



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

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Tonight's Game: Wilkes-Barre/Scranton @ Rochester

Another call-up for Baptiste means another opportunity to grow into his game

Buffalo News

By: Amy Moritz

Nicholas Baptiste is pretty familiar with the New York State Thruway. He's been back and forth between Rochester and Buffalo three times this season. When the Buffalo Sabres have suffered an injury among the forwards, he's been the guy on call.

Eventually, he'd like to work that into a permanent gig in the National Hockey League.

But at 22 and in his third year of pro hockey, he's still growing into his game and taking every opportunity to learn, improve, and turn his potential into tangible results.

"Every game I play it's exciting for me. I don't even think I'm at 30 games yet so every night's exciting for me right now," said Baptiste, who played his 23rd NHL game on Tuesday. "I'm just fortunate enough to be playing with such great players. I'm just trying to play my best and work my hardest to stay in the lineup every night. I think I'm starting to earn a lot more of coach's trust and I want to continue to do that and help this team win."

Baptiste gave the Sabres instant spark on Tuesday night, scoring the game's first goal while helping the team to set an energetic tone in a 5-3 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning in KeyBank Center.

He was among a handful of skaters who took the ice for an optional practice on Wednesday before the team flew to Ottawa for Thursday night's meeting with the Senators.

Baptiste was last with the Sabres from Jan. 29 to Feb. 1 when Jacob Josefson was out with a lower body injury.

When Josefson returned, Baptiste went back to the Rochester Americans despite playing well over four games. But Baptiste understands the deal. He's on a two-way contract which means the Sabres can make moves with him without dealing with waivers, giving him value as a movable part.

And with each move back to Rochester, he talks with the Sabres coaching staff to get a little more feedback, a few more cues, as to what he needs to develop in order to take up residence in Buffalo.

Baptiste did enough in that previous Sabres stint to earn the call when Jack Eichel went down with a right high-ankle sprain on Feb. 10. And while no one in the room wants their best player, one of the stars of the NHL, out with an injury, it does create opportunity for players like Baptiste to show their value and demonstrate how they've put advice from the coaches into practice.

"I've talked to coach a ton about how I've got to play," Baptiste said. "As you can see I'm just using my speed and being physical, taking the puck wide, and making it tough on their D. Whether I'm playing eight minutes or 18 minutes here or in (Rochester), I'm going to try and do the same thing – use my speed effectively and create offense that way."

Those conversations with the coaches are paying off. The offensive numbers may not be turning any heads (he has two goals in nine NHL games and 18 points in 36 AHL games) but his energy, the way he is using his speed, and his play away from the net, has become more consistent and noticeable.

"I think Nick has done a terrific job when he's been up here," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He's used his speed to create. ... Also I think his wall play has really improved. That's why he's getting shifts late in the third period. I wanted to get him out more (on Tuesday) and reward him but just (couldn't) with all the special teams that were going on during the game, I'd like to see him get more ice time."

Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly continued his dominance on faceoffs in Tuesday's game, winning 25. That came after setting a new career-high mark with 29 faceoff wins in Sunday's loss to Colorado. O'Reilly is on pace to have the second most faceoff wins in a season in the NHL. He currently has 856 wins; Rod Brind'Amour won 1,268 with Carolina in the 2005-06 season.

For reference, the NHL started keeping faceoff stats in the 1997-98 season.

Kyle Okposo knows all about O'Reilly's prowess in the faceoff circle. He's faced it as an opponent, back when Okposo was with the New York Islanders and O'Reilly with the Colorado Avalanche. And he remembers one game in particular.

"He takes a lot of draws and he wins a lot of draws," Okposo said. "You can see it in opposing centers when they're going to line up against him. They're trying to think of different ways to beat him. The fascinating part is he pretty much takes faceoffs the same way all the time and nobody seems to be able to figure it out. I know just in my little experience, I was with the Islanders. We had a six-on-five at the end of the game and I took three draws in a row against him and he won three dead clean. It's pretty special what he does."

The NHL trade deadline is Feb. 26, but the Buffalo Sabres' next opponent, the Ottawa Senators, have already made a deal.

