



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

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TONIGHT'S GAME: Syracuse @ Rochester

Five things to know as the Rochester Americans open their season

The Buffalo News

By: Amy Moritz

For the sixth straight year, the Rochester Americans will open the season at home, hosting the Syracuse Crunch in Blue Cross Arena at 7:05 p.m. Friday. Here's what you need to know:

1. The Amerks want to instill a winning culture. While the playoff drought in Rochester isn't as pronounced as it is for the parent Buffalo Sabres, the Amerks are looking to make the postseason for the first time since 2014. Since then they've endured three losing seasons. And the six-time Calder Cup champions haven't advanced past the first round of the playoffs since 2005.

While minor league hockey is often focused on development and depth, all in service of the parent club, winning can be a big part of that development.

"Once you become a team then everyone does well and everyone has success," new Amerks head coach Chris Taylor said. "I think that's the way we've got to approach it and the players have to approach it, because you can't do it by yourself. Especially the way we want to do it in this organization, it has to be as a team. If you don't play as a team, then it's not going to work for you as an individual. That's our whole culture. That's how we're going to do it. That's what it's all about.

2. The "old guys" are pretty important. There were some big off-season moves for the Amerks which brought veteran players to the team, including center Kevin Porter and defenseman Nathan Paetsch. The two will play a key role in establishing a new culture for the Amerks, one that looks at a team game and winning as a way to individual success.

Porter, 31, is making his third stint as the Amerks captain, who also wore the "C" in Rochester for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 seasons. Since then, Porter has won a Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins and spent time with their AHL club, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins.

Last season Paetsch, 34, won the Calder Cup with the Grand Rapids Griffins, where he was captain while the 29-year-old Fedun was an alternate captain for Rochester last season.

3. Speaking of the veterans, the Amerks are stacked. With the addition of 27-year-old defenseman Zach Redmond this week, the Amerks now have seven players with the AHL veteran designation. Per league rules, only five veterans can play in a game.

"We'll have to look at that and make sure we put guys where they're supposed to be, and the best players are going to play," Taylor said.

Redmond comes to Rochester from the trade the Sabres made which sent Nic Deslauriers to the Montreal Canadiens.

"He has a lot of experience in the back end," Taylor said of Redmond. "He's going to help our power play out with a right-hand shot. We're very happy to have him.

4. The young guys have plenty to prove. Forwards Justin Bailey and Nicholas Baptiste have been on the cusp of an NHL career. They were battling to make the Sabres roster out of training camp but both start the season with Rochester. Baptiste played 14 games for the Sabres last season while Bailey played in 32. They certainly provide depth for Buffalo, but their goal is not to be depth players. How they handle starting the season in the AHL will be a key moment in their development.

Also back in Rochester is Hudson Fasching, who missed major time last year with a groin injury. Look for Linus Ullmark to continue his development as the Amerks' starting goalie.

5. Welcome the Conacher Brothers. The Amerks opening night opponent features two Western New York collegiate connections. Cory Conacher and Shane Conacher both played at Canisius College. Cory has been at the pro game for a while, returning to North America last year to sign with the Tampa Bay Lightning. He was the leading point getter for the Crunch with 60 points in just 56 games, including a career-high 43 assists. Cory also added four points (one goal, three assists) in 11 games for the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Shane will make his Syracuse debut. He left Canisius after his junior season to sign with the Toronto Marlies only to have an injury delay the start to his season last year. He went to Tampa Bay's training camp on a professional tryout then signed with the Crunch.

2017-18 Amerks preview: Rochester seeking individual gains from team success

The Buffalo News

By: Amy Moritz

The saying goes that a rising tide lifts all boats.

When applied to minor-league sports, the theory transcribes this way – when the team wins, your individual stock will automatically rise. Opportunities increase not from production alone – the goals, assists, and other various forms of quantifying individual skill – but from the success of the team as a group.

Easy enough to understand on paper.

It's harder to apply in the midst of an American Hockey League season, when every player on the Rochester Americans roster longs to be with the Buffalo Sabres.

