



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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TONIGHT'S GAME: Charlotte @ Rochester

Eight points to ponder as Rochester Amerks start season

Pickin' Splinters

By: Kevin Oklobzija

The 91 points earned by the Rochester Americans last season looked good on the stat sheet and even in the American Hockey League standings.

But in reality, it's difficult to consider the season a success. The talk had been about rebuilding the stature of what once was a cornerstone AHL franchise. And while progress was made in restoring pride in the Amerks crest, the season ended in a first-round playoffs sweep.

"That just raises our expectations to the season," third-year defenseman Brendan Guhle said. "We're going in with the mindset to go a lot deeper."

Here are eight points to ponder as the Amerks head into Friday's 7:05 p.m. season opener against the Charlotte Checkers.

The defense appears to be stacked

If defense wins, then the Amerks will be just fine. There's a perfect mix of experience with Zack Redmond, Taylor Fedun, Nathan Paetsch and Andrew MacWilliam, and young prospects in Guhle, Jack Dougherty and rookies Will Borgen, Brandon Hickey and Lawrence Pilut.

In some ways, it's a trip back in time to when the Amerks defense always had that mix of talented veterans and NHL prospects (think 1999-2000 Mike Hurlbut and Doug Houda alongside Brian Campbell, Dmitri Kalinin and Jean-Luc Grand-Pierre).

Amerks coach Chris Taylor can certainly draw parallels because he played on those perennial playoff powers of the late 1990s and into the 2000s.

"That's what you need to groom those young defensemen," Taylor said. "But it's not just the experience back there, it's the youth; Dougherty and Borgen and Pilut."

Who's stopping the puck?

The Amerks believe it usually will be Scott Wedgewood, with Adam Wilcox again serving as the backup. Linus Ullmark, the mainstay in goal the past two seasons, has graduated to the parent Buffalo Sabres.

Wedgewood is starting his seventh pro season and is intent on re-establishing himself as a goalie with NHL skills. He missed most of 2016-17 with a shoulder injury and last season was traded twice and never really felt at home anywhere.

The Sabres signed him on the first day of free agency, an indication they believe in his ability.

Who's going to score goals?

This won't necessarily be a goals-by-committee approach. Left winger C.J. Smith will build on a very good rookie season, when he produced 17-27-44 in 57 games, and center Danny O'Regan needs to rebound from a so-so sophomore season.

Right winger Justin Bailey has 30-plus goal potential. He certainly didn't plan to be starting his fourth season in the AHL, but if he's going to play in the NHL, then he needs to dominate here.

The top rookie to watch

Baseball fans love the home-run hitters and hockey fans love the goal-scorers. Which means left winger Victor Olofsson should be pretty popular.

Olofsson piled up 27 goals in 50 Swedish Hockey League games, best in the league and the highest total in the SHL in three years.

He has the advantage of experience, since he's coming to North America at age 23.

"We expect the same thing," Taylor said. "We expect a little bit of adjustment but that shouldn't take away from his goal-scoring. And he's a really good passer."

Does Alex Nylander emerge as a legitimate prospect?

He'd better, because this is Year No. 3 for the player chosen eighth overall in 2016. He scored 8-19-27 in 51 games last year after 10-10-18-28 in 65 games as a rookie.

The thing is, the organization isn't saying it's make-or-break time. Nylander is still just 20. While his brother, William, was playing NHL games at age 19, there is no chart that says every player matures at the same rate.

He has dominated against his age all throughout his career, so there is a school of thought that says he'll be just fine in time.

"Everybody's their own person," Taylor said. "You can't judge on siblings or on this guy or that guy. Every individual is different."

A large leadership group

Taylor named 32-year-old Kevin Porter, an 11th-year veteran, his captain again. But instead of two players wearing the "A" as alternate captain, he named five, opting to rotate the A's among Redmond, Fedun, MacWilliam, Paetsch and center Kyle Criscuolo.

