



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 11, 2021

Buffalo hosts Pittsburgh after Reinhart's 2-goal game

Associated Press

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Pittsburgh Penguins (15-9-1, third in the East Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (6-14-4, eighth in the East Division)

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

BOTTOM LINE: Buffalo hosts the Pittsburgh Penguins after Sam Reinhart scored two goals in the Sabres' 5-4 shootout loss to the Flyers.

The Sabres are 6-14-4 against the rest of their division. Buffalo serves 5.2 penalty minutes per game, the least in the NHL. Rasmus Ristolainen leads the team averaging 0.8.

The Penguins are 15-9-1 against opponents in the East Division. Pittsburgh has scored 12 power-play goals, converting on 16.7% of chances.

The teams square off Thursday for the first time this season.

TOP PERFORMERS: Jack Eichel leads the Sabres with 16 assists and has 18 points this season. Reinhart has six goals and three assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

Sidney Crosby leads the Penguins with 15 total assists and has 24 points. Kris Letang has five goals and five assists over the last 10 games for Pittsburgh.

LAST 10 GAMES: Sabres: 1-7-2, averaging 2.1 goals, 3.9 assists, 2.5 penalties and 5.5 penalty minutes while giving up 3.5 goals per game with an .896 save percentage.

Penguins: 7-3-0, averaging 3.3 goals, 5.1 assists, 2.9 penalties and 5.8 penalty minutes while giving up 2.4 goals per game with a .921 save percentage.

INJURIES: Sabres: Will Borgen: out (upper body), Jack Eichel: day to day (upper body), Linus Ullmark: out (lower body).

Penguins: Colton Sceviour: day to day (covid-19).

Tickets on sale Thursday for Sabres March 20 opener; Testing plans for fans revealed

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
March 10, 2021

Tickets for the first game in KeyBank Center with fans this season, March 20 at 1 p.m. against the Boston Bruins, will go on sale Thursday, the Buffalo Sabres announced Wednesday night.

Capacity for the game is expected to be limited to around 1,900 and season ticket holders will have the first chance to purchase tickets Thursday. They will be contacted directly by the team with instructions. Tickets to the public will be available beginning Friday at 2 p.m.

Tickets may be purchased in pods of one, two, three or four seats. They may not be forwarded or resold.

All fans attending any game this season will need to produce a negative molecular PCR Covid-19 test result within 72 hours before the game. To help fans, the Sabres are collaborating with Quest Diagnostics through QuestDirect, the company's consumer-initiated testing service. All tests are \$64.

Fans can schedule their molecular PCR test with Quest at multiple locations throughout Western New York. After buying a ticket, fans will be emailed a link to a registration site and code that they can use to schedule their test. All scheduling and testing payments will be done directly through Quest.

The Sabres have also teamed with CLEAR to use their Health Pass app technology for Covid-19 screening of fans. Fans will need to download the CLEAR app, verify their identity and will then be able to securely link their Covid-19 test results to the app. The day of the game, fans will open Health Pass, verify identity with a selfie and answer a health questionnaire on the app.

Users with a negative test result and a completed health questionnaire will receive a green notification on the app, which they will show as they enter the arena.

For more information on ticket prices and availability, fans can contact the Sabres box office at (716) 855-4444. The club also has answers to numerous common questions on its web site at Sabres.com/FAQ. Ticket information for games later this season will be communicated as it becomes available.

Mike Harrington: If he's not firing the coach, what should Kevyn Adams do now?

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 10, 2021

The Sabres were off Wednesday after their disastrous road trip to New York and Philadelphia. They went 0-4-1 on the trip, and they're 0-6-2 in their last eight games and 6-14-4 on the season.

And they didn't fire Ralph Krueger. Seriously.

Looks like he'll be behind the bench Thursday night in KeyBank Center against Pittsburgh and probably beyond.

This organization should want no part of allowing fans back in the building, given the chants and catcalls it might endure. Assuming anybody shows up.

Especially since it's clear that the Sabres are punting on yet another season. The funny part about this one is that they weren't even trying to lose – and still put together a dreadful enough team to get the job done with gusto.

Yes, you, too, can be like Terry and Kim Pegula and spend \$82 million to get a 31st-place team.

General Manager Kevyn Adams' bold proclamations last week – "full authority on hockey decisions as the general manager" – seem pretty hollow right about now.

If he's a legitimate NHL GM, it's inconceivable Adams could keep his head coach at this point. But there are clearly other forces at work. Like about six million of them.

That's the dollar amount the Pegulas owe Krueger for the rest of this season and all of next year to run out his contract. Doesn't seem like they're in the mood to pay yet another coach or GM not to work. Or drill another oil well.

Firing a coach wasn't remotely on ownership's radar coming into this season. But by going 2-10-1 since coming back from their Covid-19 pause and showing all kinds of quit while doing it, Krueger's team is making his second chance at being an NHL coach look like it should last about as long as Ted Nolan's did.

Virtually no one picked the Sabres to be a playoff team. But virtually no one picked them to be so feeble either. The expectation in this corner was a lot of tossup games like Tuesday's shootout loss in Philly. Just hasn't been enough of them.

You wonder what the threshold for Pegula pain is here. What happens if the Sabres' winless streak hits 10 games? Or 12 games? Or 14 or 16 games? So, if he won't fire the coach – or isn't being allowed to do it – what should Adams do?

1. Get trading

The trade deadline isn't until April 12, and the word is that Adams is doing a lot of talking. Get something done now. Shake up the locker room. If you aren't firing the coach, you can't possibly run out the same roster every night. Taylor Hall, Eric Staal and Brandon Montour are the club's three most prominent unrestricted free agents. Fellow UFAs Tobias Rieder and Riley Sheahan might have interest to teams as cheap additions.

Get Staal and Hall to waive their no-trade restrictions. If you are talking to Canadian teams, players are going to have to quarantine for two weeks. Get that clock started right now. See if there's a hockey trade in there. You need a goalie with Linus Ullmark still going to be out for weeks. Jonas Johansson is an AHL goalie and Carter Hutton has one win this year. You're going to go with that pair maybe for 32 more games?

2. Get Jack Eichel right

The captain hasn't been close to 100 percent all season. He's had multiple problems, starting with what's believed to be a shoulder injury suffered in offseason training. There's rumors of a core muscle problem, there's the ankle

injury suffered in New Jersey – or was it in the pregame warmup two nights later, Ralph? – and the neck problem that cropped up Sunday on Long Island after a relatively innocuous push from Islanders forward Casey Cizikas.

More information on Eichel is expected by Friday. It wouldn't be shocking to hear that he's being shut down for some sort of procedure. Imagine if his season is over and he got \$5 million for each of his two goals.

Eichel has fewer goals than Rieder, Sheahan and Curtis Lazar. If he can't play, he can't lead and he hasn't been much of a captain since the first couple of weeks of the season. It sure feels like the emotional pulse of this club was Jake McCabe. But his serious knee injury, followed by Ullmark's heavy hamstring problem, put the end to any thought of a playoff spot.

Get Eichel healthy and then you have the spring and summer to figure out what to do with him going forward. Social media has already traded him. The internet's opinion doesn't count.

3. This season needs to become a lab

Wins and losses no longer matter. Let's see Dylan Cozens for the long haul at center. Let's get Arttu Ruotsalainen up here from Rochester and put him in the lineup. He's already 23 and has played three seasons in the Finnish league.

As the calendar heads deeper into April, let's get the NHL debuts out of the way for Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Mattias Samuelsson, Jack Quinn and Casey Fitzgerald. Even if it's just for a game or two, give them all a taste now so they can feel what the NHL is like and take that knowledge with them through the summer.

And if it costs you a game, as Cozens' dreadful pass in overtime nearly did Tuesday night, so be it.

4. Do something with Okposo

For all the talk about the scratching of Jeff Skinner – richly deserved for one or maybe two games – Kyle Okposo has somehow escaped Krueger's wrath, even though he's now at a year and two weeks without a goal.

I get it. Great human. Respected in the room. Has a letter as an alternate captain and hockey teams are loathe to scratch guys who have a letter. But it's clear Okposo's time is done here. He's got two years left on his contract at \$6 million per. They have to buy him out come June and just deal with the cap consequences.

Instead of being off the books in 2023, Okposo would count \$1 million on the cap in both the 2023-24 and 24-25 seasons, but he can't possibly be in this lineup anymore. He really shouldn't be in the lineup this week. Can't believe why he hasn't been put on waivers or scratched yet. He's got no goals and two assists in 19 games. Being a nice guy should only get you so far.

Sabres Notebook: Crosby & Co. hit town looking to cash in again at KeyBank Center

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
March 10, 2021

There is no respite in coming home for the Buffalo Sabres.

Not when Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the rest of the Pittsburgh Penguins will be waiting for them to open a two-game series Thursday night in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres are just 2-7-2 downtown this season, tied with New Jersey (2-9-1) for the fewest home wins in the NHL. And they are winless in their last six here (0-5-1), dating to their 4-3 shootout win over the Devils on Jan. 30.

The Penguins, meanwhile, are 10-0-2 in their last 12 games in Buffalo and have not lost one in regulation since April 23, 2013. But strangely enough, the Sabres have won three straight in Pittsburgh's PPG Paints Arena.

Crosby, 33, has nine goals and 15 assists and is again a point-per-game player with 24 in 24 games. He will be playing in his 1,009th career NHL game Thursday and has feasted on the Sabres in his career with 21 goals and 63 points in 42 games. He has recorded at least one point in 37 of the 42 meetings.

Crosby had the final goal in the teams' most recent matchup, a 4-2 Pittsburgh victory in Buffalo on March 5, 2020.

Jake Guentzel is next on the club in scoring at 8-14-22 while Malkin, now 34, is at 6-13-19. Winger Kasperii Kapanen has four goals in the last five games and seven for the season.

After some early struggles in goal, Tristan Jarry has shored up the position of late for Pittsburgh. He's tied for the NHL lead in wins since Feb. 16 by going 7-2 while compiling a 2.43 goals-against average and .922 save percentage.

Pittsburgh comes to town on a three-game winning streak after Tuesday's 4-2 win over the New York Rangers in PPG Paints Arena. The Penguins are third in the East, three points behind Washington.

The Pens are 8-3 in their last 11 games and have turned around a season that opened with quick crisis. They got blown out by a combined score of 11-5 in the opening two games of the season at Philadelphia but have gone 15-7-1 since.

Division buddies

The games here Thursday and Saturday nights will mark the first of eight meetings this season against the Penguins. The teams have not been division rivals since the 1997-98 season.