It's the universal task assigned to AHL coaching staffs, and the Amerks are hoping a culture change produces a change of fortune.

The playoff drought isn't as pronounced for the Amerks as it is for the parent Buffalo Sabres. Rochester last went to the postseason in 2014. Since then they've endured three losing seasons. And the six-time Calder Cup champions haven't advanced past the first round of the playoffs since 2005.

The Amerks roster is built to set them up for success as soon as possible. That includes signing four players who spent significant time with the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, the team which had the best record in the AHL last season. It's also the affiliate of the Pittsburgh Penguins, where new Sabres general manager Jason Botterill spent the last 10 years.

So the guys coming to Rochester understand the high expectations set by Botterill and the new culture that's descended upon the entire organization.

"We need to win here. It's going to be a little different than the last few years," veteran center Kevin Porter said. Porter played the last two seasons with Pittsburgh and Wilkes/Barre and was with Buffalo and Rochester from 2012-14.

Porter said Botterill "has high expectations this is going to be a good team. That's what he wanted. That's why he put this team together with the players he put in here. We have a great team on paper, but that doesn't mean anything. We need to come to work every day, and that's something he expects. You know, you're not going to win every game. You come to work and learn and I think we're going to have a good team."

And "team" seems to be the focus in word and deed in Blue Cross Arena these days.

Head coach Chris Taylor is ready to try and change the culture, a process that will admittedly take some time, but one that focuses on how team results can help individuals achieve their goals.

"Once you become a team then everyone does well and everyone has success," Taylor said. "I think that's the way we've got to approach it and the players have to approach it, because you can't do it by yourself. Especially the way we want to do it in this organization, it has to be as a team. If you don't play as a team, then it's not going to work for you as an individual. That's our whole culture. That's how we're going to do it. That's what it's all about.

"Individually you could score two goals and the team loses the game. That's not going to help you out. If you block two shots and we win, that's going to help you out in the long run. That's what we've got to get through to these guys and teach them. That's what we want and that's how you're going to thrive in this organization."

Hudson Fasching is one of the younger players looking to thrive in the new system. The forward, who made his NHL debut in 2016 after his season at the University of Minnesota ended, played just 47 total games last season (37 with the Amerks, 10 with the Sabres) due to a lingering groin injury.

He spent the summer working on mobility and flexibility, both to rehab the injury and better prepare his body for his second full season of pro hockey. Fasching said there is new energy and a more positive outlook throughout the organization. That can go a long way to creating a winning culture.

And while winning may help players boost their individual stock, Fasching noted there's another upside to a winning culture – it keeps hockey fun.

Winning "increases your value as an asset in the business aspect of it. That's always part of it, it's part of pro hockey," Fasching said. "Plus winning is just fun in general. So there's kind of both sides to it. I mean to have a winning team and a winning culture is huge."

Amerks name Kevin Porter Captain

The Buffalo News

By: Amy Moritz

While the Sabres have gone with a rotating alternate captain system for their leadership structure this season, the Rochester Americans have used the traditional route.

The Amerks named Kevin Porter captain while Nathan Paetsch and Taylor Fedun will be alternate captains.

"They're an extension of us," Rochester coach Chris Taylor said. "All players are, but most important is our captain and our assistant captains.

They lead the way in the dressing room, and they put a lot of internal pressure on the players to make them better. Just how they act and what they do around the dressing room will definitely lead by example. That's why we picked those three."

The 31-year-old Porter is making his third stint as the Amerks captain, who also wore the "C" in Rochester for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 seasons.

Since then, Porter has won a Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins and spent time with their AHL club, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins.

Last season Paetsch, 34, won the Calder Cup with the Grand Rapids Griffins, where he was captain while the 29-year-old Fedun was an alternate captain for Rochester last season.

The Amerks open the season at 7:05 p.m. Friday in Blue Cross Arena. They host the Syracuse Crunch, who feature former Canisius College standouts Cory Conacher and Shane Conacher.

