



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*February 16, 2021*



## Islanders beat Sabres 3-1 in Buffalo's 1st game in 2 weeks

By John Wawrow  
Associated Press  
February 16, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Islanders coach Barry Trotz wasn't happy with how his team opened against a COVID-19-depleted Buffalo Sabres squad that hadn't played in two weeks.

He was more pleased with New York's finish in a 3-1 win on Monday night, in which the Islanders didn't allow a shot on goal in the final period, a franchise first. And credit also went to goalie Semyon Varlamov, who stopped 20 shots, including all 12 he faced in the first period.

"I thought we would come out with a little more juice," Trotz said after the Islanders extended their point streak to seven games (4-0-3).

"I knew they might be a little bit rusty, but they came out enthused," he added, referring to the Sabres. "But I thought Varly was real strong for us."

Varlamov provided the slow-starting Islanders a jolt with an instinctive save off Victor Olofsson's one-timer from the lower right circle with five minutes left in the first period. Varlamov kicked out his left pad and got enough of the puck to have it bounce off the near post.

New York responded with Anders Lee and Jean-Gabriel Pageau closing the period scoring goals 1:44 apart. Brock Nelson added a power-play goal in the second period, while Josh Bailey had two assists.

Mathew Barzal extended his career-best point streak to nine straight games (four goals, seven assists) by helping set up Lee's game-opening goal.

Ultimately, the Sabres were undone by a lineup still missing six regulars, including three key defensemen, and the lingering affects of a coronavirus-forced break, which began two days after a 5-3 loss to New Jersey on Jan. 31.

Rather than use rust as an excuse, Sabres captain Jack Eichel blamed the loss on what he several times called sloppiness.

"We weren't good enough. That's what it comes down to in this league, you're either good enough or you're not," Eichel said. "Obviously, we hadn't played in the last two weeks. But nobody wants to sit here and make excuses."

Buffalo had six games postponed and resumed practicing on Wednesday. The Sabres eventually had nine players land on the NHL's COVID list, plus coach Ralph Krueger, who tested positive and said he experienced "moderately severe symptoms." The 61-year-old returned to practice Sunday and was cleared to take his spot behind the bench on Monday.

Olofsson scored Buffalo's lone goal, to extend his point streak to a career-best seven straight games, while Linus Ullmark was inconsistent in stopping 26 shots. Though Lee and Nelson scored by redirecting passes, Ullmark whiffed on Pageau's shot, which came from a bad angle.

The inability to manage a shot on goal in the third period particularly stung. The closest the Sabres came to registering a shot happened with about four minutes remaining when Eric Staal crashed the net and appeared to have the puck deflect wide off his stick.

"It is what it is. It's a bad period. It's not a good period of hockey, not the way we want to play," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said. "But they're a group that knows how to play well defensively, and they sucked us right in the third period, and we couldn't dig ourselves out of a hole."

It marked the fourth time in Sabres history they've failed to generate a shot on net in a period, and first time since a 4-1 loss to Anaheim in a 2011-12 season-opening game played at Helsinki, Finland.

The fewest shots the Islanders previously allowed in a period was one, with the most recent happening in a 6-3 loss at Washington on Jan. 28.

"We'd like to think in those situations we're comfortable and we know what we need to do to lock things down, but you certainly can't expect that to happen," Bailey said of a third period in which the Islanders had a 12-0 edge in shots. "That's just part of the commitment that we need to have the success that we're looking for."

#### SCRATCHES

Islanders: Trotz said LW Anthony Beauvillier is close to returning after missing his ninth consecutive game with a lower-body injury.

Sabres: Minor-league callups Ds William Borgen and Brandon Davidson, and forward Steven Fogarty made their season debuts. Ds Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour participated in the pregame skate in an indication they are ready to be removed from the COVID-19 list after both said they tested positive.

#### BUSY BUFFALO

The Sabres will be required to squeeze in their final 46 games over an 83-day stretch, which is scheduled to end on May 8. Buffalo is also opening a period of playing 16 games in 27 days before getting its next two-day layoff. The Sabres have just four multi-day breaks left on their schedule, including one three-day stretch spanning April 19-21.

"You might've watched your last practice until May," coach Krueger said with a laugh on Sunday.

#### UP NEXT

Teams complete a two-game series in Buffalo on Tuesday night.

## **Mike Harrington: No fresh start and more of the same for Sabres**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 15, 2021

The point of this column was supposed to be the whole fresh-start theory for the Buffalo Sabres. The first 10 games were one season, then came the two-week pause due to the Covid-19 situation, and what's essentially a new season finally opened Monday night.

Next thought.

Even if there were a few different guys in the lineup, it sure seemed like a lot of the same.

The Sabres did some decent things during their 3-1 loss to the New York Islanders. Victor Olofsson scored a lovely power-play goal and there was plenty of time in the offensive zone in the first 40 minutes.

But the Sabres still do just enough to stub their toes, and it makes a difference on a nightly basis because there are too many good teams in the East Division.

They don't score at 5-on-5, they constantly play from behind (giving up the first goal for the eighth time in 11 games), they get confused on defensive coverages too much and they just don't get enough saves. It also sure seemed, after two weeks off, that they had nothing left in their tanks for the third period.

They had no shots on goal in the final 20 minutes. None. Zip. Nada. It's just the fourth time they've done that in their history – but the first time in Buffalo – and the first time any Islanders opponent has ever been blanked.

You can line up your excuses and none of them can justify that.

"That's not good enough," Olofsson said. "I feel like we've got to just throw pucks at the net. It went in and out of their end really quickly and we didn't manage to get any offense going. Zero shots is, yeah, it's awful."

"It's a bad period. It's not a good period of hockey, not the way we want to play," Kyle Okposo added. "They're a group that knows how to play well defensively and they just sucked us right in in the third."

Olofsson leads the team with five goals, but four are on the power play and that's been his M.O. during his two seasons. He had a point-blank chance to score the game's first goal late in the first period, but was robbed by a glove save from Semyon Varlamov, who moved to his left to stab the shot and knock the puck just enough so it hit the goal post.

At the end other end, Linus Ullmark couldn't stop Anders Lee's tip-in of a Josh Bailey pass, and then completely flubbed Jean-Gabriel Pageau's snapshot from the right circle with 1:39 left in the first. A 2-0 hole after 20 minutes was too much to overcome.

Rasmus Dahlin played things decently by keeping Pageau to the outside, and it was a super shot just under the crossbar. Still, Ullmark was down far too early and flat-out missed the puck with his glove. He's 6-foot-4. He doesn't need to make himself 5-foot-6.

Can't have a mistake like that given the way the Sabres' top offensive players continue to struggle, especially at 5-on-5. Jack Eichel has only two goals and Taylor Hall has just one, but at least they've combined for 20 points. Okposo has no points in six games and Jeff Skinner has one measly assist in 11 games for his \$9 million. Memo to social media: Skinner played a whole game with Eichel and still didn't do much. Of course, that's probably Ralph Krueger's fault, too.

"We've just got to make a play. That's what it comes down to," Eichel said. "... It just seems like we're sloppy and don't make a whole lot of plays. It's tough to score goals in this league when you don't do that."

Eichel cited poor passing and puck movement and little success at transition as the Sabres' chief problems. Pretty sharp analysis.

The game was a downer for a day that began with good feelings. Krueger was on the ice for the morning skate and was full-go. So were Tobias Rieder, Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour, all of whom reported Covid-19 symptoms, but thankfully also said they were feeling better.

"We'd like to take up with some of the very good things that were happening in the first 10 games," Krueger said, in words that did not come to fruition. "Everybody knows we weren't playing a complete game yet. But we had excellent elements of our game that we'd like to reconnect to where we were on those, but use the freshness to bring the 5-on-5 game to a higher level. And it certainly counts as a continuation of the season, but with a certain new angle and a new perspective, which I think the team has really used well."

The Sabres need McCabe and Montour back in the lineup and they absolutely need Rasmus Ristolainen, who has been on the list since Feb. 2 and shows no sign of coming back in what might be the ominous item from this outbreak. The pairing of Henri Jokiharju and Matt Irwin was badly overmatched in this one.

"Getting out on the ice for a few minutes just gives you so much energy back. You know why you're here. You love the group you're working with and the potential of the group and the individuals," Krueger said.

Playing the Islanders six times in a 12-game stretch doesn't look like a great recipe for success. The Isles improved to 4-0-3 in their last seven with Monday's win – a far cry from the five-game winless skid they were on when the Sabres were supposed to meet them on Long Island two weeks ago.

The Sabres are last in the East Division in points, but you knew that would be the case when every team has played three or four more games than them due to their pause. For now, you need to study points percentage to see some hope, but even that is tough. Monday's loss dropped Buffalo to 4-5-2, a .455 clip that will have them out of any playoff shot long before St. Patrick's Day.

## **Sabres observations: Mistakes on defense magnified in 3-1 loss to Islanders**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 15, 2021

Linus Ullmark raised the paddle of his stick to communicate to his defensemen, Matt Irwin and Henri Jokiharju, that New York Islanders center Brock Nelson was wide open during a second-period power play Monday night.

Ullmark's call for help wasn't heeded by his Buffalo Sabres teammates. Jokiharju was late to the net and Nelson was given plenty of space to redirect a pass from Josh Bailey into the net for a two-goal lead.

The miscue was one of several by the Sabres' makeshift defense corps during a 3-1 loss in KeyBank Center. The margin for error was thin, as Buffalo (4-5-2) was playing its first game in 15 days and was without three of its top six defensemen, including Rasmus Ristolainen and Jake McCabe.

"Obviously (McCabe and Ristolainen) eat a ton of minutes and (Brandon Montour) as well," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "When three of your top D men are out, that's going to be tough for sure. But I thought our D played well. There's guys that played bigger minutes. ..."

"Obviously, it's not an ideal situation. It's just the reality that we're facing right now, so we're going to have to have those guys learn quickly."

