



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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TONIGHT'S GAME: Toronto @ Rochester

Amerks hire former Saints, Pelicans exec as VP of business operations

Buffalo News

By: John Vogl

The Rochester Americans went to the Big Easy for a big hire.

The Amerks have announced Rob Minter will serve as the team's vice president of business operations. He will oversee the day-to-day business activities of the Buffalo Sabres' minor-league club.

Minter arrives in Rochester after three years as the director of premium seating for the NFL's New Orleans Saints and the NBA's New Orleans Pelicans. He organized and managed a staff that focused on the sale and retention of premium products for both franchises.

"I'm tremendously excited to join such a longstanding and historic organization like the Rochester Americans," Minter said. "I look forward to getting to know our loyal season-ticket holders, corporate partners and the great hockey fans we have in the city of Rochester."

The Virginia native has also worked in the American Hockey League for the Lake Erie Monsters, overseeing their ticket operations.

The Amerks' position opened in October after the organization let go of Rob Kopacz. He had been the vice president of business operations since July 2011.

Amerks Extend Point Streak to 10 Games

Buffalo News

By: Staff Report

Rookie star C.J. Smith scored his ninth goal of the season and the Rochester Americans extended their point streak to 10 games with a 3-1 triumph over the Utica Comets in their American Hockey League game Wednesday night at Blue Cross Arena in Rochester.

Smith's goal, his 27th point of the season, gave the Amerks a two-goal cushion at 1:17 of the third period. Seth Griffith and Zach Redmond assisted. Griffith extended his point streak to six games.

Utica scored the first goal of the game when Michael Cercone tallied at 1:27 of the opening period.

Steve Moses tied it for Rochester at 17:33 of the same period with assists by Sahir Gill and Casey Nelson.

Smith and Nicholas Baptiste assisted on Stuart Percy's goal that put the Amerks in front, 2-1, at 6:50 of the second period.

Linus Ullmark made 29 saves for Rochester as his record in goal improved to 12-3-3 for the season.

With 36 points, Rochester (15-5-3-3) moved to within four points of the Toronto Marlies, who lead the AHL's North Division.

Rochester will be home to the Marlies (20-5-0-0) on Friday night.

For C.J. Smith, the points are impressive, the vision is 20/20

Buffalo Star

By: Kevin Oklobzija

You watch C.J. Smith handle the puck and it's very evident that the Rochester Americans rookie left winger has exceptional skill.

You watch him shoot the puck and you know right away that he not only sees that tiny open space between the goalie's arm and body, or the goalie's elbow and the post, but he can hit it.

You see him charge into the corner for a loose puck and you know he's not worried about the consequences of the impending collision.

But what's really impressive in Smith's game: what he sees.

The undrafted free-agent signee by the Buffalo Sabres in March has displayed quite the knack for finding not the obvious outlet for a pass but the most dangerous option.

"Some guys just have that little extra hockey IQ," Amerks goalie Linus Ullmark said on Wednesday night, when he made 29 saves in the Amerks' 3-1 victory over the Utica Comets.

There's more to it than just the vision, however. Besides seeing that player sliding in from the back side or darting between two defenders toward the net, he's also able to get him the puck.

Thus, his team-leading 18 assists and 25 points. The 23-year-old from Des Moines, Iowa, ranks fifth in the American Hockey League in points and assists, and is the leading rookie scorer.

The Amerks haven't had a point-a-game player lead the team in scoring since Clarke MacArthur in 2006-07 (63 points in 51 games). They haven't had a rookie lead the AHL in scoring since Todd Simon in 1992-93.

"We didn't know he'd be that good," said Amerks coach Chris Taylor, whose club improved to 15-5-3-3, the fourth-best points-earned percentage in the AHL (not including the late outcome of the Stockton at San Diego game). "He's an older rookie (coming out of UMass-Lowell) so that helps him out, but he's playing really well."

It has also helped to play with quality linemates. He has been with Kyle Criscuolo most of the season. Nick Baptiste was on the right wing on Wednesday and the trio produced the go-ahead and insurance goals.

Smith set up Stuart Percy's tiebreaking goal 6:50 into the second period. He hit Percy in motion in the left circle with a perfect pass from the right-wing boards near the point. Then just 1:17 into the third period, Smith was alone in the left circle to fire home the long rebound of Seth Griffith's point shot on a power play.

“He’s definitely got vision,” Taylor said, “but the other part of that is if he gets a pass, he can score.”

The vision, Smith said, came from his youth-hockey days. He was always good enough to play with the older kids.

“I was always a smaller player going up against older guys and I had to see the game better,” he said. “I just learned to see the ice better as a kid.”

What Taylor really likes, though, is Smith’s compete level. He wants the puck and he’ll go get it.

“He’s not scared to go touch the puck first in the corner,” Taylor said. “He’ll go in there and be dirty and not be afraid to take a hit. He knows he’s going to get hit but he’s going to make a play with the puck.”

What Smith doesn’t possess is blazing speed. So can he play in today’s NHL?

“No problem,” Taylor said, “because he’s smart. His smarts make him quick.”

And his skills make him dangerous.

“He can do all those things at a high speed,” Ullmark said. “Guys like Sidney Crosby and John Tavares, they’re not slowing down when they’re going down the wing. Neither is he. And if he can keep it up he’ll have a good chance at the show.”

Amerks Point Streak Reaches 10 With Win Over Utica

C&C WorldWide

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans (15-5-3-3) allowed an opening goal just 1:27 after the opening faceoff to the Utica Comets (10-11-3-1) Wednesday night before 3,941 fans at the Blue Cross Arena, but responded with three unanswered goals to push their season-long point-streak to 10 straight games.

