



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

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TONIGHT'S GAME: Cleveland @ Rochester

Sabres prospect Rasmus Asplund's development about performance, not points

Buffalo News

By: *Bill Hoppe*

On paper, Sabres prospect Rasmus Asplund appeared to be acclimating to the AHL slowly. Through his first 16 games with the Americans, the Swedish center mustered only a single assist.

But before Asplund, 21, started his rookie season, Amerks coach Chris Taylor told the former second-round pick he would be judged on his overall performance, not his offensive production.

"We told him right off the bat that points are not a factor for me," Taylor said. "It's what he does and how we play as a team, and he's made the team a lot better."

So Asplund plowed ahead, working on the details of his game and developing confidence beside his linemates Victor Olofsson and Danny O'Regan.

"Nothing fazes him," Taylor said of Asplund, a versatile youngster he utilizes in all situations. "He's one of those guys who understood what he was doing and the plays he was making contributed to our team."

The 5-foot-11, 176-pound Asplund started contributing points Nov. 18, when he scored his first and only goal. In the last nine games, he has compiled eight points, including a three-assist night in the Amerks' 5-2 win against the Utica Comets last Wednesday in Blue Cross Arena.

"Sometimes you have a great game and you get no points and you feel like, 'Did I really help the team tonight?'" Taylor said afterward. "And he got rewarded for his play tonight."

Taylor said it was Asplund's best performance this season.

"He was in guys' hands all the time," Taylor said. "I thought he was on the puck all the time, he was touching the puck first on the forecheck. He was just everywhere."

So what exactly has changed for Asplund in the last month?

"I've been trying to work a lot on small details," said Asplund, who spent the last four seasons playing against men in the Swedish Hockey League and just turned 21 on Dec. 3.

Asplund improved his goal and assist totals every season in the SHL. Still, he produced that offense on the larger European ice surface. On the smaller North American ice, he quickly learned he must operate at a faster pace.

"I've tried to adjust small things in my game that works in the big rink but doesn't work here," Asplund said. "It's really hard to say one thing. Small, small things you need to adjust it from the big rink. I think I've been doing that, I've been comfortable in the change I've been doing in my game the last couple of weeks now."

Of course, adjusting to the smaller ice — European surfaces are more than 13 feet wider — can be tough, especially when you've played pro hockey for years.

"I've been playing pro over there for four years," Asplund said. "You're getting used to playing that game. Coming over here is a totally different game, I would say. The style the game is played, it's very fast."

Asplund's wingers have boosted his development. Olofsson and O'Regan have flanked the youngster all season, giving him some stability in a league with regular roster movement.

"It's a lot easier to work on details, really get together and talk a lot about what we want to do out there," Asplund said. "Playing with the same guys helps a lot to work on the game together."

That communication is critical.

"We're just building more and more chemistry every game," O'Regan said. "Easy guy to play with, easy guy to talk to. We come up with stuff after every shift or every game. We talk about little things we can do to create a chance."

Asplund, Olofsson and O'Regan have morphed into perhaps Taylor's most trusted trio.

"They get on pucks, they're different styles, they're used to each other, they're creative but responsible in the same regard," Taylor said. "They're all the same almost but they have different tendencies on the ice. I just love that line. I can rely on them."

He added: "I can put them on against the top lines, they're very good defensively," Taylor said. "I can put them on against a line that I think they'll score us a goal."

Hunwick's assignment

Taylor said Sabres defenseman Matt Hunwick's conditioning stint with the Amerks will be treated "just like any other assignment."

"Just bring him down and get him used to the guys and let him play," Taylor said.

Hunwick, 33, played Wednesday against the Binghamton Devils and is expected to play Friday versus the Cleveland Monsters. He had an assist on the Amerks' lone goal in a 5-1 loss to Binghamton.

A neck injury he suffered training during the offseason has sidelined Hunwick all season. He recently began practicing with the Sabres.

Hunwick hasn't played an AHL game since March 26, 2014 with the Lake Erie Monsters.

Porter update

Taylor said Amerks captain Kevin Porter is week-to-week with an upper-body injury he suffered when he hit an opponent in Friday's 2-1 win against the Providence Bruins.

Sabres rookie Lawrence Pilut looking comfortable in NHL

Buffalo Hockey News

By: *Bill Hoppe*

If you've watched Sabres defenseman Lawrence Pilut closely, you possibly noticed he often taps his stick on the ice before shooting the puck.

