



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

April 23, 2021

Observations: Power play squanders Sabres' chance to rally against Bruins

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 22, 2021

Don Granato changed his personnel.

The Buffalo Sabres' interim coach also gathered his players for a meeting Thursday morning to discuss all that's gone wrong with the power play. His message was simple: shoot.

Too often, even the Sabres' most talented players have been thinking pass first and the slightest mistake can be magnified against the Boston Bruins' top-ranked penalty kill.

Granato's directive wasn't put into action. The Sabres failed to score on all five of their power-play opportunities, spoiling what could have been a promising performance in a 5-1 loss to the Bruins on Thursday night in KeyBank Center.

"It's not good enough," said Sabres winger Jeff Skinner.

The Sabres are last in the NHL on the power play since Feb. 27, converting at a paltry 7.3% clip in 30 games during that span. Comparatively, Buffalo ranked first in the league through its first 17 games (34.5%).

The regression has worsened since Jack Eichel last appeared in a game for the Sabres on March 7. Additionally, Granato admitted he had to prioritize fixing the team's 5-on-5 play upon taking over for former coach Ralph Krueger on March 17. The little practice time Buffalo had needed to be dedicated to playing a faster, puck-possession-driven game at even strength.

With a 5-on-5 system implemented, Granato has turned his attention to the power play, which was his responsibility as an assistant coach on Krueger's staff. Despite Eichel's absence and Taylor Hall's trade to Boston, the Sabres still have a talented first unit led by Rasmus Dahlin and Sam Reinhart.

Buffalo (12-28-7), though, isn't shooting the puck enough. Its first power play came shortly after Brad Marchand's goal gave the Bruins a 1-0 lead in the first period. The Sabres mustered zero shots on net. A two-minute stretch that's supposed to generate momentum had the opposite effect.

"We allowed ourselves to get frustrated partway through the first one," said Granato. "And that carried over to maybe squeezing our sticks tight the rest of the way. It might have even carried over into the game for some of the guys who were on it."

Every opportunity matters against the Bruins (27-12-6), who entered the game with zero regulation losses when leading at the first and second intermissions. Boston didn't play well for most of the first 40 minutes, as illustrated by the Bruins taking four reckless penalties in the second period.

According to Natural StatTrick.com, the Sabres had more high-danger scoring chances (9-6) and owned a better shot-quality share at 5-on-5.

The Sabres managed to overcome the early deficit with rookie forward Arttu Ruotsalainen one-timing an Anders Bjork pass to tie the score, 1-1, at 5:27 into the second period. A lead was attainable with improved special teams.

The Bruins clogged shot lanes, forced the Sabres to pass the puck behind the goal line and limited shooters to bad angles. Only five of Buffalo's 30 shots occurred on the power play.

"Obviously, they have a good penalty kill and they're going to make it hard on you, but those are moments in the game where you can kind of turn the tide, create momentum, capitalize and get a goal," added Skinner. "We're not doing that."

After killing two second-period penalties, the Bruins took a 2-1 lead on defenseman Matt Grzelcyk's unscreened wrist shot from the point at 12:50. The Sabres failed to score on two additional power plays, the first of which included two offside whistles and only one shot attempt, a Tage Thompson one-timer that went wide of the net.

The Bruins made zone entries difficult by challenging the Sabres at the blue line, forcing them to waste energy by occasionally chipping and chasing the puck to try to regain possession. Still, Buffalo could not get any quality shots, and Boston pulled away with three goals in the third period.

Granato's personnel adjustments showed promise, particularly Dylan Cozens' promotion to the top unit. But the Sabres are still searching for answers with little time to make changes ahead of a third straight game against Boston on Friday night.

"It's a mix of things, obviously," said Casey Mittelstadt. It's frustrating for sure. If we get a power-play goal with all the penalties in the second it's a different game. We have to do a better job of helping each other if we're running into trouble."

Here are other observations from the game Thursday:

1. This wasn't Dustin Tokarski's best game in goal. The 31-year-old should have stopped Grzelcyk's shot from the point. Nick Ritchie's short side shot for the Bruins' fourth goal shouldn't have gone in, either.

"That was a tough one because (Tokarski's) been so great for us," Granato said of the Grzelcyk goal. "You feel bad."

That said, let's not ignore how poorly the Sabres played at times around Tokarski, who made 33 saves. Buffalo's defense corps, which had an average age of 22.7 years old, battled inconsistency throughout the night. Dahlin should have prevented David Pastrnak from cutting to the slot on the Bruins' third goal only 4:55 into the third period.

Breakout passes weren't clean. Jacob Bryson missed an open pass on the power play. There were some promising moments – Mattias Samuelsson's work on a first-period penalty kill stood out – but this is another example of what you'll see from a roster that, according to CapFriendly.com, was the youngest in the NHL on Thursday.

2. Ruotsalainen is showing he could be a long-term option for the Sabres. Signing Ruotsalainen was a gamble. He was producing offensively in Finland's top professional league, but he was a 5-foot-9 center who lacked elite speed.

Ruotsalainen, 23, improved his skating and has shown he's more than a power-play specialist. His third goal in eight NHL games was the product of work done by Bjork and Cozens, whose forecheck gave the Sabres possession. But there's no questioning the production so far.

Ruotsalainen has 24 goals in 40 games this season between Buffalo, Rochester and Ilves of Finland's Liiga.

"That's what we want to do over and over, shift after shift," said Granato.

3. The Sabres preferred to give top goaltending prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen one more night on the bench before his NHL debut comes Friday night. Luukkonen, 22, is in line to start – likely against fellow Finnish goalie Tuukka Rask – and this will be his first game at any level since he was pulled after allowing five goals on 27 shots in a Rochester Americans game on April 10.

Granato won't give some inspirational talk to the rookie. Instead, he'll speak to Luukkonen about what sort of shots to expect to face based on how the Sabres plan to defend the Bruins.

"Those are things you just want to make sure he has a feel for," said Granato. "Just obvious preparation for him. But when the game's on, it's a read and react. So, he's on his own in that to internalize all that. That's why he's a talented guy. He'll figure it out in due time."

The Wraparound: Sabres' struggles against Bruins continue in 5-1 loss

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 22, 2021

Aslow start didn't haunt the Buffalo Sabres this time.

Only 3:38 into the game Thursday night, winger Tobias Rieder ripped a shot off the post to the right of Boston Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman.

The Sabres were possessing the puck and applying pressure in the offensive zone. This was the response interim coach Don Granato wanted after a shutout two nights earlier. Their relentless play did not stop when Bruins winger Brad Marchand opened the scoring in the first period, either.

Rookie winger Arttu Ruotsalainen capped an impressive shift by his line with a goal to tie the score in the second, but an inability to score on the power play doomed the Sabres in a 5-1 loss to the Bruins inside KeyBank Center.

The Sabres (12-28-7), now 6-5-2 since their 18-game winless streak ended, went 0-for-5 on the power play to spoil a strong defensive effort against the East Division's fourth-place Bruins (27-12-6), who have won six straight since the trade deadline and 10 in a row against Buffalo.

Ruotsalainen's third goal in eight NHL games was the primary offensively highlight, while goalie Dustin Tokarski stopped 33 of 38 shots while making his 11th appearance of the season for the Sabres.

The Bruins took a 2-1 lead in the second period on a goal by defenseman Matt Grzelcyk. David Pastrnak, Nick Ritchie and David Krejci scored in the third.

Momentum shift: The Sabres were controlling play until defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen was penalized for a hit from behind on Pastrnak. Boston had only one shot on goal during the ensuing power play, extending its slump on the man advantage to 1-of-17, but it seemed to get the Bruins' top forwards comfortable with the puck.

Opening salvo: Pastrnak carried the puck down the left wing and circled back to pass to the point, where defenseman Mike Reilly released a shot that was blocked in front by the Sabres' Jacob Bryson. The loose puck went right to an uncovered Marchand, whose 25th goal of the season gave Boston a 1-0 lead at 12:36 into the first period.

More issues: The Sabres did not heed Granato's advice to shoot on the power play. Buffalo had zero shots while on the man advantage for two minutes in the first period, although Granato shifted his personnel, most notably elevating Dylan Cozens to the top unit.

Tensions high: Remember, there were two fights in a game between these teams back on April 13. Anger returned in the first period with Ritchie taking exception to Ristolainen's hit on Pastrnak. Later, Marchand and Casey Mittelstadt were each assessed a minor penalty for getting into a shoving match in front of the bench.

Boston outshot Buffalo, 14-7, in the first period and, entering Thursday, the Bruins were 15-0-2 when leading at the first intermission.

Missed opportunity: The Sabres had a 3-on-1 rush after Ristolainen exited the penalty box early in the second period, but Drake Caggiula overpassed instead of taking a shot from the slot.

