played 39 total NHL games, his last appearance coming in 2016-17.

Johansson, 25, has developed into an intriguing prospect. He played his first six NHL games last season, compiling a 1-3-1 record. A breakout season in Rochester – he registered a 2.24 goals-against average and a .921 save percentage – helped him morph into an AHL All-Star and crack the big leagues.

"That's absolutely a boost for myself to work harder," Johansson said of his first NHL action. "I know what's ahead, I know what I need to do and how to prepare so that's definitely a boost just for my confidence and the way I try to approach this year."

In a normal year, Johansson would likely be playing in Rochester with Tokarski or Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Buffalo's top goalie prospect.

Johansson, Krueger said, needs more seasoning. He sat idle until October, when the Sabres loaned him to the Krefeld Penguins, a team in the Deutsche Eishockey Liga, Germany's top pro circuit.

He played three games in the Magenta Cup, a preseason tournament, allowing six goals on 92 shots. Before Monday's appearance, he hadn't played a game since Dec. 1. He struggled early in training camp.

Krueger, who lauded Johansson's professionalism and work ethic, said the Swede is a "strong project" for assistant coach Mike Bales, who's in charge of the goalies.

"(Bales) really is somebody that will find the potential of each and every one of our goalies," Krueger said on a Zoom call following Thursday's practice. "He just needs to build on his confidence now and continue on his path. The experience of being with us now and being on the bench and getting some minutes again came at him probably earlier than he expected this year, but we've liked having him around."

"What we've liked is his fundamentals. What we've liked is the foundation and the character is very high. He's a great teammate and he's got an exciting future. He has to continue on this path and keep working and combined with games here and games in Rochester, we need to get him experience. That's the next piece in the puzzle."

If Hutton returns soon and Ullmark remains healthy, the Sabres could assign the 6-foot-5, 220-pound Johansson to the Amerks. The AHL season is scheduled to start Feb. 5.

Tokarski, who's in his 12th pro season, would be the logical choice to keep serving as the taxi squad goalie.

Ex-Sabres forward Matt Ellis, the team's director of player development, runs the taxi squad, a group of extra players the NHL implemented because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They're all great guys, the players," said Johansson, a third-round pick in 2014, 61st overall. "We really push each other and work hard every day. We've got a great coach in Matt Ellis, who is really experienced and he has a lot of good drills we do in practice.

"Just the main focus (is) to have everyone prepared because you never know what's going to happen. Everyone can get in at some point so you've just got to stay prepared."

## **Linus Ullmark received Sabres' game puck following father's death**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 21, 2021

**BUFFALO** – When coach Ralph Krueger finished addressing the Sabres following Monday's 6-1 win against the Philadelphia Flyers, he gave his captain, Jack Eichel, the floor.

Goalie Linus Ullmark was supposed to play that night, but after he learned his father had passed away earlier in the day, he and the coaches decided he should take some time off.

Ullmark, 27, stayed with the team, and when Eichel got up, he presented the Swede the game puck from the Sabres' first victory this season.

"When they gave me the puck, it took all my might and my power to not break down completely in the locker room," Ullmark told Sabres.com. "We're always speaking that we have two families. We have a family at home and we have our family in the team. That certainly was one of the confirmers about how I feel and hopefully how they feel about the team."

Krueger said the scene inside the Wells Fargo Center dressing room "was extremely emotional."

"You can see we are a club built on good people and it means a lot to us," Krueger said on a Zoom call following Thursday's practice. "I think these situations test out mettle and thus far I'm really proud of the way the team and Linus are dealing with it."

He added: "He's been as strong as possible in the situation."

Eichel said Ullmark is "part of our family here."

"That's what we are, we're a group, one big family in that locker room," he said. "More than anything, we care about each other. It's just one of the guys going through a tough time and you just want to be there to support him."

Ullmark practiced Thursday inside KeyBank Center and accompanied the Sabres to Washington, where they begin a two-game series tonight against the Capitals.

Before the Sabres started Thursday's session, Ullmark revealed to the team's website he had lost his father, who entered the hospital early last week. He was 63.