Late Tuesday, the Senators traded veteran defenseman Dion Phaneuf and forward Nate Thompson to the Los Angeles Kings for forward Marian Gaborik and center Nate Shore. Phaneuf was pulled from Ottawa's bench on Tuesday during the Senators's 6-3 loss to the Penguins in Pittsburgh.

"I'm excited to be going to the Los Angeles Kings," Phaneuf told media in Pittsburgh Tuesday night. "It's going to be a real good experience for me to be able to join that team. ... I'm excited about the team that they have, where they're at in the standings and I'm going to go there and do my best to do whatever I can to help their team."

Phaneuf has 16 points in 52 games this season. He has played in 954 games in his 13-year NHL career that included stints with the Calgary Flames, Toronto Maple Leafs and the Senators.

The Senators have lost their last two and sit just three points ahead of the Sabres in the Atlantic Division with 47 points (19-27-9).

Sabres' Nick Baptiste embracing fourth-line role

Olean Times Herald

By: Bill Hoppe

In the NHL, Sabres winger Nick Baptiste often skates short minutes on the fourth line, a role much different than the one he enjoys in the AHL.

But Baptiste, 22, has embraced his job as a fourth-line checker during his recalls to the Sabres this season, scoring two goals in nine games.

"I've been doing real well with the role I'm in right now," Baptiste said this afternoon following the Sabres' optional practice inside KeyBank Center. "I think obviously with increased minutes, I'll be able to contribute offensively a little more. But I think right now, I'm doing the little things right."

In Tuesday's 5-3 win over Tampa Bay, Baptiste opened the scoring 6:25 into the tilt, zooming to the net and converting Zemgus Girgensons' nifty feed.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he wanted to play Baptiste more against the Lightning, although power plays and penalties limited him to seven minutes, 36 seconds.

"Nick has done a terrific job when he's been up here, he's used his speed to create, you could see the goal in Vancouver (Jan. 25), the goal last night, using his powerful speed just coming off the start," Housley said. "Also, I think his wall play has really, really improved. That's why he's getting shifts late in the third period."

Baptiste's speed, of course, is a major asset in today's NHL.

"I'm just using my speed and being physical and taking the puck wide and making it tough on their D," said Baptiste, who has played 23 NHL games. "Whether I'm playing eight minutes or 18 minutes here or in Roch, wherever I am, I'm trying to do the same thing, use my speed effectively and create speed that way."

Baptiste has also provided some critical secondary scoring. The Sabres have won two of their three games without injured center Jack Eichel (ankle), in part, because third- and fourth-liners have contributed key goals.

Winger Scott Wilson, for example, has two goals in the last three games.

"It's great, it takes some pressure off the other guys," Housley said of secondary scoring. "It's important, when you're playing really good teams, it's a great way to contribute, just feel good about yourself."

The Sabres play Thursday in Ottawa.

The Amerks week that forever changed Martin Biron's career

Pickin' Splinters

By: Kevin Oklobzija

Over the course of a two-decade career in hockey, there will be milestones and grand achievements that will never be forgotten, spectacular performances and crushing defeats that will be impossible to erase from the memory banks.

But there also will be one juncture, one occasion that defines the career. At least that's what Mitch Korn believes, and he has never forgotten the moment of truth in Martin Biron's goaltending career.

Korn knows a thing or two about what makes a successful NHL career. One of the most respected goalie coaches in the game, Korn tutored Dominik Hasek during his two Hart Trophy seasons as NHL MVP with the Buffalo Sabres. He also helped elevate the games of Tomas Vokoun and Pekka Rinne with the Nashville Predators, and Braden Holtby with the Washington Capitals.

He also was a very big part of Biron's development, first with the Rochester Americans and then with the Sabres.

So Korn will certainly feel a little pride on Friday night when Biron is inducted into the Amerks Hall of Fame in on-ice, pre-game ceremonies at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

"I strongly believe everybody's career has a red-letter day, a day that everything changes," Korn said. "It's not always changing for the better, but you hope it is."

For Biron, that day was March 1, 1998. A week earlier Amerks coach Brian McCutcheon and the organization had made the decision to send him to the South Carolina Stingrays of the East Coast Hockey League so he could play often and rediscover his game.