Response: Ruotsalainen tied the score, 1-1, with a backdoor one-timer off a perfect saucer pass by Anders Bjork at 5:27 into the second period. The Sabres gained possession with Cozens winning a battle for the loose puck near the opposing blue line.

Tough miss: Tokarski was unable to glove Grzelcyk's unscreened wrist shot from the point, giving the Bruins a 2-1 lead with 7:10 remaining in the second period.

The Sabres went 0-for-4 on in the power play in the second period, allowing the Bruins to enter the intermission with a lead. Entering Thursday, Boston was 17-0-2 when leading at the second intermission.

Pulling away: Pastrnak's third point of the night, and 18th goal of the season, came when he cut across the slot and scored on a shot to the far post. Ritchie then beat Tokarski with a short-side shot only 66 seconds later.

Krejci made it 5-1 with 1:48 remaining by deflecting a puck off the post and scoring when it rolled to the front of the net.

Lineup: Jack Eichel (herniated disk in neck), Kyle Okposo (broken cheekbone), Jake McCabe (knee), Zemgus Girgensons (hamstring) are out for the season. Goalie Linus Ullmark (lower body) is considered week to week, and goalie Carter Hutton (lower body) has resumed skating without a tentative timeline to return to the lineup.

With Will Borgen returning from a 32-game absence, defenseman Colin Miller was a healthy scratch. Center Cody Eakin and defenseman Matt Irwin were scratched for a second consecutive game.

Looking back: On April 22, 2011, the Sabres earned their last playoff win, defeating the Philadelphia Flyers, 4-3, with Tyler Ennis' overtime goal in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals. Buffalo's 10-year playoff drought matched the NHL record.

Next: The Sabres will host the Bruins again Friday night with puck drop scheduled for 7 p.m. EST. Buffalo begins a four-game road trip Sunday at Madison Square Garden against the New York Rangers.

Sabres game day: UPL will watch one more night as power play looks to rebound

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

April 22, 2021

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (12-27-7) vs. Boston Bruins (26-12-6)

Where: KeyBank Center

When: 7 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

The UPL Watch will extend for another day. The Power Play Watch continues tonight.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, the most heralded Sabres goalie prospect since Ryan Miller, won't get the call tonight against the Boston Bruins in KeyBank Center. Instead, reigning NHL First Star of the Week Dustin Tokarski (2-6-3, 3.05/.918) will get his fifth straight start. Luukkonen's debut will come Friday night.

"I think it's better for 'UPL' to see one more night," interim coach Don Granato said after today's optional morning skate. "It was going to be a split anyway, so we felt give him another night from the bench. I think that's good."

With Luukkonen not playing tonight, the biggest subplot as the Sabres try to break their nine-game winless streak against Boston will be whether they can get their power play moving again.

The man-advantage unit was 0 for 6 in Tuesday's 2-0 loss here, including a complete failure on a 6-on-3 chance in the final minutes. The Sabres are just 1 for 13 on the season against Boston and Tuesday's showing came on the heels of scoring in both games over the weekend against Pittsburgh.

The Sabres are last in the NHL on the power play since Feb. 27 at 7.9% (5 for 63). They were first in the league over their first 17 games at 34.5% (19 for 55). A lot of that obviously stems from the absence of Jack Eichel but there are other factors like sloppy entries and overpassing in the offensive zone.

"The best power plays think shoot, shot mentality," Granato said. "Even the way they posture the puck on their stick shows a shot threat. We got away from that and we've gotten away from that and gone more to a pass mentality or let's set up a play. And when you do that, you know subconsciously the penalty killer, his reaction is be ready to cover any pass option."

Winger Victor Olofsson, who leads the Sabres with 13 power-play points and has six goals, agreed with that notion.

"We kind of were looking for that perfect opportunity or cross-ice pass for one timers," Olofsson said. "Just kind of keep it more simple, take shots and retrieve the puck."

"Sometimes when you shoot it and you retrieve it, that's when the D plays out of position and then you can find ways to make that seam pass or a little bit of a prettier play. But I think we're just gonna from the start keep it more simple and shoot the puck."

Lineup news: The Sabres will make no changes at forward, but Will Borgen will be back on defense after missing the last 32 games with a fractured forearm. He'll pair with Jacob Bryson as Colin Miller will sit.

As noted by CapFriendly.com today, the Sabres' average age on defense tonight will be 22.7 years.

Samuelsson (21)-Ristolainen (26)

Dahlin (21)-Jokiharju (21)

Bryson (23)-Borgen (24)

Bruins report: Promising rookie Jeremy Swayman (4-1-0, 1.78/.938) will oppose Tokarski in goal. The Bruins are 5-0 since the trade deadline acquisitions of Taylor Hall and Curtis Lazar from Buffalo and Mike Reilly from Ottawa. They have outscored opponents, 18-6, in the five games as Hall has two goals and Lazar has one.

Numbers games: The Sabres have lost nine straight to Boston overall (0-7-2) and five straight at home (0-4-1). Buffalo's last win was Dec. 16, 2018 in Boston (4-2) and the last home win was Feb. 25, 2018 (4-1). ... Buffalo is 6-4-2 since its 18-game winless streak ended. When that franchise-record run was stopped on March 31, the Sabres were just 6-23-5. ... The Bruins are 12-1-0 in their last 13 games in Buffalo. ... The Sabres are 3-19-2 against the East's top four teams – including 1-11-0 at home – but 9-8-5 against the East's other three nonplayoff teams. ... You better get a lead on the Bruins, as they're 15-0-2 when leading after one period and 17-0-2 when leading after two.

Sabres prospect Jack Quinn undergoes season-ending surgery to repair hernia

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 22, 2021

Jack Quinn has played his last game with the Rochester Americans this season.

Quinn, the Buffalo Sabres' most recent first-round draft pick, underwent season-ending surgery to repair a hernia, the team announced Thursday afternoon. Timeline for recovery is approximately six weeks.

Quinn, a 19-year-old forward, had two goals with seven assists for nine points in 15 games with the Amerks. The timing of the procedure will allow Quinn to have a healthy offseason of training to prepare for the 2021-22 season.

"You could see improvements in his game," said Amerks coach Seth Appert. "He became way more dangerous offensively, and he always has that in him, but then it's, 'How do you do it at another level?' ... And you could see him start to put the pieces together and the questions he'd ask when we'd watch video together, where he knew he couldn't do it by leaning on people at this level, so now he had to do it more with his creativity and his mind and his deception and his playmaking, because he couldn't lean in and physically dominate like he did in (juniors).

"So, his offensive game grew a ton in understanding how to create offense at this level, and he became extremely dangerous in the last four, five games that he played."

Quinn has been playing through the nagging injury since Hockey Canada's tryout camp ahead of the IIHF World Junior Championship in November. He had one goal with four assists for five points in seven games during Canada's run to a silver medal at the tournament.

Quinn participated in the final days of Sabres training camp and earned a spot on the NHL taxi squad before he was assigned to Rochester.

This season did not go as planned for Quinn. Typically, the NHL's player development agreement with the Canadian Hockey League would have prevented Quinn from competing in the American Hockey League.

However, the Ontario Hockey League's inability to launch a season amid the Covid-19 pandemic allowed underage prospects such as Quinn to compete in the minors.

Although Quinn was not physically ready for the assignment, he earned invaluable playing time in a prominent role for the Amerks. He recently shifted to center, a position the Sabres planned for him to play with the OHL's Ottawa 67s, and learned the nuances of competing at that level. While Quinn's offensive production was limited, his playmaking ability showed he's more than a goal scorer. He also improved away from the puck, according to Appert.

"He realized really quickly that if you don't have defensive detail, if you don't stop on pucks, win puck battles that you don't get the puck very much in this league," said Appert. "And if you don't get the puck very much, it doesn't matter how talented you are, you don't get to showcase those skills.

Drafted as a right wing, Quinn had a breakout 2019-20 season with 52 goals and 37 assists for 89 points in 62 games for the 67s. He skyrocketed up draft boards and was selected eighth overall by the Sabres, General Manager Kevyn Adams' first pick.

It's unclear what the Sabres have planned for Quinn next season. He turns 20 years old in September, which would not qualify him to return to the Amerks if the OHL is able to return to play in the fall. There is a need at right wing in Buffalo, although the roster could change significantly this summer.

The plan could depend on Quinn's offseason in the Ottawa area, where he works with renowned strength coach Tony Greco, who also trains Philadelphia Flyers center Claude Giroux. Quinn is currently listed at 6-foot, 176 pounds and will need additional strength, much like Dylan Cozens in the months following his selection by Buffalo, to withstand the rigors of a full professional season.

Greco, though, expressed confidence to The Buffalo News following the draft in October that Quinn was ready for pro hockey.