Ristolainen, McCabe and Montour, all of whom remained on the Covid-19 protocol list Monday night, are key cogs on the Sabres' penalty kill, which wilted on the Nelson goal that shifted momentum back to the Islanders. The trio was replaced in the lineup by Irwin, Brandon Davidson and Will Borgen.

Additionally, the absence of Ristolainen and McCabe forced coach Ralph Krueger to use Jokiharju and Irwin against the Islanders' top line. The mismatch was on display when the Islanders took a 1-0 lead at 16:37 into the first period.

Mathew Barzal won a battle along the left wall and passed to Bailey near the top of the left circle. This drew Irwin away from the net and Jokiharju was not quick enough in coverage against Anders Lee, who redirected a down-low pass from Bailey over Ullmark's shoulder for the opening goal.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau also scored to help New York (7-4-3) extend its point streak to seven games.

Davidson, a 29-year-old making his Sabres debut, was in the penalty box when Nelson scored. Borgen was strong while playing in his first game of the season, and Rasmus Dahlin assisted on Victor Olofsson's goal. But the absence of three workhorse defensemen – Ristolainen leads the team in average ice time per game – created issues for Buffalo when breaking the puck out of the defensive zone.

"It was a pretty good depth effort," Krueger said. "I liked our D corps, for the group we had. ... We just didn't produce offensively and maybe sometimes the puck didn't come out the same (as it would) with our standard D corps."

Here are five additional observations from the game Monday night:

1. Dynamic power play: The Sabres' top-end talent, combined with strategic special teams adjustments by the coaching staff, will keep this team in games if its opponents continue to take penalties.

Buffalo's 5-on-5 game continued to be mostly ugly while playing without forwards Dylan Cozens, Curtis Lazar and Casey Mittelstadt. But the power play scored for a sixth consecutive game Monday when Olofsson one-timed a shot past Semyon Varlamov to cut the deficit to 2-1 at 1:40 into the second period.

Dahlin made a highlight-reel no-look pass to Olofsson, who extended his point streak to a career-high seven games. He leads the Sabres with five goals this season and also has nine power-play points in 11 games.

The difference with the power play this season is more movement with personnel and the presence of Taylor Hall, whose outstanding vision was probably not spoken about enough when he signed as a free agent in October.

2. Line construction: Krueger put together two potentially dynamic lines atop the lineup, as Jeff Skinner skated with Jack Eichel and Olofsson. Hall was with Staal and Sam Reinhart. The top six helped the Sabres control play at times in the first period and presented matchup problems for the defensively sound Islanders.

However, the team's 5-on-5 game remained disconnected, as the Sabres had zero shots on goal in the third period.

"They play smart," Olofsson said of the Islanders. "We didn't really get the puck in their end, especially in the third. It was going in and out quickly. I don't know; I think we kind of helped them, too. We didn't put the pucks in smart."

3. Dahlin solid: Dahlin was one of the few bright spots, as the 20-year-old used his skating to eliminate a few Islanders rushes in the first 30 minutes of the game. His footwork along the blue line extends possession in the offensive zone and the instincts he shows on the power play cannot be taught.

Dahlin played a team-high 25:02, while Colin Miller wasn't far behind at 22:38.

4. Story of goaltending: The difference in goal was noticeable in the first period. Varlamov, who entered Monday with a .930 save percentage this season, bailed out the Islanders with an outstanding pad save on Olofsson during a sequence in which Skinner and Eichel picked apart New York's defensive-zone coverage.

Skinner drew two defenders near the left wall before passing to Eichel in the slot, where he then gave the puck to Olofsson below the right faceoff dot. Olofsson's one-timer went off Varlamov's pad and hit the post at 15:05. The Islanders scored twice in the next three-plus minutes.

"Obviously that would have been a good time to get that goal," Olofsson said. "That was a great play by Jeff and Jack. I've got to score there. ... That definitely would have helped us come back into the game."

Ullmark, on the other hand, needed to make a save when Pageau scored with a wrist shot from the right circle for a 2-0 lead at 18:21 in the first period. Ullmark took a poor angle on the shot, dropped down too soon and failed to use his glove to catch the puck.

5. Top-end talent: Any analysis of this game needs to be couched by the fact the Sabres had not played in two weeks. That said, the stars need to be better offensively, particularly at even strength. Hall hasn't scored a goal since the season opener. Skinner has zero goals this season. Eichel has two goals in 12 games. The trio combined for six shots on goal Monday.

"In the end, when we score one goal with the lineup we have here at home, it's not enough," Krueger said. "We definitely have an expectation of being able to produce three to four goals a game, at minimum, with our group."

## **Sabres game day: Krueger will be on the bench as the schedule resumes**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 15, 2021

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (4-4-2) vs. New York Islanders (6-4-3)

Where: KeyBank Center

When: 7 p.m.

TV: NBCSN

Radio: WGR 550

For the first time in more than two weeks, the Sabres have a game to play downtown Monday night. And Ralph Krueger will be back in his customary spot behind the bench after battling Covid-19.

"Getting out on the ice for a few minutes just gives you so much energy back. You know why you're here. You love the group you're working with and the potential of the group and the individuals," Krueger said.

"I feel good to go. With the strong support around me, it makes it easier," Krueger said after the morning skate. "I felt really good in the skate today and in the meeting this morning with coaches, and interacting with players here and there. Feel ready to go. So hopefully we'll just take it a step at a time. But at the moment, I feel like it's gonna be a good time."

Krueger said goaltending coach Mike Bales will come down out of the press box to work behind the bench and assistant Don Granato will coach from upstairs. Granato endured a life-threatening case of pneumonia and a bacterial infection in his bloodstream 15 months ago and the Sabres no longer want to risk having him on the bench.

The Sabres have not played since their 5-3 loss Jan. 31 to New Jersey sent both teams down the spiraling road of positive Covid-19 tests and seasons put on pause. The Devils, in fact, are returning to practice today for the first time while the Sabres got in five days of workouts heading into this game.

Lineup: Winger Sam Reinhart, who practiced fully the last few days, did not skate today. He missed the games Jan. 30-31 vs. New Jersey with an upper-body injury and is still bothered some by it.

Tobias Rieder, Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour all skated Monday in their first appearance since coming off the Covid protocol list – and all three revealed they had positive Covid tests and endured symptoms.

McCabe and Montour did heavy work after the skate and likely will not play tonight. Rieder said he could play and Krueger indicated Sunday that he would consider using a player in a specialty role for 8-10 minutes. Rieder is one of the top penalty killers on a Buffalo team that's improved from 30th in the league last year to 10th this season.

"Quite simply, we're managing an issue there and what we'll do is make the final call tonight," Krueger said on Reinhart. "But there's still a chance for Sam to be in the lineup. The other players remain day to day candidates. We'd like to consume and digest what happened here this morning. And we will make very late final roster decisions here today."

Newcomers: Steven Fogarty and Brandon Davidson could make their Sabres debuts tonight while Will Borgen could make his season debut. All were recalled from the taxi quad. Rasmus Asplund skated in place of Reinhart this morning but he has been added to the taxi squad, meaning it's likely Reinhart will play.

The Sabres lined up this morning this way:

Long time, no see: If you think this kind of break is unusual, you would be absolutely right.

Buffalo's 14-day break is the longest in franchise history outside of Olympic breaks. The team went 18 days between games in 2014 around the Sochi Olympics, 17 days in 1998 for the NHL's first Olympic foray in Nagano, Japan and 16 days in both 2006 (Torino, Italy) and 2010 (Vancouver).

The longest previous non-Olympic break was 11 days in April, 1992 for an NHLPA strike that temporarily disrupted that season.

In the nets: Linus Ullmark (3-1-2, 2.56/.914) was first off the ice at the morning skate and is the Sabres' presumptive starter. Meanwhile, Semyon Varlamov has been a rock in goal for the Islanders (6-2-2, 1.98/.930) with an NHL-leading three shutouts -- but rookie Ilya Sorokin was the first off the ice early this afternoon at the pregame skate.

Sorokin, who has played the last six years in the KHL, is 0-2-1, 3.65/.871 in his first three NHL games. He had a spectacular career in the KHL, never posting a GAA higher than 1.61 or a save percentage below .929. His record was 124-40-21.

The other side: Six of Buffalo's next 12 games are against the Islanders. Mathew Barzal leads the Isles in both goals (6) and points (14). Coach Barry Trotz and GM Lou Lamoriello have 2,151 combined wins, the most by any coach/GM duo in NHL history. Trotz is third all-time at 851 behind only Scotty Bowman (1,244) and Joel Quenneville (933). Lamoriello got his 1,300th win Saturday over Boston.

"We can't let these guys off the hook," Trotz said today of the Sabres when asked about their Covid absences. "Forget about the lineup. let's go after the jersey."

## **Sabres' Jake McCabe, Brandon Montour, Tobias Rieder return after bout with Covid-19**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
February 15, 2021

Buffalo Sabres winger Taylor Hall did not experience symptoms after a positive Covid-19 test landed him on the National Hockey League's protocol list.

Tobias Rieder, Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour weren't as fortunate.

Rieder, McCabe and Montour each told the media following the morning skate Monday that they battled symptoms after testing positive for Covid-19. The trio rejoined the Sabres in KeyBank Center after clearing the league's protocols, including a mandatory minimum 10-day isolation and negative test results.

Rieder, a 28-year-old left wing, called his bout with the virus a "rough couple days." Montour, a 26-year-old defenseman, said he "wasn't feeling the best" in what he described as a "tough couple of weeks." McCabe, one of the Sabres' top defensemen and a 27-year-old alternate captain, told the media he had symptoms for around five days.

The group joined Hall and defenseman Rasmus Dahlin as players removed from the protocol list. Hall was asymptomatic after testing positive, while Dahlin was forced to quarantine after he was deemed a close contact. Dahlin, 20, tested negative throughout his quarantine and never had symptoms.

Coach Ralph Krueger, 61, rejoined the Sabres on the ice Sunday after testing positive and battling symptoms.