That year, the Penguins won the Northeast Division while the Sabres finished third. But the Penguins were upset in the first round of the playoffs by Montreal that spring while the Sabres advanced to the Eastern Conference final before losing to Washington.

Pittsburgh moved to the Atlantic Division in 1998 and stayed there until the Metropolitan Division was formed in 2013.

Hutton vs. Pens?

After Jonas Johansson started three of the last four games, it's reasonable to think Carter Hutton will get a chance in goal against the Penguins. Especially since they're a team he has dominated in his career by going 5-1, 1.95/.940 in eight career games.

The only team Hutton has been better against in his career? It's the Sabres. He went 5-0, 0.98/.963 against Buffalo while with Nashville and St. Louis.

Shootout choices

On a night the Sabres' top line had plenty of impact, their choices in the blink-and-it's-over shootout Tuesday night in Philadelphia were Rasmus Dahlin and Casey Mittelstadt – and not Sam Reinhart or Taylor Hall.

Coach Ralph Krueger's shootout choices are heavily influenced by goaltending coach Mike Bales, who charts cumulative totals for goalies and shooters in practice. The club routinely ends its practices with shootout drills.

Choosing shooters that way is common for NHL coaches. Flyers coach Alain Vigneault said after the game he left his choices up to goaltending coach Kim Dillabaugh, and they were rewarded with goals by Sean Couturier and Nolan Patrick.

Krueger said Reinhart and Hall were "coming up in the next slots" but the shootout was over in two rounds as both Dahlin and Mittelstadt were stopped by Brian Elliott.

"We do a lot of penalty shooting in practice and [Dahlin] is top of the group actually in productivity," Krueger said after the game. "It's a specialty team we look at and they do get called for a reason. Mittelstadt is also outstanding at it.

"You would always like to remix those cards when you lose and this time, this is the order we had it in. It is something that is cumulative over many, many practices."

After getting stopped Tuesday, both Mittelstadt (3-9) and Dahlin (1-3) fell to 33% in shootouts for their career. Reinhart is at 32% (7-22), while Hall is at 24% (8-33).

Another win for Flyers' Elliott

Elliott allowed just one goal over the final 45 minutes in relief of Carter Hart to get the win Tuesday and extend his career mastery over Buffalo.

Elliott is 16-2-2 against the Sabres with a 1.67 goals-against average and .943 save percentage. As you might have guessed, the wins, GAA and save percentage are his best against any opponent.

In four games against Buffalo this year, Elliott is 3-0, 0.91/.967, allowing just three goals on 90 shots and posting shutouts in both of his starts.

Sabres announce ticketing details for fans returning to KeyBank Center

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 10, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – The Buffalo Sabres have put out a release on Wednesday outlining how ticketing and COVID-19 testing is going to go when the team opens up KeyBank Center for fans on Saturday, March 20 against the Boston Bruins.

Here is the release in its entirety:

"The Buffalo Sabres today announced the on-sale dates and ticketing details for the team's game on Saturday, March 20 against the Boston Bruins. A limited number of tickets will be available for the game and season ticket holders will have the first chance to purchase tickets.

"Tickets for the game will go on sale to season ticket holders on Thursday, March 11 before the general on-sale at 2 p.m. EST on Friday, March 12. Season ticket holders will be contacted directly on March 11 with instructions on how to purchase tickets.

"Each fan who attends a game this season will need to produce a negative molecular PCR test result from a test taken within 72 hours of the game. To help fans, the Sabres will collaborate with Quest Diagnostics to facilitate cost-efficient molecular PCR testing through QuestDirect, the company's consumer-initiated testing service.

"Fans can schedule their molecular PCR test with Quest Diagnostics at multiple locations throughout Western New York. After buying a ticket, fans will be emailed a link to a registration site and code that they can use to schedule their test, which costs \$64 if scheduled through Quest Diagnostics. All scheduling and payments for testing will be done directly through Quest Diagnostics.*

"The Sabres have also teamed up with CLEAR to use their Health Pass technology for COVID-19 screening of fans. Health Pass is a free, mobile experience by CLEAR, which securely connects a person's verified identity to multiple layers of COVID-19 related insights to reduce public health risk and get people back to what they know and love.

"Fans will need to download the CLEAR app and verify their identity and will then be able to securely link their COVID-19 test results to the app. The day of the game, fans will open Health Pass on their CLEAR app, verify their identity with a selfie, and answer a health questionnaire on the app. Users who have a negative test result and pass the health questionnaire will receive a green notification on the app, which they will show as they enter KeyBank Center for the game.

"Additional information for fans attending Sabres games this season can be found at [Sabres.com/FAQ](https://www.sabres.com/FAQ). For more information on ticket prices and availability, fans can contact the Sabres Box Office at (716) 855-4444. Ticketing information for games later this season will be communicated as it becomes available.

"* - The cost of the testing purchased through this website is solely your financial responsibility. Please note that QuestDirect is unable to provide you with a receipt that contains the basic information generally required by health plans for reimbursement."

Sabres vs. Canucks: After 50 years and no Stanley Cups, whose fans have had it worse?

By Sean McIndoe, John Vogl, Thomas Drance
The Athletic
March 11, 2021

One of my favorite movie characters is Count Rugen from "The Princess Bride." He's the creepy bad guy who's trying to write the definitive work on the subject of pain. He's fascinated by how much can be endured, and just how bad it can get. The sports fan side of me kind of gets where he's coming from. Misery is interesting to me.

I'm also a Toronto Maple Leafs fan. These two facts may be related.

With three decades of Maple Leafs pain under my belt, I'm getting close to self-appointed expert status on the subject. But these days, there isn't a ton of Leafs-related agony to be found. Toronto is leading the North Division and has a shot at the first Presidents' Trophy in franchise history. They've been mostly... what's the word for it? The one that's the opposite of bad. It will come to me eventually, I'm a little rusty here.

But while my own team might be pain-deprived these days, at least temporarily, there's still plenty to go around. And it's possible that no two teams have experienced worse than the Vancouver Canucks and Buffalo Sabres.

The two franchises are forever linked, expansion cousins who entered the league together in 1970 and have been experiencing the ups and downs of NHL existence ever since. Both have come agonizingly close to Stanley Cups without ever winning one. Both have seen stars come and go. They've both made some, uh, questionable fashion choices.

And right now, both teams are terrible. Despite the season opening with significant optimism in Vancouver and at least a little in Buffalo, both teams are already all but out of the playoff hunt. And last Friday, on what was for both franchises their 18,721st day of existence, the two teams that started together found themselves arriving in the exact same spot at the same moment: With a GM facing the media, offering answers and asking forgiveness for a season going down the drain.

Players are frustrated. Jobs are in jeopardy. Vultures are circling. And fans are miserable.

But which fan base is most miserable? And which one should be?

Like my pal Count Rugen, I had a deep and abiding interest in finding out. But I couldn't do it on my own because true NHL misery is the sort of thing you need to see up close to really understand. So I asked two of our beat writers, John Vogl of the Sabres and Thomas Drance of the Canucks, to help me understand. I came up with ten categories of NHL suffering and asked Vogl and Drance to make the case that their fan base has it worst.

Remember, this is for posterity, so be honest. Sabres fans, Canucks fans... how do you feel?

Stanley Cup Final scars

Let's start with the big one. Both teams have had near-misses but no championships. Whose close call(s) hurt most?

Vogl's case for the Sabres: It's June 1999. With more than 20,000 fans gathered at the foot of City Hall, Lindy Ruff steps to the microphone with the final two words of the season.

"No goal!"

Those words still echo around town. Brett Hull put his skate in the crease and can't show his face in Buffalo. His controversial triple-overtime goal in Game 6 ended the Cup final but merely started the misery. Sabres fans will forever believe they were cheated. Making it worse is Hull, Mike Modano and other Stars were so injured they might not have skated in a Game 7, giving Dominik Hasek and Company a real chance to celebrate.

Drance's case for the Canucks: If you think Stanley Cup Final pain is your ally in a misery duel with Canucks fans, you're wrong. Canucks fans were born in the darkness.

Fun fact: No franchise in NHL history that hasn't previously won a Stanley Cup has ever lost in the Stanley Cup Final more than twice. Except for the Canucks.

Fun fact #2: No franchise in NHL history that hasn't previously won a Stanley Cup has ever lost in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. Except for the Canucks. And the Canucks have done that twice.

Sean says: This one really comes down to what type of pain hurts worse. The Canucks have come closer to the Cup, getting within one win in both 1994 and 2011. But the Sabres have that single defining play that they can probably still see when they close their eyes at night. This one's too close to call, and also I'm already sad. This may have been a bad idea.

Underrated miserable moment

Some forms of misery are big and public and obvious, but some are more subtle. I wanted to know if a fan base had been through something that the rest of us may not have noticed, or had already forgotten.

Vogl's case for the Sabres: When the NHL approved Mark Hamister as the third owner of the Sabres, he greeted reporters at a janitorial supply company.

It was fitting because his bid went in the toilet.

The league gave the Buffalo businessman and his group four extensions to finalize the deal from November 2002 to February 2003, but they never had the cash or financing to make it happen. His \$65 million offer relied upon \$40 million in public assistance, which never came. Hamister's partner, Todd Berman, was later sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement.

Drance's case for the Canucks: Right at the inception, the Canucks were doomed.

It was dubbed "Black Tuesday" by the local papers. In the smoke filled grand salon at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal, 14 NHL member clubs gathered for a hopelessly rigged expansion draft that permitted teams to protect 17 players and two skaters (not that it stopped the GMs of the time boasting to their local papers about how well prepared they were not to lose anyone of value. You think?).

Frankly, the expansion draft was a sideshow, the real prize was the first overall pick at the 1970 NHL entry draft and the right to select Gilbert Perreault.

The proceedings began with a coin flip, which would determine two items: waiver priority, and the right to select the high or the low numbers on a big pinwheel that would be spun to decide which team got picked first in both the expansion and entry drafts.

Punch Imlach, the Sabres GM, won the toss. One for one on the day, he picked the high numbers. And the Sabres won the first pick in the expansion draft.

By this point the Sabres front office is just laughing, riding high. They're two for two!

Imlach picks the high numbers again. The wheel spins and when it stops, NHL president Clarence Campbell announces the Canucks have won the first overall pick in the 1970 NHL Draft.

But wait, that can't be right, no one remembers Perreault playing on Canada's west coast. You see, as if to pour salt in the wound, Campbell had it wrong. Campbell had removed his glasses for the photo op. prior to the final spin. He'd misread the No. 11 as the No. 1.

And so the Sabres had waiver priority, the first pick in the expansion draft, and the first pick in the entry draft. Buffalo made their NHL start with the French Connection line and were an elite team by their fifth season, while the Canucks were cursed to 12 years of absolute obscurity from the outset.

