



# ROCHESTER AMERICANS

## DAILY PRESS CLIPS

*Friday, October 13, 2017*

*TONIGHT'S GAME: Utica @ Rochester*

## **Gionta begins practicing with Amerks to get ready for USA Hockey**

*Buffalo News*

By: John Vogl

Brian Gionta wants to represent the United States as best he can. Skating with the hometown Rochester Americans gives him an opportunity to stay in shape, and he started practicing with Tuesday.

The former Sabres captain also wants to avoid being a disruption. That's why he'll disappear on game days.

"Game days I'll try to be out of their space, out of their way," Gionta told reporters in Rochester after practice. "I grew up in the league that game days are a special thing, and you don't want to mess with guys' routines and get in the way at all. One of the things of not being a distraction is trying to stay out of their way."

The 38-year-old will likely represent the United States at the Olympics in February. He can't just step on the ice and compete against the best non-NHL players in the world, so he's going to work out in Rochester.

"It's a good thing for myself to stay in shape and to stay active and be practicing," Gionta said. "I think I can provide some things to the young guys in coming out and practicing and working with the young guys out there.

"I think they talked with their leadership group to make sure everything would be good, and I think the guys in the room have been great so far."

Gionta reiterated that he had interest from NHL teams, but the desire to stay local was a bigger factor. He has three kids ranging from elementary- to middle-school age. Not playing in the NHL also allows him to be considered for the Olympics.

"It's no secret I had some opportunities out there that with the family situation we weren't willing to make that change," Gionta said. "With three kids and the ages they're at, some things are tough, so we made some hard decisions.

With that come other opportunities and decisions to be made."

## **Sabres Prospects: Steve Moses embracing his new AHL adventure**

*Buffalo News*

By: Amy Moritz

It's a little bit of an unusual situation for Steve Moses.

At age 28, he's a veteran of five seasons as a professional hockey player. He's played 105 games in the KHL in Russia and 97 games in the Finnish league Liiga. Heck, Moses led the KHL in scoring in the 2014-15 season with 36 goals and 21 points in 60 games.

But in many ways, he's just like the rookies and young prospects on the roster of the Rochester Americans. He has yet to experience a full season of North American pro hockey. Yet to endure the grinding three-games-in-three-days road trips.

"I am slightly more experienced than a lot of players with the games I've played as a pro," Moses said. "But I really haven't come close to having a full season over here yet.

I have a lot to learn about the day-to-day lifestyle, how to take care of my body over the course of a longer season. I can learn from some of these guys, however I think I can help the young guys because I'm looking at the game a little differently."

The Steve Moses story goes like this: Four-year player for the University of New Hampshire who went to play in Finland. After leading the KHL in scoring, he signed a one-way deal with the Nashville Predators for the 2015-16 season. But training camp didn't go as planned and he was assigned to Nashville's AHL team in Milwaukee. After two goals in 16 games he decided to jet back to the KHL and play for St. Petersburg.

He spent last season again with St. Petersburg. Then Moses decided it was time to give North American hockey a try. This time, without the ego. This time, without money as the deciding factor.

"I've said this before in interviews that in my career I made a lot of decisions early on about money," Moses said. "When I first signed with Nashville, I expected immediate success. It didn't work out and I went out the door, by my own choice. Now, I'm ready to be patient and I think I'm off to a good start. I've got a lot of work to do."

The good start came in the first game with the Amerks when he scored on the power play in the team's 3-1 win over the Syracuse Crunch in Blue Cross Arena.

It's what Moses expects of himself and what he feels he can contribute to the team.

He's a goal scorer. That's his game. There will be some adjustment as he moves into the AHL and a North American style of hockey that relies more on the forecheck than the European game, which features more cross-ice and drop passes to create offense.

But just as the Buffalo Sabres and Rochester Americans are looking for a fresh start, so too is Moses. That fresh start mentality is what attracted him to sign with the organization over the

summer.