Roth: Now the head coach, Chris Taylor still living the Rochester Americans' dream
Democrat & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth

When Chris Taylor joined the Rochester Americans organization for the 1999-2000 season, he wasn't just looking for another team to play for.

He was looking for a home.

Taylor's first seven years in professional hockey saw him play for seven teams in six cities in three different leagues. That kind of gypsy life can get to a guy, especially a young father raising a son with developmental challenges.

Nick Taylor was born with two cysts on his brain. He would undergo 20 surgeries by the time he was 6.

Told their son would never walk or talk and probably not live long, Chris and Lisa Taylor kept believing he'd be the exception to the rule. He'd be their miracle on ice. And he has been.

Now 21, Nick attends the Day Habilitation Program at Cobblestone Arts Center in Farmington, Ontario County, while living at home.

Providing a stable life for his son in a community noted for its expert, caring professionals was Chris Taylor's goal on his way to scoring a whole lot of goals.

"You don't think of those things, it's year by year," Taylor said about staying in one city. "But I believe much depends on how you represent yourself, how hard you're going to work to stay in one place. We have two children (daughter Samantha, 19, attends Brock University), one with special needs, and I always felt that once you set him up, you want to make sure you can stay here, and make it good for his life and that's what I did."

The Taylors, who live in Churchville, have called Rochester home for 19 years and for all but four of them, Chris has worked for the Amerks, nine over two stints as a Hall of Fame captain and three-time MVP, five as an assistant coach, and now this season as head coach.

Taylor, 45, makes what he calls his "surreal" head coaching debut Friday when the Amerks drop the puck on their 62nd season against the rival Syracuse Crunch at Blue Cross Arena at the Community War Memorial.

Surreal because even though Taylor has maintained a local address all this time, he worked the 2016-17 season for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton as his family stayed behind. He was convinced his long association with the parent Buffalo Sabres organization was finished.

But pro hockey is like the Rochester weather. Wait a minute, it will change.

A complete Sabres housecleaning resulted in the hiring of Wilkes-Barre/Scranton general manager and Pittsburgh Penguins assistant Jason Botterill, Taylor's former Rochester teammate, as Buffalo's new GM.

When Dan Lambert was let go, the dots quickly connected to Taylor. There was simply no better choice.

“I never thought I’d be coming back to Rochester as a coach. Even when Jason got hired, I never thought that,” said Taylor who with Botterill ranked 1-2 in Amerks scoring in 2002-03. “I was happy for him and I was happy where I was. When (Rochester GM) Randy Sexton approached me on the head coaching job, it was surreal. I couldn’t be happier. I’ve put a lot into this community and this community has given me a lot, helping me with my family. I’m just very excited. I want the utmost best for the Amerks whether I’m coaching here or not.”

Unlike his recent predecessors, Taylor may actually have the talent to return the shine to the Amerks’ shield.

Rochester’s AHL playoff drought is three seasons and it last won a playoff series in 2004-05, the record 112-point team that Taylor led in scoring. Any wonder the Sabres haven’t made the NHL playoffs six years running?

True to his word, Botterill is rebuilding Buffalo’s farm system horse by horse, hay bale by hay bale. In addition to adding 10 new players for the Sabres, making them faster and stronger, he and Sexton overhauled Rochester’s roster with 15 new faces

Some are old faces, like former Amerks Nathan Paetsch, 34, and Kevin Porter, 31, who will play the role of veteran leader Taylor once did so superbly.

Sprinkled in are scores of players with significant AHL experience, including three plucked from the roster of the Calder Cup champion Grand Rapids Griffins (Kyle Criscuolo, Conor Allen and Paetsch). Meanwhile, the additions in Buffalo squeezed Nick Baptiste, Justin Bailey, Alex Nylander and Linus Ullmark, the core of the Sabres' future, back to Rochester for at least the start.

And get this: There are just two rookies on the club, Brendan Guhle and C.J. Smith, meaning Amerks fans used to seeing glorified college hockey at times in recent years will be screaming “hallelujah” as the puck drops.