"Well, when I got the news, I was actually a little shocked, that can't be right, like I'm not feeling anything," said Rieder, who joined the Sabres as a free agent in October. "But sure enough, a couple hours after I could feel the symptoms and I was pretty sick for a day or two."

The Sabres are still without Rasmus Ristolainen, Curtis Lazar, Dylan Cozens and Casey Mittelstadt, all of whom were on the Covid protocol list Monday. It's unclear when each will be able to skate with the team and why they were deemed unavailable. The league does not list why a player was added to the protocol list.

Any player who tests positive is not allowed to workout at home during the length of his quarantine. Once cleared by medical personnel, each participates in a rehabilitation skate away from the team and then progresses to a full-group workout.

TSN's Bob McKenzie previously reported that Sabres players expressed concern to the NHL Players' Association ahead of the game against the New Jersey Devils in Buffalo on Jan. 31.

The Devils added a player to the Covid protocol list before each game in KeyBank Center on Jan. 30-31, including winger Kyle Palmieri ahead of the second matchup. This raised questions about the decision to play the game, as the Devils had as many as 19 players on the Covid protocol list. Palmieri told the New Jersey media Monday that he tested positive for Covid-19 and experienced symptoms.

McCabe, the Sabres' NHLPA representative, echoed his teammates' thoughts Monday when he said it's not his job to determine if it's safe to play games. The NHL has since made significant changes to its protocols, including the increased use of rapid testing ahead of games and the removal of glass behind each bench in arenas.

"Looking back at that weekend, it's obviously an unfortunate circumstance," said McCabe. "But moving forward, the league and everyone's learning how to improve our protocols just to get through this entire season. I think the PA and the NHL have worked closely together just to continue to try to make it as safe and healthy as possible for all of us players. So, I think for all these new protocols you saw put in place, especially for point of care testing, I think that's really crucial. Hopefully we can just continue to have less cases around the league and continue to play these games."

Bench personnel

Sabres assistant coach Don Granato is switching to an eye-in-the-sky role following the pause. Granato, 53, is high-risk after he was hospitalized and placed on a ventilator while battling pneumonia at the start of the 2019-20 season.

Granato has not been on the ice for practices since the Sabres went back to work last week, but he has watched from the 100 level. He'll view games from a suite in KeyBank Center and will join the coaches during intermissions. Granato's spot on the bench will be taken by goalie coach Mike Bales, who also picks the Sabres' personnel for shootouts.

Bales, 49, is in his second season in Buffalo and has been a full-time NHL goalie coach for eight years. He was on the Pittsburgh Penguins' staff for the Stanley Cup wins in 2016 and 2017.

#### Roster moves

Prior to puck drop Monday, the Sabres promoted forward Steven Fogarty, and defensemen Brandon Davidson and Will Borgen from the taxi squad.

Forwards Rasmus Asplund and Andrew Oglevie were assigned from Rochester to the taxi squad. Fogarty and Davidson were free-agent signings by the Sabres in October.

#### Prospect watch

Sabres goalie prospect Erik Portillo, a third-round draft pick in 2019, made 29 saves in the University of Michigan's 3-0 win over Wisconsin on Saturday. The 20-year-old was voted by his teammates to receive the game puck and continue to impress in backup duty for the Wolverines.

Portillo has a .948 save percentage and 1.49 goals-against average in five games for Michigan this season.

## **Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Why it's time to worry about lack of production from middle six**

By Travis

The Buffalo News

February 15, 2021

Though a lot has happened around the NHL over the last two weeks during the Buffalo Sabres' Covid outbreak, the team's road map hasn't changed.

The Sabres are averaging one point per game (4-4-2 record through the first 10 games), and although the division remains quite muddy, the Boston Bruins, Philadelphia Flyers and Washington Capitals seem to have an inside track of sorts.

The remaining four teams in the East – the Islanders, Penguins, Rangers and Devils – also are averaging around a point per game, and that compression was to be expected. If you are a Sabres fan, there are two perspectives here. The glass half-empty perspective is you have to beat out all these teams for a playoff spot, not just some of them, and that's not an easy task when you consider some of the star power on these rosters. The glass half-full perspective? All these teams are flawed in some capacity, and the one team with pedigree in the group is coyly eyeing a rebuild as we speak.

So what would preclude Buffalo from jumping into that fourth spot? There are many ways for the Sabres to not get there – heck, if you have watched this team over the past decade, you know the missed opportunities can be limitless.

There are two concerns right now – one obvious, one less so. The obvious one is that a Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark goaltending tandem cannot stop less than 90% of the shots over a full season and expect this team to finish anywhere but the draft lottery. The second is that this team is struggling to generate offense, particularly inside of the middle six.

Yes, Buffalo's top line hasn't lit the world on fire offensively, either, but most of the concerns with the top line are driven by shooting percentage. In other words: tons of opportunities, pucks just not finding the back of the net, and an area where we would expect favorable regression. That's not the case for lines anchored by Cody Eakin and Eric Staal, whose lines are applying little offensive pressure:

We are comparing the on-ice offensive numbers of each skater to league averages, so when you see a lot of red, you know it's telling the story of a Sabres team that's managed just 15 even-strength goals in 10 games, a rate good enough for 30th in the National Hockey League entering the weekend.

I expect Buffalo's ranking to rise over time. The combination of Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Taylor Hall has been viciously snakebit to start the season, but the underlying offensive numbers are still encouraging. The top line is averaging about 60 shots and 2.6 expected goals per 60 minutes, which are numbers similar to that of Mark Stone (Vegas), Alex Radulov (Dallas) and Jordan Staal (Carolina) – three players who are seeing pucks find the back of the net at will right now.

But my expectation for the top line to break out of that slump isn't the same for other lines. I mentioned survival shifts earlier, and it's the best way I can describe them. When lines are so infrequently able to pierce the offensive zone and sustain pressure, they're often left defending the run of play for long stretches and merely hoping to get off the ice without giving up a goal. Best-case scenario is they don't give up that goal and stay goal neutral. Worst-case scenario? They'll give up goals sometimes, and they'll never be able to erase them because of how limited their opportunities are offensively.

The Staal and Eakin lines are particularly worrisome because they are playing a significant number of minutes. To start the season, Staal's line played primarily with Victor Olofsson and Dylan Cozens; Eakin with Tobias Rieder and Kyle Okposo. And if you map out the shot profiles of the Sabres with each of these three lines on the ice, you can see just how much difficulty they have in both shot quality and shot volume:

Barring outstanding goaltending or the deepest imaginable defensive pairings, it is really hard to carry multiple lines that cannot produce offensively. The Eakin line is designed as a checking line of sorts – I'm not quite sure they're good in that role, either against tough competition in heavy defensive zone minutes, but we already know

that they're not going to be lighting the scoreboard on fire offensively. The Staal line, which was the team's best hope of supplementing scoring away from the top line, has been similarly ineffective. They cannot gain the offensive zone with frequency, their opportunities when they do have them are mostly one-and-done, and most of those one-and-done chances are coming from the perimeter.

For the team's highest-paid players, the slow start looks like one they will be able to shake off – a little more puck luck, and the goal-scoring rates are going to start marrying up to their broader ability to pressure opposing goaltenders with frequency. The other lines in Buffalo, unfortunately, do not look as promising. And that's a concern for coach Ralph Krueger as he tries to take this team into the playoffs for the first time since the 2010-11 season.

## **OPINION: Sabres had no answers for Islanders' superior defense**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 15, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) - It wasn't hard to figure out why the Buffalo Sabres couldn't beat the New York Islanders on Monday. Buffalo played right into the Islanders' hands.

The Islanders aren't even close to the best team in the NHL, but they are the most disciplined. Head coach Barry Trotz has this team dotting every "i" and crossing every "t" when it comes to playing a sound system.

If you get down two goals to a Barry Trotz-coached team, you are likely going home a loser.

In the Sabres' case, if you get down two goals to a Trotz-coached team, you're not going to even get a shot or a scoring chance in the third period.

Yes, that happened for the first time in the history of the Sabres, where they didn't get a shot during a period at home.

This game turned around on a dime late in the first period.

Jack Eichel found a streaking Victor Olofsson down the slot and Olofsson let it fly as soon as the puck got to his stick. However, Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov got a pad on the shot, which, in turn, hit the post.

New York took advantage when Henri Jokiharju took a lackadaisical approach to Anders Lee coming out of the corner, and the Islanders captain tipped in the first goal of the game with Jokiharju trailing him.

Just 1:44 later, Rasmus Dahlin played Jean-Gabriel Pageau perfectly on the rush, forcing him wide. Pageau ripped a shot, but it was off angle and absolutely has to be stopped by Linus Ullmark. That soft goal made it 2-0, and you knew right then and there the Islanders would throw a blanket of frustration over the Sabres and never be threatened.

Yes, Olofsson's power play goal cut the lead to 2-1, but Jokiharju got caught way up high on the right wing wall on a penalty kill, allowing Brock Nelson to be wide-open. Ullmark desperately pointed at Nelson for somebody to cover him, but the two-goal lead for the Islanders was restored.

Jokiharju is struggling about as badly as a defenseman can. He isn't even close this season to playing like he did last year. I think the 21-year-old really needs some time in Rochester with the Americans to get his confidence back.

Will Borgen is ready for the NHL, and played very well on Monday. It was Borgen's first game since last March with Rochester.

The Islanders seem to get bodies, sticks and skates on every pass and every shot. Trotz has them in perfect position, and they make almost no mistakes when protecting a lead.

The way to beat the Islanders is to get the lead, so they can't play the Trotz way. Had Olofsson converted that first period chance, maybe things could've been different.

I think it's fair to say the Sabres played well in parts of the game.

Buffalo hadn't played a game in two weeks and they were without six players, who were still on the NHL's COVID-19 Protocols list. This game was going to be an uphill climb.

The good news is it sounds like it's possible Buffalo could get Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour back for Tuesday's game.