With the 3-1 win, the 10-game point streak is Rochester's longest since the team tied a franchise record with 11 straight wins from Oct. 12 to Nov. 10 during the 2009-10 season. The Amerks have also notched points in 16 of their last 17 games and have only lost twice in regulation dating back to Nov. 1.

Rookie C.J. Smith notched his sixth multi-point (1+1) performance of the season as he scored his team-best ninth goal of the campaign and increased his point total to 27 on the year. Steve Moses and Stuart Percy completed the scoring for Rochester while goaltender Linus Ullmark improved to 12-3-3 on the slate. The Swedish netminder shows a 9-0-3 in his last 12 starts and hasn't suffered a regulation loss since Oct. 28.

Second-year forward Michael Carcone tallied his third of season for the Comets as netminder Thatcher Demko, who entered the contest with a 3-0-1 record in his four starts against the Amerks in the head-to-head series, took the loss in the blue paint.

The Comets opened the scoring on the night just 87 seconds into the contest as Carcone jammed the puck behind Ullmark to give Utica an early 1-0 lead. The Amerks responded to even the game with 2:27 left in the opening period with Moses' seventh goal of the season. Sahir Gill and Casey Nelson each were awarded the helpers on the tally.

"We knew we could back from the early deficit," said Ullmark after allowing the Utica goal. "We have a good team and we know we are never really out of a game."

As the two North Division rivals emerged from the intermission break, Percy fired a shot just under the cross-bar from the left face-off dot to give Rochester a 2-1 advantage with 13:10 left in the second period. Nick Baptiste and Smith picked up the assists on Percy's third goal of the campaign.

The Amerks carried a 2-1 lead into the dressing room along with a 28-18 shot advantage after 40 minutes of play.

Rochester took its largest lead of the night 1:17 into the third period as Smith buried a rebound opportunity past the outstretched glove of Demko. The initial power-play shot came from Seth Griffith, who pushed his point-streak to six games with the primary assist. Zach Redmond also was credited with an assist and shows six points (3+3) over his last four games.

Despite the Amerks being whistled for a tripping penalty with just under four minutes to play and the Comets pulling Demko for a six-on-four advantage, Ullmark made timely saves to preserve the 3-1 win.

“Linus played really well for us tonight,” said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. “We had some timely goals and some big saves by Ullmark and those two things helped us get the win tonight.”

The top two teams in the Eastern Conference will go head-to-head on Friday, Dec. 15 when the Amerks host the first-place Toronto Marlies in a North Division showdown at The Blue Cross Arena. The 7:05 p.m. matchup will be the first of eight scheduled meetings between the two teams this season and will be carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM ESPN Rochester.

Amerks Thump Utica As Point Streak Reaches 10 Games

Rochester First

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans (15-5-3-3) allowed an opening goal just 1:27 after the opening face-off to the Utica Comets (10-11-3-1) Wednesday night at The Blue Cross Arena, but responded with three unanswered goals to push their season-long point-streak to 10 straight games.

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Amerks Drop Comets 3-1

CNY

By: Lucas Frankel

The Comets' winless streak reaches four.

After Michael Carcone gave the Comets a 1-0 lead just 87 seconds into Wednesday night's game against the Amerks, Rochester responded with three unanswered goals to get the 3-1 win.

Steve Moses tied the game at 1 with 2:27 remaining in the opening frame, and then Stuart Percy gave the Amerks a lead they wouldn't relinquish in the second period.

C.J. Smith then extended the lead to 3-1 on a power-play goal early in the third. Linus Ullmark did the rest from there for Rochester who picks up their first victory over Utica in five tries.

The Comets will return to action on Friday night at the Aud against Binghamton.

Ullmark, Rochester Halt Utica Comets

Observer-Dispatch

By: Ben Birnell

The Utica Comets had the Rochester Americans' number in the first two months of the season.

The Comets had victories in four of five meetings against their North Division rivals. That success didn't carry over to Wednesday's matchup, however.

The Americans scored three consecutive goals and got a solid start from goaltender Linus Ullmark to top the Comets 3-1 at Blue Cross Arena in Rochester. The teams meet again Saturday in Utica.

The result ended a three-game streak in which the teams needed at least overtime to decide a winner. It was the Comets' first loss in regulation against the Amerks this season.

Ullmark turned aside 25 shots for his AHL-best 12th win of the season and rookie standout C.J. Smith had a goal and assist for the Amerks (15-5-3-3, 36 points), who have earned at least a point in 10 straight games and a firm hold on second place in the North.

The Comets (10-11-3-1, 24 points, sixth place in the North) are winless in their last four games. It was the first time the Comets lost in regulation on the road since Nov. 15, snapping a five-game point streak.

Mike Carcone scored early the first period for the Comets, who have totaled nine goals in the last five games since a 7-6 overtime loss to Bridgeport on Dec. 1. Thatcher Demko finished with 31 saves and is 8-6-3 this season.

The teams traded goals in a back-and-forth and penalty-free opening 20 minutes.

The Comets needed little time getting the game's first goal. On the play, Carcone picked up the puck behind Rochester's and managed to stuff the puck past Ullmark's pad 1:27 in on the team's first shot of the game. Wacey Hamilton and Cole Cassels had assists on Carcone's third goal of the season.

Utica's lead lasted until 2:27 left in the period. The Amerks tied it when Steve Moses' one-timer from the high slot got past Demko, who had 11 saves in the period.

Rochester used that momentum to control much of a slow-moving period, when they outshot Utica 16-10.

The Amerks got one of those shots to go with 13:10 remaining in the period. Stuart Percy made it 2-1 with a quick shot from the bottom of the left circle over Demko's shoulder.