Why? The rookie said he wants to get rid of the snow that has accumulated on his blade.

"Get a feel for the puck a little better," Pilut explained after recording an assist in Tuesday's 4-3 overtime win against the Los Angeles Kings inside KeyBank Center.

Chances are Pilut, 22, would still have a pretty good feel if he kept a little snow.

Just five games into his NHL career, the Swede has looked impressive, showcasing terrific vision and playmaking ability.

On Tuesday, center Johan Larsson redirect Pilut's shot from the right point — yes, he tapped his stick first — in for the tying goal late.

"My thought was just trying to get it through and hit a skate or something," Pilut said. "I got a lucky bounce. It was a great effort by Larry."

In Saturday afternoon's 6-2 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, Pilut spotted Jack Eichel in front of the net and unleashed a quick shot from the left point the captain tipped in.

Pilut, who has three goals and 22 points in 16 games with the Rochester Americans this season, keeps looking more comfortable.

"I'm getting there and trying to transition my game from Rochester and from the Swedish league as much as possible," Pilut said. "I'm feeling better and better."

Pilut believes he has another step.

"Today was a good step forward," he said.

Matt Hunwick gets first game action, unsure of timetable for Sabres' return

Buffalo News

By: *Bill Hoppe*

As his first game in more than eight months approached, defenseman Matt Hunwick said he started feeling anxious and experiencing some nerves.

Hunwick, 33, has played 621 games as pro, but Tuesday's contest for the Americans, the start of an American Hockey League conditioning assignment, held special meaning.

The Michigan native hadn't played a game since April 1, his final appearance with the Pittsburgh Penguins. After injuring his neck working out during the offseason, he has missed more than two months of his first season with the Sabres. So Wednesday's pregame nap didn't last long.

"I took my nap, I was up at 2 o'clock ready to go," Hunwick said following the Amerks' loss 5-1 to the Binghamton Devils in Blue Cross Arena.

Hunwick, who skated beside Jack Dougherty, was one of the Amerks' few bright spots in an otherwise ugly night.

"You can tell there's a reason why he's played so many NHL games," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. "I thought he played really well for his first game. It's unfortunate that we didn't play well as a team."

Taylor utilized Hunwick in all situations, giving him big minutes.

"It's good just to get the first one over with," said Hunwick, who assisted on Sean Malone's second-period goal. "I think I've been waiting a long time for it. I did have some nerves before, just because it's been so long."

Hunwick spent nearly two weeks practicing with the Sabres before Wednesday's appearance. Still, nothing can replicate game action.

"I guess you can only practice so much," Hunwick said. "I think at some I need to get into a game. So this is a great first opportunity."

Early in Wednesday's contest, Hunwick said his body felt like he hadn't played in more than eight months.

"Seven or eight months is probably the longest I've been off other than the lockout year," Hunwick said. "I think I felt it a little bit in the first period just trying to get my mind going, just the speed of the game.

"Like anything, you adjust, you pick up things as the game goes along."

While Hunwick had made more than 100 AHL appearances, he hadn't played in the league since 2013-14.

"I don't really know anyone on the other team anymore," Hunwick said of the AHL. "It's been a while, the leagues turns over so quick nowadays, a lot of young guys. Just the speed of the game, even the American Hockey League is fast."

Hunwick doesn't have a timetable for his return to the NHL. He will likely play for the Amerks again Friday against the Cleveland Monsters.

"Another game I'll have a better idea," Hunwick said. "After the first period, I maybe did feel a little slow with decision-making. I just got to get back to that pace, reading the play, going back for pucks.

"That's probably the biggest thing as defensemen, just get used to going back, skating, checking your shoulders, seeing what's available and making the right play."

The Sabres, who acquired Hunwick on June 27, have placed him on long-term injured reserve, according to capfriendly.com. Hunwick has a \$2.25 million salary this season.

Johansson's rough night

Even though the Sabres returned goalie Scott Wedgewood to the Amerks on Tuesday, Taylor started prospect Jonas Johansson against Binghamton.

"It was warranted that he got that start," Taylor said of Johansson, who won two starts last week after the Amerks summoned him from the ECHL.

Johansson, 23, didn't last long, allowing four goals on 10 shots before Taylor yanked him after the Devils scored twice in the first 1:53 of the second period.

Taylor wouldn't pin all of the goals on Johansson.