The thing that was troubling, once again, is Buffalo's best players didn't play like their best players. They got zero production from Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Taylor Hall.

In his last two games, Skinner has played on Eichel's line and Eric Staal's line, and he's had his worst two games of the season. Skinner hasn't scored on any line in his last 15 games.

Eichel called the game sloppy, and he refused to use the break or having players missing the game as an excuse.

"We simply weren't good enough," Eichel said following the loss.

I don't think you can attribute the two-week layoff to getting no shots on goal in the third period. That came from frustration, the inability to get pucks into the zone and losing battles. It came from players trying to stickhandle through three Islanders and losing the puck. Varlamov has put up great numbers this season, but the Islanders could've played without a goalie in the third period because Buffalo had no shots on goal.

So now the hole is deeper.

With the win, the Islanders jumped into third place in the East Division with a .607 points percentage. The Washington Capitals and Pittsburgh Penguins are .577 and the New Jersey Devils are .556. Buffalo falls to a points percentage of .455.

Things are simple for Tuesday: Buffalo's best players have to produce like their best players. The goaltending can't let in soft goals to fall behind. Varlamov made three or four huge saves and Ullmark didn't.

That must change.

## **OPINION: Three Observations: Sabres fall flat against Islanders**

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

February 15, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres came out strong with a lot of energy on Monday night against the New York Islanders at KeyBank Center. However, after the first 15 or so minutes, the Sabres played like a team that hadn't played a game in 15 days.

The Islanders got the advantage with a couple of quick goals late in the first period, and the team never looked back from there.

Let's take a look at three observations from the game:

### 1.) Power play remains hot with goals in six-straight games

Buffalo's only offensive contribution came on the power play, something that's been a story all season. Victor Olofsson found himself wide-open from his typical spot on the right circle and fired the puck past goalie Semyon Varlamov to bring the Sabres to within a goal in the second period, 2-1.

Buffalo had a second opportunity on the power play at the end of the second period and the beginning of the third, but they would not convert, and they would not get any other chances.

### 2.) Islanders' smothering style prevents Buffalo from taking a shot in the third period

Opening the third period on the power play, the Sabres had a chance to set the tone for the period to claw their way back from a two-goal deficit. Buffalo was not able to generate any chances with their opportunity, and worse, they couldn't even muster a shot on goal in the entire third period.

The Islanders shot the puck 12 times in the third, controlling practically all of the play. The Sabres couldn't generate any momentum after their second power play opportunity, immediately handing the Islanders their own chance with the man advantage and allowing them to take control for the rest of the game.

### 3.) Sabres fail to convert again at 5-on-5

The Sabres have been pretty shaky to start the season with their 5-on-5 play. Buffalo was only able to generate 21 shots for the entire game, while goaltender Linus Ullmark allowed three goals on the 29 shots he face.

Part of Buffalo's 5-on-5 struggles come from shaky goaltending. The Sabres could have really used a stop from Ullmark on the Islanders' second goal from Jean-Gabriel Pageau. Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin kept Pageau to the outside, but the forward was able to find space to get it by the Sabres goaltender.

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Buffalo gets another chance at this same Islanders team on Tuesday night at KeyBank Center. Tune in for the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog starting at 6 p.m. EST with puck drop taking place at 7 p.m. EST.

Don't forget to check back after every Sabres game with our observations from the game.

## **Sabres suffocated by visiting Islanders**

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

February 15, 2021

After more than two weeks off from game action due to COVID-19, the Buffalo Sabres were back on the ice doing battle with the New York Islanders for Game 1 of their eight-game season series. However, it wasn't even really a contest in the final 30 minutes as the Islanders shut down the Sabres, earning a 3-1 win on Monday night at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres dictated much of the play in the first period, but found themselves trailing after 20 minutes. The blue and gold had a handful of nice chances on Semyon Varlamov, but it was the Islanders who boasted a 2-0 advantage.

With 3:23 left in the opening frame, captain Anders Lee tipped a puck past Linus Ullmark to open the scoring. A minute-and-a-half later, Ullmark allowed a goal to forward Jean-Gabriel Pageau that the Sabres netminder would definitely like to have back.

Buffalo had a quick response in the second period to get on the scoreboard with a power play goal from Victor Olofsson. It was his fourth tally of the season, and it also gave the winger points in seven-straight contests, which is a career-high.

The Islanders re-gained their two-goal lead about eight minutes later when Josh Bailey found Brock Nelson for a power play goal of their own. The 3-1 score would hold through the rest of the period, and eventually the remainder of the game.

The Sabres, trailing by two goals virtually the entire night, failed to register a shot in the third period, as the Islanders went into shut down mode to preserve the win. Buffalo was out-shot 12-0 in the final 20 minutes, and ended up getting out-shot on the night, 29-21.

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### GAME SUMMARY

#### Goal Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: NONE

NYI: 16:37 - Anders Lee (5) (Josh Bailey, Mat Barzal); 18:21 - Jean-Gabriel Pageau (5) (Nick Leddy, Scott Mayfield)

##### Second Period:

BUF: 1:40 - Victor Olofsson (4) PPG (Rasmus Dahlin, Taylor Hall)

NYI: 9:49 - Brock Nelson (3) PPG (Josh Bailey, Oliver Wahlstrom)

##### Third Period:

BUF: NONE

NYI: NONE

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#### Penalty Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: NONE

NYI: NONE

##### Second Period:

BUF: 8:09 - Brandon Davidson (Holding - 2 min.)

NYI: 0:28 - Adam Pelech (Tripping - 2 min.); 19:30 - Casey Cizikas (Slashing - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 1:24 - TEAM (Too many men on the ice - 2 min., served by Tage Thompson)

NYI: NONE

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STATS OF THE GAME

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Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) Josh Bailey - NYI
- 2.) Anders Lee - NYI
- 3.) Semyon Varlamov - NYI

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What's Next:

The Islanders will stick around for one more game on Tuesday night at KeyBank Center. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m. EST with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog kicking off at 6 p.m. EST on the radio home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## **Sabres finally back to playing games after two weeks off due to COVID-19**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 15, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) - The Buffalo Sabres get to play their first game since Sunday, Jan. 31, as the New York Islanders are in town.

Before Monday's game in Buffalo, the Sabres welcomed back three more players from the NHL's COVID-19 Protocols list. Tobi Rieder, Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour all said they tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms.

The Sabres still have four players in the NHL's COVID-19 protocols. They are Rasmus Ristolainen, Dylan Cozens, Casey Mittelstadt and Curtis Lazar.

McCabe and Montour were put through a vigorous workout by Matt Ellis after the morning skate, so they won't play on Monday. Rieder is a game-time decision, and has a much better chance to play.

Head coach Ralph Krueger was concerned on Sunday about the penalty kill, which is why Rieder is likely to play.

"I did test positive. I did have symptoms, but luckily it only lasted for 24 to 48 hours, so it was a rough couple of days," Rieder said following Monday's morning skate.

Rieder couldn't workout because he tested positive, but he felt pretty good on the ice Monday and said he can play.

Montour went on the NHL's Protocols list on the same day Rieder did.

"I did test positive, had symptoms and it was a pretty tough couple of weeks there, Montour said on Monday. "I was battling, just focusing on trying to get healthy and it's over with now. I feel pretty good, and now we forget about that and move forward here."

If you know anything about McCabe, you know he'd be out there on Monday if there was any way he could play.

"I did test positive. I did have symptoms for about the first five days," McCabe said on Monday. "It certainly wasn't any fun, but I'm feeling a lot better in the last little while. It's great to be back in the building and back at work."

Sam Reinhart didn't practice on Monday, but Krueger said don't count him out at all, and he's a game-time decision. Krueger said it's a minor injury and isn't COVID-19 related.

Krueger said he will be behind the bench coaching, as he was on the ice again for practice. He said there will be one change to the staff as goalie coach Mike Bales will be on the bench, while assistant Don Granato will be the eye in the sky. Granato was hospitalized in September of 2019 and is considered high risk for COVID-19.

The Sabres brought up Rasmus Asplund from the Rochester Americans to help with the loss of Lazar on the penalty kill.

The Sabres have some catching up to do in the East Division. The Boston Bruins have played 14 games. The Philadelphia Flyers, Washington Capitals, Pittsburgh Penguins, New York Rangers and the Islanders have all played 13 games. The Sabres have played 10 and the New Jersey Devils have played nine.

Buffalo has points in five out of six games, going 3-1-2. The Sabres' power play is ranked sixth in the NHL, while the penalty killing is 10th. Buffalo is 20th in goals-for and 21st in goals-against.

Jack Eichel has points in four of his last five games, while Taylor Hall hasn't scored a goal in nine games. Jeff Skinner hasn't scored in 14 games.

Linus Ullmark will likely start in goal. He's 3-1-2 with a 2.56 goals-against average and a .914 save percentage.

Ullmark will face Ilya Sorokin on the other side of the rink.

The rookie played eight years in the KHL before coming over to the NHL. The Islanders took him in the third round of the 2014 NHL Draft. This is only his fourth NHL game, where he's 0-2-1 with a 3.65 goals-against average and a .871 save percentage.

Mathew Barzal is on fire for New York. He's on an eight-game point streak, scoring four goals and six assists for 10 points. Overall, the Islanders' leading scorer has 14 points in 13 games.

The Islanders have points in six straight games, going 3-0-3.

Kind of a weird, but interesting stat for the Islanders is they have only had one power play in each of their last four games. They scored on three of them. They've also only given up one power play goal-against in six games.

Join the Bulldog for pregame coverage on WGR starting at 6 p.m. EST, where he'll be joined by Krueger, McCabe and Hall.

Monday's lines:

Forwards:

Skinner – Eichel – Olofsson

Hall – Staal – Asplund

Rieder – Eakin – Okposo

Fogarty – Sheahan – Thompson

Defense:

Dahlin – Miller

Irwin – Jokiharju

Davidson – Borgen

## **Sabres' return to ice ruined by ignominious mark in team's record book**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Sabres put a new entry in their record book.