Ullmark said after Monday's morning skate – "I had my worst pregame skate in my whole life, probably," – he said – he checked his phone and saw a missed call from his mother.

"She just wanted to call me and say that that afternoon, Dad left us," Ullmark said. "He left us around 5 very peacefully, calmly with her by his side."

The Sabres announced Monday that Ullmark wouldn't be available because of "personal reasons."

"I just told them that hockey's not a priority at the time," he said. "From there, it was basically just trying to deal with all the emotions that came. I've been kind of holding back."

–

The 1-3 Sabres, who lost twice to the Capitals last week, have caught a huge break.

The Capitals will be without superstar Alex Ovechkin, No. 1 goalie Ilya Samsonov, center Evgeny Kuznetsov and defenseman Dmitry Orlov for the next four games because the players violated the NHL's COVID-19 protocols.

The Russians gathered in the same hotel room and did not wear masks, according to The Washington Post. Samsonov tested positive for COVID-19, according to the newspaper.

"There was a positive case and through their tracing and their tracking the players were honest with what they did," Capitals coach Peter Laviolette told reporters in Washington.

—

Winger Kyle Okposo practiced as an extra Thursday and accompanied the Sabres to Washington. A lower-body injury he suffered in the team's second scrimmage has sidelined Okposo the first four games.

If Okposo can't return tonight, he'd like to play Sunday.

"Definitely back to, I'd say, 100% health-wise or close to it," he said.

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Sabres goalie Carter Hutton, who left Tuesday's 3-0 loss in Philadelphia after getting hit in the head, did not travel to Washington.

"We'll assess him when we get back," Krueger said. "It's important he gets some rest."

—

The Sabres sent forward Rasmus Asplund, who made his season debut Tuesday, back to the taxi squad Thursday.

## **Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark missed games following death of father**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 21, 2021

BUFFALO – Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark missed the last two games following the death of his father in Sweden, he told the team's website today.

Ullmark, whose father entered the hospital early last week, was scheduled to start Monday against the Philadelphia Flyers. After the morning skate – “I had my worst pregame skate in my whole life, probably,” – he told Sabres.com – he checked his phone and saw a missed call from his mother.

When he spoke to her, he learned his father had passed away. He was 63.

“She just wanted to call me and say that that afternoon, Dad left us,” Ullmark said. “He left us around 5 very peacefully, calmly with her by his side.”

Ullmark, who was scheduled to start that night, told Sabres.com he spoke to the coaching staff and decided to take some time away from hockey.

“I just told them that hockey's not a priority at the time,” he said. “From there, it was basically just trying to deal with all the emotions that came. I've been kind of holding back.”

After the Sabres beat the Flyers 6-1 – Carter Hutton started in his place – captain Jack Eichel presented Ullmark with the game puck.

“You don't see it coming,” Ullmark said. “It was a very nice gesture. Everybody reached out to me and have been giving me their condolences, Ullmark said. “When they gave me the puck, it took all my might and my power to not break down completely in the locker room.

“We're always speaking that we have two families. We have a family at home and we have our family in the team. That certainly was one of the confirmers about how I feel and hopefully how they feel about the team.”

Ullmark is practicing today and plans to travel with the Sabres to Washington, where they're schedule to begin a two-game series against the Capitals on Friday.

Update: Hutton, who left Tuesday's 3-0 loss in Philadelphia after taking a hit to the head, isn't practicing today.

The Sabres recalled goalie Dustin Tokarski to the taxi squad this afternoon and sent forward Rasmus Asplund back to the practice group.

Meanwhile, winger Kyle Okposo, who has missed the first four games with a lower-body injury, is practicing today inside KeyBank Center.

Update: Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Hutton is day to day. Okposo, meanwhile, would like to play Sunday if he can't play Friday.

“(Hutton) won't be on this trip,” Krueger said. “We'll assess him when we get back. It's important he gets some rest.”

## **Sabres goalie Carter Hutton ruled day-to-day, will not travel to Washington**

By Adam Unger

WKBW

January 21, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Sabres goalie Carter Hutton won't travel with the team this weekend. Head coach Ralph Krueger confirmed that in a press conference after practice on Thursday.