"Would he have liked one or two back? For sure," Taylor said. "You have to make a big save. The spiraling just kept going and I had to stop it. It wasn't fair for him to stay in."

Backup Adam Wilcox replaced Johansson.

"It's never fun," Johansson said of getting yanked. "You feel like you let your team down. But nothing will be better if I sit (ticked off) at the bench, that's for sure. ... I'm a little disappointed in my game tonight. I felt like I didn't come up with enough high-level (saves)."

Taylor wanted Wedgewood to receive more practice time, so he scratched him.

The Amerks sent Johansson back to Cincinnati on Thursday. The Swede went 2-1-0 with a 2.97 goals-against average and an .891 save percentage in three games.

Amerks notes

Taylor said Amerks captain Kevin Porter is week to week with a lower-body injury he suffered when he hit an opponent in Friday's 2-1 win against the Providence Bruins. ... Amerks forward Dalton Smith missed Wednesday's game because the AHL suspended him for boarding Providence's Jakub Zboril. ... Despite the loss, Rochester has won five of its last seven.

A Look Back At The Frozen Frontier Five Years Later

Amerks.com

By: *Warren Kosel*

Even It had all the makings of a Hollywood script.

The rarest of sporting events between two longtime rivals with storied histories taking the game of hockey back to its purest form in the outdoors. A standing-room only crowd of 11,015 that witnessed more than 60 minutes of unrelenting, edge-of-your-seat action that ended in true storybook fashion with the team captain emerging as the ultimate hero. And, if that wasn't enough, a climactic finale sealed by a thrilling shootout victory.

With temperatures hovering at around 18 degrees for opening faceoff and a fresh coating of snow that blanketed the downtown ballpark-turned-ice rink, the Frozen Frontier was just that. The game itself provided the perfect setting to showcase the American Hockey League in the grandest of spectacles, while giving the players, fans and even the community at large, an experience they will always remember.

"For me, unique events like these bring the game back to its purest form" said former Amerks captain Matt Ellis, who scored once in regulation and then netted the game-winner in the sixth round of the shootout to cap a stirring 5-4 victory over the North Division rival Lake Erie Monsters. "This is the start we all got when we were kids and I know for me being one of the older guys on the team it still brings me back to my childhood days playing on the pond or playing in the backyard. I felt like a kid again being able to share this with my teammates."

But the game was neither on a pond nor a neighborhood backyard. Frontier Field, traditionally home to minor league baseball's Rochester Red Wings, was converted to an outdoor ice surface equipped with all the amenities of a standard-size rink. Rochester's regular season matchup against Lake Erie was the premier event of a 10-day outdoor festival devoted to hockey players of all ages and skill levels to coincide with a schedule of events that features a slew of college and high school hockey games, as well as the opportunity for the general public to purchase ice for holiday parties, corporate outings, men's league games, youth leagues and open skates.

For the players and coaches, the Frozen Frontier offered not only a chance to be a part of something special, but it was also an opportunity to revisit their youth when the game was most fun. The off-ice pageantry made the presentation of the event all the more extraordinary, from the pregame walk down the tunnel to the powerful, evocative on-field entrance accompanied by fireworks and bellows from the Rochester faithful. This was certainly like no other game.

"It definitely takes a lot out of you in terms of the build-up of the game," said then-Amerks head coach Chadd Cassidy, whose team erased a 3-1 deficit in regulation and bounced back from a 2-0 hole in the shootout. "It was definitely an emotion-filled night and I saw a little bit of everything over the course of the game."

Rochester's late-game resurgence was a direct result of the crowd's energy and Cassidy cites that his team fed off that heading into the latter stages of the game.

"Awesome, it was just awesome," Cassidy said of the crowd's energy. "I remember during the last TV timeout just looking up at the stands, and as cold as it was, I didn't see a whole lot of empty seats up there. You just feel the energy and everybody was into the game and I'm willing to bet the fans are as emotionally drained as we are (the team) right now."

At the end of the day, though, with the Amerks already a third of the way through the season, the game remains as important as ever with another two points at stake. The magnitude and hoopla of the game aside, an event like this is something every player only wishes they can experience at least once in their career. The only downside to that, however, is recognizing the underlying importance of the game and maintaining focus on the task at hand.