"Zero shots is awful," forward Victor Olofsson said.

OK, so it's not a good entry.

For just the fourth time in Buffalo's history, the team failed to record a shot in a period. It happened during the third period of Monday's 3-1 loss to the New York Islanders, giving the Sabres an inglorious return from their two-week COVID-19 shutdown.

"We weren't good enough," captain Jack Eichel said in KeyBank Center. "That's what it comes down to in this league: You're either good enough or you're not. I think as a group — myself, everyone — we've got to be better."

The first time the Sabres failed to record a shot in a period was Feb. 19, 1981, in Montreal. They followed it up Jan. 16, 1999, in Ottawa and Oct. 7, 2011, versus Anaheim in Finland. Monday's game will join those outings in next year's media guide, leaving a lasting impression that's not impressive.

"It's a bad period," right wing Kyle Okposo said. "They're a group that knows how to play well defensively, and they just sucked us right in."

The third period was so bad that not even the potent power play could penetrate New York's defense. Buffalo opened the third with 1:33 of man-advantage carryover time but got bupkis. It was downhill from there.

"We were sloppy," said Eichel, who skated right into the Islanders' trap and turned the puck over three times in the closing minutes. "We've just got to make a play. That's what it comes down to. I mean, that's it. I've just got to make a play.

"It's been frustrating all season. It hasn't been there five-on-five. It just seems like we're sloppy. We don't make a whole lot of plays."

Buffalo's only goal was a power-play blast from Olofsson. The Sabres have scored 29 goals this year and 13 have come with the man advantage. One goal was a six-on-five with the goalie pulled.

So, in 11 games, the Sabres have 15 even-strength goals.

"When we score one goal with the lineup we have here at home, it's not enough," coach Ralph Krueger said. "We definitely have an expectation of being able to produce three to four goals a game — at minimum — with our group. So, it's back to the drawing board."

Here's the report card, based on Game Score by The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn.

Good

Victor Olofsson: He extended his career-best point streak to seven games with his team-high fifth goal. He could have had two goals, but goalie Semyon Varlamov stoned him late in the first period when it was still 0-0.

"I've got to score there," Olofsson said. "He makes a good save and it hits off the post, but it would have been really good to get that goal."

Fine

Rasmus Dahlin: The defenseman skated a game-high 25:02 and put a pass right in Olofsson's wheelhouse for the goal.

Steven Fogarty: The forward made his Sabres debut after 18 games with the Rangers during the previous three seasons. Skating on a line with Riley Sheahan and Tage Thompson, Rochester's captain played a team-low 8:28 with one blocked shot.

"Steven Fogarty has just been such a great example for the game we want to play in Rochester," Krueger said. "We are confident that Fogarty's future is far from over where it comes to the NHL. I think he has an opportunity to become a role player and to be a character player."

Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson: The defense partners made their first appearances in royal blue. Davidson made his Buffalo debut, skating for his seventh team in seven seasons. Borgen played his fifth NHL game with the Sabres but his first since March 31, 2019.

Borgen skated 14:33 with three hits and a short-handed blocked shot. Davidson had two shots, a hit and a holding penalty with 11:36 of ice time.

"I thought Borgen and Davidson stepped in and really played a good game," Krueger said. "It was a pretty good depth effort. I liked our D-corps for the group we had. They really did their job."

Poor

Jeff Skinner: The left winger, who languished in the bottom six for most of the opening 10 games, got his chance next to Eichel. Skinner drew the second-period penalty that led to Olofsson's goal, but he failed to score on his three shots and remains goalless for the season.

Colin Miller: The defenseman skated 22:38, his most ice time in a Buffalo uniform. He had three blocked shots.

Tobias Rieder: The right winger exited the COVID-19 protocols in time for the morning skate. After a positive diagnosis that floored him for two days, Rieder eased back into action. He skated just 9:42, including 1:44 of penalty-kill time.

"When I got the news, I was actually a little shocked: 'That can't be right, I'm not feeling anything,'" Rieder said of the positive test. "But, sure enough, a couple hours after I could feel the symptoms."

Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Taylor Hall and Eric Staal: Eichel had two shots in 21:37. Hall had one shot in 20:26, including 3:03 on the power play. Reinhart skated 21:39, most among Sabres forwards, and was on the ice for two goals against. Staal had one shot in 15:15.

"I'm never one that will hang it on anybody's shoulder as an individual," Krueger said in response to a question about the Sabres' best players not being their best players.

Bad

Henri Jokiharju and Matt Irwin: The defense partners let Anders Lee get open for the Islanders' first goal. They were also on the ice for New York's power-play goal, which featured goalie Linus Ullmark pointing out all the open players.

But on a night when the Sabres needed two third-period goals to tie the game and didn't even take a shot, the poor play of a defense pair is dwarfed by the abysmal showing of the offense.

"There's just some five-on-five habits that need to be strengthened," Krueger said. "The shots can come and will come. We're going to concentrate more on the process than on that final shot clock result."

## **Sabres register zero shots in third period, fall to Islanders in return**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 15, 2021

BUFFALO – Monday's loss to the New York Islanders could've been penciled in days ago.

Teams coming off a break usually fare poorly against competition that has been playing uninterrupted. The short-handed Sabres were playing their first game in 15 days without six players who are still in the NHL's COVID-19 protocol.

Adjusting to the NHL's pace and grind after sitting idle can be difficult. The Sabres had to do it without three of their top defensemen: Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour.

Two of the defensemen the Sabres utilized for the 3-1 loss at KeyBank Center – taxi-squad regulars Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson – hadn't played a game at any level in nearly a year.

The result, as expected, was a loss not nearly as the score might indicate. How bad was it? Winger Jeff Skinner recorded the Sabres' 21st and final shot on Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov 16:54 into the second period. They did not register a shot on a goal in the entire third period.

For the first time in their 48-year history, the Islanders held an opponent without a shot for an entire period, according to statistician Eric Hornick.

"That's not good enough," Sabres winger Victor Olofsson said on a Zoom call following the Sabres' first game since Jan. 31. "I feel like we got to just throw pucks at the net. ... Zero shots is, yeah, it's awful."

By the end, the Sabres' lack of energy and the Islanders' rigid structure – they execute a system and take away space as well as any NHL team – doomed them.

"There's probably no team that manages leads better than they do," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "They just really take away the middle of the ice."

So the Sabres relied on their power play again. Olofsson scored from the right circle 1:40 into the second period, narrowing it to 2-1 and extending his point streak to seven games.

Their power play, having converted 10 of 23 opportunities over the last six games, is scorching. But the Sabres are dreadful at even strength. They've scored just five even-strength goals in their last six outings.

"Coming out of our own end ... was a problem before the break," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said of the Sabres' even-strength scoring woes. "I think that was our biggest problem was that we weren't coming up together with any sort of continuity. I thought tonight we did a better job of that."

"But we've got to find a way to get more second and third opportunities. I know that's cliché to say, but it's true. There were some pucks that were playing there that we just couldn't get to and we've got to make sure that we're hungry to score in the paint."

Captain Jack Eichel said the Sabres "just got to make a play" at even strength.

"That's it," a visibly frustrated Eichel said. "We just have to make a play. It's been frustrating all season. It hasn't been there five-on-five. It seems like we're sloppy."

Krueger took some solace in the Sabres' effort.

"The guys competed pretty good tonight when you look at how this group's been brought together the last few days. The heart was there, the compete was there."

The Islanders Anders Lee and Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored first-period goals. Brock Nelson's second-period power-play goal sealed it.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark made 26 saves.

The Sabres host the Islanders again tonight.

## **Sabres notes: Tobias Rieder returns to lineup, Buffalo adds new players**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 15, 2021

**BUFFALO** – When Sabres winger Tobias Rieder learned earlier this month he had tested positive for COVID-19, the news shocked him.

The German felt fine. He figured the result couldn't be correct.

"But sure enough, a couple hours after I could feel the symptoms," Rieder said prior to Monday's game against the New York Islanders at KeyBank Center, the Sabres' first outing since Jan. 31.

Rieder, 28, said he experienced "a rough couple days." Even after he felt better, he was forced to sit idle. The NHL prohibits anyone on the COVID-19 protocol-related absences list from working out at home.

"You don't do anything for 10 to 12 days, that's pretty hard," Rieder said on a Zoom call. "But every day it gets better and I felt pretty good today on the ice."

Rieder felt well enough to face the Islanders despite having just one team skate – Monday's light morning session – under his belt. He took his normal regular spot at left wing on the third line beside center Cody Eakin and Kyle Okposo.

Sabres defensemen Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour, both of whom acknowledged they tested positive for COVID-19, also returned Monday morning but did not play.

McCabe said he had symptoms for about five days. Montour said he felt symptoms and experienced "a pretty tough couple of weeks there."

"It certainly wasn't any fun, but (I'm) feeling a lot better here the last little while," McCabe said. "So it's great to be back in the building."

McCabe and Montour are still on the absences list. Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and forwards Dylan Cozens, Curtis Lazar and Casey Mittelstadt are also on it.

The NHL has removed Rieder, defenseman Rasmus Dahlin and winger Taylor Hall from the list. Dahlin and Hall also played Monday.

To replace McCabe and Montour and fill a spot up front, the Sabres recalled defensemen Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson and winger Steven Fogarty from the taxi squad before the game. Borgen and Davidson hadn't played a game at any level since March 11.

The Sabres also summoned forwards Rasmus Asplund and Andrew Oglevie from the Rochester Americans and assigned them to the taxi squad.

Fogarty, the Amerks' captain, skated at left wing on the fourth line beside center Riley Sheahan and Tage Thompson.

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On Monday, the New Jersey Devils, the Sabres' last opponent before their COVID problems began, returned to practice. At one point, the Devils had 19 players on the absences list. That number is down to four.