"He won't be on this trip, and we'll assess him when we get back," Krueger said. "It's important he gets some rest."

Hutton missed the third period of the Sabres' last game against the Flyers on Tuesday. Philadelphia defenseman Ivan Provorov ran into him in the second period of a 3-0 loss.

Jonas Johansson had been recalled from the taxi squad earlier this week while Linus Ullmark sat out for personal reasons. Ullmark revealed today that he found out he had lost his father on Monday.

Buffalo's next game is on the road against the Washington Capitals on Friday at 7:00 p.m.

## **Sabres goaltender Carter Hutton day-to-day, won't make trip to Washington**

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

January 21, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Buffalo will be down at least one goaltender for their upcoming series on the road against the Capitals. Carter Hutton suffered an injury against the Philadelphia Flyers Tuesday night and left the game after the second period. While head coach Ralph Krueger did not say what in particular the injury was, he said the goalie was “day-to-day” and would not be with the team when they traveled to Washington.

Linus Ullmark will travel with the team this week. He missed the previous two games against the Flyers for personal reasons because his father passed away, according to an article on the team website.

Teammates showed their support for Ullmark in their own way. Jack Eichel gave Ullmark the game puck after their win against Philadelphia Monday. Head coach Ralph Krueger said the team's been good to their goaltender in this tough time.

“All I can say is players have been terrific you know he's been as strong as possible in this situation and we'll work together with him to move him forward with the memories of his dad on his path so it's definitely a tough one but the team, the players have been terrific in supporting him,” Krueger said.

“That's something you can't imagine going through,” Eichel said. “In Linus's spot, he's probably got a lot of emotions and it's tough, you can't really come up with the words to make someone feel better in that situation. It's a little tougher even with the way things are currently in our world and him not being able to be with his family. I think more than anything your thoughts are with him and you hope he's able to deal with this emotionally. Linus is a big part of our team, I think everyone knows that. I think his play speaks for itself when he's in our net, but more than anything he's a part of our family here. That's what we are. We're one group, we're one big family in that locker room. More than anything we care about each other. It's one of the guys going through a tough time and you just want to be there to support him.”

Right now the Sabres haven't announced who will start in goal against the Capitals in game one on Friday. Jonas Johansson came in for the injured Hutton against Philadelphia and he'll be ready if called upon.

“I just try to prepare myself like I'm going to play every game because you never know it's going to happen,” Johansson said of his readiness earlier this week against Philadelphia. “Just have that in your mind that I'm going to play, and if I don't play at least I'm prepared. That's just the mindset I'm trying to have.”

Krueger said Johansson's a strong project and just needs to build on confidence.

“What we like is his fundamentals, what we like is the foundation and the character is very high,” Krueger said. “He's a great teammate and he's got an exciting future. He's got to continue on this path and keep working and combined with games here and games in Rochester, we need to get him experience. That's his next piece in the puzzle.”

Buffalo plays the Washington Capitals Friday on the road at 7 p.m. and again on Sunday at 3 p.m.

## **Hutton day to day; Caps will be without Ovechkin and three others**

By Adam Benigni

WGRZ

January 21, 2021

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger says goaltender Carter Hutton is day to day after taking a heavy hit in a collision at the start of the second period of Tuesday night's 3-0 loss in Philadelphia. He will not make the trip to Washington where the Sabres face the Capitals Friday and Sunday.

Goaltender Linus Ullmark did not play Monday or Tuesday night after learning that his father passed away according to sabres.com. Hutton was replaced by Jonas Johansson at the start of the third period.

The Washington Capitals will be without Alex Ovechkin and three other prominent players for at least the next four games because of COVID-19 protocols, coach Peter Laviolette said.

Ovechkin, a three-time NHL MVP, was placed on the league's unavailable list Wednesday along with center Evgeny Kuznetsov, goaltender Ilya Samsonov and defenseman Dmitry Orlov. Laviolette indicated there was a positive virus test and the league did contact tracing.

Washington was fined \$100,000 for breaking pandemic protocol for the players being in a hotel room together unmasked.