Will the Amerks be better on Fridays?

Taylor hopes so, because the team was pretty awful in a lot of Friday first periods on home ice a year ago. They often found themselves trailing by two or three goals.

Taylor said he had his team practicing harder early in the week, then tapered toward Friday. "I'm kind of going the other way on that this year," he said.

New at the arena

A video board with a screen that is 10 feet high and 16 feet wide. It's the same board that is used in nine NHL arenas.

Delaware North has replaced the SMG subsidiary as the concessionaire.

Fans to all events in the arena will be subject to search wandung upon entry.

The glass partition the separated the ticket windows from the lower concourse has been removed, opening up the lobby somewhat.

Amerks announce team captain for 2018-19 season

WHEC

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans announced Thursday that veteran forward Kevin Porter has been named team captain for the 2018-19 season. Additionally, the team will rotate among forward Kyle Criscuolo and defensemen Taylor Fedun, Andrew MacWilliam, Nathan Paetsch and Zach Redmond as the five assistant captains throughout the course of the season.

Porter will serve as the Amerks captain for the second consecutive season and third time in his 11-year career. Last season, Porter, who also captained the Amerks during the 2012-13 campaign, finished second on the team with 17 goals and fourth in points while leading Rochester to its first playoff berth in four years. The Detroit, Mich., native has amassed 122 points (51+71) over 164 career games with the Amerks and has added eight points (1+7) in eight playoff appearances for Rochester.

"It's a huge honor," said Porter. "This is a great organization and to be the captain is pretty exciting. We have a great group of guys and anyone of them could have been the captain. I'm honored to be picked by the coaching staff."

"We have a great group of guys here and as a staff we couldn't just name just two alternates," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "By committee, they will run the locker room the way it should be."

Rochester opens its 63rd American Hockey League season at home on Friday, Oct. 5 against the Charlotte Checkers at The Blue Cross Arena. Amerks 2018-19 Season Ticket Memberships, which start as low as just \$12 per game, are on-sale now. Full-season ticket member benefits include, but are not limited to, Riverside Club VIP Room access with Amerks Alumni, family meet and greet and annual Skate with the Players event, an exclusive preseason Ice Breaker Party and Chalk Talk with the Amerks coaching staff, your very own Season Ticket Member ID and Discount Card and much more. For more information, visit www.amerks.com/seasontickets or call 1-855-GO-AMERKS.

Kevin Porter named captain of Rochester Americans for third time

Buffalo News

By: Staff Report

Veteran Kevin Porter will serve as captain of the Rochester Americans for the second consecutive season and the third time in his 11-year career., the team announced Thursday.

Porter, who also was captain in 2012-13, had 17 goals last season as the Amerks earned their first playoff appearance in four years.

"It's a huge honor," Porter said in a statement released by the team. "This is a great organization and to be the captain is pretty exciting. We have a great group of guys and anyone of them could have been the captain. I'm honored to be picked by the coaching staff."

Rather than two assistant captains, the team will rotate among five players: forward Kyle Criscuolo and defensemen Taylor Fedun, Andrew MacWilliam, Nathan Paetsch and Zach Redmond.

"We have a great group of guys here and as a staff we couldn't just name just two alternates," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "By committee, they will run the locker room the way it should be."

The Amerks also announced their roster for Friday's season opener against Charlotte at 7 p.m. at the Blue Cross Arena in Rochester.

Forwards (15): Rasmus Asplund, Justin Bailey, Eric Cornel, Kyle Criscuolo, Alexander Nylander, Danny O'Regan, Andrew Oglevie, Victor Olofsson, Kevin Porter, Myles Powell, Tyler Randell, Wayne Simpson, C.J. Smith, Dalton Smith and Yannick Veilleux.

Defensemen (9): Will Borgen, Jack Dougherty, Taylor Fedun, Brendan Guhle, Brandon Hickey, Andrew MacWilliam, Nathan Paetsch, Lawrence Pilut and Zach Redmond.