The Devils had 5 players on the list when they started their weekend series against the Sabres on Jan. 30. The next day, the NHL placed Devils winger Kyle Palmieri on the list, yet the game was played.

Palmieri told reporters Monday he tested positive for COVID-19.

McCabe, the Sabres' union representative, refused to say if any discussions were held about postponing the second game against New Jersey on Jan. 31.

Notes: Winger C.J. Smith, who practiced in Rieder's spot over the weekend, did not skate Monday morning or play. ... Winger Sam Reinhart missed the morning skated but played. An upper-body injury sidelined Reinhart two games before the Sabres' COVID pause. ... Jeff Skinner, who has spent most of the season on the fourth line, skated at left wing beside top center Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson.

## **Ralph Krueger plans to coach behind bench; Sabres move Don Granato**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 15, 2021

**BUFFALO** – Coach Ralph Krueger, who recently recovered from COVID-19 and returned to the Sabres on Sunday, plans to be behind the bench tonight against the New York Islanders at KeyBank Center.

“I feel good to go,” Krueger said on a Zoom call this morning. “Obviously, with the strong support around me it makes it easier where they’ve done an excellent job. But I felt really good in the skate today and meetings this morning with coaches and interacting with players here and there.”

But the Sabres’ COVID problems will force them to switch two coaches.

Krueger said assistant coach Don Granato, who was hospitalized with severe pneumonia in 2019, will move upstairs to be the “eye in the sky.” Mike Bales, the assistant who normally fills that role, will move to the bench beside Krueger and assistant Steve Smith.

Krueger said Granato will still be in charge of the power play and come down between periods to meet with the coaching staff.

“One of the things that’s really good about the way we work here is everybody knows everything about everybody,” Krueger said. “There’s no secrets here. We communicate openly. We’ve been meeting for months and months before the season started in different forms so it’s very fluid and very easy to make these kinds of adjustments and the players are always just feeling the same language.”

## **Three Sabres return from COVID-19 absences, say they tested positive**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO – Three Sabres on the NHL's COVID-19 protocol-related absences list – winger Tobias Rieder and defensemen Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour all acknowledged they tested positive – skated with their teammates again this morning.

Now, will they play tonight against the New York Islanders at KeyBank Center?

"They remain day-to-day candidates and we'd like to consume, digest what happened here this morning," said coach Ralph Krueger, whose Sabres haven't played since Jan. 31.

Krueger said roster decisions will be made later today.

Update: The Sabres late this afternoon recalled winger Steven Fogarty and defensemen Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson from the taxi squad and reassigned forwards Rasmus Asplund and Andrew Oglevie from the AHL to the taxi squad.

McCabe and Montour skated as a pair this morning and went through extra work after the team session with Matt Ellis, the Sabres' director of player development. That, of course, is a sign they possibly won't play tonight.

Rieder, meanwhile, skated in his regular spot at left wing beside center Cody Eakin and Kyle Okposo and said he feels well enough to play tonight.

The German was stunned to learn he tested positive.

"When I got the news, I was actually a little shocked, that can't be right, like I'm not feeling anything," Rieder said on a Zoom call. "But sure enough, a couple hours after I could feel the symptoms."

Rieder said he endured a rough day or two. McCabe said he had symptoms for about five days. Montour said he felt symptoms and experienced "a pretty tough couple of weeks there."

Stay tuned for more updates. Sabres winger Sam Reinhart, who missed the last two games before the Sabres' COVID pause with an upper-body injury, did not skate this morning.

"We're managing an issue there and what we'll do is make the final call tonight," Krueger said of Reinhart's status. "But there's still a chance for Sam to be in the lineup."

Rasmus Asplund, who was recalled from the Rochester Americans, skated in Reinhart's place at right wing beside center Eric Staal and Taylor Hall.

If McCabe and Montour can't play, Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson will likely replace them.

Winger C.J. Smith, who subbed in Rieder's spot over the weekend, wasn't on the ice this morning.

Krueger, who returned to the Sabres on Sunday after testing positive for COVID-19 Feb. 4, said he plans to coach behind the bench.

## 5 Observations: Islanders top Sabres 3-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. [WKBW] — In their first game back after a two-week shutdown, the Buffalo Sabres came up short, falling to the New York Islanders 3-1. Victor Olofsson scored the Sabres only goal and Linus Ullmark turned away 25 of 28 shots faced.

5 Observations from Monday's loss:

"Zero shots is awful" - Victor Olofsson

The Buffalo Sabres did not record a single shot in the third period. You didn't read that wrong. In the final frame, the Sabres finished with zero shots.

If you thought the Sabres would make a late push in the third period then you'd be mistaken. Heading into the final frame the Sabres were trailing by two goals but you'd think they were the team trying to protect a lead. Perhaps the team that hasn't played in more than two weeks ran out of energy or maybe the Islanders just completely shut them down. For my money, it was a bit of both. But I can't remember watching an NHL team fail to record a single shot in a period.

That's probably because it doesn't happen very often. This is just the fourth time in franchise history the Sabres have failed to record a shot in a period. It's the first time it's happened since 2011. Shoutout to our friend John Vogl from The Athletic for digging up those stats in the Sabres media guide.

"It's a bad period. It's not a good period of hockey and that's not the way we want to play," Kyle Okposo added. "The best part about it is we've got another game coming up in less than 24 hours."

"We couldn't find the energy, especially in the third period," head coach Ralph Krueger added.

Failing to generate at 5-on-5

When the Sabres have the man advantage they're a dangerous team. The same can't be said when they're playing at even strength.

"It's frustrating when we don't get the offense going," lone goal scorer Victor Olofsson said. "We need to do a better job at putting the puck in better positions for ourselves."

As a team, the Sabres started strong but that push came to a screeching halt as the game moved along. If they don't figure things out at 5-on-5 soon things are going to get much worse before they get better. And that's saying a lot.

Will Borgen can stay

In his first game of the 2021 season, Will Borgen looked confident and comfortable every time he was on the ice. For someone his size, he's a strong skater and it seems like always wins loose puck battles. In the defensive zone he clears the front of the ice and while on the penalty kill, he didn't hesitate to drop down to one knee and block a shot. Even when the Sabres are fully healthy, Borgen deserves a look.

Missing pieces

Despite the strong play of Borgen, the Sabres desperately missed both Jake McCabe and Rasmus Ristolainen on Monday. Their absence was especially evident on the Islanders' third goal when Brock Nelson slipped behind the Sabres defense to tap in an easy goal. Matt Irwin and Henri Jokiharju failed to pick up Nelson and the Isles doubled their lead. Although he's still listed on the NHL's COVID list, McCabe skated Monday morning and appears to be close to his return to the lineup. Ristolainen has yet to practice since he was placed on the list two weeks ago.

## Dahlin was strong

With an expanded workload, Rasmus Dahlin had a strong game at both ends of the ice. He was crisp breaking out of the defensive zone and handled the extra minutes well. The Sabres third-year defender took some flack for getting caught flat-footed on the Islanders' second goal of the night scored by JG Pageau. But if the shot is saved by Ullmark, which it should have been, we'd never be talking about the play. Dahlin was solid on a night when a lot of his teammates were not.

## **Three Sabres return from COVID protocol list ahead of matchup with the New York Islanders**

By Anthony Reyes

WKBW

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres will hit the ice Monday night for the team's first game since January 31 due to the NHL's COVID-19 protocol.

The Sabres had several players enter the NHL's COVID-19 protocol and several games were postponed following two games against the New Jersey Devils at the end of January.

Monday, Jake McCabe, Brandon Montour and Tobias Rieder returned from the COVID protocol. The team says they will be game-time decisions for Monday night's matchup against the New York Islanders.

Four Sabres remain in the NHL's COVID protocol: Dylan Cozens, Curtis Lazar, Casey Mittlestadt, Rasmus Ristolainen.

The team says McCabe, Montour and Rieder all confirmed they tested positive for COVID-19 and experienced varying degrees of symptoms.

## **Sabres struggle to find offense in loss to Islanders**

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Their first game back in 15 days, and the Sabres had trouble putting the puck in the back of the net. Aside from a second period goal, Buffalo was held off the board in the 3-1 loss to the New York Islanders.

They had opportunities, and even outshot the visiting team in the opening period, but those scoring chances didn't materialize into goals.

Buffalo gave up a pair of goals late in the first period. Anders Lee scored on a redirect with just outside of three minutes to go. Less than two minutes later, Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored to make it 2-0 after one.

In the second period, the Sabres got on the board with a power play goal from Victor Olofsson, cutting the lead in half. About halfway through the period, the Islanders got the goal back on a power play goal from Brock Nelson to make it 3-1.

New York's defense clamped down in the 3rd, as the Sabres didn't even get a shot on goal in the first 18 minutes of the period. They were outshot 12-0 in the final period.

Buffalo now moves to 4-5-2 on the season, and host the Islanders again on Tuesday night at 7 p.m.

## **Sabres to play first game since January 31**

WIVB

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The Buffalo Sabres are set to play the New York Islanders on Monday night.

Buffalo hasn't played a game since January 31 after a coronavirus outbreak in the locker room benched several players and Head Coach Ralph Krueger for most of this month.

The NHL had to postpone eight Sabres games over the past two weeks, and now Buffalo will have to play 46 games in a little more than 80 days.

It's a stretch the team knows will be difficult, but the Sabres say they're ready to hit the ice and face it head on.

"It's tough and the same for everyone," Rasmus Dahlin says. "So, we've just got to go out there and compete, first of all, and then the other stuff will come."

The puck will drop at KeyBank Center at 7 p.m. The Sabres will host the Islanders Tuesday night as well.

## **Sabres' Krueger will coach against Islanders, 3 more Sabres return from NHL's COVID-19 Protocol**

By Julianne Pelusi

WGRZ

February 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres will play their first game since January 31st at the KeyBank Center Monday night, hosting the New York Islanders. Head Coach Ralph Krueger said he will be behind the bench, coaching, as he recovers from his COVID-19 diagnosis.