The four Russians are expected to miss the Capitals' home opener Friday night against Buffalo and then at least games Sunday against the Sabres and Tuesday and Thursday with the New York Islanders. There was no word Thursday whether any of those games were in danger of being postponed, like what happened to the Dallas Stars and Carolina Hurricanes already this season.

## **NHL's COVID-19 Protocol Complicates Sabres Road Trips**

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

January 21, 2021

**BUFFALO, N.Y.** — The NHL's COVID-19 protocol has thrown a wrench into team-bonding activities over road trips, and the Sabres are no exception.

After the Sabres' first road trip of the season to Philadelphia, goalie Jonas Johansson says he missed team dinners, and Head Coach Ralph Krueger was dismayed to lose 1-on-1 time with his players.

### What You Need To Know

- The Sabres say road trips aren't as fun because players have to isolate more due to the NHL's COVID-19 protocol
- As part of new league rules, players can't visit each other's hotel rooms or meet up for team dinners
- The Sabres played two games in Philadelphia this past weekend, and head to Washington D.C. for two more matchups this weekend

"You certainly miss those moments of camaraderie. It's tough for us coaches to get any type of private time," says Krueger. "I'm the kind of coach that usually rubs shoulders with every player at least once a day. It's been almost impossible."

"It's definitely different. You need to find ways to occupy your time because a lot of it's by yourself," says captain Jack Eichel. "You obviously don't want to put yourself or your team in a bad situation."

As part of the league's protocols, players cannot congregate for team meals, and they're forbidden to visit each other's hotel rooms. The next team on the Sabres' schedule, the Washington Capitals, were fined \$100,000 this week after four of their players broke that rule. Superstar Alexander Ovechkin is among the players who won't play in two games against the Sabres this weekend.

"We just need to take those things out of the league's control, out of the league's hands. Just obey the rules," Eichel says.

The Sabres' second road trip of the season could mean the first game for Kyle Okposo. The veteran winger has missed each of the team's first four games with a lower-body injury, but Okposo says he's back to being "100 percent healthy."

## **Buffalo Pick Returns After 20-Month Odyssey**

By Ryan Kennedy

The Hockey News

January 21, 2021

It was the spring of 2019 and the future was looking pretty bright for Aaron Huglen. The Northern Minnesota native had just completed a before-and-after rookie season with the USHL's Fargo Force which saw him play the middle of the campaign for Roseau high school, where he led the Rams in scoring with 52 points in just 24 games. The NHL draft was approaching and Huglen, a University of Minnesota commit, was a lock to get picked.

"He had a real strong finish with us and we had a plan in place for Aaron," said Fargo coach Pierre-Paul Lamoureux. "He could have gone into Minnesota as a freshman that year and he is a mature kid, but physically to step into college hockey - it's a big step. So the plan was for him to have a great summer, train and build his body, come into Fargo and be a go-to player for us. Everyone was on board."

But just a few weeks later, Huglen's story took a turn. At the time it seemed like a minor setback, but it became an incredible ordeal that he is still reckoning with today.

"I was doing a lift and I felt my back slip as I was doing it," Huglen said. "Right away, I didn't realize the severity of it - I thought it was just a pulled muscle in my back."

But the muscle didn't heal. Huglen eventually went to get an MRI, which revealed that he had a bulging disc - an injury that typically takes two or three months to heal. In the meantime, Huglen was indeed selected at the 2019 draft, going in the fourth round to the Buffalo Sabres. It was a great piece of news during a time of great uncertainty for both Huglen and the Force - uncertainty that would stretch on for a staggering amount of time and include doctors from the Force, the University of Minnesota, the Sabres and the Minnesota Wild.

"The initial injury, we thought it would take a few months to go back to normal," Lamoureux said. "We always had benchmarks for when we were expecting him to return. The goal was for him to be training full-bore in summer so he'd be ready for training camp. That didn't happen. Then it was, 'maybe the end of training camp or the pre-season.' Then it was month-to-month from there and he wasn't getting any better. Early last year, he started regressing and that's when we as a staff and Aaron were getting really concerned."

Eventually, Huglen opted for back surgery and even that was delayed - this time by the Covid-19 pandemic. But in the middle of May, 2020, he finally had the operation. After that, it was more rehabbing, but on Jan. 2, Huglen played his first USHL game of the season - scoring a goal in a 4-1 win over Sioux Falls. It was his first action in 20 months.