51 years later and the Canucks have still yet to select first overall in the draft, while the Sabres have done so three times. Not that a wide-angle understanding of NHL history stopped Tim Murray from having a meltdown in 2015.

Sean says: Anyone who's read my book knows I'm mildly obsessed with The Wheel. Canucks take this one.

Worst transaction

I offered the guys a chance to vent about the most painful trade or signing in team history.

Vogl's case for the Sabres: Trading Ryan O'Reilly in 2018 wasn't the mistake. The error was not taking a bag of pucks for him.

That would have been a better return than the real one.

Patrik Berglund quit after 23 games and forfeited \$12.5 million just to get away. Vladimir Sobotka had six goals and 10 assists in 85 games before injuring his knee and returning to Europe. Tage Thompson has been a steady scratch on a last-place team. And the first-round pick ended up being 31st overall because O'Reilly won the Cup and Conn Smythe.

The only positive came in the bank account of owner Terry Pegula, who avoided paying O'Reilly the \$7.5 million bonus due on the day of the deal.

Drance's case for the Canucks: You can't beat the Canucks giving up on Cam Neely for the layers of pain that come attached with the transaction.

Neely was dealt on his 21st birthday. He was from Comox, B.C. and was young enough to have grown up a Canucks fan.

Unfortunately, Canucks coach Tom Watt saw Neely as a one-dimensional fighter. In Vancouver, he was a fourth liner.

The club was being run by the worst general manager in team history at the time, Jack Gordon, who everyone knew was just a placeholder while the club completed a botched, extended search for what the Griffiths family ownership group publicly referred to as their "Hockey Tsar."

In the summer of 1986, the Boston Bruins signed Canucks great Thomas Gradin away from Vancouver as a free agent (or what we'd now call a free agent anyway). And so the Canucks responded by signing Barry Pederson, except that Pederson was the equivalent of an RFA, and so the Canucks had to agree to a trade as compensation — the cost was ultimately a player and a conditional first-round pick in 1986 or '87.

The player turned out to be Neely, who became an immediate superstar in Boston. It helped that he spent his first Bruins season playing with — yep — Gradin, who he never got an opportunity to play with in Vancouver.

Meanwhile the Canucks kept the seventh overall pick in 1986, took a player you've never heard of named Dan Woodley and ultimately surrendered the third overall pick in 1987, who the Bruins used to pick defenseman Glen Wesley.

As if this wasn't already harrowing, it actually gets worse. Wesley spends seven years with the Bruins organization and in 1994 gets dealt to the Hartford Whalers for three first-round picks, the last of which is used to select one of Joe Thornton's first beneficiaries, Sergei Samsonov, in 1997. In 2004, the Bruins dealt Samsonov to the Edmonton Oilers for a package centred around Marty Reasoner that also included a second-round pick.

With the 50th overall selection at the 2006 NHL Draft — hosted in Vancouver, of course — the Bruins select Vancouver Giants hero and East Vancouver legend Milan Lucic. And Lucic goes on to play a crucial role in defeating the Canucks in the 2011 Stanley Cup Final.

Find me another hockey trade in which a team acquires nothing of consequence while giving up a local kid that immediately blossoms into a Hall of Fame quality player for his new team. Now tell me, does it also have a trade tree that spans a generation and links directly to a second NHL star, another local kid, that has a direct hand in defeating that team in a Cup final 25 years later?

Sean says: I thought Drance would go with something from the Mark Messier/Trevor Linden era here, but yeah, the Neely trade might be in the running as the very worst in NHL history — and that was before I knew about the Lucic connection. The Canucks take this one.

Ugly uniforms

You know we can't do a Sabres/Canucks battle without this hotly contested category.

Vogl's case for the Sabres: The Sabres' two-sided monstrosity introduced in 2013 is called the Turd Burger. And what cold-hearted meanie would dub it that?

The team president.

So, yeah, it's disgusting.

After a summer teasing the yellow sweater, the Sabres got teased when they unveiled it with an out-of-focus picture of Steve Ott in an equipment room. But it could have been immortalized by Glamour Shots and it wouldn't have mattered. Yellow in the front, navy in the back with gray arms for some unknown reason, you can still find it on the discount rack of closeout stores.

Drance's case for the Canucks: You can't beat the Flying V. It's the worst jersey in hockey history.

Designed with heavy input from pseudo-psychologists to create "upbeat, happy, aggressive" hockey players, the jersey is far and away the worst sweater ever worn by an NHL team.

The reaction of the players at the time — as told by the late Jack McIlhargey to Global News back in 2018 — says it all.

"I remember one of the guys said, 'Well, last year we played like clowns, now they're dressing us like them,'" McIlhargey recalled.

Sean says: The Turd Burgers and the Flying Vs may be the two worst looks in NHL history. And to make matters worse, both teams have had amazing uniforms — the Canucks' black-and-gold skate look and the Sabres classic blue-and-yellow are both fantastic. I think we have to give an edge to Vancouver here because the Sabres' disaster was largely a one-off while the Canucks have had multiple other designs that were almost as awful. But then again, the Flying V never had to be modelled by a confused Steve Ott, so it's close.

Saddest fact from franchise history

I had a simple ask for the guys: Give us one fact that will make us feel sorry for you.

Vogl's case for the Sabres: Pat LaFontaine has his name and number hanging in the rafters but is persona non grata with ownership.

Drance's case for the Canucks: Want to know where the Canucks rank out of the NHL's 31 current marketplaces in all-time points percentage? If you guessed dead last, you nailed it! The Canucks have won 158 fewer games than the Sabres since both teams entered the league and have picked up points in 26 fewer games.

Vancouver is, as a matter of fact, the NHL's least successful current franchise by on-ice results.

Sean says: That... that can't be right, can it? The Canucks are the worst of the existing 31 teams, a group that includes perpetual losers like the Maple Leafs, Panthers, Senators and Blue Jackets? (Checks numbers.) Dear lord.

Also, we're halfway through, so feel free to take a break and do something less depressing than thinking about these teams, like watching the Johnny Cash "Hurt" video a few dozen times.

Most painful what-if

Sometimes the things that nearly happen are more painful than the ones that actually do, so I asked if there was something from team history that almost came to pass and could have changed everything.

Vogl's case for the Sabres: There's no doubt about this one. What if arguably the best and most-beloved team in franchise history hadn't lost four of its top six defensemen for Game 7 of the 2006 Eastern Conference final?

For one thing, this little comparison of woe wouldn't be happening. Buffalo would have a Cup.

My friend and colleague Tim Graham did the insane oral history, so I'll provide the synopsis. With an entire roster playing the best hockey of their lives, Sabres defensemen suffered a broken left ankle, broken left arm, hip flexor and left ankle strep infection that nearly resulted in amputation.

Yet the team was still 20 minutes away from reaching the final, where a mediocre Oilers squad awaited defeat. Instead, Buffalo went to the hospital while Carolina sipped champagne.

Drance's case for the Canucks: Before the Pat Quinn era was waylaid by Mike Keenan and Mark Messier, the Canucks met with Wayne Gretzky in the summer of 1996 in Seattle and effectively agreed to terms with him and his agent Mike Barnett on a multi-year contract.

And then for reasons I still can't grasp, a decision was made to have team president Stan McCammon make a call to Gretzky at 1:30 a.m. and insist that a deal that was all but agreed to be signed on the spot. A take it or leave it offer.

The George McPhee and Pat Quinn account of the tale, which is best told by our The Athletic colleague Dan Robson in his essential biography of Quinn, suggests that ownership blew up the deal because of paranoia that Barnett and Gretzky were using their offer as leverage to get a better deal from the Rangers.

The Tony Gallagher account, however, echoed by McCammon, suggests that Canucks ownership was reacting to a hockey operations recommendation from McPhee and Quinn. And there's certainly reason to believe that they were skeptical about doing the deal (Quinn wasn't in the loop when negotiations started, and didn't drive the bus on the Messier deal the next summer either).

Whatever account you prefer, tension between Quinn and new Canucks ownership was mounting in that time frame and McCammon delivered a wee hours ultimatum. Obviously Gretzky wasn't going to agree so the deal fell apart.

And so Vancouver fans never got to see an Alexander Mogilny-Gretzky-Pavel Bure first line skate together.

Sean says: Yeah, I'm legitimately bummed out right now. John didn't even mention that the 2006 team still only lost because of the terrible (and then new) puck-over-glass rule, and the idea of a Gretzky-Mogilny-Bure unit is making my teeth itch.

One YouTube clip that makes your fans sad
Let's pivot to video. Horrible, gut-wrenching videos.

Vogl's case for the Sabres: Ryan Miller walked into Boston's arena in November 2011 as the face of the franchise. He walked out with a concussion.

Milan Lucic exposed Paul Gaustad and the Sabres as kittens. Just look at Lucic smirk and trash-talk his way to the box without even dropping his gloves. Some say this changed everything for the Sabres, who haven't made the playoffs since. Some might be right.

Drance's case for the Canucks: So many to choose from. Brad Marchand speed bagging Daniel Sedin, the Todd Bertuzzi punch, Zdeno Chara lifting the Stanley Cup on Vancouver ice, Nick Lidstrom scoring on Dan Cloutier from centre ice, Markus Naslund admitting at centre ice that "we choked." They'd all work.

I'm going to go with this though, even though it's seemingly unrelated. No gallery of Canucks fan misery is complete without a cameo from one of the NHL's most beloved legends in every single hockey market (except Vancouver):

Sean says: Ah, there's the Messier reference. Both of these are pretty bad, but Buffalo's may have actually had consequences for the long-term outlook of the franchise, so I'll give them the nod.

Previous rock bottom

In the decades before this current edition, which team had suffered through the most painful moment/season/era?

Vogl's case for the Sabres: The Sabres made headlines around the globe in 2002 with owner John Rigas splashed across the Wall Street Journal, BBC News and Billings Gazette.

He was in handcuffs being escorted to a police car.

Rigas used his public company as a personal piggy bank, running Adelphia Cable and the Sabres into the ground. Players started interviews by saying, "You know I can't talk about not getting paid, right?" Cities that missed out on expansion were circling like vultures. Gary Bettman, despised for No Goal, was in charge of the bankrupt organization. Buffalo legitimately didn't know if the Sabres would survive.

Drance's case for the Canucks: It has to be the 2011 Cup final loss.

That Canucks team was probably the best team we've seen in the salary cap era. They won the Presidents' Trophy and boasted the league's No.1 offense, defense, power play and were like two-tenths of a percentage point away from having the No. 1 penalty kill too (and they probably lead the league by PK% if Manny Malhotra hadn't been devastatingly injured in Game 72).