"Jack's game is very quick, explosive," said Greco. "He can turn on a dime and that's basically what we adapted. We got him stronger, more powerful. He was able to accelerate quicker. Jack has springs in his legs. This guy is going to be a star for Buffalo. He really is."

Alan Pergament: Sabres stage a comeback – in TV ratings; Edelman joins 'Inside the NFL'

By Alan Pergament
The Buffalo News
April 22, 2021

Will the much-anticipated debut of Buffalo Sabres goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen Friday night keep the comeback going in the National Hockey League team's TV ratings?

There certainly were signs before Tuesday's shutout loss to the Boston Bruins Tuesday that the Sabres had won back a large number of armchair fans because of the recent encouraging play of Casey Mittelstadt, Tage Thompson and Rasmus Dahlin in a dreadful season.

The four games before the Boston game averaged a 4.7 rating, led by a 5.1 rating for Saturday's 3-2 afternoon loss to Pittsburgh carried by WGRZ-TV, the local NBC affiliate. The Sabres victory over the Penguins on Sunday afternoon had a 4.5 on MSG, their usual home. Those ratings were even more encouraging because afternoon games generally get lower ratings.

Ratings for Tuesday's loss don't arrive until late today or Friday.

But ratings for the four-game stretch before Tuesday were significantly higher than the 2.9 average rating for the previous four games, which included a season low 1.6 rating on Sunday afternoon April 11 when the Sabres defeated the Philadelphia Flyers, 5-3.

Of course, even a 4.7 rating isn't in the ballpark of what Sabres games usually get when hopes are high for the team.

In the abbreviated 2019-2020 season, the Sabres averaged a 7.05 rating on MSG for the first 50 games. The average for the entire 69-game season is unavailable but bound to have declined from the 7 rating.

The Sabres' TV games averaged an 8.1 rating in the 2018-19 season.

It wouldn't be surprising if the Sabres ended the season with a rating near or slightly below the 4.8 the team's games averaged in the 2017-18 season.

The team opened this season with high hopes it would break the playoff drought with an 8.5 rating for a game with the Washington Capitals on Jan. 14 and hit a 9.6 rating for a game with the Flyers on Jan. 18. The first four games of the season averaged an 8.2 rating.

Things went downhill fast, with only four games getting higher than a 6 rating after Jan. 30.

For the season, the Sabres are averaging about a 4.7 rating, which isn't that bad when you consider how dismal the season has been.

There are many prime-time broadcast network programs that don't receive a live rating that high. A rating point is equal to 5,787 households in Western New York.

Former New England Patriots star wide receiver Julian Edelman, who recently retired, has a new TV job. He will become one of the studio analysts for "Inside the NFL," which is moving from Showtime to the new streaming service Paramount+. Both Showtime and Paramount+ have the same owner. Edelman's teammates on the show are host James Brown, Phil Simms, Brandon Marshall and Ray Lewis.

OPINION: Sabres can't seem to solve Bruins

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – The Buffalo Sabres just don't match up with the Boston Bruins, which is why they've lost 10-straight games to them.

Buffalo was on the short end on Thursday night, 5-1, but things were close for most of the game. Boston led 2-1 four minutes into the third period, and three goals in quick order put it away.

Many wanted to put this game in the effort category, but I would totally disagree. This wasn't an effort issue.

The issue lies in Buffalo is 0-for-11 on the power play in the last two games, and they can't match up at all with Patrice Bergeron's line or David Krejci's line.

Almost every time those lines get on the ice, they dominated in the offensive zone. The Sabres don't have the quickness or the smarts to defend them.

Boston also takes away the shooting lanes very well while killing a penalty. On five power plays, Buffalo got five shots. None of them were difficult saves for Jeremy Swayman, because he was never screened.

Don Granato saw some improvement, because they did get some pucks at the net, but he stressed that doesn't mean they're there yet. Dylan Cozens joined the first unit power play, and there were some things Granato saw with that that he'd like to explore.

Another thing that didn't go well was Dustin Tokarski, who let in two goals for sure, and probably three where saves needed to be made. Even though it was an easy night for Swayman, he didn't hurt his team letting in pucks that shouldn't go in.

There were times I thought the Sabres were hard on battles, but that usually wasn't the case with Boston's top-two lines. Buffalo's goal was a prime example of that.

Cozens hustled to the wall to help cause a Sean Kuraly turnover. He then relayed the puck ahead to Anders Bjork, while Arttu Ruotsalainen went to the net. Bjork found him and Buffalo had tied the game at 1-1.

Had Tokarski not let Matt Grzelcyk's unscreened point shot get by him, Buffalo would've remained tied heading into the third period.

I think what this three-game series against Boston is telling general manager Kevyn Adams is many of his players are much improved in the past month. However, there's still work to do to build a team that can compete with the likes of Boston or the Tampa Bay Lightning.

When the league gets back to normal, Boston will still be in Buffalo's division. If Jack Eichel stays, then, of course, Buffalo will be better prepared to match the Bruins.

It's going to take more than just Eichel, and some of those players needed aren't on the roster.

OPINION: Three observations: Sabres power play shut down; Bruins pull away in third

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres hung around a little bit on Thursday night at KeyBank Center against the Boston Bruins.

Buffalo managed to tie the score at 1-1 early in the second period, but the Bruins grabbed their lead back near the midway point of the game. Boston never looked back from there, scoring another two quick goals early in the third period before coasting to an easy 5-1 victory against Dustin Tokarski and the Sabres.

Buffalo struggled mightily on the power play, and couldn't keep up with Boston at 5-on-5 either.

Let's take a closer look with three observations from Thursday night's game:

1.) Ruotsalainen continues his successful first NHL call up

Even in a loss, it's been easier to point out some of the more positive developments with this year's Sabres team.

Since being called up from the Rochester Americans earlier this month, Sabres rookie forward Arttu Ruotsalainen has shown that he may not need to be sent back to the American Hockey League at any point.

The 23-year-old forward has tallied three goals in eight games with the Sabres. He's shown that he has a nose for the net, while also fitting in extremely well on a line with fellow Sabres rookie Dylan Cozens, along with the recently traded-for Anders Bjork.

2.) Sabres power play can't save them, even with five opportunities

It can't be a great sign for your team to get five power play opportunities and not score on any of them. That's what happened for the Sabres on Thursday night.

Neither team scored on the power play, but in a game where the Sabres were desperate for any form of offense against a strong 5-on-5 team like the Bruins, they needed the power play to come through.

In five opportunities, the Sabres mustered just five shots on the power play, while giving up four shots from the Bruins. Not only did the Sabres struggle to generate offense, but they were on their heels defending a Bruins team down a man.

The power play has been struggling since Jack Eichel's exit from the lineup. Once first in the league in power play conversion percentage, the Sabres have been in a free-fall for over a month, now just 15th in the league with a conversion rate of 20.3%.

3.) Tokarski's magic runs out

Tokarski has enjoyed a nice stretch of hockey over the last couple of weeks, performing admirably in a backup role behind Linus Ullmark, then stepping into a starting role after Ullmark suffered a lower-body injury.

The Sabres netminder had turned in a couple of great performances against the Pittsburgh Penguins over the weekend, as well as another one on Tuesday night in another loss to the Bruins. Tokarski relieved Ullmark last week in a shootout loss to the Bruins, and also was a big reason the Sabres were able to win against the Capitals last week.

However, Tokarski allowed quite a few goals he'd like back on Thursday.

While the first Bruins goal from Brad Marchand was practically hopeless to stop, the Bruins' second goal scored by Matt Grzelcyk was a clean shot directly in front of him that he just missed. That ended up being the game-winning goal.

In the third period, the Bruins extended their lead on shots you'd like your goaltender to stop. Tokarski has done a good job of keeping those goals out of his game for the last week or so, but on Thursday, the floodgates opened.

With Ullmark expected to be out on a week-to-week basis, Tokarski will continue to see time in the crease.

With another game against the Bruins looming on Friday, it looks like the Sabres may be inching closer to giving former 2017 second round pick Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen his first career NHL start.

The Sabres will need to be ready to take on this same Bruins team for the third time in a row on Friday at KeyBank Center.

We'll start things off with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show at 6 p.m. ET with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog. Opening faceoff is set to take place just after 7 p.m. ET on the radio flagship station of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Sabres lose to Bruins again on Thursday

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres' struggles against the Bruins continued on Thursday night, as the blue and gold were crushed by Boston, 5-1 at KeyBank Center.

Brad Marchand and the Bruins opened the scoring, just as they did on Tuesday, in the first period of play. It was the star winger's second goal in as many games against the Sabres this week, as Boston took a 1-0 edge 12:36 into the game.