“Once the puck drops, you play hockey,” said Ellis, whose valiant efforts promptly earned him a promotion to the parent Buffalo Sabres the very next day. “I don’t think the setting really makes a difference. We’ve all played enough games to realize that as soon as you throw a puck on the ice, all of a sudden it’s a game. The venue might have been a little different, as well as the outdoor elements, but we forced ourselves to become accustomed to them. Once we’re out there, we all have a job to do and it’s game time.”

Amerks veteran forward Mike Zigomanis knew all too well how to balance the fine line of enjoying the outdoor experience while getting the job done. The outing at Frontier Field was the second in three years for Zigomanis, who also appeared in the provincial matchup against the Hamilton Bulldogs as a member of the Toronto Marlies during the 2011-12 campaign. His prior experience was very influential for the Rochester youth, especially considering the amount of physical and mental preparation leading up to puck drop, but he, too, echoed Ellis’ sentiments about the game overall.

“I told the guys before that it was going to be one of the games where you really can’t blame the elements,” said Zigomanis. “We just had to go out there and enjoy it and the team that was going to have the most fun, was going to come out on top. At the end of the day, it’s still a regular season game and we needed to continue doing the things we have been doing and building as a team to go out there and get two points.”

From a fan perspective, the Frozen Frontier may have offered a different outlook for those fortunate enough to partake in the historic evening, but also something equally as meaningful. In actuality, the bigger picture of Friday’s events had little to no relevance whatsoever with the outcome of the game or its participants as evidenced by the Lake Erie players, who despite losing the game, chose to stay on the ice and render an appreciative salute to both the Rochester and Cleveland fans that made the four-hour commute to the Flower City.

The Frozen Frontier represented how a community rallied around its team and how 11,015 crazed and energetic fans braved the cold and wintery elements just to say they were part of the first-ever outdoor game in franchise history. The game unified a town with an already deep-rooted hockey history and further solidified its legendary status as a hockey hotbed. It was about a city celebrating a game its most passionate about. It was about creating memories.

Years from now, everyone involved will look back and reflect on what was the Frozen Frontier and how it will forever be a truly one-of-a-kind experience that players and fans alike will always remember.

But, then again, not even Hollywood could have scripted this one better.

Your Amerks 6-pack from a forgettable Wednesday
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija

Even though goalie Scott Wedgewood was returned to the Rochester Americans on Tuesday by the Buffalo Sabres, Jonas Johansson was given the start on Wednesday night.

It might be his last for a while.

Johansson didn't make it through 22 minutes, allowing four goals to the Binghamton Devils on just 10 shots before he was replaced by Adam Wilcox.

Needless to say, Johansson struggled. Then again, which Amerks player didn't? The goalie was hardly deserving of all the blame in what became a 5-1 loss.

Your Wednesday night Amerks 6-pack:

1. So why did Johansson start?

Amerks coach Chris Taylor said the start "was warranted" based on how the second-year goaltender played last week, and because "Wedgewood just got sent down and didn't get a lot of practice time (during the five-day recall) in Buffalo."

Johansson won his first two starts, 5-2 on Dec. 5 against a mediocre Utica team and 2-1 on Friday against the on-a-roll Providence Bruins. He stopped 51 of 54 shots in the two games.

And he was promoted to the Amerks on merit. He had gone 7-3-1 with 2.49 GAA and .912 save percentage with ECHL Cincinnati.

Still, Wedgewood is clearly the Amerks No. 1 goalie. Now that he's back, the Amerks will soon need to decide who goes to Cincinnati.

2. Grind line was Amerks most effective line

When your fourth line creates the most scoring chances, turnovers and offensive zone time, that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's definitely not a compliment to the other three groups.

Still, for the entire night, wingers Tyler Randell and Yannick Veilleux with just-recalled center Myles Powell were clearly the most effective line. Taylor agreed.

"They just worked hard, they went after pucks, they forced turnovers," he said. Veilleux had a game-high seven shots on goal.

3. Where was everyone else?

The Amerks essentially gave the Devils two goals in the first period.

Ineffective play in the Amerks zone by the Malone-Nylander-Justin Bailey line led to the Devils first goal. Defenseman Zach Redmond then made a poor pass in the D-zone that turned into the second goal during an Amerks power play.

"It's unacceptable to start that way," Malone said.

Said Taylor: "Those are two costly mistakes. Our execution was terrible."

4. Hunwick begins conditioning assignment

Defenseman Matt Hunwick, 33, made his Amerks debut, joining the club Wednesday on a conditioning assignment.

