



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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TONIGHT'S GAME: Belleville @ Rochester

Colin Blackwell morphs from Sabres camp invite into Amerks' top threat

Olean Times Herald

By: Bill Hoppe

With the Americans about to suffer a devastating loss that would drop them into fourth place, coach Chris Taylor tabbed center Colin Blackwell for a crucial offensive zone faceoff.

Blackwell, 25, has been the Amerks' unsung hero for more than a month, quietly piling up points and morphing into the AHL club's late-season MVP.

In critical times, Taylor enjoys utilizing Blackwell, a Harvard graduate who had trouble finding work this season.

Blackwell won the draw, creating winger Hudson Fasching's tying goal with 1:09 left in regulation of Saturday's 6-5 overtime win against the Toronto Marlies.

The assist, Blackwell's second of the night and third point, continued a torrid stretch that began in late February.

Before a pointless outing Wednesday, Blackwell scored a whopping nine goals and 15 points during a seven-game point streak. In his last 20 contests entering tonight's home finale against the Belleville Senators, he has compiled 11 goals and 25 points.

Blackwell, whose outburst coincided with several regulars on recall to the Buffalo Sabres, thinks he possesses an even higher level.

"I still have a hell of a lot more in the tank," he said Saturday inside Blue Cross Arena. "I just feel like I'm kind of getting going. Hopefully I can keep riding the wave. It's just kind of one of those things, I like the opportunity and I like rising to the occasion.

"I always kind of want the puck on my stick. I've been given the opportunity to get those chances many different times in the game. I'm just trying to roll with it and show what I can do."

Eight months ago, the Amerks' biggest surprise couldn't find a job. After scoring four goals and 11 points as a rookie for the San Jose Barracuda, the Sharks' AHL affiliate, Blackwell was a free agent.

The Sabres invited him to their rookie camp late, only after forward Sean Malone suffered an injury.

Right away, the 5-foot-10, 190-pound Blackwell caught Taylor's attention during the Prospect Challenge games.

"He stood out big time for me," Taylor said. "I really liked his compete, his willingness to go into corners, getting over pucks, everything about him. (He was) a character guy in the dressing room. He cared if we won or lost."

Those showings earned Blackwell an invitation to Rochester's training camp and eventually a regular-season tryout. The Amerks signed him to an AHL deal for the rest of the season on Oct. 31.

To Taylor, Blackwell's offensive outburst – overall, he has scored 16 goals and 44 points in 59 games – isn't too surprising.

"I don't know if he's the seizing opportunity," Taylor said. "I think he's getting more comfortable around the room. But he was playing the exact same way and things weren't going in at the start of the year."

Blackwell, a seventh-round pick by the Sharks in 2011, isn't lacking in confidence. In September, when he was just an unknown the Sabres brought in, he talked about his patience and the strong belief he has in his abilities.

Once he received a chance to showcase his talents, he said he'd "be good to go."

"Everything's kind of rolling – legs, body – everything kind of feels good," said Blackwell, who missed the entire 2013-14 season with a concussion. "Coaches are putting me in some really good situations where I can succeed, building their trust. ..."

"I've always thought I can be that guy. I think I'm slowly showing that I can be that go-to guy down the stretch. Whether it's penalty kill or power play, faceoff, five-on-five, offensive zone, defensive zone, I'm up to the challenge."

Blackwell has become Taylor's No. 1 center. With so many Amerks back from the Sabres, it's unclear what his role could be during the playoffs.

Whatever happens, Blackwell's services should be in demand if the Sabres don't re-sign him.

Amerks auctioning off jersey for Humboldt community

WHEC

By: Staff Report

The Rochester Amerks are auctioning off a game-worn jersey to raise funds for the Humboldt community Thursday night.

The jersey, autographed by Nathan Paetsch, will be auctioned during the Amerks first home playoff game on April 25th. Sixteen people were killed last week when the bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos Junior Hockey Team collided with a tractor trailer.

The silent auction will be held in the upper concourse of the Blue Cross Arena.

All proceeds will be donated to Humboldt.

Amerks lose as tune-up for the playoffs begins

Pickin' Splinters

By: Kevin Oklobzija

Before the Calder Cup playoffs begin for the Rochester Americans, there is the formality of finishing the regular season this week.

And while the final three games don't have massive importance it's pick your poison with either first-round opponent, the Syracuse Crunch or Toronto Marlies the Amerks did crank up the intensity on Wednesday night.

"I'm sure everyone in the building could feel that," defenseman Casey Nelson said of the playoff-type sense of urgency that prevailed for three periods against Syracuse at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

If Wednesday had been a playoff game, the Crunch would be up 1-0 in the series after the 1-0 victory. But the Amerks would like their chances moving forward, that's for sure.

They outshot Syracuse 38-18, attempted 75 shots by the team count, and generated as many as a dozen high-quality scoring chances.

Crunch goalie Connor Ingram was outstanding, however, and a fluke bounce led to the only goal against Amerks goalie Linus Ullmark.

Reid McNeill's point blank shot missed wide left of the net but a lively carom put the puck back in front, Carter Verhaeghe chipped it across the slot and Matthew Peca slammed it home 1:22 into the third period.