That year, Canucks personnel took home the Art Ross, the Jennings, GM of the Year, the Selke, the Ted Lindsay. After surviving a near-collapse against Chicago, they steamrolled the Predators and Sharks, then took a 2-0 series lead over Boston.

And then things got funky. Suspensions, don't poke the bear stuff and all that. Somehow this immaculate team got beat up in the alley, sustained an insurmountable number of injuries and ultimately got blown out in a nervous, low-energy Rogers Arena in the decisive seventh game.

This hockey market still isn't really over that one.

Sean says: The Sabres' one is awful and embarrassing, but it didn't result in the fans burning their own city down. I feel like you have to get bonus points for that.

Current season misery

We've covered the history, but what about today? I'm told it's not going super-great for either team. But given expectations and recent history, who has it worse?

Vogl's case for the Sabres: Whether the Sabres made the playoffs or not, they were going to be fun this year. With Taylor Hall and Eric Staal joining Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Jeff Skinner and Rasmus Dahlin, the team was going to put the puck in the net and lose 5-4 instead of 3-1.

But coach Ralph Krueger got the keys to a Camaro and drove it like a postal truck. The Sabres are an absolute bore. They can't score at even strength, which is almost a literal statement rather than a figurative one. The NHL used them as ingredients in COVID-19 soup. The only goalie who stops pucks is injured. And they play every 1.8 days, rarely giving fans a break.

Drance's case for the Canucks: The Canucks are bad and it's a big comedown after their success in the bubble last season.

This season is mostly miserable because it's the last year that Quinn Hughes and Elias Pettersson will be affordable, and honestly, it's going to be a lot harder to have good depth surrounding them going forward. And to meet this unique opportunity, the Canucks have blown it at every level of the organization.

Ownership cut 20 percent of their player personnel budget — at least based on Cap Friendly's estimates — which accentuated how harshly a host of brutally inefficient contractual commitments to a ton of non-contributing players is felt. Those commitments include the club carrying dead cap hits on the most expensive taxi squad contract in the NHL in Loui Eriksson and the most expensive AHL player in Sven Baertschi.

And for all of that, I still think the Sabres have it worse at the moment.

Sean says: Drance is basically conceding here, and it's the right move because the Sabres had this one in the bag even before Vogl broke out the phrase "ingredients in COVID-19 soup."

Future outlook

Finally, let's end on a positive. It can always get better, right? (Spoiler: No.)

Vogl's case for the Sabres: When The Tank patrolled Buffalo from 2013 to 2015, it sparked a bitter civil war. Friends, neighbors and family members fiercely debated the merits of losing, swearing at each other while belittling their fandom.

Ah, the good old days.

Now there's nothing, which is even worse. Fans have become numb to the never-ending carousel of players, coaches and general managers. It doesn't matter who's in the uniform, on the bench or calling the shots. Losing is the only constant.

Buffalo has seen a decade's worth of prospects turn into rejects, so there's not even joy about the future anymore. There's just a bleak outlook that's as dark and cold as February midnights.

Drance's case for the Canucks: The worst part of how the Canucks are set up at the moment is that every year from here on out it's going to be really complicated to do the things this club still needs to do to be a contender — namely improving the bottom-six significantly, and upgrading the defense corps. Pettersson, Hughes and Thatcher Demko expire after this season, then Brock Boeser is due for a significant raise, then the next season Bo Horvat and J.T. Miller expire.

Because of bad planning, this promising core the Canucks have assembled may only have a one or two year runway to credibly compete together. Those are cataclysmic circumstances for a fanbase that's endured several years of arduous misery over the past half decade, has now invested into a promising /young core, and isn't yet prepared to see the writing on the wall for how much more this team has to improve and how challenging it's going to be to make those improvements ahead as the core gets paid.

But at least Canucks fans aren't living under the constant threat of ruefully watching Eichel star on Broadway for the New York Rangers. They've got that going for them.

Sean says: Drance just throwing haymaker parting shots at the Sabres fan base now. Hey maybe if Eichel leaves the team that drafted him to go play for the Rangers and spends years there establishing himself as the league's marquee player, the Canucks will wait until he's washed up and then sign him as a free agent.

And the winner loser is...

Me. And you. And all of us who made it all the way through that. This was a bad idea, I apologize to everyone for coming up with it, and I'm going to go lie down in a dark room and cry for a few hours.

Or maybe not. Maybe reading all that made you feel good about where your own team is at. And if you're a Sabres or Canucks fan, I hope it was at least cathartic.

As for who has it the worst, I'll be honest — I went into this thinking the Sabres would take the crown. The skate in the crease, the ownership problems, a bankruptcy, and (gestures at the current season) all of this made them the favorites. But Drance did a good job of closing the gap, and there's a good case to be made that the Canucks going into this mess of a season with actual optimism makes everything else even worse.

I don't know. I say we let Canucks and Sabres fan duke it out in the comments. You all tell us, who takes the crown? And more importantly, tell us which one of these two franchises will do what they do best: Come up just short of getting a win.

NHL trade deadline: What to expect from all 31 teams

By Ian Mendes and Sean Gentile

The Athletic

March 10, 2021

The week of April 12 usually marks the start of the Stanley Cup playoffs on a regular NHL calendar.

But as hockey fans are well aware, the normal NHL schedule has been thrown out the window in this pandemic-condensed season.

So instead of marking the beginning of the postseason, April 12 is now the trade deadline in this 56-game campaign.

And just as the regular season has been altered from reality — with realigned divisions and a baseball-style schedule — the trade deadline will also have a completely different feel in 2021.

Aside from the later date on the calendar, teams will have to adapt to pandemic circumstances that could drastically alter the complexion of the trade deadline. Transactions between American and Canadian teams are expected to be at a minimum, as Canadian law requires travelling players to quarantine for 14 days after they cross the border.

The flat salary cap could also serve as a restrictive force on trades around the deadline, as many teams are finding themselves with very limited cap space.

We decided to look at all 31 teams and determine who could be buyers and who could be sellers in this unique marketplace.

All deadline cap space numbers courtesy CapFriendly and as of March 8.

Buffalo Sabres

Status: Sellers

Projected Deadline Cap Space: \$1.8 million

Notable UFAs: Taylor Hall, Eric Staal, Brandon Montour, Jake McCabe, Linus Ullmark

Notable RFAs: Rasmus Dahlin, Sam Reinhart, Henri Jokiharju

Where, uh, are we supposed to start here? Nice as it would be to sidestep the Jack Eichel minefield, that's not possible. Let's just say it seems like a summer trade, if anything, and move on. Ralph Krueger would trade Jeff Skinner to the moon, but that's not in the cards. Hall is the obvious movable piece, and he's going to be linked to any team with a hole in its top six. Catastrophic few months aside, Hall still qualifies there. If the Sabres are indeed willing to eat some of his \$8 million contract to get a draft pick in return, Boston, Carolina and Columbus are all teams that fit, in terms of need and space. Staal is in decline, but he was productive enough last season and still makes sense as a depth add down the middle. Edmonton, on paper, is a fit for him (or anyone similar). The most interesting name here might be Montour. He's a talented offensive defenseman whose productivity has cratered in Buffalo. Go figure. If you're interested in a pending UFA with a \$3.85 million cap hit and a right shot — and at the deadline, most contenders are — he makes sense. McCabe would draw interest, but he's done for the season with a knee injury.

Sabres rookie Jacob Bryson quickly emerging as special talent

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 10, 2021

BUFFALO – In the second period of Tuesday's 5-4 shootout loss, Sabres defenseman Jacob Bryson grabbed the puck along the left wall, skated behind his net and adroitly fed winger Victor Olofsson an outlet pass from the right circle.

A few seconds later, Bryson swooped into the Philadelphia Flyers zone, grabbed center Eric Staal's pass high in the slot and backhanded the puck to Olofsson as he charged to the net.

While Olofsson did not score, the sequence illustrated Bryson's slick playmaking ability, smarts and growing confidence. The rookie was playing just his eighth NHL game.

In what has become another awful season, Bryson, 23, has emerged as a bright spot for the hapless Sabres, showcasing poise that belies experience. He has quickly earned coach Ralph Krueger's trust, playing more than 20 minutes in four of the last five games.

"What a great find for us now in this situation," Krueger, whose Sabres have lost eight straight games, said on a Zoom call Friday.

Bryson will likely make his sixth straight appearance Thursday for the Sabres, who host the Pittsburgh Penguins at KeyBank Center.

In Thursday's 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders, Bryson skated a game-high 24 minutes, 10 seconds. In Saturday afternoon's 5-2 defeat to the Islanders, he scored his first NHL goal.

"It's been a journey and a long one," Bryson said. "But I think I'm just getting better every game."

Krueger said Bryson's "poise when pressure is coming at him when he has the puck" has wowed him.

"Whether it's on retrievals on our end, when he's trying to solve pressure or when he's at the blue line and he's getting a winger closing on him extremely quickly, he's so calm and cool," he said. "He's got his head up all the time and makes the right decision. We're extremely pleased with his puck management. The same thing is going on without the puck. ...

"It's an extremely intelligent game that he's shown us here."

The Sabres recalled Bryson from the taxi squad Feb. 23 after defenseman Will Borgen broke his forearm and utilized him that night in their 4-1 win against the New Jersey Devils, their last victory.

Bryson knew with the team battling injuries and COVID-19 problems he could earn his first big league action. At that point, Borgen and defensemen Jake McCabe and Rasmus Ristolainen were all sidelined. A knee injury has ended McCabe's season.

"I knew I was gonna potentially crack the lineup and I did and I thought I had a pretty good first game," Bryson said. "I had no nerves and I was playing with confidence."

Early in his debut, the 5-foot-9, 179-pound Providence College product joined the rush and hit the post. That play turned out to be a harbinger.

Right now, it will be hard for Krueger to yank Bryson from the lineup. He has been playing over established talent like Henri Jokiharju and Colin Miller, who was a healthy scratch Tuesday.

Bryson, perhaps because of his diminutive stature, hasn't received as much attention as some other prospects in the organization. He was a fourth-round pick in 2017. He enjoyed a terrific rookie season with the Rochester Americans last year, registering four goals and 27 points in 61 AHL games. He scored all four of his goals and 16 points in the final 21 contests.

"I know that being a smaller guy, I have to be able to compete with those guys if I want to play in the NHL and any other league," said Bryson, who recorded three assists in five AHL outings earlier this season. "So I've been kind of having that mindset going into things. I can knock guys off the puck. It's a low center of gravity and I've been working on my strength over the past four or five years.