The 12th-year defenseman hadn't played all season because of a neck injury suffered during a summer workout. He came to organization along with Conor Sheary in an off-season trade that sent a conditional draft pick to Pittsburgh.

Hunwick's last game was on April 1. He was a healthy scratch for the Penguins final 14 games last season (two regular season, 12 playoff). He felt the layoff, too.

"After the first period I did feel a little slow in decision-making," he said. "That's the biggest thing."

How long will it be before he's NHL ready? "I think I'll have a better idea after one more game."

Hunwick helped set up the Amerks goal 8:22 into the second period. He denied a clearing attempt near the left point, sweeping the puck to high slot for Alex Nylander, who then made a perfect no-look pass to Sean Malone. All it did, however, was cut the deficit to 4-1.

5. Kevin Porter injury update

Taylor said the Amerks captain has a lower body injury and his status is considered "week to week."

Porter was hurt midway through the third period on Friday, when he delivered an open-ice check in the game against Providence.

Following what ended up being an awkward hit, he immediately went to the bench and then to the dressing room.

That's why Myles Powell came up from Cincinnati on Tuesday.

6. Within three degrees of the Rockies

The game's first goal was scored by John Quenneville, who was barging across the deep slot and had the point shot by defenseman John Ramage deflect in off his body.

It was a Long Live the NHL Colorado Rockies moment, repeated when Quenneville assisted on a Ramage goal 1:21 into the second period.

Quenneville is the second cousin of former Chicago Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville and Ramage is the son of former NHLer Rob. The elder Quenneville and elder Ramage spent three seasons (1979-80 through 1981-82) with Rockies in Denver before the franchise moved to East Rutherford, N.J., and became the Devils.

NOTE: Amerks winger Dalton Smith was forced to miss Wednesday's game because of the one-game suspension issued by the AHL on Monday. He was punished for a check early in the third period that sent Providence defenseman Jakub Zboril awkwardly into the boards. No penalty was assessed on the play.

Binghamton be-Devils the Amerks
C&C Worldwide
By: *Craig Potter*

It was a rough outing pretty much all the way around for the Rochester Americans on Wednesday night as the visiting Binghamton Devils skated away with a 5-1 victory before 2,772 fans at the Blue Cross Arena.

Starting goalie Jonas Johansson, who was recalled from Cincinnati of the ECHL last week, suffered his first AHL loss of the season after winning both games last week at the BCA.

Amerks coach Chris Taylor said the start "was warranted" based on how the second-year goaltender played last week, and because "(Scott) Wedgewood just got sent down and didn't get a lot of practice time (during the five-day recall) in Buffalo."

The Amerks double the Devils shots in the first period (16 to 8), but trailed, 2-0.

"We had a lot of good shots in the first period, but not a lot of good second chances nor traffic in front of the net," said Taylor. "On Binghamton's first goal, they capitalized on their chance and their second goal while we were on the power-play. It really hurt and we could not recover."

Johansson gave up 4 goals on 10 shots before being pulled by coach Chris Taylor after allowing 2 goals in 32 seconds less than 2 minutes into the second period.

Adam Wilcox came on in relief and stopped 20 of the 21 shots he faced.

The loss ended Rochester's 3-game winning streak as the Amerks had won 5 of their last 6 games to remain in first place in the North Division.

Sean Malone tallied Rochester's lone goal midway through the second period as he convert a pass from Alex Nylander.

"The start we had tonight was unacceptable," said Malone. "With Wednesday games and games at home we have to have better starts. Binghamton is a good team, who plays us hard every game, so we have to know that going into the game."

Matt Hunwick, 33, who is on a conditioning assignment from the Buffalo Sabres, picked up an assist on the play.

"Overall, I felt pretty good," said Hunwick, who made his organizational debut after missing the first three months of the season due to a neck injury suffered in the off-season. He last played a game April 1 with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

"The first period to period and a half, I felt slow trying to get up to speed, but as the game went on I felt better and better. By the end of the game, I thought my skating was where I had hoped it would be."

How long will it be before he's NHL ready? "I think I'll have a better idea after one more game."