“The organization has to turn around with the young guys and you have to start from the bottom up,” said Taylor, who saw firsthand how two-time Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh made it work. “Jason recognizes that, which is why the big emphasis on Rochester. But to help the young guys out you need veterans. You need the peer pressure in the dressing room, people to help them out in certain situations. Jason and Randy have done an unbelievable job of finding quality people but these guys can also play the game just as good, so that’s the bonus.”

Having a GM devoted to the Amerks for the first time in seven years is also a bonus. Former Sabres GM Tim Murray needed to ask directions to Blue Cross.

As for how Taylor will do, nobody need worry. Yes, there could be a growing pain or two as a head coach but players should feel excited to skate for him, along with assistants Gord Dineen and Toby Petersen, two accomplished hockey men.

Should Taylor encounter a frustrated or pouting prospect, he might mention that most of his 1,297 professional games over a 19-year career were spent in the minor leagues. He's too humble to mention the Fred T. Hunt Memorial Award, given to an AHL player "best exemplifying sportsmanship, determination, and dedication to hockey" that's on his resume, so I will.

Craig Charron and Randy Cunneyworth are the only other Amerks to win the honor.

"Whatever you do in life, you give it your best and it doesn't matter where you are at," Taylor said, "be it high school, college, the NHL or the American League. If I was down here, I was working to be the best teammate I could be and trying to win a championship, to get recalled. That's the goal. But if I wasn't, I'm still working my butt off. That award meant a lot, absolutely."

That guy is behind the bench now, still working his butt off. And Friday there will be a lot of love in the building for the Taylors.

Out in the concourse will be Nick Taylor and his mom, selling T-shirts as spokespersons for the Best Buddies program, which creates one-on-one friendships and employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"It was tough going back and forth last year but it was important that everyone stayed," Chris Taylor said. "We love this community. It's home for us."

Nick Taylor was an exception to the rule. Just like his dad.

Sabres add another veteran defenseman for Amerks via trade

Democrat & Chronicle

By: Leo Roth

The Rochester Americans allowed 240 goals last season, tied for sixth most in the American Hockey League. All-Star goaltender Linus Ullmark faced a league-high 1,678 shots in the 55 games he played.

But help is on the way.

Having already added four new veteran defensemen for Rochester, the parent Buffalo Sabres added a fifth on Wednesday through a trade that sent forward Nicolas Deslauriers to the Montreal Canadiens in exchange for defenseman Zach Redmond.

Redmond was assigned to the Amerks, where he joins newcomers Nathan Paetsch, Andrew MacWilliam, Conor Allen and Barry Goers, other veterans with healthy AHL résumés. Returning defensemen include Taylor Fedun, who logged 27 games with the Sabres, Casey Nelson and prospect Brendan Guhle, a 2015 second-round draft pick who joins the team full time.

“It’s a big year for him and it’s important to get off to a good start,” coach Chris Taylor said of Ullmark. “Last year he had a lot of shots, but with our veteran defense right now, we don’t want to give up as many shots, and he can be in control so that he can play back-to-back games. Same with (Adam) Wilcox. Two good goalies and pushing each other and that’s what we want internally so they’re both ready to play.”

Along with organizational depth, Redmond can supply some scoring punch.

In 190 regular-season AHL games for various organizations, he has recorded 100 points on 29 goals and 71 assists. He has 4-15 — 19 in 35 playoff games. He has 38 points and is a plus-11 in 130 career games with three NHL teams.

The 6-2, 212-pounder split time between Montreal and the St. John’s IceCaps last season. The Traverse City, Michigan, native played for Team USA in the 2015 World Hockey Championships.

Deslauriers, 26, acquired in a March 2014 trade with Los Angeles, skated the past three seasons with the Sabres and played in 211 games overall (12-18 — 30). He had no goals and two assists in 42 games last season.

Deslauriers was a late training camp cut and was slated for Rochester after clearing waivers.