"It's intriguing as player," Moses said. "They're trying to make some cultural changes and I felt like this was a place where I could go and play well and earn an NHL chance at some point."

**Rochester Americans:** The Amerks reassigned forwards Vaclav Karabacek and Daniel Muzito-Bagenda to the Cincinnati Cyclones of the ECHL.

The Amerks, who won their first two games of the season, are home for their next three games. They host the Utica Comets at 7:05 p.m. Friday, host the Charlotte Checkers on Oct. 20 and host Utica, again, on Oct. 21.

### **WHL**

**Vojtech Budik (defense, Prince Albert Raiders):** Has one goal and one assist in six games with 14 shots on goal. The Raiders are 3-3-0.

**Brandon Hagel (forward, Red Deer Rebels):** It was a hot start for Hagel who has three goals and five assists through his first six games. But the Rebels have cooled off. After opening the season with three wins, Red Deer dropped its next three.

### **OHL**

**Cliff Pu (forward, London Knights):** Pu, who finished last season ranked eighth in the OHL in points with 86 (35 goals, 51 assists), is still looking for his first goal of the season. Through six games he has three assists, has taken 19 shots, and is a minus-seven.

**Austin Osmanski (defense, Peterborough Petes):** The East Aurora was traded from the Mississauga Steelheads to Peterborough and registered an assist in his first game with the Petes.

### **QMJHL**

**Vasily Glotov (forward, Shawinigan Cataractes):** Scored his first goal of the season on Oct. 7 in a 3-2 loss to the Cape Breton Screaming Eagles. On the season he has one goal, two assists, and is a minus-4.

### **NCAA**

**William Borgen (defense, St. Cloud State):** The junior picked up his first assist of the season as the Huskies opened the season with a 4-0 win over Minnesota State.

**Christopher Brown (forward, Boston College):** One of three captains for Boston College, Brown kicked off his junior year winning 15 of his 24 faceoffs as the Eagles opened the season with a 1-1 tie against Quinnipiac.

**Jacob Bryson (defense, Providence):** The sophomore had two assists as the Friars opened the season with a sweep of Miami (Ohio).

**Ivan Chukarov (defense, UMass):** Will be out for four to six weeks with an upper body injury. He enters his junior year at UMass with five career goals and 11 points over 72 games.

**Casey Fitzgerald (defense, Boston College):** A captain for Boston College, Fitzgerald picked up his first point of the season, an assist on the power play, as the Eagles opened with a 1-1 tie against Quinnipiac.

**Connor Hurley (forward, Minnesota):** After three seasons at Notre Dame, Hurley transferred to the University of Minnesota. He will sit out this season per NCAA transfer rules and have one year

of college eligibility left for the 2018-19 season. In 98 career games for the Fighting Irish, Hurley had 48 points (14 goals, 34 assists).

**Casey Mittelstadt (forward, Minnesota):** The Sabres first-round pick in 2017 picked up his first collegiate point, with a power-play assist in the Golden Gophers season-opening 4-3 overtime loss to Minnesota-Duluth. He then scored his first collegiate goal the next night as Minnesota blanked Union, 2-0.

**Brett Murray (forward, Penn State):** Murray was held off the scoresheet in the Nittany Lions opening trip to North Country. He was a minus-1 in a 2-1 loss at Clarkson.

**Philip Nyberg (defense, UConn):** Played one game as the Huskies split their opening weekend at Maine. Nyberg had one shot in a 4-3 overtime loss to the Black Bears.

**Judd Peterson (forward, St. Cloud State):** The senior registered his first assist and went 8-8 on faceoffs in the Huskies 4-0 season-opening win against Minnesota State.

**Linus Weissbach (forward, Wisconsin):** A native of Sweden, the 19-year-old freshman scored two goals in his first collegiate game, a 3-2 win over Michigan Tech. He picked up an assist as the Badgers then split a Big Ten series with Ohio State.