"It felt really good," Huglen said. "We're pretty fortunate to be playing anyway with Covid and coming back from that long injury - it's awesome to be back with the guys, be in the lineup and having the energy with the guys. I was nervous for sure, but talking to a lot of people, the main message was to have fun: You don't know how it's going to go, coming back after a year and a half. And it was a lot of fun."

Since returning to the Force lineup, Huglen has been a point-per-game player and while he's still getting comfortable, he looks pretty great out there. Fargo is the best team in the Western Conference and extending his season with a good playoff run would obviously be beneficial. It has yet to be determined if Huglen will join the NCAA's Golden Gophers next season, but the kid once again has a bright future.

"He's a special talent," Lamoureux said. "He's a fourth-round NHL draft pick but he's probably more talented than a fourth-rounder. He has NHL attributes with his skill and his vision and his hockey sense. He has an exceptional feel for the game; what's coming at him and where his space is and how to elude defenders and play with or without the puck. He has a knack for stripping opponents of the puck and putting opponents in awkward positions where they turn it over. We've managed his minutes so far, but he can play in almost any situation."

The fact Huglen uses his mind as much as he does his body on the ice actually helped the teen get through the past 20 months.

"I definitely had some doubts as I went along, but I've never been a physically dominant player - my hockey sense has been my best attribute," he said. "So that's what I was holding on to."

And make no mistake: it was a mental grind for him. In order to keep Huglen in the fold, Lamoureux and his staff made the center a de facto coach during his time off. Huglen would look at video, he would go on the road with Fargo and he would even give the occasional pre-game speech.

"The coaches in Fargo have been great throughout the injury, just keeping me involved with the team and being supportive in every way," Huglen said. "I definitely owe a lot to them. Getting involved is so important for any athlete, just staying connected. You can kinda be a loner if you're not involved in practices and such, so it was important."

When the Sabres drafted Huglen back in 2019, it looked like a savvy selection: the kid definitely had talent and he just needed time to grow and develop as a player. Though he ended up losing a lot of that time in the past year and a half, Huglen's early results suggest that his game hasn't diminished one bit during that time and as he continues to develop in Fargo and then the University of Minnesota, he could become an incredible weapon for Buffalo.

"He's not even close to reaching his full potential physically," Lamoureux said. "He hasn't even gotten back to the spring of 2019. There's a tremendous amount of upside, which is extremely exciting."

And after all he's gone through, there is no questioning Huglen's perseverance and dedication to the game.

## **Eichel on awarding game puck to Ullmark: 'We're one big family'**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 21, 2021

Ralph Krueger likes to pick his spots when it comes to addressing the Sabres after games. He decided Monday would be a good time, following the team's first victory of the season in Philadelphia.

Krueger addressed the team and then turned the floor over to captain Jack Eichel, who presented the game puck to goaltender Linus Ullmark. Hours earlier, Ullmark learned his father had passed away in Sweden.

"It was extremely emotional," Krueger said. "I want to say again that when he came to the locker room as the guys came off the ice, there wasn't a guy that didn't just give him a hug or whatever we're allowed to do to give him some contact and show we're there for him.

"It was an emotional moment. Definitely, you can see we are a club built on good people and it means a lot to us. I think these situations test our mettle and thus far I'm really proud of the way the team and Linus are dealing with it."

Ullmark opened up about the loss during a conversation published to Sabres.com on Thursday. He had been checking in back home since his father was hospitalized early last week and learned of his passing following the team's morning skate on Monday.

Ullmark did not play that night, instead using the time to begin dealing with his emotions. The Sabres skated to a convincing 6-1 victory and dedicated it to the goaltender afterward.

"You really can't come up with the words to make someone feel better in that situation, and so it's a little bit tougher even with the way things are currently in our world and not being able to be with his family," Eichel said. "So, I think more than anything your thoughts are with him and you just hope he'll be able to deal with this emotionally.