Talk about a wake-up call, especially for a first-round draft pick (16th overall by the Sabres in 1995).

But Biron hadn't been playing like a top prospect in his rookie season with the Amerks, which is why journeyman veteran Mike Bales was getting the high-quality minutes.

"From my first year of junior (1994-95) to pro hockey, my career was in a downward regression, not a progression," he said. "I still remember getting called into Brian's office and him saying, 'We've decided you're going to go to the East Coast League.'"

"Now, the East Coast League then wasn't what it is today. You were going down three steps when you went to the Coast."

But Biron understood. He boarded a plane for Charleston and by Saturday night had played two games for the Stingrays. Korn was in the arena for both, ready to critique, advise and counsel. Biron allowed just three goals but didn't get a win either night (a loss and a tie).

“After the Saturday game, everybody’s holding a white Styrofoam thing of food and getting on the sleeper bus to go to Pensacola,” Korn remembers. “All of a sudden Rick Vaive (South Carolina’s coach and general manager) comes out and says, ‘We’ve got a problem.’”

Bales had been hurt that night during the Amerks game in Hershey. The Amerks needed Biron back in Rochester for Sunday’s game.

Korn needs to book flights.

“There was no team services guy, we didn’t have cell phones and there’s no internet to book flights,” Korn said. “I finally get us from South Carolina to somewhere to Washington, D.C., and then from Washington, D.C., to Rochester. We started the process at 6 a.m. and finally got in about 1.”

The game was at 5. Biron allowed one goal and the Amerks defeated the Kentucky Thoroughblades 2-1.

That was Biron’s red-letter day.

“I had the story from the Democrat and Chronicle matted and framed and I gave it to Marty,” Korn said. “I told him that was the day everything changes.

“He still has that framed story in the basement of his parents’ house.”

Korn was right, too. On Monday morning the Amerks boarded a bus for Toronto to catch a flight to Fredericton, New Brunswick. Biron started on Tuesday night and posted a 2-0 shutout. The guy in the other net: Vokoun.

Biron was on his way. He finished the 1997-98 season strong, and the next season, 1998-99, Biron was the AHL’s all-everything goalie. A first-team All-Star, the Baz Bastien Memorial Award winner. He went 36-13-3 with a 2.07 goals-against average and .930 save percentage as the Amerks reached the Calder Cup finals before falling to the Providence Bruins.

“He was rock solid, I don’t recall any real blip the whole season,” said Jon Christiano, the Amerks assistant coach in 1998-99. “When we had a video meeting — and we didn’t have big-screen TVs in the room back then — he was two feet from the TV.”

Biron became a full-time NHL goalie the next season, a gig that lasted 14 years (230-191-52, 2.61 GAA, .910 save percentage, 28 shutouts).

“We had a written plan,” Korn said. “This will happen, and then this will happen, and then you’ll be here and this will happen.

“Marty always thought it would happen quicker than I did. And he was right.”

That ECHL wake-up call might be why.

“Going to South Carolina was the lowest of times in my career,” Biron recalled, “and the very next year was probably my highest of times.”

Sabres Notebook: Housley on alert for deadline as Sens' trade pickups debut

Buffalo News

By: Mike Harrington

It's that time of year.

The Ottawa Senators made a huge trade Tuesday with the Los Angeles Kings, offloading expensive defenseman Dion Phaneuf and getting veteran winger Marian Gaborik and center Nick Shore in return. Gaborik and Shore made their debuts here Thursday night against the Buffalo Sabres, whom most NHL observers also expect will be busy in advance of the NHL's Feb. 26 trade deadline.

First-year Buffalo General Manager Jason Botterill is expected to trade pending unrestricted free agents Evander Kane and Benoit Pouliot prior to the deadline, and starting goalie/restricted free agent Robin Lehner is also a good bet to go.

"We're on alert and Jason and I talk every day about situations," coach Phil Housley said prior to the game in Canadian Tire Centre. "About lineups, different things, what's going on in Rochester. It's a day-to-day thing. We're getting closer to the trade deadline and we're continuing to evaluate our guys."