Buffalo evened the score 5:27 into the second period when Dylan Cozens broke up a pass at the Boston blue line. Cozens dished the puck off to Anders Bjork, who skated down the right wing boards. Bjork then looked across the ice and found Arrtu Ruotsalainen crashing the net.

It was Ruotsalainen's third goal of the season.

The Bruins took the lead back with 7:11 to play in the middle stanza, when Dustin Tokarski was the victim of some friendly fire. Immediately after an offensive zone faceoff win, defenseman Matt Grzelcyk's point shot appeared to change direction off the stick of Tobias Rieder before finding its way behind Tokarski.

Boston pulled away from Buffalo in the final period of regulation, when forwards David Pastrnak and Nick Ritchie scored goals in quick succession. Just 66 seconds separated the tallies, from the 4:55 mark to the 6:01 mark of the frame.

The third period onslaught continued when forward David Krejci deposited his sixth goal of the season behind Tokarski with 1:58 to play.

Not to be lost in the shuffle was another forgettable performance by the Sabres' power play. The blue and gold have now gone 0-for-11 on the man advantage this week against the Bruins after an 0-for-5 effort on Thursday.

STATS OF THE GAME:

Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) David Pastrnak - BOS
- 2.) Brad Marchand - BOS
- 3.) Patrice Bergeron - BOS

What's Next:

The blue and gold wrap up their makeshift three-game series with the Bruins on Friday night in Buffalo. Puck drop at KeyBank Center is set for 7 p.m. ET with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog starting at 6 p.m. ET on the radio home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Jack Quinn's season is over due to hernia surgery

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – It was hoped that Jack Quinn would get a game or two with the Buffalo Sabres this season, but their 2020 first round pick won't be able to.

The Sabres announced Thursday that Quinn underwent successful hernia surgery and will need approximately six weeks to recover.

Quinn was supposed play junior hockey this year, but the Ontario Hockey League season was canceled, so he wound up in Rochester with the Americans.

The 19-year-old played both wing and center for the Amerks, scoring two goals and seven assists for nine points in 15 games. Head coach Seth Appert thought Quinn learned a lot this season.

"It was really week-to-week and game-to-game, and we could see improvements in his game," Appert said on Thursday.

"He became way more dangerous offensively. It's something he's always had in him, but it's how do you do it at another level, how do you do it against men. You could see him start to put the pieces together."

As we all know, it's a two-way game in professional hockey, and Appert saw growth there too.

"His defensive detail just got a ton better," the Amerks head coach said. "He realized real quickly that if you don't have defensive detail, if you don't stop on pucks and win puck battles, you don't get the puck very much in this league."

Appert also mentioned that he was impressed with Quinn's work ethic, too.

After Rochester's game on Wednesday, Appert said Quinn had been dealing with this injury since World Junior Tryout Camp with Team Canada back in November.

Quinn played the entire World Championship for Canada, winning a silver medal. He had a goal and four assists in seven games.

Mittelstadt: 'It's crazy how much of a difference a few years can make'

By Howard and Jeremy Show

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

After one of, arguably, the worst starts to a season in franchise history, the Buffalo Sabres have started to turn the corner in the second half of the 2020-21 campaign.

In the first half of the 56-game season this year in Buffalo, the Sabres finished with just a 6-18-4 record before head coach Ralph Krueger was relieved of his duties. Over the course of the past 18 games under the tutelage of Don Granato, the Sabres have gone 6-9-3 and are playing much more inspired than from the first 28 games of the season.

Part of the reason why the Sabres have played better in this recent stretch of games has been the contributions from the younger players on the roster. Granato's main message from that start has been to let his players play more freely, and not being afraid to make a mistake when they take the ice for a shift.

That new mentality has allowed players like Tage Thompson, Rasmus Asplund, Rasmus Dahlin, Henri Jokiharju and others to flourish in their environment, playing with more spark and confidence in their game.

Perhaps the player who has taken off the most since Granato's takeover of the team back on March 17 is forward Casey Mittelstadt.

The 22-year-old has completely turned his game around with seven goals and three assists for 10 points in his last 18 games. Mittelstadt is also showing promise again as a center in the NHL, winning 48.5% of his faceoffs this season, including 51.8% of the faceoffs he's taken in the offensive zone.

Mittelstadt has flourished playing on a regular line with Thompson and Asplund, averaging 16:38 of ice-time over his past 18 games. This included a season-high 20:41 of total ice-time on Tuesday night in a 2-0 loss to the Boston Bruins at KeyBank Center. That total also led all forwards for the game.

Just ahead of the Sabres' second game of a three-game set with the Bruins on Thursday night in Downtown Buffalo, Mittelstadt took some time to join Howard Simon and Jeremy White on WGR. He talked about his team's turnaround this season under Granato, the uptick his game personally and more.

Here is some of what he had to say:

Mittelstadt on the young players making an impact on the NHL roster:

"We're having fun. We're in a spot where we don't want to be, but I think the young guys all getting a chance to play and getting a chance to have some fun. We've all done it together in Rochester [Americans], for the most part minus a couple of guys. It's fun. Obviously we have some chemistry with each other, and we just try to make plays and play the right way."

Mittelstadt on how the team has turned things around this season:

"I think guys are just playing looser; making the plays with the puck, making plays coming out of our zone and not playing scared to make a mistake. I think if you mess up or turn the puck over, then just know you have to backcheck and your linemates will do the same. I feel like some of those mistakes can be fixed with hard work, and we've done a good job with that. If we want to keep making plays and keep playing that way, then the hard work is going to have to continue."

Mittelstadt on his play over the course of the 2020-21 season:

"It's been my best stretch as a pro hockey player, for sure. I think it just goes with just not being afraid to make a mistake. Obviously you see the play, you make it, and you know if you mess up, you just get back and you're going to get out there the next shift and have another chance to make the play. For me, it's just go out and play, I guess. I know that sounds simple, but just go have fun, and playing with 'Aspie' [Asplund] and 'Tommer' [Thompson] too; I've played with them a lot in [Rochester] and 'Tommer' all-around. It's been fun, and it's been good for us."

Mittelstadt on his progression from his rookie season to now:

"It's crazy how much of a difference a few years can make. Obviously just getting the puck, looking up and all-of-the-sudden you feel like you have more time than you feel you've had in the past. That's definitely a thing, and it helps when you feel that way and you get to make better plays."

You can listen to the entire interview below:

Report: NHL targeting Oct. 12 start for 2021-22 season

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

The National Hockey League appears to be setting its sights on trying to get back to normalcy with their 2021-22 regular season schedule.

According to TSN hockey insider Pierre LeBrun, the NHL shared with all of the league's 32 general managers on Wednesday its hopeful target date to start the next hockey season. That date would be Tuesday, Oct. 12, 2021.

This target date would be a week later than the league's usual start date for an 82-game regular season, which usually commences during the first week of October. However, the league is still planning on returning to a full 82-game schedule for the 2021-22 season, barring any setbacks on the COVID-19 front.

LeBrun also notes that the hope is for NHL training camps to open for all 32 teams as early as Sept. 22, allowing for teams to get in some potential preseason games during that nearly three-week span.

The NHL is currently in the back end of a 56-game regular season, which got underway back on Jan. 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The regular season is scheduled to wrap up league-wide on Wednesday, May 19 before the Stanley Cup Playoffs will begin, though a start date for the postseason has yet to be determined.

The biggest addition to the NHL in the upcoming 2021-22 season is the official introduction of the Seattle Kraken, who became the NHL's 32nd franchise back on Dec. 4, 2018 when the NHL's Board of Governors unanimously approved the vote for Seattle's expansion application.

Seattle will officially begin to formulate their team with the NHL Expansion Draft set for Wednesday, July 21. General manager Ron Francis and his front office staff will then have the selection of one player from 30 NHL teams to add to the group for the Kraken's inaugural season.

Given the Expansion Draft rules, the Vegas Golden Knights will be the only team not be forced to expose a player for selection in the Expansion Draft. Vegas was the NHL's 31st team when the Golden Knights entered the league in 2017.

Following the Seattle Expansion Draft, the league is scheduled to hold the 2021 NHL Draft two days later with Round 1 set to take place on Friday, July 23. Rounds 2-7 of the NHL Draft are scheduled to take place the next day on Saturday, July 24.

Four days later, the NHL is expected to officially kick off the 2021-22 season with the opening of the new league year, as well as the official start of NHL Free Agency.

All dates for the upcoming league events are subject to change.

Sabres look for some goals on Thursday against Boston

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 22, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – The Buffalo Sabres play Game 2 of their three-game set against the Boston Bruins on Thursday.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen will not make his NHL debut in this game, but he will in Friday's game against the Bruins.

"I think it's better for 'UPL' [Luukkonen] to see one more night, and it was going to be a split anyway," said Sabres interim head coach Don Granato on Thursday. "He'll get another night from the bench, and that's good."