"So that's what I look toward every summer is trying to get stronger. I know I can compete and I can knock these guys off the puck. I really think I stand a chance in those battles."

Notes: The Sabres, who had a CBA-mandated day off Wednesday, have lost 12 of their 14 games since their COVID-19 pause ended. ... Thursday is the first of eight meetings with the Penguins, the Sabres' new East Division foe, this season. ... Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby has recorded 21 goals and 63 points in 42 career games against the Sabres.

Here's what you need to know before getting tickets to Buffalo Sabres home games

By Paul Ross

WKBW

March 10, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres will allow fans at home games for the first time in over a year on March 20th; here's what you need to know if you want to get tickets.

Tickets for season ticket holders go on sale on Thursday, March 11th at 2 p.m., and to the general public on Friday, March 12th.

Recent Stories from wkbw.com

Each fan who wants to go to a game will need to produce a negative molecular PCR test result from a test taken within 72 hours of the game.

The Sabres are working with Quest Diagnostics for fans to schedule a test at multiple locations throughout Western New York.

Once you purchase a ticket, fans will be emailed a link to a registration site and code that they can use to schedule their test, which costs \$64 if scheduled through Quest Diagnostics.

Payments for testing and scheduling will be done through Quest Diagnostics, according to the team.

Fans will also need to download the free CLEAR app so you can verify your identity and then be able to securely link your COVID-19 test results to the app.

On game day, you will open Health Pass on your CLEAR app, verify your identity with a selfie, and answer a health questionnaire on the app.

Once you can submit your negative test result and pass the health questionnaire, you will receive a green notification on the app, which you will show as you enter KeyBank Center for the game.

You can find more information by clicking [here](#) or by calling the Sabres box office at (716) 855-4444.

First Sabres tickets go on sale Thursday for season-ticket holders, Friday for public

By Patrick Ryan

WIVB

March 10, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The Buffalo Sabres will begin selling tickets Thursday for the first time since the pandemic began.

Season ticket holders will have the first shot at tickets, which will be made available for the March 20 contest against the Boston Bruins.

The team's announcement Wednesday comes after the organization said in late February fans will be allowed back in KeyBank Center at 10% capacity for certain home games.

KeyBank Center to welcome Sabres fans in the stands at 10% capacity for select home games
The Sabres said season ticket holders will be contacted directly with details on how to purchase. Ticket sales to the general public begin at 2 p.m. Friday.

The organization said fans who attend will have to provide a negative molecular PCR COVID-19 test within 72 hours of the game.

The Sabres say they teamed up with Quest Diagnostics to assist fans with COVID-19 testing.

Fans can schedule their molecular PCR test with Quest Diagnostics at multiple locations throughout Western New York. After buying a ticket, fans will be emailed a link to a registration site and code that they can use to schedule their test, which costs \$64 if scheduled through Quest Diagnostics. All scheduling and payments for testing will be done directly through Quest Diagnostics.*

*The cost of the testing purchased through this website is solely your financial responsibility. Please note that QuestDirect is unable to provide you with a receipt that contains the basic information generally required by health plans for reimbursement.

THE BUFFALO SABRES

The team also says fans will need to download the CLEAR app to verify their identity and link their COVID-19 test results. For complete information on protocols, [click here](#).

The Sabres earned a point Tuesday in a shootout loss to the Flyers, which ended a streak of six straight regulation losses.

Patrick Ryan is a digital producer who has been part of the News 4 team since 2020. See more of his work [here](#).

Hamilton Take2: Why Ralph Krueger is still the Sabres' coach

By Paul Hamilton

WGRZ

March 10, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Buffalo Sabres GM Kevyn Adams has still not made a coaching change, and many fans are wondering why.

The general manager has already stated that the on-ice product is unacceptable, and I think it's very obvious that Ralph Krueger is no longer connecting to his players.

I can tell you the Pegulas desperately want stability, and they don't think changing coaches every two years will get the team to where it needs to be. There's only one problem with that. When it becomes obvious that the coach in place is in way over his head and no longer has any answers, staying with it will not make you better.

There's also the thought process that they don't want to pay two coaches to finish a season that has been over for three weeks or more. If Krueger finishes this season, they would only be on the hook for one season of him not coaching.

There's also the thought that the guy Adams has targeted isn't available yet. I think Adams will go the same route as he did when he hired Seth Appert to coach Rochester, and that's the college ranks.

Appert was not a successful college coach at Rensselaer Poly Institute. In 11 seasons he had only four seasons with a winning record and overall was 152-221-48. Appert came a lot cheaper than Chris Taylor, who Krueger ran out of town.

I think cost is the reason Adams will target another college coach. That man would come a lot cheaper than Bruce Boudreau or Claude Julien.

I've had more than one person mention Nate Leaman from Providence as a prime candidate. Leaman won the NCAA championship with the Friars in 2015 and took them to the Frozen Four when it was in Buffalo in 2019. He has a .612 winning percentage in 10 seasons with Providence.

Don't forget Adams played four years of college hockey at Miami of Ohio.

No matter what direction they're heading when it comes to coaching, I think hanging on to Krueger until the end of the season is a huge mistake.

First, in all my years covering this team, I have never seen them as hated from their fan base as they are now. The vile and negative things I read from fans on a daily basis shouldn't even be said in private.

Fans have turned big time on this coach, and if he's here to finish the season, the hatred towards this team will just escalate.

It's possible they've been quarantining somebody since the Sabres were shut out two straight games at home to the Philadelphia Flyers. If that's true, that quarantine would end this Monday.

Putting off firing Krueger may save the Pegulas money, but the damage it brings to the franchise may be impossible to repair.

Sabres announce ticketing policy for limited attendance March 20

By Adam Benigni

WGRZ

March 10, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Sabres are set to allow a limited number of fans to attend their home game March 20 against the Boston Bruins.

The team announced the ticketing guidelines Wednesday night.

The highlights are as follows:

- Season ticket holders will have first access to tickets on Thursday. The Sabres will make direct contact with season ticket holders with further instructions.
- Whatever tickets remain will go on sale to the general public at 2 p.m. Friday.
- Fans attending will need to present evidence of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the game. The Sabres have worked with Quest Diagnostics to provide more affordable testing for fans wishing to attend games.
- Fans will need to download the CLEAR app and verify their identity. They will then be able to link to their test results to confirm their test status before entering the building.

New York State allowed arenas and stadiums with capacities of 10,000 or more to host fans at 10% capacity so long as they meet the requirements listed above and adhere to masking and social distancing guidelines.

Sabres announce ticketing details and on-sale dates

By Carly Mascitti

WHEC

March 10, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WHEC) — The Buffalo Sabres announced the on-sale dates and ticketing details for the team's game on Saturday, March 20 against the Boston Bruins.

Tickets will go on sale to season ticket holders on Thursday, March 11 before the general on-sale at 2 p.m. on Friday, March 12. Season ticket holders will be contacted directly on March 11 with instructions on how to purchase tickets.

Each fan who attends a game this season will need to produce a negative molecular PCR test result from a test taken within 72 hours of the game.

The Sabres are collaborating with Quest Diagnostics to facilitate cost-efficient molecular PCR testing through QuestDirect, the company's consumer-initiated testing service. Fans can schedule their molecular PCR test with Quest Diagnostics at multiple locations throughout Western New York. After buying a ticket, fans will be emailed a link to a registration site and code that they can use to schedule their test, which costs \$64 if scheduled through Quest Diagnostics. All scheduling and payments for testing will be done directly through Quest Diagnostics.

The Sabres have also teamed up with CLEAR to use their Health Pass technology for COVID-19 screening of fans. Health Pass is a free, mobile experience by CLEAR, which securely connects a person's verified identity to multiple layers of COVID-19 related insights. Fans will need to download the CLEAR app, verify their identity, then link their COVID-19 test results to the app. The day of the game, fans will open Health Pass on their CLEAR app, verify their identity with a selfie, and answer a health questionnaire on the app. Those who have a negative test result and pass the health questionnaire will receive a green notification on the app, which they will show as they enter KeyBank Center for the game.

Additional information can be found at [Sabres.com/FAQ](https://www.sabres.com/FAQ). For more information on ticket prices and availability, fans can contact the Sabres Box Office at (716) 855-4444.

NHL trade candidate tiers: Names to pay attention to ahead of the deadline

By Rory Boylen

Sportsnet

March 10, 2021

Though this year's NHL trade deadline falls on April 12, and thus we're just about a month out, there is a lot of belief that more business could get done earlier this season so teams can deal with any quarantine and get their acquired player for more than a handful of post-deadline games.

Just how busy this deadline will be is a big question. On one hand, you have the economic reality around the league. That captures a flat salary cap with around half the league's teams using LTIR, and that fans are only starting to trickle back into some arenas, so revenues are far from usual levels. How many owners will be looking to spend? How many GMs will want to add salary that carries into next season?

On the other, look at this list. There are nearly 50 names of players who are believed to be available on some level. Some of these players would take a substantial return, while others could move for whatever assets their current team is able to get. Not all of these players will be traded of course, but it gives you the idea of the possibilities that are out there this trade season.

What that divide between buyers and sellers ultimately settles as will be a huge factor in how busy deadline season is. And that's how we should view this year's deadline: it's less a "day" than a "season" and it starts right now.

With all these complexities on the market, rather than rank a top 20 or 25, or list the most likely candidates to be moved, this season we're putting rumoured names into various tiers depending on their type and potential availability. We will continue to update this list between now and April 12.

THE RENTAL MARKET

Mikael Granlund, Nashville: Among many struggling Predators. Granlund, 29, never put up the offence he did with the Minnesota Wild, but presents intriguing upside for at least a one-off playoff run. And if he clicks in a new spot, maybe there's an extension to be had.

Tanner Pearson, Vancouver: The Canucks are playing better lately and GM Jim Benning said last week that he wanted to try and re-sign the winger. But with the cap situation what it is, Pearson is also a struggling depth scorer who could hold some value for that role in certain places around the league. Recouping assets for a player like this is usually what teams in Vancouver's place do.

Taylor Hall, Buffalo: Hall is in the classic rental situation. Star scorer on the last year of his contract getting traded for futures to help some contender's top six. But this is different for a few reasons. One: Hall has just two goals in 23 games. Two: How many teams are looking to add, and can fit, a salary like Hall's the rest of the way? Three: He has a full no-move clause. Four: He's mentioned being open to re-signing in Buffalo, which could provide better security than heading to free agency again. Given his struggles and the uncertain market, what would a return on a Hall trade look like today compared to last season, when Arizona gave up a first-rounder, third-rounder and three prospects?