The Comets had a few solid chances near the end of the period — Hamilton and Carcone had back-to-back attempts and Cam Darcy had good scoring opportunity in front soon after — but were turned away by Ullmark.

Rochester closed out the scoring less than two minutes into the third. The Comets were called for the first penalty of the game and the Amerks answered 37 seconds into the advantage when Smith buried for his ninth goal of the season.

The Comets got their only power play of the game with 3:51 remaining when Moses was called for tripping. They Comets pulled Demko for an extra attacker — and a 6-on-4 advantage — but weren't able to solve Ullmark again.

Notes: Cam Darcy had a six-game point streak end Wednesday. ... Hamilton left in the third period with an upper-body injury, according to the team. ... Darren Archibald, Jaime Sifers, Philip Holm and Yan-Pavel Laplante each missed the game with injuries

Culture change making an impact for the Rochester Americans

Buffalo News

By: Amy Moritz

The difference in results has been impressive. Amazing, really.

The Rochester Americans have points in their last nine games, their longest streak since a record-tying 11 straight wins from Oct. 12 to Nov. 10 during the 2009-10 season. Rochester is now six points behind the first-place Toronto Marlies in the North Division and in third place in the Eastern Conference standings. It's bringing new hope around Blue Cross Arena for a franchise that hasn't made the playoffs the last three years and hasn't made it out of the first round since 2005.

On the ice, the Amerks have been playing with consistency while depth throughout the lineup has allowed the team to roll four lines and go six deep at the blue line.

Off the ice, the Amerks have quickly created a new culture, one that goes beyond hockey. One that is demonstrating that success is not a zero-sum game.

"I'm surprised at how well our culture has changed and how quickly it's changed in the dressing room," said Amerks coach Chris Taylor. "The staff and players are talking and enjoying each other. We know we're here for a reason and the end result is we're here to win and develop and have fun as a family. Everyone is buying in. Everyone wants to come in and see each other and see what's going on in other people's lives, not just our hockey lives. We care about each other outside of the game. That makes us a stronger team."

And that has translated into success in games. Sure, this season in particular has provided ample opportunity for players to earn call-ups to the Buffalo Sabres as the parent NHL club has struggled mightily, and somewhat unexpectedly. But nobody has been focused on the potential opportunity. That's not the culture in Rochester these days. Instead, the family atmosphere allows for players to grow and develop while the internal competition reinforces the need to bring their best every single day.

"With our people and our dressing room, it's about caring about each other," Taylor said. "They really want to win for each other. Everyone has a big picture. Everyone wants to be in the NHL. But when we're here, we're working hard. It's a family. We're trying to win for each other. There's internal pressure and internal competition. We want to compete daily, not just against another team but with each other, pushing each other to get better. Who wants to score that next goal? Who wants to step up on the PK and do a great job for us? Who wants to block a shot for us to make sure we get a win? Internally we're doing a really good job with that."

The rookies in particular have been able to shine in this culture. Forward C.J. Smith leads all active AHL rookies in scoring with 25 points in 25 games. His 17 assists tie him for sixth in the league. Brendan Guhle ranks second in scoring among AHL rookie defensemen with 15 points (five goals, 10 assists), all of which have come in his last 20 games.

The depth of the team has allowed them to make rookie mistakes without a loss in confidence. As others pick them up, they learn from the mistake instead of suffering a setback.

"The biggest thing is they're improving every day and not taking steps backward," Taylor said of Smith and Guhle. "They're still making young mistakes. That's part of the process of developing, but how are they going to respond to that when they're out there? They've had good responses and are really helping our team."

The Amerks are getting something the Sabres wish they had -- scoring from the blue line. Three of Rochester's top five scorers are defensemen, all with 15 points -- Guhle, Zach Redmond and Stuart Percy.

Backstopping it all is Linus Ullmark, who played his 100th game as an Amerk over the weekend. In his last 11 games, Ullmark is 8-0-3 and has not lost in regulation since Oct. 28. He leads the AHL in saves (508) and ranks second in wins (11) and minutes played (1,002). But what makes him a crucial element to the Amerks' culture aren't his numbers but rather his approach to the game.

"His professionalism around the rink, especially for practice and how he gets prepared for a game is so great," Taylor said. "He so badly wants to win. He's not worried about his goals against or his save percentage. He's just worried about winning first and foremost. He gives us a chance to win every game. He doesn't like to lose and that's a great mentality."

Rochester hosts the Utica Comets at 7:05 p.m. Wednesday in Blue Cross Arena then hosts the Toronto Marlies at 7:05 p.m. on Friday. The Amerks travel to Utica to play the Comets at 7 p.m. Saturday in Adirondack Bank Center.

WHL

Vojtech Budik (defense, Prince Albert Raiders): Has two goals and nine assists in 31 games for the Raiders. Was named to the Czech Republic's preliminary roster for the IIHF World Junior Men's Championship that will be in Buffalo beginning on Dec. 26.

Brandon Hagel (forward, Red Deer Rebels): Has 23 points in 27 games for the Rebels, including seven goals and 16 assists. Has one power-play goal.

OHL

Cliff Pu (forward, London Knights): On a four-game point streak with two goals and four assists over that span. He had a three-point night (one goal, two assists) in a 6-2 win over the Erie Otters on Dec. 10. For the season has 39 points in 29 games (14 goals, 25 assists).

Austin Osmanski (defense, Peterborough Petes): The East Aurora native has one goal and 11 assists through 30 games.

QMJHL

Vasily Glotov (forward, Shawinigan Cataractes): Held off the scoresheet in his last four games. On the season has 12 goals and five assists in 29 games.