Housley said Botterill has been in Plymouth, Mich., scouting the Under-18 Five Nations Tournament featuring the best players from the U.S., Sweden, Finland, Russia and the Czech Republic. But the GM is obviously continuing his talks about moving players at the NHL level as well.

"We talk about it every day," Housley said. "He's still trying to scout and watch players for the draft but certainly it's in the back of his mind coming up here. We'll have more conversations as we move closer to the date."

Trading away Phaneuf and Nate Thompson for Gaborik and Shore saved the Senators about \$2 million as they look to create more cap space to sign captain Erik Karlsson to a long-term extension before he becomes an unrestricted free agent in July, 2019.

Gaborik, 36, may be flipped by the Senators at the deadline or he could be a candidate to be bought out at the end of the season as Ottawa tries to move to a younger, prospect-filled roster. Gaborik has a cap hit of \$4.875 million per season over the next three years but is only owed \$10.8 million of actual salary. So a buyout would cost the Senators about \$7.2 million spread over the next six seasons. Phaneuf had a monstrous cap hit of \$7 million a year for three more seasons.

Gaborik is fourth on the active career goal list with 403, behind only Washington's Alex Ovechkin (591), Toronto's Patrick Marleau (527) and Rick Nash of the New York Rangers (433). He had only seven goals in 30 games for the Kings this year. Gaborik is also one of 18 active players to have skated in 1,000 games, as Thursday was No. 1,020. The Senators are his fifth team.

"Honestly I was surprised but that's the way it goes. It's a business," Gaborik said here Thursday.

"I had four unbelievable years with LA. We won a Cup and I have nothing but good things to say about the organization and the guys. Obviously it's a new chapter and I'm looking forward to it and to the challenges of new teammates, new team, new system, new city."

Gaborik was unable to mask his disappointment about being traded from a 65-point Los Angeles team that entered Thursday in a wild-card slot to a 47-point Ottawa club whose playoff hopes were snuffed weeks ago.

"Every player wants to compete in playoffs and play for the Cup," he said. "LA is in pretty good position compared to Ottawa but there's 27 games left. You just have to go game by game and you never know what's going to happen. It's just to create good habits and make sure the team gets back on track and be ready to play every game and compete."

Gaborik started the game on the Senators' top line with center Matt Duchene and winger Mike Hoffman. He was told about the trade after the Kings' game Tuesday in Carolina. Phaneuf, meanwhile, was pulled in the middle of Tuesday's Senators game in Pittsburgh when the trade was struck -- just like Matt Duchene was in November by Colorado when he was in Brooklyn and was traded to the Senators.

"All of us at the other end of the bench had no clue," Duchene said Thursday. "A lot of times if a D-man gets hurt, you don't know it at times. We found out in the room right before the third period. Same thing happened to me this year against the Islanders. I don't think the D-man knew then either. Pretty crazy to see it happened twice in one year involving the same team."

"I haven't seen that. I know Duchene was the same thing and it's weird," Housley said. "I've never seen it when I was playing or when I was coaching. Look at the trade and both clubs improved their team and it will be interesting what their lineup will be."

Former Sabres goalie and current Buffalo broadcast analyst Martin Biron will be inducted into the Rochester Amerks Hall of Fame Friday night in conjunction with the Amerks' 7:05 game against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins in Blue Cross Arena.

Biron played for the Amerks for parts of four seasons (1997-2001), posting a 59-32-9 record with a 2.36 goals-against average and .921 save percentage. The goals-against mark ranks 12th in franchise history.

His best season in Rochester was 1998-99, when Biron went 36-13-3 while setting the franchise mark for the lowest goals-against average (2.07) and highest save percentage (.930). He tied the AHL record for save percentage while earning the Bastien Memorial Award presented to the AHL's best goalie and the Holmes Memorial Award for being part of the team with the lowest GAA in a season. Biron played in the '99 AHL All-Star Game and was named a first-team AHL All-Star after the season.

Biron, 40, went on to post 230 NHL victories for five teams in a career that stretched to 2013. He's fourth on the Sabres' all-time list with 134 victories, second to Dominik Hasek in GAA (2.53) and third in shutouts (18) behind Hasek and Ryan Miller.

Amerks lose leading scorer C.J. Smith for 4-6 weeks

Buffalo News

By: John Vogl

The Rochester Americans will be without their leading scorer for the next four to six weeks.