Goaltenders (2): Scott Wedgewood and Adam Wilcox.

Will Amerks contend with Nylander on Rochester roster?

Spectrum News

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Amerks will look to build on last year's success, when they finished third in the AHL's North Division with a 37-22-record. The Amerks open the regular season on Friday and former top Sabres pick Alexander Nylander is back with the team.

His return to Rochester a bit of a surprise since he played well during the Sabres preseason.

"I think I had a really good camp," Nylander said. "It's their decision and there's nothing I can do about it. I just need to get playing here and play well. I felt great. I had a really good summer and I had a really good camp, so I just need to build off that, get better here every day and play as good as I can and hopefully — I'm obviously trying to be the first one for them to call up."

Forward Justin Bailey is beginning his fourth season in Rochester and once again he'll be expected to produce offensively.

Obviously disappointed with not making the Sabres, Bailey also dealing with the trade of teammate and close friend Nick Baptiste: The forward was traded to Nashville on Monday.

"Obviously it's tough to see him go," Bailey said. "We were hanging out yesterday when he got the call. It kind of came out of nowhere but at the same time I think it's a great opportunity for him. A change of scenery is sometimes the best thing for you. "

"I'm happy for Nick to find a new start for himself," said Chris Taylor, Amerks Head Coach. "He's a great kid and we're going to miss him and obviously it's one of our guys and one of our family members that's leaving. He was a big part of our team last year and a big part of the organization for a lot of years."

Sabres got defenseman Jack Dougherty from the trade with Nashville — he's expected to join the Amerks this week before the team hosts the Charlotte Checkers for the season opener at the Blue Cross Arena Friday at 7 p.m.

And there's a lot to look forward for those attending Friday night's season opener. The team is having a special two-hour Party on the Patio, presented by Genesee Brew House, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. before the puck drops. The riverside event will feature live music from Big Eyed Phish and \$2 drafts of Genesee and Genesee Light. Fans will also have the chance to win some prizes, including a set of custom-made Amerks cornhole boards autographed by this year's team.

Simply making playoffs isn't enough for Amerks this year

Democrat & Chronicle

By: Leo Roth

Rochester Americans general manager Randy Sexton called it a "top-down, bottom-up approach."

In Buffalo, the parent Sabres provide the resources. In Rochester, the Amerks provide the environment for developing successful players who will one day help the Sabres be successful.

Year 1 of the Great Culture Change put in place by new general managers Jason Botterill in Buffalo and Sexton in Rochester — two men who once worked magic for the Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins — bore quick fruit: a playoff berth for the Amerks, their first in three seasons.

However, a quick three-game sweep at the hands of the Syracuse Crunch, coupled with the Sabres' playoff drought hitting seven years with yet another last-place finish in the NHL, showed just how extensive this organizational rebuilding project would be.

"Playoffs was one of our goals and we wanted to go deeper, so we didn't achieve that goal," Sexton said. "But in terms of changing the culture, putting in place the standards we believe are critical for sustainable success, and getting the right people here, no doubt we felt it was a successful season."

It means that when the puck drops for the Amerks' 63rd American Hockey League season Friday against the Charlotte Checkers at Blue Cross Arena, the bar will be set higher.

The last of Rochester's six Calder Cups came 22 years ago, its last playoff series win was 13 years ago.

But last season's 24-point jump in the standings under rookie coach Chris Taylor, the retention of 14 players off that team, the addition of a handful of AHL free agents, and seven rookies, three of them strong Sabres' prospects, gives everyone reason to believe a legitimate run at a title is possible.

"Regular-season success is one measure of your model, but playoff success is a more accurate measure of your model and how it's working," Sexton said. "Part of development is playing in tough games, tough series, the grind of pressure-packed games, the big crowds. That's part of development. And it's no secret part of our strategy is to build the right culture in Rochester and when players flow up to Buffalo, they take that winning culture with them."