NCAA

William Borgen (defense, St. Cloud State): The junior has one goal and seven assists in 15 games as the Huskies are ranked No. 1 in the latest USCHO.com poll at 12-2-1 overall.

Christopher Brown (forward, Boston College): Scored his fifth goal of the season in a 5-2 loss to Northeastern on Dec. 9. Has 10 points in 18 games

Jacob Bryson (defense, Providence): The sophomore has one goal and 11 assists in 18 games for the Friars.

Ivan Chukarov (defense, UMass): Missed the first month of the season with an upper body injury. Has three assists in eight games.

Casey Fitzgerald (defense, Boston College): Has three goals and six assists in 17 games. Has gone without a point in his last five games.

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 extended his point streak to five games with an assist in each game at Ohio State. The Gophers lost both those games and have dropped their last three but remain ranked 10th in the nation. Mittelstadt has five goals and 12 assists in 19 games.

Brett Murray (forward, Penn State): The sophomore has one goal and four assists in 16 games. Penn State is ranked 15th.

Philip Nyberg (defense, UConn): Has two goals and one assist in 11 games.

Judd Peterson (forward, St. Cloud State): The senior has one goal and nine assists in 15 games for the Huskies, ranked No. 1 in the latest national poll.

Linus Weissbach (forward, Wisconsin): Was on a six-game point streak that ended Dec. 9 in a 6-2 loss to Notre Dame. Has five goals and nine assists for the No. 13 Badgers.

Maxwell Willman (forward, Brown): The senior has one goal and four assists in nine games.

Europe

Rasmus Asplund (forward, Farjestad BK): In 26 games in the SHL, he has four goals and 12 assists.

Marcus Davidsson (forward, Djurgardens): Has two goal and seven assists in 23 games in the Swedish Hockey League. He has three goals and an assist in three games played with the Djurgadens Under-20 team in the SuperElit League. Was named to Sweden's preliminary roster for the world juniors.

Oskari Laaksonen (defense, Ilves): Has three goals and eight assists in 33 games in the Under-20 league (Jr. A SM-Liiga).

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (goalie, LeKi): Has a 2.82 goals-against average and a .914 save percentage for LeKi, a second-tier league in Finland. Was named to Finland's preliminary roster for the world juniors.

Victor Olofsson (forward, Frolounda HC): Has 15 goals and nine assists in 24 games the Swedish Hockey League.

Amerks on a hot streak, collect points in 16 of the last 17 games

Rochester First

By: Dan Fetes

Before the season started, Sabres GM Jason Botterill, stressed the importance of rebuilding the Amerks.

He said that winning is part of development and that his plan was to build two teams, one in Buffalo and one in Rochester that would be highly competitive.

Well he's got one of them right so far.

The Amerks have collected at least a point in 16 out of their last 17 games, including nine straight. That's the longest point streak for the team in seven years.

Rochester is in 2nd place in the North Division, and they say they're just having fun.

"Come to the rink everyday and everyone's smiling, none is down, its just a good environment to be in," said Brendan Guhle. "All the trainers and all the staff is excited to be there and the coaches are having a blast too."

"There's no negativity in our dressing room," said Head Coach Chris Taylor. "We keep that out. That's what it's all about, when you have a positive energy that creates a winning attitude."

"I think when you're having fun and playing hockey and the team is close, that's when you start having success and vice versa I think winning also helps bring the team closer together too," said C.J. Smith.

Sabres' Rodrigues answers the call after promotion

Buffalo News

By: John Vogl

Evan Rodrigues is doing something that Buffalo Sabres call-ups simply don't do.

He's producing.

In his first three games since arriving from Rochester, Rodrigues has two goals and three points. That's an impressive start anywhere. In Buffalo, it's especially noteworthy.

The shuttle from Rochester to Buffalo has been busy since the start of the 2015-16 season. The Sabres have called up 17 forwards, giving them a combined 227 games.

They've responded with just 24 goals and 21 assists.

If Rodrigues can extend his point streak to three straight games Tuesday when Buffalo hosts Ottawa, he'll become the first recalled player to do so during the three-season slump.

"For my first three games of the year here, it's nice to step in and play good minutes right away," Rodrigues said Monday in KeyBank Center. "That definitely gives me a pat on the back and a little bit more confidence to just go out, play my game and believe in myself. If I play the right way, good things will happen."

After failing to record a point in his season debut, Rodrigues earned an assist Friday in Chicago and scored both goals during Sunday's 3-2 overtime loss in St. Louis. He centered for Scott Wilson and Sam Reinhart and skated 16:29, including 4:22 on the power play. He's on the penalty-kill unit, too.

"Evan's been terrific since he's been back," coach Phil Housley said. "It's good to have him down the middle contributing, more than just scoring goals."

Scoring matters, though, especially for guys coming up from Rochester. They're not expected to take over the top line, but any production is nice.

Instead, the Sabres have seen little to no offense from the likes of Cal O'Reilly (three goals, five assists in 31 games), William Carrier (five goals, three assists in 41 games), Justin Bailey (four goals, three assists in 39 games), Tim Schaller (one goal, two assists in 17 games), Dan Catenacci (no points in 11 games) and Kyle Criscuolo (no points in eight).

Rodrigues is on the list, too. After starting last season with the Amerks, he recorded four goals and two assists in 30 games with Buffalo.

The 24-year-old looks like a new man this year.

"I have a lot more confidence this year compared to last year," Rodrigues said. "They're giving me a good chance, and I just have to take full advantage of it and continue to believe in myself and continue to put in the work. If I do that, I think I'll have a good year."