Left wing C.J. Smith has suffered a lower-body injury and will be out at least a month, the organization announced Tuesday. Smith has a team hat trick, leading the Amerks in goals (14), assists (25) and points (39).

The 23-year-old is an American Hockey League All-Star in his first pro season. The Sabres signed him out of UMass-Lowell at the end of last year, and Smith appeared in two games with Buffalo.

Rochester (25-13-12) is third in its division but is on a season-worst five-game winless skid.

Amerks forward Sahir Gill stands tall for Punjab background

Rochester First

By: Prescott Rossi

As the 2017-18 season has been good for the Rochester Americans, so too has it benefited forward Sahir Gill.

The 25-year old is currently tied for the team lead with 14 goals scored through 50 games played, which already eclipses the season totals from any of his previous four seasons.

"Coming into the year, personal goal was just trying to get to the net more and have more of a shooting mentality," said Gill after practice on Tuesday. "Good things happen around the net."

Until this season, Gill played in the Pittsburgh Penguins system with stops in Wheeling and Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. He played under the tutelage of Jason Botterill and Chris Taylor. Soon after Botterill became the Sabres general manager and Taylor was named the Amerks head coach, Gill joined up in WNY. Botterill and Taylor want Gill to be part of the changing culture inside the Amerks locker room.

"When they come to me and approach me about guys like that," said Taylor. "Absolutely, I want them, and I want all the guys that came from Wilkes-Barre, that's why we have them."

Gill was born to Sikh parents that moved from India to British Columbia before Sahir was born in 1992. He is part of a small number of pro hockey players with a South Asian background. Gill admits that early in his career he wanted to be viewed like any other hockey player, but as he's grown up, he understands the importance of representing his heritage on the ice.

"It'd be cool if people could watch guys like myself play and find interest in the game and someone that hopefully kids can look up to a little bit, and feel comfortable to reach out and ask questions or whatever it is, I think that's a cool opportunity to have," said Gill.

In the summer of 2017, Gill was invited to the Hockey Night in Canada Punjabi set. The show broadcasts NHL games to the 500,000 Canadians with backgrounds in Northern India.

"The studio there and seeing some of the footage that they have from some of the Indian families that are starting to pick up on the game and see the passion that they have," said Gill. "I think it's a huge market that's been lightly touched."

Gill still dreams of playing in his first NHL game. At 25-years-old, he understands his route to the big time will take longer than most, but he believes in his ability, skill, and effort.

"Every day you just try to come in and improve a little bit," said Gill. "We realize the better we do as a team, the better off we'll be individually and hopefully that takes care of itself when the time comes."

2018 Winter Olympics primer: When can you watch Rochester athletes in action

Democrat & Chronicle

By: Sal Maiorana

With a 14-hour time difference between Rochester and PyeongChang, South Korea, it can be a little tricky figuring out when our local athletes will be competing, as well as when mainstream events such as hockey and figure skating, will be broadcast on NBC's family of networks.

Suffice it to say, if you want to watch certain events live, you will likely have to get up very early in the morning, though some of the events will be re-broadcast at more convenient times for the prime-time United States East Coast audience.

The Opening Ceremonies will be shown on NBC (Channel 10 in Rochester) at 8 p.m. Friday, though they will obviously be on tape. In looking at the NBC television schedule, it appears that NBC is trying to corral the largest possible audience, so the network is not showing the ceremonies live on any of the other four channels it will utilize to broadcast the 16 days of the Games — NBC Sports Network, CNBC, USA Network and the Olympic channel.

There are four Rochester natives competing in these 2018 Winter Games: Pittsford freestyle aerial skier Jon Lillis; Pittsford moguls skier Morgan Schild; Greece hockey player Brian Gionta, the 39-year-old longtime National Hockey League star who will serve as captain of the U.S. team; and Pittsford pairs figure skater Paige Connors, who is representing Israel.

Interestingly, Schild will begin qualifying in her specialty before we see the Opening Ceremonies. The ladies' moguls competition starts at 8 p.m. Thursday Rochester time, which is 10 a.m. Friday in South Korea. If Schild advances, the finals are scheduled to begin at 5:30 a.m. Sunday (Eastern time).