**Maxwell Willman (forward, Brown):** Begins his senior season when Brown opens at Yale on Oct. 27. As a junior, Willman scored 11 goals with 15 assists in 31 games, including four power play goals.

## Europe

**Rasmus Asplund (forward, Farjestad BK):** Has three goals and three assists in seven games.

**Marcus Davidsson (forward, Djurgardens):** Still looking for his first point after playing five games in the Swedish Hockey League. He has three goals and an assist in three games played with the Djurgardens Under-20 team in the SuperElit League.

**Oskari Laaksonen (defense, Ilves):** Has four assists and one goal in 14 games in the Under-20 league (Jr. A SM-Liiga).

**Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (goalie, HPK):** In two games with the Under-20 team, he has a 2.50 goals against average and a .924 save percentage. He has been on loan to LeKi, a second-tier league in Finland, posting a 1.75 goals against average and a .944 save percentage in four games.

**Victor Olofsson (forward, Frolounda HC):** Has two goals and an assist in six games in the Swedish Hockey League.

## **Amerks Send Karabacek, Muzito-Bagenda to ECHL**

*Buffalo News*

By: John Vogl

The Rochester Americans have sent two players to the ECHL, including former second-round pick Vaclav Karabacek.

Karabacek and fellow forward Daniel Muzito-Bagenda are off to Cincinnati, the Amerks announced Tuesday. Both were scratched for the Amerks' first two games.

The Sabres selected Karabacek with the 49th overall pick in the 2014 NHL Draft. As a first-year pro last season, the winger had three goals and eight points in 23 games with Rochester. He also recorded five goals and 11 points in nine games with Elmira, the Sabres' former ECHL affiliate.

Muzito-Bagenda has a one-year, American Hockey League contract. He had nine goals and 15 points in 61 games with Rochester last season.

The Amerks also welcomed former Sabres captain Brian Gionta to practice Tuesday. He is not on the roster but is staying in shape as he prepares to represent the United States in the 2018 Olympics.

## **Former Sabre Brian Gionta to skate with Amerks**

*Buffalo News*

By: Amy Moritz

Former Buffalo Sabres captain Brian Gionta was invited to practice with the Rochester Americans as the center prepares for international play.

"We were recently approached by Brian and his agent about him practicing regularly with Rochester as he prepares for international competition," Amerks general manager Randy Sexton said in a news release. "While Brian's role with the team will be limited to practicing only, we feel this can be a real win-win situation for both he and the Amerks organization."

The 38-year-old Gionta is a native of Rochester and has played in 1,006 NHL games with the Sabres, Montreal Canadiens and New Jersey Devils. In his 16-year pro career, he has 588 points (289 goals, 299 assists).

Gionta served as team captain in his last seven seasons, including his last three in Buffalo, where he notched 103 points. He became a free agent in the summer and did not sign a contract with any NHL team.

## **Brian Gionta to practice with Amerks with sights set on Olympic roster spot**

*Democrat & Chronicle*

By: Leo Roth

Brian Gionta has joined his hometown Rochester Americans, just not the way his many fans would hope.

Amerks general manager Randy Sexton announced early Monday night that Gionta, 38, the Greece native and former captain of the Montreal Canadiens and Buffalo Sabres, will join the team on a practice-only basis as he prepares for international play in hopes of making Team USA for the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

Gionta is scheduled to be on the ice at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at Blue Cross Arena at the Community War Memorial. Gionta and his agent, Pittsford's Steve Bartlett, recently reached out to the Amerks regarding the possibility of training with the team.

"The focus is on the Olympics and no immediate thought of playing games with Amerks," Bartlett said. "There is an international tournament in November where he will play for Team USA and that will help determine the (Olympic) team. Obviously, he still loves to play and was not lacking NHL opportunity. But this works family-wise."