"We had a lot of chances but give them credit, they play a fast game and they took advantage of their opportunity," said Nelson, one of eight players reassigned on Sunday by the parent Buffalo Sabres.

In losing to the Crunch for the sixth time in the past seven meetings (1-5-1), the Amerks surely learned a few little lessons. Like the speed with which the Crunch play; they're relentless. And they don't ever pass on an opportunity to play the body.

"They're committed to it," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. "They make our 'D' work and they finish their hits all the time. I thought we didn't throw the body when we had the angle."

The Amerks also didn't get to the net enough to create traffic in front of Ingram, Taylor said.

That said, there was plenty to like.

"You get 38 shots and can still be better? I think that's a good problem to have," Taylor said.

Another good problem? Trying to decide which players won't be in the lineup for Game 1 of the best-of-five first round series (on the road, either April 20 if it's against the Crunch, or April 21 if it's Toronto).

C.J. Smith returned from his lower-body injury, had three shots on goal and was right back in the thick of the offense. Defensemen Brendan Guhle and Matt Tennyson and forwards Kevin Porter and Alexander Nylander joined Ullmark and Nelson in the lineup from the contingent reassigned by the Sabres.

Ullmark last played on March 24. He had been out with a concussion suffered in practice in Buffalo. There was certainly no rust. More importantly, he said he's eager for his first AHL playoff action.

"Oh my God, yes," he said. "I may not look like I'm excited, but inside I'm very happy and very excited about it."

Amerks blanked by Crunch in potential playoff preview

Rochester First

By: Staff Report

In a potential playoff preview between the Rochester Americans (35-22-11-6) and North Division rival Syracuse Crunch (45-21-3-5), the two clubs combined for 14 penalties but the Amerks came up empty-handed in a 1-0 loss at The Blue Cross Arena.

Despite Wednesday night's setback, the Amerks show a record of 5-2-1-0 in their last eight contest and hold a two-point lead on the Utica Comets for the third spot in the AHL's North Division standings going into the last four days of the regular season.

Justin Bailey had a game-high five shots while Colin Blackwell saw his career-long point-streak come to an end at seven games. During his point streak, the second-year pro tallied 15 points (9+6) while adding 21 points (10+11) along with seven multi-point efforts dating back to Mar. 11. In his first game back in Rochester after missing the last 12 while on recall with the Buffalo Sabres, goaltender Linus Ullmark made 17 saves but was tagged with the loss. The Swedish netminder boasts a 20-12-10 record in 43 appearances this season.

Fourth-year forward Matthew Peca scored his 13th goal of the season for the Crunch, who have a 6-1-1-1 record against the Amerks in the head-to-head series this season, while netminder Connor Ingram recorded his fourth shutout of the campaign. In four games against Rochester, the rookie netminder boasts a 2-0-1 record to go along with a 1.34 goals-against average.

Neither the Amerks nor the Crunch found the back of the net in the opening 40 minutes as the two rivals combined for 13 infractions, including eight in the first seven minutes of the tilt.

"We had a lot of good chances tonight," Amerks head coach Chris Taylor said. "I think we had close to 75 shots attempts, which is really good for us. I really liked our chances. We had some good opportunities but were not able to capitalize on those chances and they were able to score on the chance they had."

As the two clubs emerged from the locker room scoreless to begin the final frame, Reid McNeill fired a shot from the left point towards Ullmark. The shot went wide of the cage and caromed off the end boards to Carter Verhaeghe. The forward slid a cross-crease pass to Peca, who shot the puck past the defenseless netminder.

The Syracuse goal came just 1:22 into the third period.

Rochester continued to test Ingram, but the rookie goaltender could not be cracked as he stopped all 14 shots he faced during the final frame to preserve the shutout and victory.

"I think we played a pretty solid game," said Casey Nelson, who returned to the Amerks lineup after spending nearly three months with the Sabres. "While we unfortunately did not score, I think we played well. We just have to put pucks behind their defensemen and get bodies to the net."

Rochester concludes its home portion of the 2017-18 regular season on Friday, April 13 when the Amerks welcome the Belleville Senators back to The Blue Cross Arena on Fan Appreciation Night. The 7:05 p.m. matchup will be the second meeting in the last seven days and the final contest of the season between the two teams.

Amerks run into hot Syracuse goalie

C&C WorldWide

By: Craig Potter

In what may be a preview of Round 1 of the upcoming Calder Cup playoffs, the Syracuse Crunch shut out the Rochester Americans, 1-0, on Wednesday night before 4,090 fans at the Blue Cross Arena.

The Amerks outshot the Crunch, 38-18, but Syracuse goalie Connor Ingram turned aside every one, including a breakaway by team captain Kevin Porter. The hosts also missed a couple of open nets.

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Rochester also went 0-for-6 on the power play, including a 5-on-3 advantage for 1:01 in the first period.

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The Crunch scored in the third period when Matthew Peca was parked on the open right side to Linus Ullmark and ripped the puck in for the lone goal of the game.

Ullmark, who was making his first start since sustaining an injury while on recall to the Sabres, made 17 saves, several of the spectacular variety to keep his team in the game.