"I feel good to go," Krueger said Monday, after revealing Sunday he was not sure if he would be able to coach in the first of the Sabres two back-to-back games against the Islanders.

"Obviously, with the strong support around me it makes it easier where they've done an excellent job, but I felt really good in the skate today and meetings this morning with coaches and interacting with players here and there," he said. "I feel ready to go so hopefully, you know, we'll just take it a step at a time, but I feel like it's going to be a good night."

The Sabres have now returned five of the nine players placed onto the NHL's COVID-19 protocol list, with three more back on the ice Monday in defensemen Brandon Montour and Jake McCabe and forward Tobias Rieder.

All three players said they tested positive for the virus and, like Krueger, were symptomatic at times throughout their quarantine. Because of league rules, players who have tested positive are unable to workout and train during quarantine.

Krueger said all three will be game-time decisions tonight against the Islanders, but Rieder said he feels ready to go.

"I think I feel well enough I can play. We'll see tonight what's going to happen," Rieder said after his first practice back with the team on Monday. "Obviously, the first day back was pretty hard. You don't do anything for 10 to 12 days, that's pretty hard. But every day it gets better and I felt pretty good today on the ice."

## Islanders spoil Sabres return, extend point streak to seven

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

February 15, 2021

**BUFFALO** -- The New York Islanders extended their point streak to seven and spoiled the Buffalo Sabres' first game since Jan. 31 with a 3-1 win at KeyBank Center on Monday.

Semyon Varlamov made 20 saves, and Josh Bailey had two assists for the Islanders (7-4-3), who are 4-0-3 in their past seven games and did not allow a shot on goal in a period for the first time in their history when they outshot Buffalo 12-0 in the third.

"I don't think we were taking it lightly," New York center Brock Nelson said. "They had some time off, but after a break like that, everybody's fired up to play and is just happy to be back out there. We've been in that situation now, different scenarios with bye weeks and things like that. ... We knew they were going to come out and have some jump having not played in a bit."

Victor Olofsson scored and Linus Ullmark made 26 saves for the Sabres (4-5-2), who had six games postponed due to NHL COVID-19 protocols. They will host the Islanders again Tuesday.

Buffalo still has six players (forwards Dylan Cozens, Curtis Lazar and Casey Mittelstadt, and defensemen Jake McCabe, Brandon Montour and Rasmus Ristolainen) on the COVID-19 protocol list.

"I don't think it was fatigue," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said. "I just think that we got away from our game a little bit and kind of got sucked into what feeds their game and that's when you turn the puck over."

"They're a team that knows how to play with the lead, they know how to lock things down. I just thought we fed into their game in the third period."

Anders Lee redirected Bailey's shot stick side to give New York a 1-0 lead at 16:37 of the first period.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau extended his goal streak to three games 1:44 later when he took a pass from Nick Leddy and scored from the right circle to make it 2-0 at 18:21 of the first.

"He's engaged, he's playing that role, he's going against top people, he's moving around a little bit," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "I thought he had a little bit slow start today, honestly. ... But I like 'Pager.' Pager's a guy you win with. He gets it done when it matters most."

Olofsson cut it to 2-1 on the power play at 1:40 of the second period with a one-timer from the right circle. He has an NHL career-high seven games (three goals, five assists).

Buffalo is 10-for-23 on the power play in its past six games but has five goals at even strength during that stretch.

"We've just got to make a play. That's what it comes down to," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said of the 5-on-5 struggles. "That's it. We just have to make a play. It's been frustrating all season. It hasn't been there 5-on-5. It seems like we're sloppy. I don't know, we don't make a whole lot of plays. It's tough. It's tough to score goals in this league when you don't do that."

Nelson scored a power-play goal on a redirection of Bailey's pass at 9:49 of the second period for the 3-1 final.

It was Bailey's second multipoint game of the season; the forward has scored six points (one goal, five assists) in 14 games.

"I think first and foremost, [it's about] team success," Bailey said. "That being said, we all take pride in our roles and our jobs on this team. When you're not doing what's expected of you, it hurts you. I think it's a motivating factor to get going, and sometimes you just need some results. I'm looking to build off it personally, and as a team it's a good win to start the trip. It's a quick turnaround here, so we can't sit on it for too long."

NOTES: Islanders center Mathew Barzal had an assist and extended his NHL career-high point streak to nine games (four goals, seven assists). ... New York forward Oliver Wahlstrom got his first NHL assist. ... The Islanders have scored a power-play goal in three straight games and five of their past six. ... Sabres defenseman William Borgen had one shot on goal and three hits in 14:43 of ice time in his season debut and first NHL game since March 31, 2019. ... Defenseman Brandon Davidson made his Sabres debut and had two shots on goal in 11:36.

## Islanders stay hot, spoil Sabres' return from COVID postponements

By James O'Brien

NBC Sports

February 15, 2021

After recently beating the Bruins, Barry Trotz raved about it being the sort of win the Islanders strive to carve out in the playoffs. The Islanders' 3-1 win on Monday felt that way too, although it also probably showed how far the Sabres need to come to finally break their playoff drought.

The Islanders now have points in seven straight games (4-0-3), improving to 7-4-3 overall. During the last five games, they've stacked up four wins.

As stingy as the Islanders can be, losing like this had to be pretty demoralizing for the (now 4-5-2) Sabres. Heading into an aggravating COVID delay, the Sabres had been building up steam with wins in four of their last six. They have to hope this was a matter of rust, and will get a chance to prove that much as the Islanders and Sabres turn around for another game on Tuesday.

Semyon Varlamov, Islanders combine for stingy win vs. Sabres

When it comes to the Isles and their goalies, people often fall into chicken-and-the-egg arguments.

Has Semyon Varlamov/Robin Lehner/Thomas Greiss really been that good under Barry Trotz, or was it all about the system? Of course, the truth is that it's usually been a mixture; the more interesting debates probably boil down to assigning percentages to the goalies vs. the nurturing atmosphere.

To some extent, the Islanders' philosophy about defense has probably helped Varlamov. But Varlamov's earning his portion of the credit. After all, saves like this one on Victor Olofsson come down to a goalie being keyed-in.

Consider the gap between Varlamov and Ilya Sorokin heading into Monday's Sabres – Islanders game:

Now, that's a small sample size. But it's another way to illustrate that Varlamov's off to a hot start. Via Hockey Reference, the Islanders have been on the wrong end — sometimes significantly — when it comes to the share of scoring chances, including high-danger ones. Varlamov's been able to keep them in games nonetheless.

So, imagine if the Islanders can clog things up. That certainly was the case on Monday. For the first time since 2011, the Sabres were held without a shot on goal during a period. That happened in the third, when the Islanders were nursing a 3-1 lead.

Other hot streaks continue

While Mathew Barzal continues to be a key catalyst, the Isles are receiving contributions from a variety of scorers. In Barzal's case, he pushed his point streak to a career-best with nine on Monday.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau has been especially hot lately. Pageau extended his goal streak to three games (4G) with a tally on Monday. The Islanders had to be pleased to receive contributions from Brock Nelson and Anders Lee, as well.

Most of the news is bad for the Sabres. Going without a shot during a period where you're trailing has to sting. Rust or not, and as hot as the Islanders have been lately, you'd think a fresh Sabres team would be able to get more done as this game went along.

Instead, they could really only do damage on the power play.

That's where Olofsson scored after being robbed by Varlamov earlier in the game. His power-play tally extended a career-best point streak to seven games. The 25-year-old's scored at least one point in all but two games so far this season.

Jack Eichel and Taylor Hall both failed to generate a goal or an assist in this one, combining for three SOG while each player logged more than 20 minutes. That's disappointing stuff, and it's fair to wonder how much longer that partnership might last.

## **Olofsson scores lone goal for Sabres in loss to Islanders**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 15, 2021

Victor Olofsson scored the lone goal of the game for the Sabres as they returned from a layoff of more than two weeks with a 3-1 loss to the New York Islanders at KeyBank Center on Monday.

Anders Lee, Jean-Gabriel Pageau, and Brock Nelson scored for the Islanders while Josh Bailey tallied two assists. Semyon Varlamov made 20 saves.

Here are five takeaways from the game.

### 1. Missed chances overshadow strong start

Kyle Okposo had likened the thought of jumping back into the NHL season following a 15-day layoff to jumping onto a moving train. Early on, it seemed like the Sabres were up to the task.

Buffalo outshot New York, 12-8, during the first period and had a prime opportunity to open the scoring when a tic-tac-toe succession of passes from Jeff Skinner and Jack Eichel led to Olofsson seemingly staring down an open net. Instead, Varlamov got a piece of the shot and deflected it wide.

The Islanders responded less than a minute later with a deflection goal by Lee to open the scoring with 3:23 left in the period. Pageau doubled the lead a minute after that.

"I really liked our start," Okposo said. "We came out in the first couple periods, I thought we played really well. We just didn't capitalize on some opportunities."

### 2. Islanders shut the door

The deficit proved insurmountable against an Islanders team that entered the night ranked fifth in the NHL with an average of 2.46 goals allowed per game. After Olofsson and Nelson traded power-play goals in the second period, the Islanders held the Sabres without a single shot on goal in the third.

Okposo and captain Jack Eichel both said the late struggles were more a matter of puck mismanagement than anything having to do with rust from the long break.

"I don't think it was fatigue," Okposo said. "I just think that we got away from our game a little bit and kind of got sucked into what feeds their game and that's when you turn the puck over."

"They're a team that knows how to play with the lead, they know how to lock things down. I just thought we fed into their game in the third period."

Added Eichel: "I think as a group, myself, everyone, we've got to be better. It's a quick turnaround. We're going to play a lot of hockey in the next week or so. Obviously, we hadn't played in the last two weeks. But nobody wants to sit here and make excuses."

### 3. COVID-related absences force multiple debuts

The Sabres skated Monday morning with four players still absent due to COVID-19 protocols: forwards Dylan Cozens, Curtis Lazar, and Casey Mittelstadt and defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. Three others - forward Tobias Rieder and defensemen Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour - joined the team on the ice for the first time at the morning skate after respective bouts with the virus.