Rodrigues had a chance to make the opening-night roster, but it disintegrated when he suffered a broken hand Sept. 22 during the third preseason game. He finally opened the season Nov. 17 in Rochester, and he recorded five goals and 10 points in eight games.

The Sabres recalled him last week, and the production continued.

"It took a couple games just to get control of my hand, get the strength back," Rodrigues said. "But once I got the first couple under my belt, I felt great. It felt like I was dominating, controlling the play and controlling the puck.

"I'm just trying to translate that into here, and I think I've done a pretty good job of that so far."

He's already tied for eighth on the team in goals, though that's an indictment of the team as a whole. The Sabres are still last in the NHL in scoring at 2.13 goals per game.

"We'd like to have more production from everybody," Housley said.

That includes Rodrigues' fellow call-up, Hudson Fasching. The winger has no points in four games and skated a team-low 6:47 against St. Louis.

"Hudson had a really good spark for us in Colorado using his speed, using his size, the physical element to his game," Housley said. "He just got a little bit away from that, and as a result his minutes went down.

"For him, it's just being that net-front presence and being tough to play against down low, getting his body over the puck and wearing other teams down in their own zone.

"Hudson's a terrific person, a really good competitor. It's everything we want in Buffalo, and he's going to get another opportunity."

Amerks broadcaster Don Stevens talks of culture and confidence in Rochester

HockeyBuzz

By: Michael Pachla

If you noticed a difference in the way the Buffalo Sabres played on Tuesday night in Colorado, you weren't seeing things. Heading into the matchup the Sabres were in a serious 1-9-2 rut that included being shut out three times in a row (a franchise record for futility) and goal-less drought that lasted almost four full games in length.

Frustrated with the way his team was playing, GM Jason Botterill shook things up by waiving veteran forward Matt Moulson and his \$5 million salary and trading for forward Scott Wilson, a player he was quite familiar from his time in Pittsburgh. In addition, center Evan Rodrigues got the call from Rochester to join Hudson Fasching who had been called up from the Amerks the prior game.

None of Wilson, Rodrigues or Fasching scored a point in the game, but they had an impact in how the team looked as a whole. Buffalo played a fast, north/south game up and down the lineup and were hard on the puck which eventually lead to a 4-2 victory. Two of the Sabres goals were scored at even strength, compared to zero for the Avalanche, one was scored short-handed and the last was into an empty net. It's the type of game that Botterill and coach Phil Housley had wanted to see their team play more often and it may have been their best 60-minute performance in a winning effort this season.

When Botterill took the job this past April, the Sabres organization was in need of a culture change. He had two problems, one in Buffalo and the other in Rochester. Both teams were flailing and on July 1, the first time GM went to work to stabilize Rochester. He signed five players ticketed for Rochester that day including Kevin Porter, who had spent the previous two seasons with him in the Pittsburgh Penguins organization.

When Botterill came to Buffalo, he brought in Randy Sexton as his assistant GM, and the general manager of Rochester, as well as Chris Taylor to be his head coach, both of whom came from the Penguins. Sexton followed Botterill's lead with Porter and signed more 'Baby Pens' to the Amerks in an effort to help stop a losing culture in Rochester using an influx of personnel that knew success and what it took to get there.

"[The Sabres] came in with Botterill and Randy Sexton and the rest of the group," long-time Amerks broadcaster Don Stevens told me, "and the number-one focus was to change the culture. As Sexton said," continued Stevens, "it's a lot easier to change the culture here (at the AHL-level) than it is up-top because of salaries and all the different things that go on up above. You can't do it as rapidly (in the NHL) as you can here.

"I think we've seen a pretty good change in culture here.

The results have been very good so far as the culture change is taking hold. The Amerks are 12-5-5 on the season and sit in second place in the North Division after finishing near the bottom of the league for the prior three seasons.

Porter, whom Botterill knew well from his time in Pittsburgh and whom he spoke very highly of, is the captain and leads the charge of 'Baby Pens'. Sexton, who was Pittsburgh's director of amateur scouting prior his role in the Sabres organization, continued by bringing in four more former Pens-centers Sahir Gill and Adam Krause, defensemen Stuart Percy and Barry Goers.

In addition, the Amerks brought in players like Kyle Criscuolo, Nathan Paetsch and Connor Allen, all of whom were on last year's Calder Cup Champion Grand Rapids Griffins (DET) team.

It's a good mix of players overall. And when you add in young players and rookies from the Sabres pipeline it creates something the team hasn't had in a while, depth, an aspect that's rather crucial to the success of an AHL team.

The Sabres went through a rash of injuries on the blueline earlier this season and have dressed 11 defensemen so far. Although injuries haven't hit the forward ranks as hard, the Sabres did call up a number of forwards from Rochester including Criscuolo for eight games and Justin Bailey for seven. Seth Griffith looked to be ticketed for Rochester out of camp but stayed in Buffalo and played in 18 games for the Sabres. It's the nature of the beast. "But the difference (for the Amerks,)" said Stevens, "is that there's enough depth here, which we haven't had in the past decade or so, to weather the storm.

The AHL is a tough business in that they're in it to win, but they also have a very important role in developing the youngins. The two aren't mutually exclusive and as we've seen, development without winning may not be development at all (Buffalo,) and that winning is the best form of development (Pittsburgh.)

Every time we've talked, Stevens has mentioned needing an environment that allows prospects and players to develop at their own pace and the need to keep them at the AHL-level until they're ready to make the jump. As our attention moved towards individual players, like 20 yr. old d-prospect Brendan Guhle, the word confidence, "which seems to be an overall theme for the team," according to Stevens, came to the fore.