Dustin Tokarski will get his sixth-straight start in goal. This season, he's 2-6-2 with a 3.05 goals-against average and a .918 save percentage.

The Sabres got even younger on defense, because Will Borgen will return after missing 32 games with a broken bone in his forearm. Colin Miller will be the defenseman that sits, which means the 24-year-old Borgen will be the second-oldest defenseman the Sabres will dress for this game.

"If we had an older team and we were where we are at in the standings, we would be doomed," Granato said. "The fact that we have a younger team means there's such a capacity for growth."

After scoring a power play goal in two-straight games, the Sabres went 0-for-6 on Tuesday and didn't even get near the net when for they had a 6-on-3 advantage for 1:33.

"It's very, very simple - the best power plays think shoot," Granato said. "Even the way they posture the puck on their stick shows a shot threat, and we've gotten away from that and gone to a more pass mentality. When you do that, the penalty kill is ready to cover any pass option."

The Sabres are 3-2-1 in their last six games, but are 0-3-1 against Boston. Buffalo only has five goals in the four games against them.

Jeremy Swayman gets the call for the Bruins in goal. The rookie is 4-1-0 with a 1.78 goals-against average and a .938 save percentage this season. The 22-year-old played just nine games in the American Hockey League before coming to the NHL. Last year, he was a junior at the University of Maine.

Brad Marchand is fourth in league scoring with 55 points in 42 games. His 24 goals are also fourth.

Marchand has five goals in his last four games, and has only gone two games without a point all season.

Boston is a perfect 5-0-0 since the trade deadline, and is three points out of third place in the East Division and four points out of first. The Bruins have two games in-hand on all three teams, and still have four games left against the Sabres and two against the New Jersey Devils.

Join Schopp and the Bulldog at 6 p.m. ET for pregame coverage on WGR, where you'll hear from Granato, Tokarski and Victor Olofsson.

Sabres' awful power play costs them in loss to Bruins: 'It's frustrating'

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 22, 2021

BUFFALO – At least the Sabres have started drawing penalties. At various times over the past two months, simply getting a man advantage was an accomplishment.

In Thursday's 5-1 loss to the Boston Bruins, the Sabres enjoyed five power plays. In Tuesday's 2-0 setback to the Bruins, they had six.

The Sabres have consistently moved their feet and played aggressively to force the Bruins into taking infractions.

They just can't convert their opportunities. They're zero of 11 over the past two games. In the last 30 outings, they scored on just five of their 68 attempts, just 7.4%.

The Sabres' power play, perhaps their greatest strength earlier this season, has morphed into the NHL's worst.

"Those are moments in the game where you can kind of turn the tide, gain some momentum and capitalize and get a goal," Sabres winger Jeff Skinner said on a Zoom call. "We're not doing that."

While they lost by four goals Thursday inside KeyBank Center, they had all five power plays in the first two periods when they were either tied or trailing by one goal.

"It's frustrating, for sure," Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt said. "If we get a power-play goal there with all the penalties in the second, it's a different game."

Prior to Thursday's game, interim coach Don Granato said he showed the Sabres video and addressed how they've developed a passing mentality on the power play instead of shooting.

Hours later, the Sabres sprinkled only five shots on Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman on the man advantage. The Bruins have the NHL's top penalty kill.

"There's got to be some simplifying," Mittelstadt said. "Sometimes if you get a shot, you got to take it and make a play off the shot. I think that breaks down the PK a lot."

Granato said: "The power play, there were things about it that were better but clearly not where we want to be, so don't confuse better with where we want to be."

Granato said the Sabres carried their frustrations from the first power-play attempt into the rest of the game.

"That carried over to maybe squeezing our sticks tight the rest of the way," he said. "It might have carried over even into the game for some of those guys who were on it, the rest of the game. There were some things I didn't like that carried over in the form of frustration and not-so-positive energy that I think hurt us."

After Brad Marchand opened the scoring, Sabres winger Arttu Ruotsalainen's third goal in his eighth NHL game tied it 5:27 into the second period.

Cozens, who was moved up to the No. 1 power-play unit, created the score by stealing the puck from Sean Kuraly inside the Boston blue line. Ruotsalainen buried linemate Anders Bjork's pass as he zoomed to the net.

The aggressive goal can serve as a blueprint for the Sabres.

"We have to play that way to be successful in the game of hockey," Granato said. "So hit the reset button on that over and over and that's what we want to do over and over, shift after shift. The Mittelstadt line had a couple of cases that were similar. That pressure, playing with that energy."

"For us, it's a process of being able to do that each and every shift. Stay consistent, not allow frustration to come in. ... That was something that we want to replicate over and over."

Matt Grzelcyk's weak wrist shot from the point put the Bruins up for good 12:50 into the second period. Sabres goalie Dustin Tokarski, the NHL's First Star last week, simply missed the puck. He wasn't screened.

"That was a tough one because he's been so great for us," Granato said. "You do, you feel bad because of the effort, the focus he's put in and the results he's put in. ... In a tight game, it was a tough one."

The Sabres, who host the Bruins again tonight, fell apart in the third period, allowing three goals.

They're 0-4-1 against the Bruins this season.

Sabres prospect Jack Quinn showcased growth before season-ending surgery

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 22, 2021

BUFFALO – Before Sabres prospect Jack Quinn left the Rochester Americans earlier this week to undergo season-ending hernia surgery, coach Seth Appert said the rookie's teammates gravitated to him and wanted to say goodbye.

In a normal year, Quinn, the eighth overall pick in 2020, wouldn't have been eligible to play in the AHL. But the Ontario Hockey League's COVID-19 pause created a unique opportunity for teenagers like Quinn to develop against men in pro hockey.

Quinn, 19, embraced his three-month stint in Rochester. His maturity and talents impressed Appert and others.

"He was just one of the guys," Appert said on a Zoom call. "He was a great teammate and he treated everybody the way that you'd want your teammates to be treated. I think that the combination of his talent and his work ethic mixed with that character is a really good sign for our organization."

Quinn underwent surgery Thursday and is expected to recover in about six weeks, according to the Sabres.

Appert said Quinn had been battling the hernia problem since he participated in Team Canada's World Junior Championship training camp late last fall. The Sabres want him to have surgery now so he can focus on training for next season.

"It's not a surgery that is going to take him out for months and months at a time; it's something that we feel is going to be cleaned up," Appert said. "And the reason we're doing it right now is we're trying to put him in the best position to be successful for next year."

Despite only playing 15 games this year, Appert said Quinn displayed consistent development while recording two goals, nine points and a minus-14 rating.

Quinn, who scored 52 goals for the junior Ottawa 67's last season, started the season as a winger before recently being switched to center.

"His growth was really week to week and game to game," Appert said. "You could see improvements in his game. He became way more dangerous offensively, and he always has that in him, but then it's, 'How do you do it at another level? How do you do it against men? How do you do it in the second-best league in the world?'"

"And you could see him start to put the pieces together and the questions he'd ask when we'd watch video together, where he knew he couldn't do it by leaning on people at this level. So now he had to do it more with his creativity and his mind and his deception and his playmaking, because he couldn't lean in and physically dominate like he did in the OHL."

He added: "He became extremely dangerous in the last four, five games that he played."

Appert also said Quinn's "defensive detail just got a ton better."

"He realized really quickly that if you don't have defensive detail, if you don't stop on pucks, win puck battles that you don't get the puck very much in this league," he said. "And if you don't get the puck very much, it doesn't matter how talented you are, you don't get to showcase those skills."

–

The Sabres, who rank dead last in the NHL, dressed the NHL's youngest lineup – an average of of 24.3 years, according to CapFriendly.com – against the Bruins.

Interim coach Don Granato said if the Sabres were an older team and had the same meager standing, "we would be doomed."

"The fact that we have a younger team means there's such a capacity for growth," Granato said prior to Thursday's game inside KeyBank Center. "The older players within the group are not even that old, we're talking about (Sam) Reinhart (25) and (Rasmus) Ristolainen (26), who are just approaching the prime of their careers. And those guys have been spectacular in all this. They've been very supportive however many changes and tweaks we've made, progressions we've looked toward, moved toward."

Granato said a younger team possesses "a growth mindset."

"There's an appetite for more," he said. "There's nothing that they can hang on to from their career. They can't reflect back and say, 'Boy, I scored 10 goals here on the power play, I need to play here. That's the only thing in my head I need to do.' They're kind of an open canvas in that regard. And as long as we keep them believing that there's more to go after, we're good. And that's easy to show what the next challenge is for them. And we've had a good roll at that."

"They're embracing the fact they're playing teams that are playing hungry every night, teams that are quality. So that's going to push their development even further, as long as they engage the way we've talked about."

Goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to start Friday; Sabres to make lineup change

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 22, 2021

Top Buffalo Sabres goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen will start his first NHL game Friday against the Boston Bruins, coach Don Granato said this morning.

Dustin Tokarski will play tonight versus the Bruins at KeyBank Center, giving Luukkonen, 22, another opportunity to watch a game from the bench as a backup.

The Finn dressed for his first NHL contest Tuesday, a 2-0 loss to the Bruins.

"It's better for UPL to see one more night," Granato said on a Zoom call. "It was going to be a split anyway, we felt, and give (him) another night from the bench. I think that's good. He'll be in there tomorrow, that's the plan."

Granato believes learning the daily routines and getting to know his teammates will benefit Luukkonen.

"I mentioned how important I thought that was to give him that time to acclimate, sit through meetings," Granato said. "There has been a blend, you see him talking to guys – older guys or a mix of guys, a natural progression in that, which I think is a big part of this. The other guys invested in his first start, maybe they block another shot, maybe they work a little harder and concentrate a little more. So I think that all factors in.

"The biggest thing is his comfort level increases every day. So that's more of what goes into this decision. Because of the back-to-back, it just makes sense to give him another day for all of that to hopefully improve even more."

The Sabres recalled Luukkonen from the Rochester Americans on Saturday.

In other lineup news, Granato said defenseman Will Borgen, who has missed the last 32 games after fracturing his right forearm, will return tonight.

To make room, the Sabres will scratch defenseman Colin Miller.

Granato said Borgen will play beside rookie Jacob Bryson.

5 Observations: Bruins top Sabres 5-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

April 22, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. [WKBW] — For the second time this week and fifth time this season the Boston Bruins knocked off the Buffalo Sabres with a 5-1 win. Arttu Ruotsalainen scored the only Sabres goal as they fall to 12-28-7 on the season.

5 Observations from Thursday's loss:

Pitiful power play

In two games against the Bruins this week the Sabres are 0-for-11 with the man advantage. With this abysmal of a performance on the power play, the Bruins can play even more aggressive than usual because they know, when they take penalties, the Sabres won't capitalize. You can't even make the argument that it's just bad luck for the Sabres because you can count on one hand how many quality chances they've generated.

Borgen back at it

In his first game back in more than two months, Will Borgen looked confident and comfortable. The 24-year-old defenseman was actually the second oldest defenseman that skated for the Sabres on Thursday night. In a year where so much has gone wrong, the Sabres future on the blue line looks bright with Dahlin, Jokiharju, Bryson, Samuelsson, and Borgen.

Suplex City

Rasmus Ristolainen tackled a Bruins player on Thursday night. It was his second penalty of the evening & one of the many head-scratching plays he made. With Colin Miller scratched on Thursday to make room for Will Borgen, it makes you wonder if the Sabres would ever actually sit down their veteran defender for a game or two. I doubt they will, but you could make the case that Miller deserves to be playing more than Ristolainen.

Ruotsalainen continues to impress

Not to be confused with the Sabres defenseman, Arttu Ruotsalainen scored his third goal in his eighth NHL game Thursday night thanks to a pretty finish on a saucer pass from Anders Bjork. Albeit a small sample size, the 23-year-old from Finland is looking like a player who should be on the roster next season. With an expanded role it's not unrealistic to think of him as someone who can score 15 or 20 goals a season.

Not the first star

On Tuesday, the NHL's reigning first star of the week kept the Sabres within striking distance of the Bruins. Two days later, Dustin Tokarski struggled as the Bruins found the back of the net five times. Not all the goals were his fault, but Boston's second of the night from Matt Grzelcyk was one he'd certainly want back. On Friday, we expect Sabres prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to make his NHL debut. In 14 games with Rochester this season, Luukkonen has a 3.60 goals-against average and a .888 save percentage.

Power play struggles doom Sabres

By Josh Reed

WIVB

April 22, 2021

(WIVB) — The Bruins domination of the Sabres this season continued on Thursday.

Buffalo is winless in 5 games following a 5-1 loss vs. Boston this season.

The Sabres were 0-5 on the power play and are 0-11 in their last two games, both were losses to the Bruins.

Boston jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the 1st period on Brad Marchand's 25th goal of the season.

Arttu Ruotsalainen pulled the Sabres even with a goal in the 2nd period but it was all Bruins after that.

It was a 2-1 game entering the 3rd period but Boston scored three more goals to end all doubt.

The Sabres have scored 1 goal in the last two games.

Next game: vs Bruins Friday

Sabres prospect Jack Quinn out with season-ending injury

By Mary Margaret Johnson

WIVB

April 22, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The Buffalo Sabres 2020 first-round draft pick Jack Quinn underwent surgery and will miss the rest of the season, the Sabres announced on Thursday.

Quinn had surgery to repair a hernia. The timeline to recover from that surgery is expected to be six weeks.

The forward has played in 15 games for the Rochester Americans. Quinn has scored two goals and accumulated seven assists.

Bruins defeat Sabres for sixth straight win

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

April 22, 2021

BUFFALO -- Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak each had a goal and an assist to help the Boston Bruins extend their winning streak to six games with a 5-1 victory against the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Thursday.

The Bruins have outscored their opponents 22-7 during their streak.

"Not a lot of poor stretches," Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said. "I think that shows in our goals against. We don't have these lulls where we have pockets of poor puck management shift after shift. I think we've had some, no doubt, where we haven't executed well enough.

"Some of that is the skill of the player at times and some of it is us preaching having good awareness of where we are in the game. ... The skill part, we'll keep encouraging the guys to execute well and support the puck well."

David Krejci, Matt Grzelcyk and Nick Ritchie scored for Boston (27-12-6). Jeremy Swayman made 29 saves.

The Bruins are fourth in the MassMutual East Division, eight points ahead of the fifth-place New York Rangers, and three behind the Pittsburgh Penguins and New York Islanders. The top four teams qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Arttu Ruotsalainen scored, and Dustin Tokarski made 33 saves for Buffalo (12-28-7), which lost 2-0 here Tuesday. The teams play here again Friday.

"I'll watch the film and go over it and could have a different thought on it," Sabres coach Don Granato said. "I thought we played a much more aggressive game (than Tuesday). When I mentioned the shot mentality the other night, we were missing an aggressive attack, puck-pressure mentality. We were better in that area tonight. We played better tonight, there's no question. We played better. We didn't get any breaks."

Marchand gave the Bruins a 1-0 lead at 12:36 of the first period. Mike Reilly's point shot hit Sabres defenseman Jacob Bryson in front and bounced to Marchand at the side of the net.

Ruotsalainen tied it 1-1 at 5:27 of the second period on a one-timer from the slot off a pass from Anders Bjork.

Matt Grzelcyk made it 2-1 with a point shot that beat Tokarski glove side at 12:50.

The Sabres had four of their five power-play opportunities in the second period. They are 0-for-11 in the past two games.

"Obviously, it's frustrating, for sure," Buffalo forward Casey Mittelstadt said. "If we get a power-play goal there with all the penalties in the second, it's a different game, so, yeah, I think it's a better mix of we've got to do a better job of helping each other if we run into trouble. ... Yeah, it's definitely something that's frustrating and we've got to be better at."

Pastrnak extended the lead to 3-1 when he cut around Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin into the slot at 4:55 of the third period.

"[Pastrnak] just didn't have it (last game) for whatever reason," Cassidy said. "It was going off his stick. Today he just felt much more comfortable hitting his shot, through the neutral zone, making some plays. Sauce passes that were on the tape. One-on-one moves where the puck's sticking to him like it used to. Hopefully this is a sign of things to come for him because he's fought it a little bit lately."

Ritchie scored from the left circle at 6:01 of the third to push it to 4-1. Krejci scored on the rebound of his shot in front of the net at 18:02 for the 5-1 final.

"These points are super crucial and we understand that but, again, we're taking every game as a playoff game," Swayman said. "I think at this point we're making sure that we're doing whatever we can to get two points."

NOTES: Marchand has scored 12 of his 25 goals in 13 games in April; he scored 13 goals in 30 games prior. It is his eighth season with at least 25 goals, tying Phil Esposito and Cam Neely for third-most in Bruins history, trailing Johnny Bucyk (11) and Rick Middleton (9). ... The Sabres are 1-for-18 on the power play against the Bruins this season.

What Went Wrong: 2020-21 Buffalo Sabres

By James O'Brien

NBC Sports

April 22, 2021

As the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs approach, NHL teams will start getting mathematically eliminated from contention. PHT's "What Went Wrong" series aims to analyze why each team missed the playoffs. The "What Went Wrong" series begins with the Buffalo Sabres, the first team to be officially eliminated. When you ask most hockey fans "what went wrong with the 2020-21 Buffalo Sabres?," plenty will answer " ... Everything."