After participating in five Winter Olympiads, the NHL, citing the negative impact of injuries and fatigue on its star players, has elected not to participate in PyeongChang, Korea Feb. 9-25.

Team USA's final 25-man roster will come from players from the college, American Hockey League and professional European ranks as well as anyone not under an NHL contract.

The United States will compete in the Deutschland Cup in Augsburg, Germany, from Nov. 11-12. The team is coached by Tony Granato. Assistant coach Chris Chelios was captain of the 2006 Olympic squad in Torino, Italy, on which Gionta played.

Gionta has also appeared in three world championships and two junior world championships in his storied career that has seen him win an NCAA title with Boston College and a Stanley Cup with the New Jersey Devils.

He has played in 1,006 NHL games over 16 seasons, recording 588 points as a right winger. He has served as team captain each of his last seven seasons.

He appeared in all 82 games for Buffalo in 2016-17, notching 15 goals and 35 points, but as a free agent was not signed by the Sabres' new coaching and management team. However, there is interest in hiring Gionta to work in coaching and player development when he does eventually retire.

Gionta had offers from other NHL teams, Bartlett said, but elected not to relocate his wife and family of three young children. Having a player of Gionta's stature around the Sabres' prospects is of great value, Sexton said.



“We were recently approached by Brian and his agent about him practicing regularly with Rochester as he prepares for international competition,” Sexton said. “While Brian’s role with the team will be limited to practicing only, we feel this can be a real win-win situation for both he and the Amerks organization.”

## **Is red, white and blue in Gionta's future, either Olympics or Amerks?**

*Democrat & Chronicle*

By: James Johnson

Believe it or not, there were conditions that had to be met before Brian Gionta began skating with the Rochester Americans.

After all, Gionta was not re-signed by the Buffalo Sabres this past off-season. He was told to find somewhere else to play by the Amerks parent club. There is a new group of people running the Sabres these days, and how many teams want people around from the old regime?

From the sound of it, however, this seems like this was a thought for no longer than the time it takes Gionta to score in an open net. Why wouldn't the Sabres and Gionta work out a trade of their own, letting the Greece native practice with the Amerks, his hometown team?

"Of course, he's a Stanley Cup champion," Amerks defenseman and longtime off-season training partner Nathan Paetsch said. "How many Stanley Cup champions are from Rochester?"

"I'm sure he's the only one, so he's a big deal."

Gionta has a place to stay in shape on his path that seems all but guaranteed to end with him on Team USA in South Korea in February for the Winter Olympics. The Sabres — more accurately their prospects — benefit from the leadership qualities Gionta is known for, including three seasons as Buffalo's team captain and an example of how to build double-digit year professional career.

"There was an overhaul in the organization," Gionta said. "So from top to bottom, it's all a part of the Sabres, and those were discussions (about training with the Amerks) that have happened over the course the last few weeks, and like I said, everybody had to be comfortable with it, and everybody has been.

"The professionalism of everybody, knowing and having the respect back and forth is what made this happen."

Amerks general manager Randy Sexton, who is part of the new Sabres regime, called the arrangement a "win-win" Monday, while delivering the news about fan-favorite Gionta.

"He needed some time to think about it," Sexton said. "(Amerks coach) Chris (Taylor) and I talked about it and thought that it was really important that it was full-blown commitment on both sides, not a casual or a part-time commitment.

"He's the consummate pro, he handles himself so well, you can tell that he's been around the game a long time. There were no issues for us, we just wanted to be sure that if he's going to be here, he was all in, and he wanted to make sure that he could be all in. He's all in, we're all in. It's all good."

Gionta, who has played in 1,006 NHL games during 16 seasons, finished with 35 points, including

15 goals, in 2016-17, largely on the Sabres' third line. He remained dependable enough to be asked to kill penalties and work on power plays, while participating in all 82 games.

"Yeah, he's still pretty good at hockey," Amerks winger C.J. Smith, 22, said.