Eric Staal, Buffalo: His numbers aren't there this season -- eight points and a minus-15 in 23 games -- but there will always be a market for centre depth and Staal is one of the best rentals available at that position.

Ryan Dzingel, Ottawa: The Sens acquired Dzingel for Alex Galchenyuk and Cedric Paquette a month ago and it would be a surprise if he's not flipped again. Dzingel wasn't fitting or producing with the Hurricanes and the hope would be that he gets back to the level he was at with the Sens two years ago and creates a market. When the Sens traded him away in 2019 he returned Anthony Duclair and a second-round pick.

Artem Anisimov, Ottawa: It hasn't been Anisimov's season by any measure, but still, he could be a target for a franchise just looking for centre/wing depth.

Brandon Sutter, Vancouver: Strong on faceoffs and a penalty kill presence. The Canucks need to be thinking of ways to alleviate the pressure applied by bottom-six cap hits, making Sutter a strong candidate to move.

Brandon Montour, Buffalo Sabres: Another player it just never worked out for in Buffalo. The Sabres will not recoup the assets they gave up to get Montour in 2019 (Brendan Guhle, first-round pick), but the right-shot blueliner has more to give with the right D partner.

Niklas Hjalmarsson, Arizona Coyotes: The Coyotes could be a fascinating deadline team. They're contending for a playoff spot right now, but have a need for futures after they were fined draft picks. They may also be looking to shed salary. At 33, Hjalmarsson is a veteran who could give you shorthanded minutes. He has a full no-move clause.

Alex Goligoski, Arizona Coyotes: Similar to Hjalmarsson, Goligoski is at a stage in his career where he might just not fit with the direction anymore. He has a modified no-trade list, but would be an attractive top-four upgrade with more offensive upside than Hjalmarsson (though Goligoski has managed only two points so far in 2021).

Patrick Marleau, San Jose Sharks: Just 22 games away from breaking Gordie Howe's all-time games played record, would the Sharks deal him before that milestone? They traded him to Pittsburgh at last year's deadline for a conditional pick. Marleau has five points in 23 games this season after going pointless in four playoff games with the Pens last summer.

Carl Soderberg, Chicago Blackhawks: Fairly productive player, wins over 51 per cent of his faceoffs and useful in most situations. Soderberg is a flexible option for the bottom six, who could move up in a tight pinch.

David Savard, Columbus Blue Jackets: If Columbus fades they'll have to consider any option and that includes the 30-year-old Savard. He could confidently slide into a top four, and possibly be a nice complement to some team's No. 1. Savard would be one of the best rental blueliners available.

Bobby Ryan, Detroit Red Wings: After a great start to the season, Ryan has just two goals in his past 22 games. Few players combine value and big-game upside better than Ryan in his market.

Luke Glendening, Detroit: There's always a market for a bottom-six centre who wins draws as frequently as Glendening (67.7 per cent this season) and can be counted on for the penalty kill.

Brad Richardson, Nashville Predators: More defensive depth, Richardson is a right winger who can give you dependable PK minutes and step in for a draw in a pinch.

Kyle Palmieri, New Jersey Devils: If Palmieri is available, he'd likely bring the Devils a nice return of futures, but it would cost them one of the more consistent goal scorers around. Palmieri is one of the top adds for teams in need of secondary scoring help.

Marc Staal, Detroit Red Wings: He'll have final say in any trade with his no-move clause, but Staal could bring the Wings at least a minor return. We can't underestimate how valued blue line depth is post-deadline.

Travis Hamonic, Vancouver Canucks: With a full no-move clause, Hamonic likely won't waive for many places, but Winnipeg makes a lot of sense.

EXCITING THOUGHT, BUT IT'S COMPLICATED

Jack Eichel, Buffalo Sabres: It's an other off-the-rails season in Buffalo so another round of "will Jack Eichel get fed up and want out" has picked up. It was notable when last week GM Kevyn Adams had to confirm that Eichel has not asked for a trade. Now he's injured -- with speculation on how injured -- which would complicate a trade anyway, but even if he were healthy an in-season Eichel trade seems unlikely. Not only would the market be smaller than it could be in the summer months, but Adams is less than a year into his tenure and won't want to rush that decision.

Johnny Gaudreau, Calgary Flames: If Darryl Sutter doesn't get this thing on track soon the Flames could be deadline sellers. Gaudreau's trade candidacy has been a long time coming and building to this window. If things spiral, could the Flames explore moving Gaudreau now and extract a bigger return out of a team that would get him for two runs at least? This, too, feels like an off-season move when bigger decisions on the core may have to be made. The Flames are a long way off from being eliminated from contention and Gaudreau is their leading scorer.

Ryan Getzlaf, Anaheim Ducks: The Ducks are capital S Struggling this season and the offence is their biggest sore spot. Getzlaf is no longer the top player he once was, but still has that vision and playmaking ability to complement stars. Think a slightly younger Joe Thornton. Getzlaf will be 36 in May, is in the final season of his contract and doesn't seem to fit the Ducks' direction. But he has a no-move clause, is a legacy player in the organization and GM Bob Murray doesn't seem to have any appetite to make the trade after 16 years.

"I don't want to hear this out of Toronto anymore," Murray told The Athletic. "I'm tired of hearing how his name's out there. The only way Ryan Getzlaf would ever go anywhere is if he came to me and said, 'Bob, can you try to trade me to a contender again?' I don't think ... he's never said he wants to do that. He never will. As for next year, we've talked and we're going to see how he feels after this year. We'll see how his body feels. We'll see how it's going. He may just say I don't want to keep going through this little bit of this rebuild we're doing here."

Evgeni Malkin, Pittsburgh Penguins: When new management came in and the Penguins were struggling, the question about Malkin's trade candidacy had to be asked again. Since Brian Burke and Ron Hextall's arrival, though, Malkin has been finding an old form and has 13 points in those 14 games. The Penguins have turned a corner too, with a 10-4-0 record. Burke and Hextall talked about improving this year's team if it performed, so an in-season Malkin deal now seems less likely.

Kris Letang, Pittsburgh Penguins: He may not be peak Letang anymore, but the soon-to-be 34-year-old is still the Penguins' No. 1 defender. Like Malkin, it'd be hard to move Letang now, one year out from his contract expiring, while the team is competing. There was a rumour former GM Jim Rutherford wanted to move Letang and was rebuffed by ownership, but he denied that last week.

Filip Forsberg, Nashville Predators: Of all the names in this tier of long shots, Forsberg's is the one that may be most likely to move. It's far from a sure thing, but the Preds are so obviously in need of a shake up. It'd take a big offer to get Forsberg with another season left on his deal, but it's not often players like him come available at 26 years old. Preds GM David Poile doesn't sound like a motivated seller, but he also kept the door open a crack.

"I try to be open with everybody because you're exchanging information, you want to hear what people have to say so you don't want to set up any barriers to any conversation," Poile told ESPN radio. "Having said that I really don't think Filip Forsberg is going to be a guy we have any interest in trading at this time."

THE GOALIE MARKET

Jonathan Quick, Los Angeles Kings: The biggest hurdles to a Quick trade is that he's prone to injury and has a \$5.8 million cap hit for another two seasons, but what if the Kings retain a portion of that? Quick is actually owed only \$2.5 million and \$3 million in those last two seasons. Goaltending depth is a priority around the league, and though it's been three years since Quick was remotely close to the goalie who won two Stanley Cups, he has been moderately better lately. Cal Petersen's play has earned him more playing time.

Ryan Miller, Anaheim Ducks: The 40-year-old would probably have some say as to whether he's available or not, despite the lack of a no-trade clause, but if he were available he'd be one of the more reliable and experienced backups out there.

Antti Raanta, Arizona Coyotes: Depending on where the Coyotes are and what the organization's mindset is, Raanta could be an interesting addition to the trade market. He had a .921 save percentage last season, though it has been a bit bumpy in 2021. The pending UFA wouldn't be expansion draft eligible for an acquiring team, but would beef up the position for a run this season. But the Coyotes themselves are still very much in it and the injury to Darcy Kuemper complicates this now.

Martin Jones, San Jose Sharks: At this rate, Jones will go three years in a row with a save percentage below .900. He makes \$5.75 million for another three years and there isn't much salary relief as it goes. He's a buyout candidate for San Jose and certainly will be left unprotected to Seattle -- which is what could give him some value to another team if the Sharks retain salary. There just might be better, less messy options.

Chris Driedger, Florida Panthers: The pending UFA has been one of the better underdog goalie stories of the year. As Sergei Bobrovsky starts building momentum, the Panthers could be made to feel better about moving Driedger, who has a .920 save percentage.

Jonathan Bernier, Detroit Red Wings: Has been good enough in three years with the Red Wings and would be a good second stringer in the final season of his contract.

Aaron Dell, New Jersey Devils: you have to wonder because the Devils got Dell on waivers for nothing and, as a pending UFA, he'll be of more value to a playoff team than New Jersey if the Devils slip further out of the race.

Jonas Johansson, Buffalo Sabres: As Buffalo considers everything, putting the 25-year-old Johansson out there has to be on the table. He has just an .892 save percentage in 11 NHL games across two seasons, but did show much better in the AHL a year ago. A No. 3 option for better teams, Johansson would bring depth and can be exposed to Seattle in the expansion draft.

Alexandar Georgiev, New York Rangers: After a promising past two years as the backup in New York, Georgiev is struggling with consistency at 25 years old. Might the Rangers seek a trade partner for this still-young goalie and eye moving ahead with Keith Kinkaid as Igor Shesterkin's backup?

THE DEPTH

Sam Bennett, Calgary Flames: We know he's asked for a trade, but we also know he's been a valued playoff performer for the Flames and won't return that sort of value in a trade. Darryl Sutter's arrival might help Bennett's situation.

Jake Virtanen, Vancouver Canucks: The Canucks have been trying to move him and he may be attractive as a reclamation project, but the problem is that Virtanen also comes with a \$2.25 million cap hit next season with an actual salary of \$3 million.

Adam Henrique, Anaheim Ducks: He's already passed through waivers, which tells you something about his \$5.825 million cap hit of a contract. The Ducks would need to retain a fair amount of salary to find a taker, but if you suddenly shave a couple million off his price tag, having Henrique as, say, a third-line centre would be a nice fit.

Danton Heinen, Anaheim Ducks: Already linked to the Canucks, Heinen will be an RFA this summer who may even be a candidate to be left unqualified, but in the meantime he's a -- as Anthony Stewart might say -- tertiary offensive option.

Matt Nieto, San Jose Sharks: A 28-year-old pending UFA, Nieto returned to San Jose on a one-year contract last off-season, but the Sharks are in a spot where they need assets rather than prioritizing re-signing bottom-six forwards. Nieto can play PK minutes and is an inexpensive addition.