Because the timing worked out for Schild's qualifying, Bristol Mountain is hosting a "Watch Party" that starts at 7 p.m. Thursday in the rocket lodge. Bristol Mountain freestyle coach Johnny Kroetz, who mentored Schild and Lillis before they moved on to the national program, will share his comments regarding the journey of these athletes and the rest of the Bristol Mountain "Super Six."

Lillis has to wait a bit to get his Olympic experience started. The men's freestyle aerial qualifying starts at 6 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, and the finals are at the same time Sunday, Feb. 18.

Connors was born in Pittsford but now lives in Edgewater, N.J., and because her mother is an Israeli citizen, she has dual citizenship so she can compete on the Israeli team. She and her partner, Evgeni Krasnopolski, will participate in the team competition short program Thursday night starting at 8 p.m. and the team free skate Saturday at 11:30.

Her pairs short program will commence at 8 p.m. Feb. 13, and the free program is at 8:30 p.m. Feb. 14.

All times are scheduled, but subject to change, and you should check NBC's Olympic television schedule to see which networks are carrying each event.

As for the hockey tournament, there are 12 countries competing, and they have been broken into three groups. The United States has been placed in Group B along with Slovakia, Slovenia and Russia. Gionta and his teammates will play each of those teams in the preliminary round to determine seeding for the remainder of the tournament, which consists of four rounds of elimination games.

The U.S. opens play against Slovenia on Wednesday, Feb. 14, and the game will be shown live at 7 a.m. on NBC Sports Network. Their next game against Slovakia will be at 10 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 15, on CNBC. And the prelim round concludes with a game against Russia on NBC Sports Network at 7 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 17.

The qualification rounds begin Tuesday, Feb. 20, the quarterfinals are Feb. 21, the semifinals Feb. 23, the bronze medal game Feb. 24, and the gold medal game is Feb. 25. All matchups, times, and networks are yet to be determined.

Amerks recall Danforth from Cincinnati

Pickin' Splinters

By: Paul Gotham

Rochester Americans General Manager **Randy Sexton** announced today that the team has recalled forward **Justin Danforth** from the Cincinnati Cyclones (ECHL).

A native of Oshawa, Ontario, Danforth earns his second recall of the season to the Amerks after making his season debut with the team against Belleville on Jan. 27.

The 24-year-old is having a breakout season with the Cyclones, scoring 28 goals and adding 30 assists for 58 points in 44 games. The first-year pro currently leads all ECHL rookies and ranks second overall in the league in scoring while also owning a team-best plus-26 on-ice rating. Danforth is currently in the midst of a seven-game point streak over which he's compiled 17 points (7+10) and five multi-point outings, including a season-best four-point effort against Wichita on Feb. 10.

Last month, the 5-foot-9, 181-pound forward was named to the 2018 CCM/ECHL All-Star Classic, where he set a new league record with a lap time of 12.75 seconds during the Fastest Skate Competition.

Danforth has tallied two goals in seven career AHL games, including five with the Amerks at the end of last season.

Prior to turning pro, Danforth played four seasons at Sacred Heart University (AHA), where he amassed 124 points (42+82) in 147 career games for the Pioneers. Danforth led the team in scoring in three of his four years at Sacred Heart, earning AHA Rookie of the Year honors and a selection to the AHA All-Rookie Team as a freshman in 2013-14. He was later selected to the Atlantic Hockey All-Conference Second Team following his junior season and was also named the AHA Player of the Month for January 2016. Danforth finished seventh all-time in program history with 124 points and fifth all-time with 82 career assists.

Rochester's next home game is on Friday, Feb. 16 when the Amerks host the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins at 7:05 p.m. at The Blue Cross Arena. Individual game tickets for the 2017-18 season start at just \$14. Amerks Season Ticket Memberships, which start as low as just \$12 per game, are on-sale now. The Amerks are also offering a variety of partial plans, including Half-Season Memberships and Flex Season Memberships with vouchers good for best available seating to any home game. All memberships are up to 40% off Box Office day of game pricing. For more information, visit www.amerks.com or call 1-855-GO-AMERKS.