There were offers for Gionta to go play in the NHL, according to the right winger with 588 career points and more than 1,000 games.

"It's no secret that I had some opportunities out there that in our family situation we weren't willing to make that change (relocate)," Gionta said.

"With three kids, at their ages they are at, some things are tough, so we made some hard decisions, and with that come other opportunities and decisions to be made.

"That's what this year has presented myself with. I'll try to have fun every day with it."

Gionta already is being asked if he can see himself in an Amerks sweater, playing in an American Hockey League game.

"This is the step I wanted to get into some action with some guys," Gionta said. "I've been skating with a skill guy in Buffalo, and I'll continue to skate with him on and off, but this brings that team dynamic, being a part of some different things. It's a good step to prepare myself."

While Gionta said nothing is guaranteed, the way seems clear toward a spot on the Team USA 25-man roster, unless he returns to the NHL. The NHL is sitting out these Olympics, Feb. 9-25, clearing the way for pros in the AHL and Europe, plus college players, to form the team coached by Tony Granato.

Gionta played in the 2006 Olympic Games in Torino, Italy, three world championships and two junior world championships. Performance in the Deutschland Cup, Nov. 11-12 in Augsburg, Germany, will help shape Team USA. Gionta plans to skate for the United States next month.

"I've had a couple of conversations with those guys (coaches), met with them a few times," Gionta said. "It's a want on my part, and I have to be prepared to try and make that team."

## **Brian Gionta begins practicing with the Amerks in preparation for 2018 Olympics**

*News 8 Now*

By: Dan Fetes

Brian Gionta's hockey career is not over, but it's come full circle.

The Rochester native remains an NHL free agent but has reached an agreement with the Rochester Americans to practice with the team to prepare for the upcoming 2018 Olympics.

"I think it's a good thing for myself to stay in shape and stay active and be practicing and I think I can provide somethings to the young guys," said Gionta.

New rules in the NHL does not allow any of their players to compete in the Olympics. Gionta has expressed interest in playing for Team USA come February.

Before Gionta began practicing with the team, he wanted to make sure it was okay with the Amerks leadership council.

"I didn't want to be a distraction. I didn't want to be something that was going to get in the way of these guys prepping for games. Those are some of the things we had to work through the last few weeks and try and figure out a way that would be both good for myself and good for these guys," added Gionta.

Rochester wasn't Gionta's only option to play hockey this year.

"It's no secret I had other opportunities to play. Family situation, we were not willing to make that change and with three kids the ages they are at some things are tough so we made some hard decisions and with that come other opportunities and decisions to be made."

The 38-year-old plans to play in an international tournament in mid November but says he's 'all-in' on helping the team. Amerks GM Randy Sexton said it's a win-win.

"Brian is the kind of person and professional who will handle it the right way and will deliver the right messages both through his actions and words to our team," added Sexton.

Gionta reached out to longtime friend and Amerks defenseman Nathan Paetsch for insight on working out with the team. Paetsch was excited to being on the former Stanley Cup champion.

"Its great for our young guys to have him around, he's a true pro and a great human being so for them to be around him everyday is just a bonus for our hockey team," said Paetsch.

"When I skated with Brian in the summers he treated everyday like it was game day for him and for our young guys its invaluable," smiled head coach Chris Taylor.

Gionta would not even begin to speculate if and when he would play a game for the Amerks, but when asked if the door to play with the Sabres again had closed.

Gionta said, "I don't think anything in this world is completely closed but as for right now, yeah."

## **Gionta says practice with Amerks is win-win**

*News 8 Now*

By: Thad Brown

Rochester Americans General Manager Randy Sexton announced today that Brian Gionta has been invited to practice with the team for an extended period of time in preparation for international play. Gionta is scheduled to join the Amerks on the ice beginning Tuesday, Oct. 10 for the team's 10:30 a.m. practice at The Blue Cross Arena.