**NOTES* — Amerks team captain Kevin Porter has a lower body injury and his status is considered "week to week" . . . The Buffalo Sabres announced on Wednesday that the team has assigned goaltender Scott Wedgewood to the Rochester

Americans...The Sabres also assigned defenseman Matt Hunwick on Wednesday to the Amerks on a conditioning loan. He last played in the AHL with the Lake Erie Monsters in 2013-14...The Amerks play a home-and-home series against the Cleveland Monsters starting Friday night at 7:05 pm at the BCA before the series moves to Cleveland Saturday night... In 3 games thus far this season versus Binghamton, the Devils lead the series, 2-1...Amerks winger Dalton Smith was forced to miss Wednesday's game because of the one-game suspension issued by the AHL on Monday. He was punished for a check early in the third period that sent Providence defenseman Jakub Zboril awkwardly into the boards. No penalty was assessed on the play.

Binghamton in Big Blow -Out Victory Over Rival Rochester
All About The Jersey
By: *Jeff Ulmer*

Binghamton Devils' offense exploded for five goals on Wednesday en-route to a 5-1 victory over the Rochester Americans at Blue Cross Arena. The win helped erase a four-game losing skid for the Devils and also stopped a three-game winning streak to their arch-rivals in the North Division.

Devils' defenseman John Ramage had himself a three-point night (1g, 2a) and the top line of *Quenneville - Sharangovich - Studenic* were reunited and shined for a combined five points on the night. Goaltender Mackenzie Blackwood was solid as he bounced back from last Saturday's poor performance in stellar fashion, making 36 saves to earn himself second *Star of the Game* honors.

Binghamton (11-14-3-0) got on the scoreboard quickly as John Quenneville continued his recent hot streak as his re-direction went by Rochester netminder Jonas Johansson less than five minutes in. BDevils would make it a two-goal advantage followed by a Rochester turnover from defenseman Zach Redmond, as the puck bounced to Egor Sharangovich off his shin. He in turn scored his fifth of the season for a shorthanded tally.

In the second period, the Devils would score twice within 32 seconds apart to open for a 4-1 lead. First Ramage would slap home his third of the season off a loose puck and Blake Pietila added his ninth with a sharp wrist that picked the far corner of the net, unassisted. That would end Johansson's evening, as he was then replaced by backup Adam Wilcox after he let in four goals on ten shots.

Rochester's Sean Malone would end the shut-out bid in that middle frame but yet another turnover led to Kurtis Gabriel in answering back with a rocket from the circle for his second in 17 games.

There would be no scoring from either club in the final 20 minutes as the Devils won their second in a row over the Amerks despite being out-shot 37-31.

Post Game Notes

- Tangradi received a game suspension on his hit to Utica Comets' defenseman Ashton Sautner last Saturday. Ryan Schmelzer's (2 games) check to the head of Guillaume Brisebois in the same night with the Utica Comets.
- A nice road win against the top team in the division as the Devils have the Amerks number winning two out of three so far with seven remaining.
- With the win, Blackwood improved to 6-6-1-1 on the season with a 2.59 GAA, 0.917 SV%, a far cry from last year as he continues to prove why he is the BDevils #1 goalie. I have total confidence in him as long as Coach MD utilizes him correctly and not overplay him with any more back-to-backs.
- JQ continues to play well as he has nothing left to prove in the AHL. He should be up with the big club as a result of his fifth goal in the last seven outings for Binghamton.
- Devils' PK was awesome in stopping all four man-advantages for the Amerks. PP was 0 for 1 but also showed some improvement, however slightly it was. But I'll take it on both fronts with the struggles it has been.
- Rochester and ex-Devil goaltender Scotty Wedgewood was a healthy scratch as the Amerks continue to experiment with the rotation of three netminders. I'm surprised, as Wedgie had some early success against his former team with the lone win back on Nov 24th.

B-Devils snap skid by dominating AHL North Division leader

W BNG.com

By: *Bill Hoppe*

The Binghamton Devils scored the first four goals of the game Wednesday night in Rochester to top the AHL North Division leader, the Rochester Americans, 5-1.

The victory snapped Binghamton's four-game losing streak.

The B-Devils scored twice in the first period and three times in the second. John Ramage netted a goal (3) and two assists in the victory. John Quenneville (9), Egor Sharangovich (5), Blake Pietila (9) and Kurtis Gabriel (2) also scored for the B-Devils.

Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 36-of-37 shots on net in the victory for Binghamton.

Final score: Binghamton (11-14-3-0) – 5, Rochester (16-7-2-0) – 1

Binghamton is back on the road Friday, November 14 at Utica before returning home Saturday, November 15 to face the Belleville Senators. Puck drops Saturday night at 7:05 p.m.