Speaking more literally, that's an exaggeration. But that's certainly how it must feel to be a Sabres fan in 2020-21, and likely how it often felt to be a player or staffer. With that in mind, there's a lot to chew on when it comes to dissecting the Sabres' spectacular failure of a 2020-21 season.

(Note: full season Sabres stats from before Buffalo's 2-0 loss to the Bruins from Tuesday.)

What went wrong before the Sabres 2020-21 season

Look, the Buffalo Sabres didn't tie an NHL record by extending their playoff drought to a haunting 10 consecutive seasons because of any single failure.

Instead, the Sabres have made mistakes at virtually every level, and you could say that the 2020-21 team boiled down to paying for past sins as much as anything else.

As much as people want to heap blame on Jack Eichel, his development hasn't been the problem. Instead, the Sabres haven't been able to find much NHL talent outside of the first round. And, unfortunately, even some of their high first-round picks haven't panned out. Not every situation is as bad as trading 2016 eighth overall pick Alex Nylander for a marginal defenseman, but there are a lot of swings-and-misses.

To an extent, the 2020-21 Buffalo Sabres suffered for the franchise's past sins as much as anything else.

They've failed to make up for draft and develop struggles by flubbing free agency, too.

To be fair to Kevyn Adams, the Taylor Hall signing probably should've gone better. Most importantly, he didn't make a huge gamble by giving Hall a bunch of term.

Unfortunately, the Sabres are paying for previous GMs failing to learn those lessons. From Ville Leino and Matt Moulson to Kyle Okposo and Jeff Skinner, this franchise has been saddled with terrible contracts.

Either way, though, there haven't been many free agent additions to paper over failures in drafting and developing prospects.

They haven't found the right coach, either.

For all the positive buzz Ralph Krueger brought in, he couldn't put it together for the Sabres.

No doubt, some of that boils down to weak personnel. Even so, Krueger didn't always hit all the right notes. Healthy-scratching Jeff Skinner for multiple games only made matters worse. It's possible that he shackled Rasmus Dahlin and others with his defensive system, too.

What went wrong during the Sabres' 2020-21 season

While people praised some of Kevyn Adams' work in surprisingly landing Taylor Hall and shrewdly trading for Eric Staal, it wasn't enough to raise expectations too high. After all, no one polled by PHT picked the Sabres to make the playoffs in 2020-21.

Still, it was surprising to see the Sabres reach new lows in 2020-21, but that's exactly what (agonizingly) happened.

Bad luck

Hockey can be a sport of cruel bounces. While the Sabres paid for mistakes of the past (recent, but mostly before Adams' time), their 2020-21 season felt like a series of worst-case scenarios.

During January, the Sabres looked average (sometimes downright good) according to underlying metrics, but their results were below-average. As one example, the Sabres only scored eight goals on 86 high-danger chances at even-strength, while allowing 12 goals on the 71 high-danger chances they allowed.

At that time, the Sabres were probably cursing their bad luck, but it would get a lot worse. Unfortunately, the Sabres' 2020-21 season experienced a serious COVID-related disruption. Word was that Rasmus Ristolainen dealt with significant issues, and even then-head-coach Ralph Krueger tested positive.

From there, the Sabres' actual play gradually started to match their dismal record ... until they set some dismal NHL records.

If you want to summarize the Sabres' lousy luck during the 2020-21 season most simply, turn to Taylor Hall. In 37 games with the Sabres, Hall only scored two goals on a 2.3 shooting percentage, easily the worst of his career. Hall needed just three games to reach two goals with the Bruins, and his shooting percentage with Boston dipped to 18.2 after "settling" for an assist in his fourth Bruins game.

Naturally, the Sabres dealt with injuries, too. But between a daunting lack of puck luck and the unique challenges of COVID, some big bounces went against them.

That 18-game winless streak, and Krueger's firing
Even for a bad team — and an unlucky one — it's still stunning that the Sabres suffered through that 18-game winless streak.

PHT's Adam Gretz broke down some of the numbers from the Sabres' 18-game winless streak, and it's staggering stuff.

The Sabres were outscored 74-30 during that 18-game winless streak, making for a -44 goal differential. Buffalo ranked last in goals per game and goals against per game, and in the bottom-three in shots per game, shots against per game, save percentage, and on the power play. Only two Sabres scored more than two goals during that 18-game winless streak: Sam Reinhart (six) and Jeff Skinner (three).
(There's more, so check out Gretz's piece.)

Once the Sabres lost their 12th game in a row, they decided to fire Ralph Krueger. Really, it all seemed inevitable, especially when Krueger pointed to the team's fragile psyche and said they were in a "dark, dark place."

You almost wonder if injuries to Jack Eichel and others felt like missed blessings, as they no longer had to slog through the Sabres' miserable 2020-21 season. Yes, it was that bad.

Bad enough to make a rebuild harder, thanks to plummeting market value for a Taylor Hall trade, and so on.

So, the Sabres were unlucky, but they were also bad. There's only so much you can do to sugarcoat that.

What went right for the Sabres?

Obviously, the larger answer is "not much." That said, you can shine a light on a few things.

Through February, the Sabres boasted one of the best power plays in the NHL. During that span, they connected on 31.2-percent of their chances (19 PPG on 61 opportunities), the third-best rate in the league. It's unclear if Victor Olofsson can develop beyond being a power-play specialist, yet it's clear that his shot is a useful weapon in that area.

Sam Reinhart continues to establish himself as a quality piece. No, he's not the superstar you dream of when selecting second overall, but he could be part of the solution in Buffalo. Maybe.

Quietly or not, Linus Ullmark put together a pretty good season — again.

If Jack Eichel's willing to stick around, he's a true star, and he's still only 24.

What's next?

In trying to fix the Sabres, GM Kevyn Adams has his hands full. He needs to re-sign (or trade) RFAs, such as Sam Reinhart. And, no doubt about it, the Sabres either need to trade Jack Eichel, or at least find ways to maintain his morale.

Really, it's such a complicated process that it justifies its own post. So stay tuned for that.

NWS grad makes NHL debut

Lake Placid News

April 22, 2021

LAKE PLACID — On Sunday, Northwood School alumni Mattias Samuelsson realized his childhood dream when he made his NHL debut in a 4-2 win for the Buffalo Sabres over the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Pittsburgh Penguins is the team his father Kjell won a Stanley Cup with in 1992. Mattias spent two years at Northwood School before heading to the National Team Development Program (NTDP) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for two years. After the NTDP, Mattias chose to attend Western Michigan University to play under Andy Murray.

Northwood Head Hockey Coach Chadd Cassidy, took a moment to talk about his feelings watching Samuelsson, a 2018 Huskies graduate, take the ice for the Sabres.

"To see Mattias realize his dream of playing in the National Hockey League was a thrill for me," Cassidy said. "He has worked extremely hard and taken his time with his game to get to this point. After his time at Northwood School, the United States National Team Development Program, Western Michigan University, and the Rochester Americans, he is prepared for a long and successful NHL career. It was a pleasure to watch him grow and prosper."

Samuelsson's debut comes just after Northwood has announced that it has joined forces to create the Prep Hockey Conference. The league is set to begin to play in the 2021-22 season. Northwood also recently announced the renaming of the two teams from Juniors to Prep and Prep to Varsity.

"Our students have aspirations to achieve at the highest level," said Huskies Director of Athletics Gino Riffle. "To see Mattias do this so soon after leaving Northwood reflects the dedication and focus he has. Watching Mattias see his dream of playing in the NHL come true is an example to all of our current and incoming students that the Northwood experience helps motivate all of us to chase our dreams."

5 takeaways | Power play falls short in loss to Bruins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 22, 2021

Before the Boston Bruins widened the gap with a string of third-period goals, the Sabres had ample opportunity to erase a one-goal deficit on Thursday.

Lack of success on the power play factored largely in a second straight loss.

"Those are moments in the game where you can kind of turn the tide, gain some momentum and capitalize and get a get a goal," Jeff Skinner said afterward. "We're not doing that."

The Sabres went 0-for-5 on the power play - all during the first two periods - against the Bruins' top-ranked penalty kill in a 5-1 loss. They were 0-for-6 during a 2-0 loss to the Bruins on Tuesday.

Arttu Ruotsalainen scored the lone goal for the Sabres, who conclude a three-game set with the Bruins at KeyBank Center on Friday. Dustin Tokarski made 33 saves.

David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand each tallied a goal and an assist for the Bruins.

Here are five takeaways.

1. Frustration settles in on the power play

The Sabres tweaked their units after the 0-for-6 night on Tuesday, promoting Dylan Cozens to the top grouping along with Rasmus Dahlin, Sam Reinhart, Casey Mittelstadt, and Victor Olofsson.