“We were recently approached by Brian and his agent about him practicing regularly with Rochester as he prepares for international competition,” said Sexton. While Brian's role with the team will be limited to practicing only, we feel this can be a real win-win situation for both he and the Amerks organization.”

The 38-year-old Rochester native has appeared in 1,006 National Hockey League games with the Buffalo Sabres, Montreal Canadiens and New Jersey Devils over a 16-year professional career in which he has recorded 588 points (289+299) and 375 penalty minutes. Gionta has also compiled 68 points (32+36) over 112 career playoff appearances and was a member of the 2003 Stanley Cup-winning Devils.

Gionta has served as team captain in each of his last seven seasons, including the previous three in Buffalo. He totaled 103 points (40+63) in 230 career games with the Sabres from 2014-17, appearing in his 1,000<sup>th</sup> NHL game during the 2016-17 campaign.

## **Gionta says practice with Amerks is win-win**

**13 WHAM News**

By: Staff Report

Brian Gionta is with the Amerks, but he does not play for the Amerks. The long time NHL star from Greece is a free agent. His plan is to get himself ready to try to earn a spot on the US Olympic hockey team. For now, it works well for him to practice with and try to mentor some of the young players on this year's version of the Rochester Americans. At the moment there is no plan for Gionta to suit up and play in a game for the Amerks

## **Gionta says practice with Amerks is win-win**

**News 10 NBC**

By: Staff Report

Brian Gionta was on the ice with the Amerks for his first practice on Tuesday.

Monday, the team announced Gionta would join them for practices, but wouldn't play for the team. Instead, Gionta will use the ice time to prepare for the Olympics.

Still, wearing that signature shield brings back childhood memories playing for the Junior Amerks.

"It's been 25-plus years since I've worn that logo," Gionta said. "There was only one travel team and that's the team you played for so it's been a while since then. You know I think it's a good thing for myself to stay in shape and stay active and I think I can provide some things to the young guys by coming out here and practicing with them. It's a win-win for both sides and it just worked out well that way."

## **Brian Gionta to practice with Amerks ahead of Olympics**

**News 10 NBC**

By: Staff Report

Rochester native Brian Gionta will spend some time on the ice with the Amerks.

In a news release, Rochester Americans General Manager Randy Sexton says Gionta has been "invited to practice with the team for an extended period of time."

Gionta is preparing for the Olympics with the team. While he will practice with the team, it appears Gionta won't suit up with the team for game action.

"We were recently approached by Brian and his agent about him practicing regularly with Rochester as he prepares for international competition," writes Sexton. "While Brian's role with the team will be limited to practicing only, we feel this can be a real win-win situation for both he and the Amerks organization."

The 16-year NHL veteran played for the Sabres, Canadiens, and Devils over the course of his career.

## **GIONTA TO PRACTICE WITH AMERKS**

*TheAHL.com*

By: Staff Report

Rochester Americans general manager Randy Sexton announced Monday that Brian Gionta has been invited to practice with the team for an extended period of time in preparation for international play.

Gionta is scheduled to join the Amerks on the ice beginning Tuesday for the team's practice at the Blue Cross Arena.

The 38-year-old Rochester native has appeared in 1,006 National Hockey League games with the Buffalo Sabres, Montreal Canadiens and New Jersey Devils over a 16-year professional career in which he has recorded 588 points. Gionta has also compiled 68 points over 112 career playoff appearances and was a member of the 2003 Stanley Cup-winning Devils.

Gionta, who also played parts of the 2001-02 and 2004-05 seasons with the AHL's Albany River Rats, has served as team captain in each of his last seven seasons, including the previous three in Buffalo.



## **Vet Brian Gionta practicing in AHL with eye on U.S. Olympic team bid**

**ESPN**

By: Staff Report

Brian Gionta is turning to hockey's minor league Rochester Americans in his bid to land a spot on the U.S. men's Olympic team.