Marcus Pettersson, Pittsburgh Penguins: It's been a down year for Pettersson after he signed a long-term contract with Pittsburgh. There may be a buyer looking for what Pettersson did a year ago, but his \$4 million cap hit could be an issue.

HEAD TURNERS

Mattias Ekholm, Nashville Predators: The best defenceman believed to be available, Ekholm makes just \$3.75 million against the cap this season and next, making him affordable to any team. On one of the worst goal differential teams in the league, Ekholm's 65.22 GF percentage is the best mark on the Preds -- when he's on the ice Nashville is outscoring opponents 15-8. While Ekholm is hoping to remain a Predator his lack of trade protection, the team's general strength on defence, and that they're at a crossroads leave him as a trade candidate likely to bring a large return to help reshape the future.

Clayton Keller, Arizona Coyotes: While a few other Coyotes have appeared on this list, those were all veterans, on short deals, without much of a long-term fit in Arizona. But Keller represents something different. He is signed at \$7.15 million for another seven seasons and can be seen as a centrepiece of their future. But, he's also not been able to get back even close to his 65-point rookie performance in the past two seasons, so has that perception changed? As the Coyotes look to cut costs and rebuild their prospect and pick base, the 22-year-old Keller would be the player who could give them the best return on a single trade. He has been on a tear lately, though, and might prove too valuable to move in the end.

Sam Reinhart, Buffalo Sabres: There aren't many bright spots in Buffalo this season, but Reinhart is one of them. As the headliners struggle, Reinhart has 11 goals and 19 points in 22 games with positive shot metrics and an expected goals for percentage in his favour. Reinhart has overcome the miserable situation around him for a

pretty good start. He's making \$5.2 million and is an RFA this summer. On one hand, he could bring the Sabres a nice return to move on with, but on the other trading away players who are actually performing is a risky proposition for a team stuck in the mud.

Rasmus Ristolainen, Buffalo Sabres: A polarizing player that often splits the analytics and "old school" fans, Ristolainen has had a decent season all things considered. Shot attempts are actually in Buffalo's favour when he's on the ice at 5-on-5 and he has a solid eight points in 17 games. He's a \$5.4 million blueliner and signed through another season. The Sabres may be motivated to move him before that deal expires and he's free to explore signing elsewhere.

Travis Dermott, Toronto Maple Leafs: We're putting Dermott in this category because if he gets traded, it's probably going to be as part of a package for a "head turning" return. The Leafs need defensive depth, so giving up Dermott would present its own risk that could be offset by a specific, possibly high end, target.

Vince Dunn, St. Louis Blues: Honestly, we were looking for this one to happen all last off-season when Dunn needed a new contract and the Blues didn't have much room. The two sides agreed on a one-year deal with a \$1.875 million cap hit, which again will leave him as an RFA this off-season. He's a young (24) puck-mover with an affordable contract and controllable beyond this season. Most teams would be happy to have him within their top four.

Anthony Mantha, Detroit Red Wings: The Wings are one of those teams considering all of its options and while we'd assume it'd be extremely hard, if not impossible, to pry Dylan Larkin out of there, Mantha could be a different story. Here you have a goal scorer who is maybe better used as a complementary producer so he's not taking a step to another level in Detroit. He's in his prime at 26, has 30-goal upside (though hasn't hit that mark yet in his career) and has a \$5.7 million contract that runs another three years.

Shayne Gostisbehere, Philadelphia Flyers: An up and down NHL career has brought us to this point where at 27, Gostisbehere is a bit of a project with tantalizing upside for a team looking to bolster its blue line. Much has been made about his bounce back season defensively in Philadelphia and maybe now some of his offence is starting to come back with five points in his past eight games. The Flyers aren't your traditional seller, though, so moving Gostisbehere would likely mean a somewhat substantial deal.

How 2 franchise-altering trades could spark a new Sabres rebuild

By Josh Wegman

The Score

March 11, 2021

BUFFALO, NY - JANUARY 14: Jack Eichel #9 of the Buffalo Sabres talks to Taylor Hall #4 during an NHL game against the Washington Capitals on January 14, 2021 at KeyBank Center in Buffalo, New York.

The Buffalo Sabres have hit rock bottom. The team was supposed to contend this year after the additions of Taylor Hall and Eric Staal, but they sit dead last in league standings.

General manager Kevyn Adams has vowed to make changes, calling the team's struggles "unacceptable."

How far Adams goes to shake up the roster remains to be seen. Hall, Staal, and Brandon Montour are all pending UFAs and it's seemingly a foregone conclusion the trio is gone by the April 12 trade deadline. If Adams fails to move them, the Sabres will miss out on valuable returning assets; re-signing any of those three players is highly unlikely.

And then there's Jack Eichel. Trading him is not necessarily the best course of action, but it's definitely in the cards if Adams is intent on starting a new rebuild. Remember, Adams was just promoted to GM this past offseason, he may want to build this team from the ground up.

Before we explore two potential franchise-altering trades the Sabres should consider, there's an important piece of business Buffalo needs to address.

Management shake-up

The Sabres should hire a president of hockey operations. It may seem unlikely since it hasn't happened to this point, but it would be highly beneficial to have an accomplished executive oversee Adams, given that his front-office experience is fairly limited.

Ideally, the hire would have a track record of NHL success - perhaps Dean Lombardi, for example. Finding a top hockey executive by the offseason should be a priority for owners Terry and Kim Pegula.

Not only would the president of hockey operations provide another voice in any Eichel trade negotiations, but the potential hire would help Buffalo find it's next head coach. It's clear Ralph Krueger's message is not getting through. The Sabres need to replace him in the offseason.

Hurricane Hall

There are a number of potential suitors for Hall. The Colorado Avalanche, Toronto Maple Leafs, Florida Panthers, and Boston Bruins all make sense. But the Carolina Hurricanes may be the most intriguing option.

This year could be Carolina's best chance to win a Stanley Cup. Andrei Svechnikov's entry-level deal expires after this season and Dougie Hamilton is a pending UFA. Both players are due for hefty raises.

Carolina has some cap space to burn this season, though. It makes sense for them to go all-in.

TO CAR

F Taylor Hall*

F Eric Staal*

D Brandon Montour*

TO BUF

F Warren Foegele

F Morgan Geekie

F Jack Drury

D Jake Gardiner

2021 2nd-rounder**

*Buffalo retains 50% salary

**Becomes first-round pick if Hall re-signs in Carolina

There are a couple caveats to this deal. Staal has a 10-team no-trade list, but it's hard to imagine the Canes are on there. An opportunity to return to his old stomping grounds to try and win another Stanley Cup - this time alongside his brother, Jordan - would be appealing.

Gardiner also has a seven-team no-trade list. Buffalo is not the most desirable market, so it's possible the Sabres are on there. If that's the case, it would be hard to make this deal work from a cap perspective. He's signed through 2022-23 at \$4.05 million per season. Carolina has tried to move him in the past - as recently as this offseason - to no avail.

For Sabres fans, this deal may look a tad underwhelming considering the haul the New Jersey Devils received for Hall last season. There are a few important factors to consider here. The Arizona Coyotes acquired him well before the deadline, Hall is in the midst of his worst season, and this year is a buyer's market - partially due to the flat cap.

However, Foegele - an RFA after this season - is a high-floor, top-nine forward at just 24 years old. Geekie, a 22-year-old center, has dominated the AHL and appears to be NHL ready. Drury, the son of Sabres legend Chris, was a 2018 second-round selection. Factoring in the draft pick, that's a solid return for three pending UFAs.

Eichel to the Big Apple

Firstly, an Eichel trade would have to wait until the summer. Massive deals like this with plenty of money moving around are too difficult to pull off during the season.

Secondly, the Sabres don't need to trade Eichel since he's locked up through 2025-26 at \$10 million per season. So if they're going to deal their captain, it would take an offer they can't refuse.

The Los Angeles Kings and New York Rangers would reportedly be the front-runners to land the star center, but we've opted to go with the latter, since the Blueshirts are seemingly further along in their rebuild. New York has plenty of young talent required to land Eichel, and their farm system would remain strong even after this proposed trade.

TO NYR	TO BUF
F Jack Eichel	F Kaapo Kakko
	F Vitali Kravtsov
	F Ryan Strome
	D Nils Lundqvist
	2021 1st-rounder*
	2022 2nd-rounder

*Buffalo receives New York's 2022 first-rounder if trade occurs after draft, or if pick is in the top five

It's possible the Rangers aren't interested in paying a price this steep, but Eichel is a bonafide superstar and still just 24 years old. Plus, it's hard to imagine Buffalo parting with its franchise player for much less. New York also gets this done without subtracting much from its current roster.

Buffalo's haul includes a lot of high-end talent. Kakko has been a disappointment early on in his NHL career, collecting just 27 points in his first 83 games. However, there's been some strong underlying improvements this season, showing that the 2019 second overall pick still has loads of potential.

Kravtsov and Lundqvist are not far behind. They were two of New York's three first-round picks in the 2018 draft. Kravtsov - a big, goal-scoring winger - was taken eighth overall. Lundqvist - a right-handed offensive defenseman - was chosen 28th overall.

In this scenario, the Rangers hold on to Alexis Lafreniere - who has more value than Kakko. And they manage to keep Filip Chytil and K'Andre Miller - who are arguably more important to the club's future than Kravtsov and Lundqvist.

Strome, who's signed through 2021-22 at \$5.35 million per season, is included for cap reasons. But he's no slouch, as he's piled up 18 points in 24 games this season. He could be used as future trade bait for Buffalo, too.

Buffalo's next step

There's still a lot that could happen in Buffalo's 2021 offseason if this trade goes through. They could immediately flip Strome before he ever suits up as a Sabre. They could also trade defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen (a 2022 UFA) and Sam Reinhart (2021 RFA, eligible 2022 UFA).

But for the sake of this exercise, we're including that trio in a 2021-22 roster projection. All three could still be moved ahead of the 2022 deadline.

With ample cap space, the Sabres re-signed UFAs Jake McCabe (potentially the next captain) and Linus Ullmark. We're also predicting Buffalo loses Colin Miller in the expansion draft.

LW	C	RW
Victor Olofsson	Dylan Cozens	Sam Reinhart
Jeff Skinner	Ryan Strome	Kaapo Kakko
Warren Foegele	Casey Mittelstadt	Vitali Kravtsov
Zemgus Girgensons	Morgan Geekie	Tage Thompson
Cody Eakin	Kyle Okposo	

LD	RD
Jake McCabe	Rasmus Ristolainen
Rasmus Dahlin	Henri Jokiharju
Jake Gardiner	Nils Lundqvist
Will Borgen	

G
Linus Ullmark
Jonas Johansson

This team is obviously lacking the high-end talent to compete, but it's a much younger squad with more depth.