Guhle is playing all-situations, top-pairing minutes as a rookie in his first full pro season. In 21 games he has 14 points (5+9) and is a plus-8. Those are just the numbers, but what Stevens has been seeing from the young player is "more confidence rushing the puck" and that he "is now one of those who is willing to take chances." However, Guhle's successes circle back to the depth in Rochester. "He's doing things he might have held back on," said Stevens, "and trying more things than he used to because he knows he's got somebody back there who's going to cover up for him."

Coach Taylor seems to have made a lot of good moves in his first stint as a head coach and he has the team in a good place. After Fasching got called up, he told the gathered media about the feel in Rochester. "Guys there are happy," he said. "We're excited to be there every day. There's a lot of energy at the rink. It's fun to be there, fun to play like that.

"We're almost playing more loose, more relaxed."

Earlier in the season it wasn't quite that way as the Amerks had lost three of their prior four games and were down 3-0 vs. the Laval Rocket (MTL) at Blue Cross Arena. They were being booed by the home crowd as they left the ice for the second intermission but came back to tie the score with three unanswered goals in the third and won the game in overtime.

Taylor told his team during the intermission to relax and just play their game. A reporter stated that with his team down 3-0, he had to have a lot of confidence in them. "For sure I have a lot of confidence," said Taylor. "I see them every day. I have confidence in everyone of those guys in the locker room and that's what it's all about. And they have to have the confidence in me. We're all in this together."

That was on October 27th, since then his team has gone 8-2-5 and have gotten points in 13 of their last 14 games (8-1-5.)

Rodrigues and Fasching both seem to have benefitted well from the change in culture, especially Fasching. The 6'3" 204 lb. winger was traded for by the former regime for his size and ability to work the front of the net. The issue with him, other than youthful inconsistencies, has been his skating. Fasching will never have blazing speed but the difference between last season and this year is that he's playing the game faster and it looks as if he's a faster player because of it. Although he still needs to produce at the NHL-level and will need to develop more consistency, which is typical of most young players, he looks like he took a big step forward.

Rodrigues had shown marked improvement last season and looked to be on the Sabres roster until an injury sidelined him in training camp. After being sent to Rochester to start his season and managing one assist through his first three games, Rodrigues used a four-point game and a three-point game to leave Rochester with 10 points (5+5) in eight games. "Again, it's that confidence-level," said Stevens.

Another player playing with a lot of confidence is goaltender Linus Ullmark.

Ullmark took the reigns of the starting goalie position last season and was the Amerks MVP. Back in October, Stevens said that the best thing for Ullmark was that the Sabres got back-up Chad Johnson in the off season which kept the 24 yr. old developing in Rochester.

That may change, however, as Buffalo's goalies are becoming a part of trade rumors. Should one of Robin Lehner or Johnson be moved and the Sabres receive no NHL goalie in return, Ullmark may end up in Buffalo. It's something Stevens doesn't want to see for Ullmark and the Amerks, but something that may happen.

When asked if he thought Ullmark was ready to make the jump, Stevens, who's always been an advocate of keeping young players in the AHL for as long as necessary, said, "yes," but qualified it by saying, "but I would like to have him [finish the year here] so that when he goes into next year, he's just brimming with confidence."

We need to keep in mind that despite the Sabres playing one of their best games of the season on the road and winning on Tuesday, they're still a 7-17-4 team, something that may not be conducive to proper development if they continue down that road.

"[Ullmark's] built up to where he's at now and I would hate to see him go into a situation on a team that's really struggling the way they are, and he plays well but doesn't get the wins and starts to lose that confidence."

Which happens all the time, especially with team trying to rush players.

But Botterill seems to have Rochester on the right track which benefits the Amerks right now and will eventually make it's way up to Buffalo. There are a lot of players who've played under Botterill and they're beginning to make their way onto the Sabres. Players like Wilson, and to an extent Rodrigues and Fasching, know what he and his staff are trying to do and know their roles are in this process.

Rochester is having success right now but by no means are they an AHL juggernaut at this time, as inconstancies still rule. It's something they "really need to develop," according to Stevens, but the foundation seems to be there which is a major step in the right direction.

Redmond scores twice in Amerks' win

Buffalo News

By: Staff Report

Veteran defenseman Zach Redmond scored two power-play goals and had an assist in leading the Rochester American to a 4-1 win over the Bridgeport Sound Tigers Sunday afternoon at Webster Bank Arena in Bridgeport, Conn.

It was the final stop in four straight road games for the Amerks. Rochester went 3-0-0-1 on those four games and extended its season-long point streak to nine games.

In addition to Redmond's first three-point game since 2014 when he was a member of the St. John's Ice Caps, Seth Griffith extended his point streak to five games with a power-play goal and an assist.

Redmond is third on the team in scoring with 15 points (6+9) in 17 games.

Colin Blackwell rounded out the scoring with his second shorthanded goal of the season, and Stuart Percy contributed a pair of assists

Adam Wilcox of the Amerks turned aside 36 of 37 shots to improve to 3-2-3 on the season.

Casey Bailey provided the lone Bridgeport goal while Kristers Gudlveskis made 29 saves in the loss.

The Amerks jumped to a 1-0 on Redmond's first goal exactly halfway through the first period as the Sound Tigers were on their second consecutive penalty. Later in the period, Blackwell scored short-handed with rookie Sean Malone in the box for holding.

The Sound Tigers cut the Amerks lead in half eight minutes into the second period on Bailey's power-play goal.

Rochester widened the gap with two more goals in the third period, beginning just 2:09 in when Griffith swept in Redmond's rebound for his third goal in six AHL games this season. Redmond tallied his second goal on the power-play with 2:15 remaining.