Rieder stepped right into the lineup, skating 9:42 and assuming his usual role on the penalty kill. McCabe and Montour both remained absent, however, leaving the Sabres without three of their top four defensemen in terms of average ice time. Their absences paved the way for Brandon Davidson and William Borgen to make their season debuts.

Davidson skated 11:36 and tallied two shots but took the holding penalty that preceded Nelson's power-play goal during the second period. Borgen skated 14:43, tallying one shot and three hits. Neither player had appeared in a game since last March.

"I thought Borgen and Davidson stepped in and really played a good game today for the fact that they haven't played in something like a year," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "It was a pretty good depth effort. I liked our D corps for the group we had."

#### 4. Olofsson extends his point streak

Olofsson extended his point streak to a career-best seven games, fueled almost entirely by production on the power play. His four power-play goals are tied for fourth in the NHL this season while his nine power-play points are tied for sixth.

He is the first Sabres player to record a power-play point in six straight games since Daniel Briere in 2005.

The Buffalo power play remained hot despite the layoff, scoring for the sixth straight game.

#### 5. Right back at it

The Sabres host the Islanders again Tuesday, then face them four more times in the next 11 games.

"We've got to have a short memory and learn from it, rectify it," Okposo said.

Krueger said that McCabe and Montour will both be eligible to return to the lineup Tuesday but added that both players will be evaluated before decisions on their availability is made.

Puck drop on Tuesday is scheduled for 7 p.m. with coverage on MSG beginning at 6:30.

## **At The Final Horn: Islanders 3 - Sabres 1**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 15, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres were back in action for the first time in two weeks Monday night, but the result did not go their way in a 3-1 loss to the New York Islanders at KeyBank Center.

Victor Olofsson scored Buffalo's lone goal and Linus Ullmark made 26 saves in net.

Anders Lee, Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Brock Nelson scored for the Islanders. Mathew Barzal assisted on New York's first goal to extend his career-high point streak to nine games. Semyon Varlamov turned aside 20 Sabres shots.

Olofsson's power-play goal extended his point streak to a career-best seven games (3+5). Seven of his eight points have come on the power play.

Due to a rash of COVID-related absences that affected nine players plus head coach Ralph Krueger, Monday marked Buffalo's first game action since January 31. Krueger was back behind the bench Monday night.

The 14-day layoff marked Buffalo's longest in-season break between games not caused by player participation in the Winter Olympics.

### What happened

The Islanders took a 2-0 lead in the first period with a pair of goals in the late stages of the frame. Lee opened the scoring when he deflected in a shot by Josh Bailey with 3:23 remaining. Pageau doubled the lead when he flew down the right wing and roofed a shot short side with 1:39 left.

Olofsson got Buffalo on the board with a power-play marker 1:40 into the second. His give-and-go with Rasmus Dahlin set up a good shooting lane and he made no mistake for his fifth goal of the season.

New York added to its lead at the 9:49 into the second when Nelson redirected the puck while in tight with the man advantage.

The Sabres were outshot 29-21 in the game and did not record a shot on goal in the third period.

### Roll the highlight film

Let's take a look at Olofsson's goal:

### Worth mentioning

Three Sabres - forward Steven Fogarty and defensemen William Borgen and Brandon Davidson - made their season debuts. For Fogarty and Davidson, it was their first game in a Buffalo uniform.

The Sabres have six players on the COVID-related absence list: forwards Dylan Cozens, Curtis Lazar, Casey Mittelstadt, and defensemen Jake McCabe, Brandon Montour and Rasmus Ristolainen. Dahlin, Taylor Hall and Tobias Rieder had been in protocol prior to the game and were cleared for action.

The NHL is sharing the names of players who are "unavailable" to teams due to COVID protocols and updating a public list each day.

These "COVID Protocol Related Absences" can be the result of a number of factors including, among others:

- (1) an initial positive test which remains unconfirmed until confirmatory testing is completed pursuant to the Positive Test Protocol;
- (2) mandated isolation for symptomatic individuals pursuant to the Positive Test Protocol;
- (3) required quarantine as a high-risk close contact in accordance with the Positive Test Protocol;
- (4) isolation based on a confirmed positive test result and/or;
- (5) quarantine for travel or other reasons as outlined in the COVID-19 Protocol.

No additional detail will be provided either by the League or the team, including the precise reason a player is unavailable or how long he might be out.

#### Coming up

The Sabres and Islanders will wrap up their back-to-back set Tuesday night at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550. Pregame coverage begins at 6:30 on MSG.

## **Sabres call up Borgen, Davidson, Fogarty from taxi squad**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 15, 2021

The Sabres have recalled forward Steven Fogarty and defensemen William Borgen and Brandon Davidson from the team's taxi squad. Forwards Rasmus Asplund and Andrew Oglevie have been reassigned from Rochester (AHL) to the team's taxi squad.

The Sabres face the New York Islanders tonight at KeyBank Center. Pregame coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. on MSG. Rick Jeanneret and Rob Ray will have the call on MSG and WGR 550. The game can also be seen nationally on NBCSN.

Fogarty, who signed a one-year deal during the offseason, will look to make his Sabres debut after spending the morning skate on a line with Tage Thompson and Riley Sheahan. Fogarty earned the captaincy in Rochester and scored a goal through two games with the Amerks.

Borgen, a fourth-round pick from 2015, made his NHL debut late in 2018-19 but spent last season with Rochester, tallying 11 points (1+10) in 61 games. He's spent all of this season on the taxi squad thus far.

Davidson, 29, signed a one-year deal with the Sabres during the offseason after appearing in 12 NHL games for Calgary and San Jose last season. He has 23 points (9+14) in 174 career NHL games.

### **3 players return from COVID protocol ahead of meeting with Islanders**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 15, 2021

Ralph Krueger said he feels well following his bout with COVID-19 and expects to be behind the bench when the Buffalo Sabres host the New York Islanders on Monday.

The rest of the lineup remains to be seen. Sam Reinhart did not participate in Buffalo's morning skate due to a minor injury but has not been ruled out for the game, according to Krueger.

Meanwhile, forward Tobias Rieder and defensemen Jake McCabe and Brandon Montour all returned from the COVID-related absence list and will be game-time decisions.

"They remain day-to-day candidates and we'd like to consume, digest what happened here this morning and we will make very late final roster decisions here today," Krueger said.

McCabe, Montour, and Rieder all confirmed they tested positive for COVID-19 and experienced varying degrees of symptoms. Rieder said his symptoms lasted for 24 to 48 hours; McCabe says his went on for roughly five days.

"It was a pretty tough couple of weeks there," Montour said. "So, happy to be back now."

Rieder said he felt well enough to play against the Islanders but echoed Krueger in referring to his status as a game-time decision. McCabe and Montour both remained on the ice long after the morning skate with skills coach Matt Ellis.

Buffalo hosts New York again at KeyBank Center on Tuesday, adding another wrinkle into the decision on when to bring players back into the lineup.

"Honestly, this whole time, just throughout from the first day of testing positive, I've just been taking a day-by-day approach," McCabe said. "I had another good day today so hopefully I have another good day tomorrow and just continue on managing it in that sense."

In the event McCabe and Montour do not play, it would likely open the door for defensemen Brandon Davidson and William Borgen to make their season debuts after spending the entirety of the campaign thus far on the taxi squad.

Davidson, 29, signed a one-year deal with the Sabres during the offseason after appearing in 12 NHL games for Calgary and San Jose last season. Borgen, a fourth-round pick by Buffalo in 2015, played four NHL games at the end of 2018-19 before spending last season in Rochester.

"Davidson and Borgen have just been outstanding since Day One and consummate professionals," Krueger said. "They've given us what we needed in that difficult taxi squad role and helped to increase the standard of practice whenever they did join us."

"It's terrific. This opportunity for them, should it come for both of them, is so well deserved. We are confident going into the game that we will be fine and we have depth there. ... We would be happy for them to have them into the games here."

Steven Fogarty, another veteran who signed a one-year deal during the offseason, could also make his Sabres debut after spending the morning skate on a line with Tage Thompson and Riley Sheahan. Fogarty earned the captaincy in Rochester and scored a goal through two games with the Amerks.

"He had an outstanding training camp with us and also just shows some of the smarts that we are enjoying with Riley Sheahan in our lineup and the stability that they can bring to our game," Krueger said.

"We are confident that Fogarty's future is far from over when it comes to the NHL and we think he has an opportunity to become a role player and to be a character player. His personality is outstanding but also his habits are very strong, and we look forward to seeing him at this next level."

### The lineup

Here's how the Sabres lined up during the morning skate, with Rasmus Asplund filling in for Reinhart alongside Taylor Hall and Eric Staal.

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 68 Victor Olofsson  
4 Taylor Hall - 12 Eric Staal - 74 Rasmus Asplund  
13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 21 Kyle Okposo  
72 Tage Thompson - 15 Riley Sheahan - 17 Steven Fogarty

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

Linus Ullmark was the first goaltender off the ice.

### Scouting the Islanders

The Islanders have maintained their stingy identity under coach Barry Trotz, holding opponents to an average of 2.46 goals per game. That number ranks fifth in the NHL. Veteran goaltender Semyon Varlamov has a .930 save percentage and leads the league with three shutouts.

New York has points in six straight games (3-0-3) coming off a victory over East Division-leading Boston - a team with a similar reputation for defensive play - on Saturday. Trotz called the showing an "Islanders-style playoff game."

"I thought we were moving our feet, I thought we were physical, I thought we were winning our battles," Trotz said. "I liked the fact that we were throwing pucks to the net and winning some of those loose pucks and getting some chances."

### Tune in

The game can be seen locally on MSG with pregame coverage beginning at 6:30 p.m. It will also be broadcast nationally on NBCSN. Puck drop is scheduled for 7.