Taylor, the Amerks Hall of Fame player, has been entrusted to nurture a crop of Sabres' draft picks that include first-rounder Alex Nylander, the No. 8 overall pick in 2016, and second-rounders Justin Bailey (2013), Eric Cornel (2014), Brendan Guhle (2015) and Rasmus Asplund (2016).

But he has help.

The veteran corps Sexton and Botterill handed him includes Nathan Paetsch, Zach Redmond (team-leading 47 points), Taylor Fedun and Andrew MacWilliam, which will form the backbone of a deep defensive corps, along with ageless center Kevin Porter, who keeps churning along in his 13th pro season. Porter had 17 goals and 25 assists last season.

The Amerks lost some goal-scoring but do get back team Rookie of the Year C.J. Smith, who finished with 17 goals and 27 assists, and Kyle Criscuolo (15-19 – 34).

A lot will be expected of Nylander (18 goals in two seasons) and Bailey (53 goals in three seasons) early before the inevitable recalls kick in. Nylander and Bailey each made a strong bid to stick with the Sabres full-time.

Veteran free agent forwards Wayne Simpson, Tyler Randell and Yannick Veilleux add size to the lineup when a physical style is called upon. The Amerks were also anticipating the addition of 22-year-old defenseman Jack Dougherty, a former second-round selection, obtained in a trade with Nashville for Nick Baptiste.

Linus Ullmark, a workhorse in net for three seasons in Rochester, earned his long-expected NHL roster spot in Buffalo. But consummate pro Adam Wilcox and free agent Scott Wedgewood, who played 20 NHL games last year with Arizona, figure to form a strong battery.

“There was a reason why we brought these guys back, the leaders they were in the dressing room and on the ice, and we’ve got some young guys coming in, some second- and third-year guys,” Taylor said. “I think we have a good mix. You never know until we actually step on the ice Friday and see how we do. But right now, I’m excited and I know our fans should be excited.”

In preseason play, the Amerks beat the Crunch 4-1 and split two games with the defending Calder Cup champ Toronto Marlies.

Bailey, who starts his fourth pro season in Rochester, said experiencing the playoffs last year forced him to raise his game to another level and looks forward to doing it again.

“That playoff series was fast-paced and very physical,” said Bailey, who scored two goals. “For me, I kind of made that decision to play fast and physical and finish off my hits. They were definitely dishing it out, and I ended up having a good playoff.”

As for a change in culture, Bailey said he felt it like one of those checks dished out by the Crunch.

"You create a culture by the type of people you bring in," Bailey said. "Chris Taylor is a super positive guy whether we're winning or losing, and that trickles down to our leadership group, the young guys and the guys in the middle. We stressed in meetings that everyone is here for a reason, every guy is a character guy, a good person and I think that translates to the ice."

The super-skilled Guhle, a second-round pick in the Connor McDavid-Jack Eichel year, established himself as a player to watch last season with 26 points in 50 games in Rochester. He also appeared in 18 games for Buffalo, picking up five assists.

"It's a blessing in disguise, a chance to work on my game some more, hopefully get some wins," said Guhle when asked about returning to Rochester.

"We definitely think we have a championship team in there (the locker room), a lot of skill, a nice mix of older and younger guys, veterans to lead the way. We feel we can play any style and we've set a high standard for us this year."

As for Taylor, who will be assisted by Gord Dineen and Toby Petersen again, nobody knows the storied history of the franchise better than he. He helped write it. And now that fans have tasted the playoffs again, Taylor welcomes the fact expectations have been raised.

"There's always pressure, always nerves," he said. "I'll be nervous Friday. I want to get off to a good start, I want the players to get off to a good start, I want this organization to get off to a good start. I care deeply about it, what's in Rochester with our fans and how much they care about this team. It's like when I played. I'll be nervous but they're good nerves."