The Amerks will return home to face the Utica Comets at 7:05 on Wednesday at The Blue Cross Arena.

Amerks close out road-heavy weekend with 4-1 win in Bridgeport

13 Wham

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans closed out their first three-in-three of the season with a 4-1 win over the Bridgeport Sound Tigers Sunday at Webster Bank Arena in the final stop of a four-game, eight-day road swing. The afternoon win extends Rochester's point streak to a season-long nine straight games as the Amerks closed out the road trip with a 3-0-0-1 record to inch closer to the Toronto Marlies for first place in the AHL's North Division standings.

Veteran defenseman Zach Redmond led the way offensively for the Amerks with a three-point effort, including a pair of power-play tallies, and Seth Griffith added two points (1+1) to extend his point streak to five straight games. The game was Redmond's first three-point outing since April 13, 2014 as a member of the St. John's IceCaps, moving him into a tie for third on the team in scoring with 15 points (6+9) in 17 games.

Colin Blackwell rounded out the scoring with his team-leading second shorthanded goal of the season while Stuart Percy (0+2) contributed a pair of assists as Rochester won its first-ever matchup in Bridgeport. Adam Wilcox earned his second start in five games for the Amerks, turning aside 36 of 37 to improve to 3-2-3 on the season.

Casey Bailey provided the lone Bridgeport goal while Kristers Gudlveskis made 29 saves in the loss for the Sound Tigers.

The Amerks jumped out to a 1-0 lead exactly halfway through the first period as the Sound Tigers were on their second consecutive penalty. Griffith stepped through the right circle and sent a shot off the body of Kyle Burroughs just north of the crease. The puck kicked back towards the blueline, where a waiting Redmond fired a one-timer that sailed past Gudlveskis' blocker side.

Later in the first, rookie Sean Malone was sent to the box for holding, giving the Sound Tigers the man-advantage. Towards the end of the penalty kill, the Amerks freed the puck and sent it down the ice with Nick Baptiste in pursuit. Baptiste fired the initial shot that pinballed its way through the crease before Blackwell was able to steer in the bouncing puck to put Rochester up by a pair.

The Sound Tigers cut the Amerks lead in half eight minutes into the second period. With Matt Tennyson in the box for slashing, Bridgeport capitalized on the man-advantage. A scramble around the net led to a cross-ice pass from Dal Colle to Vande Sompel to Bailey. Bailey stepped into the left circle, and took a shot that went off the post and over Wilcox to make it a 2-1 game.

Rochester widened the gap with two more goals in the third period, beginning just 2:09 in when Griffith swept in Redmond's rebound for his third goal in six AHL games this season. The Sound Tigers' fate was sealed when Redmond tallied his second goal of the night on the power-play with 2:15 remaining, sending the Amerks to their third win in four games.

The Amerks return home from their weekend trek through the Atlantic Division on Wednesday, Dec. 13 when they host the intrastate rival Utica Comets in a North Division showdown at The

Blue Cross Arena. Game time is slated for a 7:05 p.m. start and will be carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950AM ESPN Rochester.

Amerks pick up point, but fall in shootout 5-4

13 Wham

By: Staff Report

For the 13th time in 14 games, the Amerks picked up at least one point. But for the second straight game, they failed to pick up two.

Rochester lost 5-4 in a shootout to the Hartford Wolf Pack on Friday night.

Rochester will hit the road for a Saturday night tilt at first place Scranton/Wilkes-Barre.

Four different Amerks scored goals for the team tonight, with three coming in the second period, giving the team a 4-3 lead heading into the third.

But Hartford picked up the only goal of the third, sending it to overtime and eventually a shootout, where the Wolf Pack won on the fifth round.

Amerks dominate Bridgeport, 4-1

C&C World Wide

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans concluded their 3-game weekend trip to New England with a 4-1 victory over the Bridgeport Sound Tigers on Sunday afternoon before 2,642 fans at Webster Bank Arena.

Rochester (14-5-3-3) earned 5-of-6 points during the road trip.

Defenseman Zach Redmond paced the Amerks with 2 goals and one assist. He opened the scoring midway through the first period with a power play goal off assists from Seth Griffith and Stuart Percy.

Colin Blackwell gave the Amerks a 2-0 lead late in the stanza with a short-handed marker off a pass from Nick Baptiste.

The Sound Tigers cut the lead in half in the second period on a power play goal against Rochester netminder Adam Wilcox.

Griffith got that one back early in the third period as Kyle Criscuolo and Redmond picked up assists.

Redmond closed out the scoring with another power play tally as Percy and Sahir Gill assisted on the play.

Two locals play for the Sound Tigers as both are coming off injuries with the parent New York Islanders – Greece native Stephen Gionta and Spencerport native Shane Prince.

Prince led Bridgeport with 7 shots on goal as Gionta had 2 shots.

The Amerks have 2 games at the Blue Cross Arena this week as they entertain the Utica Comets on Wednesday at 7:05 pm, and the North Division leading Toronto Marlies on Friday at 7:05 pm.

Amerks lose in shootout to Hartford

C&C World Wide

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans held the Hartford Wolf Pack without a shot in overtime but were unable to convert on any of the 5 they took and ended up losing, 3-2, in a shootout before 2,248 fans at the XL Center.

The Wolf Pack opened the scoring in the first period, but C.J. Smith tied it midway through the second stanza off assists from Seth Griffith and Andrew MacWilliam.

Hartford regained the advantage 6:48 into the third period. About four minutes later Zach Redmond tallied the equalizer off assists from Colin Blackwell and Stuart Percy.