"But Linus is a big part of our team. I think everyone knows that. I think his play speaks for itself when he's in our net. But more than anything he's a part of our family here. That's what we are. We're one group, we're one big family in that locker room. More than anything, we care about each other. It's just one of the guys going through a tough time and you just want to be there to support him."

The moment was not lost on Ullmark.

"When they gave me the puck, it took all my might and my power to not break down completely in the locker room," he said.

Ullmark was back at practice on Thursday and traveled with the team for its road trip in Washington, with games on Friday and Saturday.

"These kinds of things, you need to process yourself and find your way back into some sort of routine," Krueger said. "We are very compassionate for what he went through and what he's going through and what he will go through. All I can say is the players have been terrific.

"He's been as strong as possible in the situation and we'll work together with him to move him forward with the memories of his dad on his path. It's definitely a tough one, but the team, the players, have been terrific in supporting."

## **Okposo practices, Hutton to be re-evaluated following D.C. road trip**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 21, 2021

Kyle Okposo joined the Sabres for practice on Thursday while goaltender Carter Hutton was absent after taking an elbow to the head from Philadelphia Flyers defenseman Ivan Provorov on Tuesday.

Hutton began feeling effects of the hit during the second intermission of the game against the Flyers and did not return for the third period. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said the goaltender is day-to-day and will not join the team for its two-game series in Washington.

"We'll assess him when we get back," Krueger said. "It's important he gets some rest."

Linus Ullmark practiced with the team after missing the past two games following the unexpected passing of his father, which he detailed here. Jonas Johansson will be the other active goaltender on the trip while Dustin Tokarski will also travel after being recalled to taxi squad.

Okposo has missed the first four games with a lower-body injury he sustained during the team's intrasquad scrimmage on Jan. 10. He will travel with the team to Washington.

"Definitely back to, I'd say, 100 percent health-wise or close to it," Okposo said. "We'll see about tomorrow. I'm not sure yet if I'm going to be in. I haven't practiced with the team, but we'll take it from there."

Here's how the Sabres lined up at practice:

4 Taylor Hall - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart  
68 Victor Olofsson - 12 Eric Staal - 72 Tage Thompson  
13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 24 Dylan Cozens / 21 Kyle Okposo  
53 Jeff Skinner - 27 Curtis Lazar - 15 Riley Sheahan / 37 Casey Mittelstadt

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
62 Brandon Montour - 10 Henri Jokiharju  
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 33 Colin Miller  
44 Matt Irwin - 3 William Borgen

35 Linus Ullmark  
34 Jonas Johansson

Sabres to face shorthanded Capitals

Washington was fined \$100,000 on Wednesday for violating COVID-19 protocols, which resulted in forwards Alex Ovechkin and Evgeny Kuznetsov, defenseman Dmitry Orlov, and goaltender Ilya Samsonov being placed on the COVID-related absence list. Coach Peter Laviolette said all four players are quarantining and are expected to miss at least the next four games.

The NHL said in its statement that the Capitals' violations "involved social interactions among team members who were in close contact and who were not wearing face coverings." In a team-issued statement, the Capitals said the interaction occurred in a player's hotel room.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel withheld comment on the Capitals' situation but did discuss how his own team has tried to manage protocols.

"I think the onus is on the guys," Eichel said. "We've had conversations internally within the locker room and the staff and management. A lot of it obviously lies on us."

The Sabres' first road trip of the season was a back-to-back set of games in Philadelphia, leaving little room for down time. Their trip in Washington features games on Friday and Sunday with a practice day in between.

"The management of that is a challenge," Krueger said. "But the guys have been doing a good job with it. We have spoken about it openly as a team. You want to make sure you're not watching three movies in the afternoon. You've got to get out. We're allowed to get out and get fresh air, we just have to stay out of commercial spaces. So, you know, just recommending guys to get out, get walks. They can take walks at social distances together.

"You've just got to get creative in this situation to keep ... not only your body fresh, but your head and your minds so that you're just not locking yourself up in the room."

The Sabres and Capitals open their series at 7 p.m. on Friday. Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30.

## **Sabres add Tokarski to taxi squad**

By Chris Ryndak

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The Buffalo Sabres announced this afternoon that the team has reassigned goaltender Dustin Tokarski from Rochester (AHL) to the team's taxi squad and loaned forward Rasmus Asplund to the taxi squad.