Interim head coach Don Granato said he saw intricacies to build off with that look but felt frustration threw the power play off its game early.

"We had five power plays, I believe," Granato said. "We allowed ourselves to get frustrated partway through the first one. ... And then that carried over to maybe squeezing our sticks tight the rest of the way."

The Sabres finished with a combined five shots on goal over the course of their five opportunities.

"It's no secret how guys score goals on the power play," Mittelstadt said. "You look at the other teams and you look at a team like Boston - in the playoffs, good power play - they snap it around and when they see the shot, they got a guy in front and fire it and go get it back and do it again.

"Eventually, if you keep getting it back, you're going to find seam or find someone open. Yeah, that's another part of it, for sure. There's some things we got to work on with that."

2. A "more aggressive" game at 5-on-5

The fact that the Sabres had five power plays over the first 40 minutes was an indicator of a better performance at even strength than the one they put together on Tuesday.

Buffalo held a 13-9 edge in scoring chances at 5-on-5 during the first two periods, according to Natural Stat Trick. Boston pulled ahead late during the second on a shot from the point by Matt Grzelcyk that beat Dustin Tokarski cleanly to his glove side.

The game tipped during the third period, with Pastrnak and Nick Ritchie beating Tokarski for goals just 1:06 apart. David Krejci added the final goal with 1:58 remaining.

"We were missing an aggressive attack, puck pressure mentality (on Tuesday)," Granato said. "We were better in that area tonight. We played better tonight, there's no question."

3. Strong forechecking leads to Ruotsalainen's goal

The young trio of Anders Bjork, Cozens, and Ruotsalainen put together a strong shift in the offensive zone to earn the Sabres' lone goal of the night.

Ruotsalainen knocked a defender off the puck behind the Boston net and followed it up along the boards to Cozens, who stripped it away from Sean Kuraly at the point. Cozens passed to Bjork, who attacked with speed before finding Ruotsalainen for a tap-in goal.

"Hit the reset button on that over and over and that's what we want to do over and over, shift after shift," Granato said. "The Mittelstadt line had a couple of cases that were similar. That pressure, playing with that energy. For us, it's a process of being able to do that each and every shift."

4. Borgen returns on defense

William Borgen returned from a 32-game absence stemming from a fracture in his right arm. He replaced Colin Miller in the lineup and skated 18:08, including 2:12 on the penalty kill.

The addition of the 24-year-old Borgen gave the Sabres defense corps an average age of 23 years, 14 days - the youngest in the league this season, according to NHL Stats.

5. The big picture

The youth movement continues when the Sabres and Bruins conclude their three-game set on Friday. Goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, 22, is expected to make his NHL debut.

Luukkonen would become the fifth rookie to debut this season, following Cozens, Jacob Bryson, Ruotsalainen, and Mattias Samuelsson.

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

At The Final Horn: Bruins 5 - Sabres 1

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 22, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres were once again unable to generate any offense on the power play in the team's 5-1 loss to the Boston Bruins on Thursday at KeyBank Center.

Buffalo's power play went 0-for-5 with five shots after going 0-for-6 against Boston on Tuesday.

The Sabres have just one goal in 18 power-play opportunities against the Bruins in five games this season.

Arttu Ruotsalainen scored for the Sabres on Thursday. Dustin Tokarski stopped 32 Boston shots.

Brad Marchand, Matt Grzelcyk, David Pastrnak, Nick Ritchie and David Krejci were the Bruins' goal scorers. Jeremy Swayman made 29 saves. .

What happened

The Bruins struck first when Marchand pounced on a rebound in front for his 25th goal of the season with 7:24 left in the first period.

Buffalo tied the game 5:27 into the second period when Anders Bjork found Ruotsalainen for a cross-ice one-timer as Buffalo was completing a line change.

Boston regained the lead on Grzelcyk's long wrist shot from the point with 7:10 remaining in the second.

The Bruins pulled away with three goals in the third period.

Boston took a 3-1 lead when Pastrnak scored in the slot at the 4:55 mark of the third and then Ritchie put one in short side to make it 4-1 just 1:06 later.

Krejci redirected a shot that careened off the goal post with 1:58 left in regulation for Boston's fifth goal of the game.

Roll the highlight film

Here's Ruotsalainen's third goal of his career:.

Worth mentioning

-Defenseman William Borgen returned to the lineup after missing the past 32 games with a broken arm. He skated 18:20, including 2:12 on the penalty kill.

-New associate general manager Jason Karmanos joined Brian Duff and Martin Biron on tonight's pregame show:

Coming up

Tomorrow is Fan Appreciation Night at KeyBank Center as the Sabres wrap up their three-game set against Boston. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550 with pregame coverage on MSG starting at 6:30.

For details on the night, including how you can win prizes throughout the day, [click here](#).

Quinn has season-ending surgery to repair hernia

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 22, 2021

Jack Quinn underwent successful surgery to repair a hernia and will miss the rest of the season, the Sabres announced Thursday. The estimated recovery time for the injury is six weeks.

Quinn, 19, was selected by the Sabres with the eighth overall pick in last year's NHL Draft. He tallied nine points (2+7) in 15 games this season as the youngest player on the Rochester Americans.

Amerks coach Seth Appert said the injury had been nagging Quinn since before the season. The organization decided to move ahead with the surgery now to enable a full offseason of training for the forward.

"Just with where the injury was at, we felt it was the best interest for Jack for next year to get it cleaned up, to have the surgery to put himself in position to have a really important summer of development and training in the weight room," Appert said.

Quinn was eligible to play in Rochester due to the cancellation of the Ontario Hockey League's season as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the usual agreement between the Canadian Hockey League and NHL, he would either play for Buffalo or return to the OHL's Ottawa 67s in 2021-22.

Quinn spent his final games of the season at the center position after being drafted on the wing. He tallied three assists over his last three contests.

"He had a great experience here playing in the American League in a year that you didn't anticipate him being here," Appert said. "He got to learn and get better and grow through the adversity that he faced here."

Morning Skate | Tokarski to start, Borgen to return vs. Bruins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 22, 2021

Dustin Tokarski will make his fifth straight start in goal for the Sabres against the Boston Bruins on Thursday. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen will back up Tokarski and make his NHL debut against the Bruins on Friday, interim head coach Don Granato said.

"I think it's better for UPL to see one more night," Granato said. "It was going to be a split anyway, we felt. Give him another night from the bench. I think that's good. He'll be in there tomorrow, is the plan."

Tokarski made 39 saves in a 2-0 loss to the Bruins on Tuesday. He has a .938 save percentage in his last five games dating back to a shootout loss in Boston on April 13.

The Sabres are looking to rebound from their loss on Tuesday, which snapped a streak of 13 straight games with at least two goals scored. Granato cited the opportunity for a rematch as a measuring stick for his young lineup against a Bruins team expected to contend for the Stanley Cup.

"We didn't make the game simple for ourselves," Granato said. "We complicated simple things, maybe puck placement wasn't good. We didn't put pucks to areas we could pursue and put pressure, more pressure on them. We hope to do that a little better tonight and give ourselves even a better chance to compete harder."

The lineup

William Borgen will play for the first time since having surgery to repair a fracture in his right arm in February. He will replace Colin Miller, a healthy scratch, on a pair with Jacob Bryson.

The addition of Borgen, 24, injects even more youth into an already young defense corps. The average age of the six Sabres defensemen on Thursday is 22, the eldest being 26-year-old Rasmus Ristolainen. Rasmus Dahlin, Henri Jokiharju, and Mattias Samuelsson are all 21.

Here is the full projected lineup based on Wednesday's practice:

53 Jeff Skinner - 23 Sam Reinhart - 68 Victor Olofsson
74 Rasmus Asplund - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 72 Tage Thompson
96 Anders Bjork - 24 Dylan Cozens - 25 Arttu Ruotsalainen
13 Tobias Rieder - 15 Riley Sheahan - 91 Drake Caggiula

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 10 Henri Jokiharju
54 Mattias Samuelsson - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
78 Jacob Bryson - 3 William Borgen

31 Dustin Tokarski
1 Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen

Scouting the Bruins

Boston won its fifth straight game with the 2-0 victory over Buffalo on Tuesday, which saw Tuukka Rask earn his first shutout of the season with a 32-save shutout.

The Bruins will turn to rookie Jeremy Swayman in goal on Thursday, coming off a 25-save performance against the Islanders for his first career shutout on April 16.

David Pastrnak enters the contest riding a four-game point streak, with one goal and six assists in that span. He tallied an assist on Brad Marchand's goal to open the scoring Tuesday.

Tune in

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. Radio coverage can be found on WGR 550. Puck drop is at 7.

Facebook Share

Twitter Share
Link Share
Email Share