Neither team scored in the overtime so the game went to the shootout. Smith and Griffith scored for Rochester, but the Wolf Pack won it in the fourth round on a goal by Scott Kosmachuk.

Goalie Linus Ullmark made 24 saves for Rochester.

The Amerks conclude the 3-game weekend road trip with a game Sunday afternoon in Bridgeport against the Sound Tigers.

Amerks hold off Springfield

C&C World Wide

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Americans held on to edge the Springfield Thunderbirds, 2-1, on Friday night before 4,068 fans at the MassMutual Center.

Kyle Criscuolo, who was recently re-assigned to the Amerks by the parent Buffalo Sabres, scored what proved to be the game winner early in the third period. It was his 6th goal of the season for Rochester as C.J. Smith and Zach Redmond assisted on the play.

Seth Griffith tallied his second goal for the Amerks since coming down which gave Rochester a 1-0 lead 7:15 into the opening stanza. Brendan Guhle and Casey Nelson drew assists.

Goalie Linus Ullmark had a shutout going until midway through the final period when Maxime Fortunus scored to break the shutout bid.

Ullmark finished with 18 saves as the Amerks outshot the Thunderbirds, 37-19.

Rochester continues its weekend trip through New England with a game Saturday night in Hartford against the Wolf Pack.

*NOTES — Rochester Americans General Manager Randy Sexton announced today that the team has reassigned defenseman Arvin Atwal to the Cincinnati Cyclones of the ECHL.

Amerks hold off Springfield

CT Post

By: Michael Fornabaio

It was only a week ago the Bridgeport Sound Tigers hadn't lost a game in regulation in three weeks. It's now been over a week since they won a game.

The Sound Tigers are winless in four after Sunday's 4-1 loss to the Rochester Americans at Webster Bank Arena. They fell behind early for the second night in a row and never caught up.

"I think, plain and simple, that hockey team outworked us," Bridgeport coach Brent Thompson said. "The first period, we stood around and watched."

Zach Redmond's loose-cannon one-timer to open the scoring was one thing.

The Rochester players left open at the back door, the Amerks players left for uncontested rebounds: Those proved deadly in front of a crowd of 2,642.

Since Bridgeport's eight-game streak with points culminated in last Saturday's shootout loss to Utica, the Sound Tigers have a pair of 4-1 home losses to Providence and the Americans around a 4-3 loss this Saturday at Springfield.

"I think it's just an incomplete game," Sound Tigers defenseman Kyle Burroughs said. "There are parts of the game we need to clean up. We obviously want to get ahead, and we're playing from behind."

The Sound Tigers did put 37 shots on Amerks goalie Adam Wilcox, and they did force him to make some big stops. All he allowed was Casey Bailey's one-timer from the left circle on a second-period power play.

"We had pushes, don't get me wrong," Thompson said. "In the third, it wasn't enough. We need to be better in our 200-foot game."

Rochester is 5-0-2-2 in their past nine games, in second place in the North Division. Bridgeport (12-10-1-1) is fifth in the Atlantic Division on winning percentage and sixth in points.

Ross Johnston sat out ill after taking part in warmups, but the offense got a little infusion when the New York Islanders sent winger Shane Prince down on a conditioning stint.

Prince underwent ankle surgery in August. He returned to practice about a month ago with the Islanders.

This was Prince's first AHL game since the end of the 2014-15 season, when he was with the Binghamton Senators. Ottawa dealt him to the Islanders at the trade deadline the next season.

He led Bridgeport with seven shots.

The Amerks claimed the lead on Redmond's left-circle one-timer off a skipping pass from former Providence Bruins standout Seth Griffith. They stretched it to 2-0 on a short-handed two-on-one after Bridgeport failed to gain the zone; Mitch Vande Sompel broke up Nicholas Baptiste's first pass, but no one got to Colin Blackwell, who tapped in the second pass.

Griffith scored 2:09 into the third, left alone for a rebound, to make it 3-1, and Redmond scored another power-play goal through a screen with 2:15 left.

Springfield Thunderbirds come up short against Rochester Americans

MassLive

By: Conor Ryan

Despite a strong showing from Sam Montembeault in net, the Springfield Thunderbirds were unable to come away with a win Friday night at MassMutual Center -- falling to the Rochester Americans by a score of 2-1.

Montembeault finished with 35 saves in the loss for the T-Birds, who drop to 9-16-1 on the season.

The Amerks opened the scoring in the first period, with former Florida Panther Seth Griffith picking up the puck near center ice, skating past a Springfield defenseman and wristing the puck past Montembeault to make it a 1-0 game at 7:15.

Springfield had a chance to counter just 90 seconds later on the power play, but the Thunderbirds only mustered one significant chance -- with Alex Grenier firing in a shot that hit off the crossbar.

Rochester netminder Linus Ullmark kept his team ahead in what was a scoreless second period, with the Amerks' goalie denying Springfield forward Chase Balisy on a rebound chance in the closing seconds of the frame.

The Amerks secured the eventual game-winning tally at 7:18 in the third, with Kyle Criscuolo lighting the lamp off of a slick backhand shot to make it a 2-0 game.

Springfield finally got on the board at 12:31 in the third, with Max Fortunus securing his first goal as a Thunderbird after firing home a rebound.

Rochester picked up a point in its seventh straight game, while Springfield has now dropped three straight.

The Thunderbirds will resume play Saturday night at MassMutual Center, with the team hosting the Bridgeport Sound Tigers in what will be the second annual T-Birds Teddy Bear Toss presented by Teddy Bear Pools & Spas. Fans are encouraged to bring in new or gently used stuffed animals to throw onto the ice in celebration of Springfield's first goal. The bears, in turn, will be donated to local charities this holiday season.