The Buffalo Sabres' American Hockey League affiliate announced the 16-year NHL veteran accepted an invitation to practice with the team starting Tuesday. Gionta, 38, is from Rochester and spent the previous three seasons as the Sabres captain.

After failing to land an NHL contract this offseason, Gionta elected to remain unsigned to pursue an opportunity to represent the U.S. at the Winter Games in South Korea in February. The league is forgoing sending players to the Olympics next year in a decision that bars all players -- including minor leaguers -- signed to an NHL contract from competing.

Americans general manager Randy Sexton said Gionta's role will be limited to practice. Sexton called it "a real win-win" for Gionta and the Americans because of the veteran experience the player can provide.

Gionta won a Stanley Cup with the 2003 New Jersey Devils. He also played for the Montreal Canadiens, and has 289 goals and 299 assists in 1,006 career NHL games.

A majority of the U.S. team will be made up of players currently competing in Europe. The roster will start taking form after the team competes in a three-game Deutschland Cup tournament in Germany in mid-November.

## **Gionta to skate with Amerks, prepare for international competition**

***WIVB***

By: Nick Filipowski

After going unsigned heading into the season, former Buffalo Sabres captain and Rochester native Brian Gionta will still get to suit up for his hometown team in some capacity.

The Amerks on Monday announced the 38-year-old winger was invited to skate with the team during practices as he prepares for international competition.

“We were recently approached by Brian and his agent about him practicing regularly with Rochester as he prepares for international competition,” Amerks GM Randy Sexton said in a statement. “While Brian’s role with the team will be limited to practicing only, we feel this can be a real win-win situation for both he and the Amerks organization.”

After spending the first seven years of his career with New Jersey, Gionta then went to Montreal where he was named captain ahead of his second season with the club.

In the summer of 2014, Gionta signed with the Sabres.

In 1,006 career NHL games, the winger has 289 goals and 588 career points.

## **Brian Gionta turns to AHL Americans in US Olympic team bid**

*The Virginian Pilot*

By: John Wawrow

Brian Gionta is turning to hockey's minor-league Rochester Americans in his bid to land a spot on the U.S. men's Olympic team.

The Buffalo Sabres' American Hockey League affiliate announced the 16-year NHL veteran accepted an invitation to practice with the team starting Tuesday. The 38-year-old Gionta is from Rochester and spent the previous three seasons as the Sabres captain.

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## **Is Brian Gionta Planning for the Olympics?**

*Boston College Eagles Community*

By: Laura Berestecki

This evening, the Rochester Americans announced that Brian Gionta will be joining the team to practice “for an extended period of time in preparation for international play.” The wording of the announcement has us thinking that the former BC star is likely preparing for the 2018 Winter Olympics. Let’s break it down...

The NHL announced earlier this year that they will not be allowing current NHL players to play in the Olympics. This means Team USA and Team Canada in particular will be made up of AHL/ECHL players, college players, and/or recent retirees. Gionta, who captained the Buffalo Sabres for the past 3 seasons, does not have a professional contract for the 2017-18 season. (The Amerks are the Sabres’ AHL affiliate and are located in Gionta’s hometown.)

If you are creating a team for international play that is largely made up of young players, having a veteran leader of Gionta’s caliber would be a huge plus. Gionta had a modest but respectable 35 points in 82 games last season, and has played in over 1,000 NHL matches. He would not put up huge numbers for Team USA, but would be good for a few goals. In recent seasons, he has gotten particularly good at knocking in the gritty rebound goals that might not be pretty but can make all the difference.

The alternative to preparing for an Olympic appearance is preparing for a European contract. But why would Gionta need to practice in the US to join a team that has already started its season (as most European leagues have)? Plus, Gionta is a married father of three young children - not ideal for moving overseas when you have already made a significant amount of money from hockey.

Between the wording of the statement and his status as an unsigned veteran player, all signs point to Gionta getting ready to try out for the 2018 Olympic Team.