The game had a playoff atmosphere.

“I’m sure everyone in the building could feel that,” Nelson said.

Ullmark added “I may not look like I’m excited, but inside I’m very happy and very excited about it.”

The Amerks play their final regular season home game on Friday against the Belleville Senators at 7:05 pm on Fan Appreciation Night.

Amerks shutout by Crunch at home

13 Wham

By: Prescott Rossi

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Syracuse Crunch gets shutout effort by Connor Ingram to edge Rochester

Syracuse.com

By: Staff Report

Connor Ingram recorded a 38-save performance as the Syracuse Crunch shutout out the Rochester Americans, 1-0, Wednesday at the Blue Cross Arena.

Matthew Peca scored the game's only goal early in the third period to advance the Crunch to 45-21-3-5 on the season and 6-1-1-1 in the 10-game season series against the Amerks.

With the win, the Crunch will set a new franchise record for points percentage, surpassing .638 in both the 2012-13 and 2005-06 season.

Tonight's victory marked Ingram's fourth shutout of the season. Linus Ullmark turned aside 17-of-18 in net for the Amerks. Syracuse was scoreless on four power play opportunities, while the penalty kill was successful on all six Rochester man-advantages.

After two scoreless periods, Peca tallied his 13th of the season 1:22 into the third. He chased the puck into the corner and sent it up to Reid McNeill at the left point. The blueliner's slap shot went wide and ricocheted off the end boards to Carter Verhaeghe at the post. He managed to quickly redirect the puck across the crease for Peca to chip into an open net on the backdoor.

The Crunch travels to Utica for the final road game of the regular season on Friday at 7 p.m.

After health scares, Blackwell now reaching new heights with Amerks

Rochester First

By: Prescott Rossi

With nine goals in his last seven games, Amerks center Colin Blackwell is playing the best hockey of his pro career.

"I don't take the game for granted anymore," said Blackwell after practice on Tuesday. "The game has been taken away from me, so I go out there and treat every shift like it's going to be my last."

The journey has hardly been easy. During his sophomore season at Harvard, Blackwell suffered a concussion in a game against Brown. He didn't suit up again for the Crimson for nearly two years.

"I was in a dark place, no doubt about it, but I had unbelievable support from my parents, and extended family, friends," said Blackwell.

Blackwell spent last season with the San Jose Sharks' AHL affiliate before becoming a free agent. He went through the summer without receiving an offer from another team. The Sabres invited Blackwell to their prospect camp in September only because another player went down with an injury, but that opportunity gave Blackwell a chance to stand out.

"There was the first time where I think the coaching staff was able to see the potential of what I was capable of doing and showing that I'm confident in a bunch of different situations," said Blackwell.

There were still more hurdles to climb after camp. Blackwell opened the season on a tryout contract with the Amerks and had to impress again. After eight games, the Amerks offered Blackwell a full-time contract for the rest of the season.

"He just brings energy. He's a spark plug out there," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "It rubs off on other guys. It rubs on draft picks. 2nd round, 1st, 3rd, doesn't matter, look at how he's playing. That's how you want to play, next thing you know, Colin is probably going to get an NHL contract."

With his health concerns behind him and his pro career established, Blackwell is eager to help the Amerks go far in the playoffs.

"Everybody is going to run into some roadblocks in life but it's kind of how you are going to overcome those road blocks," said Blackwell. "I'm looking forward to the playoff push that we can make here and three games left, so we have to make a few statement games moving forward."

The Rochester Americans host Syracuse on Wednesday at 7:05 in the Amerks penultimate home game of the season.

Amerks' Paetsch mourns for families back home in Humboldt bus tragedy

Pickin' Splinters

By: Kevin Oklobzija

As Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial went silent on Saturday night to pay respect for the victims of the junior hockey bus crash in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, the magnitude of the tragedy hit Nathan Paetsch much harder.

The bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos Tier II junior team collided with a tractor-trailer in near Tisdale, Sask., near the intersection of two highways late Friday afternoon. Of 29 passengers on the bus, 15 died. The other 14 were injured.

Humboldt has a population of around 5,900. That's where Paetsch was born, on March 30, 1983. He grew up about 25 miles north, in LeRoy, essentially the distance from Le Roy, N.Y., to Rochester. There's no hospital in LeRoy, which doesn't have 500 residents.

"My heart breaks for those parents, those families, those kids," Paetsch said late Saturday night after the Amerks 6-5 overtime victory over the Toronto Marlies. "Everyone's in mourning.

"It's just awful. It's hard to speak about."

Paetsch has made Spencerport home for more than a decade, going back the start of his pro career with the Amerks. But the rest of his family is back in Saskatchewan. His parents, Brenda and Rick, still live in LeRoy. His grandmother, Anne Bendig, lives in Humboldt. He has friends in Humboldt and phoned one on Saturday.

"Everybody knows everybody there," Paetsch said. "I grew up watching the Humboldt Broncos. I think the first higher-level hockey game I ever saw was in Humboldt. I went to the Broncos hockey camp when I was a little kid.

"It's been a tough day."