Buffalo signed Tokarski to a two-year contract this offseason. A two-time Calder Cup champion, the 31-year-old goaltender spent the 2019-20 season with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton in the AHL.

He made his NHL debut in 2010 with the Tampa Bay Lightning and has started 27 games over the course of his career.

Asplund recorded two shots in his season debut Tuesday night.

Goaltender Jonas Johansson also made his first appearance of the season on Tuesday, stopping eight of nine shots in the final 20 minutes of Buffalo's 3-0 loss to Philadelphia. Carter Hutton started that game, but left after two periods due to an injury.

Linus Ullmark has missed the past two games after learning that his father passed away in Sweden on Monday.

Teams are required to carry at least three goaltenders between their active roster and taxi squad this year.

Buffalo will play the Washington Capitals on Friday at Capital One Arena.

## **Ullmark opens up about absence from past 2 Sabres games**

By Brian Duff and Chris Ryndak

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Some things in life are bigger than the game and Buffalo Sabres goaltender Linus Ullmark is unfortunately experiencing that now. He's missed the past two games for personal reasons, and he shared the reason why with Sabres.com.

Ullmark found out right after Monday's morning skate in Philadelphia that his father had passed away in Sweden.

"I had my worst pregame skate in my whole life, probably," he said. "Usually when these things sort of happen, with me, there's always been a common theme, and that's been that my dad has either been very sick or that something bad has happened back home. I sensed that something was wrong."

He said he'd been checking his phone a lot since his father entered the hospital early last week. When Ullmark reached the locker room, he found that he had a missed call from his mother.

"The hunch that I had was true," he said. "She just wanted to call me and say that that afternoon, Dad left us. He left us around 5 very peacefully, calmly with her by his side."

Ullmark was scheduled to start that night, but talked with the coaching and support staff about taking some time away from hockey.

"There was no question about it for me, personally," he said. "...I just told them that hockey's not a priority at the time. From there, it was basically just trying to deal with all the emotions that came. I've been kind of holding back."

Linus Ullmark (35) Buffalo Sabres training camp at KeyBank Center, January 7, 2021. Photo by Sara Schmidle

Carter Hutton started in his place on Monday and made 21 saves in a 6-1 win over the Flyers.

"Same thing for [Tuesday's] game as well. I was in a better place, but not in the state of mind that I felt that I could go out there and perform the way I wanted to," Ullmark said. "And, also, that I wasn't done dealing with the emotions and the thoughts that I had - still have - regarding all this."

After Monday's game, Ullmark was surprised when he was handed the game puck by captain Jack Eichel.

"Obviously, you don't see it coming. It was a very nice gesture. Everybody reached out to me and have been giving me their condolences," Ullmark said. "When they gave me the puck, it took all my might and my power to not break down completely in the locker room."

"We're always speaking that we have two families. We have a family at home and we have our family in the team. That certainly was one of the confirmers about how I feel and hopefully how they feel about the team."

Ullmark's father was 63 and while he was never able to see his son play in North America, he closely followed Ullmark's NHL career.

"Even though things got tough, he was always interested in my teammates, my team, and how I did," Ullmark said. "That is something I'm going to miss a lot."

Ullmark's last conversation with his dad came around the time he entered the hospital for the final time.

"I called back as soon as I found out that he was going to the hospital and he wasn't in any shape of talking or holding a phone or anything like that, but I told my mom to put the phone against his ear and I said goodbye, told him all the things I wanted to do," he said. "I'm very fortunate that I had the opportunity to do it. There are some people in the world who don't get to say goodbye and get those last words."

Moving forward, Ullmark is planning on practicing with the team on Thursday at KeyBank Center and traveling to Washington for the team's pair of games against the Capitals. Buffalo is next scheduled to play Friday night at 7 p.m. at Capital One Arena.

"You never know about these things, how you're going to feel and how you're going to handle it. But I feel a lot of gratitude towards the boys, towards the organization and everyone around it," he said. "It's been very supportive ever since they found out so a lot of love to them."