Plus, the Sabres will likely have a top-five pick in the 2021 draft that should be ready to suit up within a year or so. Buffalo will also have Drury, Jack Quinn, John-Jason Peterka, and other prospects ready to come through the system.

An Eichel trade would obviously be devastating for Sabres fans, but if management can hit a home run on the return and properly support that young core, Buffalo could finally begin its journey out from rock bottom.

NHL Injury News: Eichel to miss a week; Pietrangelo out for 'foreseeable future'

By Sean Leahy

NBC Sports

March 10, 2021

As if things aren't bad enough for the Sabres, they will be without Jack Eichel for at least the next week. The Buffalo captain missed Tuesday's 5-4 shootout loss to the Flyers with an upper-body injury.

According to head coach Ralph Krueger, Eichel is back in Buffalo for evaluation.

"We have an upper-body situation that needs some deeper analysis before we decide further," Krueger said after Tuesday's game. "He's definitely out a minimum a week and has been back in Buffalo."

It's been a rough season for Eichel, who has just two goals in 21 games. He entered the year injured, then hurt his leg last month against the Devils. A Casey Cizikas crosscheck on Sunday left him feeling the effects of his on the bench.

Four of the Sabres' next five games are at home against the Penguins, Capitals and Bruins.

No timetable for Pietrangelo's return

Alex Pietrangelo was injured blocking a shot during Saturday's win over San Jose and appeared to favor his hand. The defenseman would sit out Monday's loss to the Wild.

While it's unknown when he'll return to the lineup, head coach Peter DeBoer didn't sound too worried.

"Obviously not a great sign that he returned home for evaluation," he said. "I'm not concerned it's long, long-term, but he's out for the foreseeable future."

The Golden Knights finish up a six-game road trip Saturday in St. Louis before heading home for two games against the Sharks.

Vegas has already been without Brayden McNabb since the end of January.

"It's the reality of the NHL in a normal year, particularly in a condensed schedule like this year," DeBoer said. "You look around and everyone's got pieces moving in and out."

Lower-body injury sidelines Kuemper

It'll be the Antti Raanta and Adin Hill show in Arizona with Darcy Kuemper out injured. The veteran netminder was hurt during their win over the Avalanche Monday.

"They're gonna hold the fort for us," head coach Rick Tocchet said Tuesday, who added Kuemper is "week-to-week."

Arizona sits fifth in the West Division in points percentage (.540) through 25 games. They play the second of their two-game series with Colorado Wednesday night before heading to Minnesota for a three-game series with the Wild. The Coyotes play every other day for the remainder of the road trip, which finishes up in Anaheim, before a back-to-back at home against the Avalanche.

The Coyotes will need to rely on Raanta and Hill before Kuemper gets back.

"We're going to play a ton of games and we're going to have to manage it, and we're going to have to get [Hill] ready to play some games for us," Tocchet said. "We'll make sure 'Rants' gets his rest because I'm not sure we can play him six, seven games in a row with the schedule we're in."

Short skates

- Tomas Hertl is back with the Sharks after being placed on the NHL's COVID-19 protocols list Feb. 24. Also back is Timo Meier, who skated on a line with Hertl and Rudolph Balcers. The trio are expected to reunite Friday against the Ducks.

- Robin Lehner is on his way back to the Golden Knights. The netminder will begin a conditioning loan with their AHL affiliate in Henderson this week. He's been out since Feb. 7 with an upper-body injury, missing the last 13 games.
- There's no return in sight just yet for Teuvo Teravainen. Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said the forward is "still a ways away" from being back as he deals with concussion symptoms, while adding Teravainen "doesn't feel ready."

What's new with the Buffalo Sabres, the Penguins' opponent this week?

By Adam Bittner

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 11, 2021

They're in a tailspin — Competing in this loaded division was always going to be difficult for a club that hasn't posted a winning record since 2011-12. Still, they managed to hang within a few games of the .500 mark until late February; not quite a feel-good story but also far from a laughingstock. Fast forward a couple of weeks, and the wheels have almost completely fallen off. Buffalo has dropped each of its last eight decisions, including six in regulation. They allowed at least four goals in five of those defeats, and managed no more than two markers themselves in six. They enter Thursday with a minus-24 goal differential, the second-worst mark in the NHL. So yeah. You could say those faint hopes of respectability have faded.

Jack Eichel is injured — Coach Ralph Krueger announced that his captain will miss at least the next week with a dreaded upper-body injury, further compounding his team's misery. Eichel's goal scoring has been an issue in 2021, as he has just two tallies in 21 games. He's still been setting up his teammates fairly well, though, notching 16 assists to secure the second spot on the team's scoring list. Now even that playmaking ability is gone, which should make the Penguins' job easier in these next two games.

Linus Ullmark, too — The 27-year-old Swede was putting together a great season with a 5-4-2 record, 2.44 goals against average and .919 save percentage. Then he was injured in 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey on Feb. 25. He has not played since, and perhaps not coincidentally, Buffalo has not won since, as Carter Hutton and Jonas Johansson have struggled mightily since. Both are allowing at least 3.40 goals per game and have save percentages of .890 or worse. Not good.

Sam Reinhart is stepping up — It's becoming something of a theme across the East division, as seemingly every team has at least one player who's taking the step from "good" to "great." The 25-year-old Reinhart is that guy for Buffalo. He's on pace to notch a career high 28 goals this season, and that's despite a shortened 56-game campaign. He'd be on a 41-goal pace in a normal season. Not bad. And he's been particularly dangerous when his team has the man advantage. Five of his goals have come on the power play this season, so he's a guy the Penguins will want to pay extra attention to with Eichel out of the lineup.

Penguins finally get their crack at Sabres. Now they need to pay it off.

By Tim Benz
Pittsburgh Tribune
March 11, 2021

After months of waiting, the Penguins are finally getting their shot at the Buffalo Sabres.

While the rest of the Eastern Division teams have had their crack at the lowly cellar dwellers, the Pens and Boston Bruins have not.

Now it's time for the Penguins to make the most of the opportunity. Because everybody else sure has. The Sabres are an ugly 6-14-4 so far this year. And they've lost eight in a row.

How bad are they? Consider some of these numbers.

- The Sabres rank 30th in goals per game at 2.55.
- They give up the fourth-most goals per game at 3.25.
- Their goal differential of minus-24 is third from the bottom in front of only Ottawa (-38) and Detroit (-34).

Beyond that, Buffalo is going to be playing without star center Jack Eichel for at least a week. He's going to be sidelined with what is believed to be some sort of neck injury. And fellow center Eric Staal is the subject of trade rumors with the Edmonton Oilers.

At least Buffalo is good on special teams. Their power-play percentage of 28.8% is fifth best in hockey and the penalty kill is at 81.8%. But their 5-on-5 play has been horrid. Their PDO or SPSV% (shooting % + save percentage) during 5-on-5 play is 96.7, the worst in the NHL.

The Penguins get Buffalo eight times over their last 32 games. That means 16 points on the table to be grabbed. They shouldn't settle for anything less than 15.

OK, maybe 14. Perhaps a couple of overtime losses along the way to get loser points. But no less than that.

Here's the problem. With the Sabres having lost eight straight, they have to win one in regulation eventually ... don't they?

Sal Capaccio joins me from WGR in Buffalo for Thursday's hockey podcast. He tries to answer that question. He also gets into why coaching is at the center of so many complaints from Sabres fans, what the goaltending has been like, and why people are wondering about Eichel's future in Western New York.

We also talk some Buffalo Bills football, too. Is Buffalo a potential landing spot for Steelers linebacker Bud Dupree? Click the podcast and find out.

Mittelstadt making the most of NHL opportunities

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 10, 2021

Casey Mittelstadt makes it a point to make the most of every day he has in the NHL. He knows it can be taken away at any time.

Mittelstadt played one season at the University of Minnesota after being selected by the Buffalo Sabres with the No. 8 pick in 2017. He signed an entry-level deal that spring, appeared in six games with the Sabres, and then carved out a full-time NHL role the following season.

He already had 114 NHL games under his belt by the time he was assigned to the Rochester Americans for his first AHL experience in December 2019. It would be more than a year before he returned.

"I kind of saw how quickly it can be taken away," Mittelstadt said. "I kind of took it for granted a little bit. So, I think when my chances come, just go play and play as hard as I can, make sure that when the game's over I know that I left it out there."

Mittelstadt embraced the assignment to Rochester, where he sought to work on his two-way game and allow the offense to follow. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Mittelstadt was the top performing forward in Rochester and was in line for a recall when the season ended abruptly in March due to COVID-19.

The wait continued early on this season. Mittelstadt spent the start of the year on the taxi squad, honing his skills and staying active under player development coach Matt Ellis. He tallied an assist in his season debut on Jan. 24 and has since appeared in nine games, including the last two.

"What I see him doing is staying focused on one single thing and that's becoming a consistent National Hockey League player," Krueger said. "Whether he is playing in games, whether he's on the taxi squad or whether he's practicing with the full squad, I've seen nothing but a pro in action."

"He has truly got a competitive bite within him right now. We're expecting him to eventually find his way into a regular spot."

Mittelstadt has spent the past two games skating on his off wing alongside Jeff Skinner and Curtis Lazar. Scoring chances have been in Buffalo's favor, 13-4, with Mittelstadt on the ice at 5-on-5 in those games. Krueger suggested Mittelstadt's path could be on the wing moving forward.

"He's done a good job of increasing his strength and his foundation," Krueger said. "The second is his ability to play without the puck and what we need from everybody when it comes to checking and defense and he's working hard with the coaching staff on that. And, finally, we want his genius to express itself."

"He has the potential to be a top-six forward in the National Hockey League and that will be the final piece then to the puzzle."

Reinhart scoring at a career-best pace

Sam Reinhart's two-goal outing on Tuesday brought his team-leading total to 11 in 22 games this season. His average of .50 goals per game is the highest of his career and ranks 17th in the NHL.

At his current pace, Reinhart would set a new career high with 28 goals despite the shortened 56-game schedule. He would be on pace for 41 goals in a typical 82-game season.

Penguins up next

The Sabres open a two-game set with the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday. It will be the first meeting between the two teams this season. Pittsburgh has won three straight games and currently sits in third place in the East Division with 31 points.

Coverage on Thursday begins at 6:30 p.m. on MSG. Puck drop is scheduled for 7.