Sabres' Matt Hunwick to start rehab assignment with Amerks
Buffalo Hockey News
By: *Bill Hoppe*

On April 1, defenseman Matt Hunwick made his 521st NHL appearance, skating just over 12 minutes in Pittsburgh's 3-1 loss in Washington.

More than eight months later, Hunwick, 33, hasn't played another game. That should, however, change Wednesday for the Sabres newcomer, who has missed the first 30 contests this season recovering from a neck injury.

Hunwick will be assigned to the Rochester Americans for an AHL rehab assignment today, Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

The Amerks host the Binghamton Devils on Wednesday and the Cleveland Monsters on Friday. Housley said Hunwick could play both games.

"It's nice to be healthy and to get kind of get past the last step," said Hunwick, who was acquired from the Penguins with winger Conor Sheary on June 27.

Hunwick, who was injured training during the offseason, started practicing almost two weeks ago. While the Sabres have had a decent amount of practice time in the last week or so, that can only help Hunwick so much. Game action simply can't be replicated during practice.

Hunwick hasn't played an AHL contest since March 26, 2014.

"Our practices are obviously high-tempo, but games, the intensity's a lot higher," Hunwick said. "So it'll be good to get a couple games in before joining the team again.

"The NHL game, obviously, at the start of the season, maybe is a hair slower than it is at the midpoint. . . . Joining kind of halfway through will kind of be like just getting right in the fire."

Naturally, waiting so long to play has "been frustrating at times," Hunwick said.

"I'm not a very patient person, and this process has tested that," he said. "Sometimes you have to let time do it's thing and try to heal. We've done that."

Hunwick is long-term injured reserve, giving the Sabres relief from his \$2,250,000 salary, according to capfriendly.com. The Sabres are \$315,556 under the salary cap, according to the site.

Hunwick was one of a handful of Sabres on the ice this morning. The team hosts the Los Angeles Kings tonight at KeyBank Center.

Sabres' Hunwick nearing return, joining Rochester for conditioning assignment

Buffalo News

By: *Lance Lysowski*

Matt Hunwick is inching closer to making his long-awaited debut with the Buffalo Sabres. Hunwick, a 33-year-old defenseman acquired along with Conor Sheary from the Pittsburgh Penguins in June, was assigned to the Rochester Americans for a conditioning assignment Tuesday.

Hunwick is expected to play Wednesday night against the Binghamton Devils at Blue Cross Arena and could remain with the Americans for a home game Friday night against the Cleveland Monsters. He was unable to practice with the Sabres until Nov. 29 because of a neck injury suffered during an off-ice offseason workout.

His potential return is good news for the Sabres, who are in need of blue-line help. Injured defensemen Jake McCabe and Casey Nelson remain week-to-week, while Marco Scandella wore a white noncontact jersey during an optional morning skate Tuesday.

"I think it's a good step in the process, especially not having played a game in six, seven months, something like that," Hunwick told reporters Tuesday in KeyBank Center. "It will be a good start."

Hunwick has played in 521 NHL games for five teams. In July 2017, he signed a three-year, \$6.7 million contract with Pittsburgh, where he never quite fit into coach Mike Sullivan's system. Hunwick had four goals and six assists with a minus-4 rating in 42 games.

It was in stark contrast to his play one season earlier when he was a plus-8 in 72 games for Toronto. Hunwick was acquired along with Sheary for a conditional 2019 fourth-round pick. He counts \$2.25 million against the cap this season and is under contract for the same amount through 2019; however, the Sabres have received salary-cap relief this season since he's on long-term injured reserve.

Hunwick, a seventh-round draft pick out of the University of Michigan in 2004, played on a fourth defensive pairing with winger Remi Elie at practice Monday. It remains unclear whether he will play one or both games with Rochester, though it is unlikely the Sabres would rush him into their lineup.

"Hunwick's done a great job. ... He's in a good place," coach Phil Housley said. "We just need to get him some action. Possibly two games — Wednesday and Friday home games."

It's been an unusual six months for Hunwick. He was a healthy scratch throughout the Stanley Cup playoffs last season when the Penguins lost to the Washington Capitals in the second round. The injury put his 2018-19 season in jeopardy, and he was not able to join the Sabres until this past road trip.

This past week has given Hunwick more practice time to learn the Sabres' system, particularly defensive-zone and neutral-zone coverages. He has also enjoyed Housley's uptempo practices, which served as an important step in his return to game action. The veteran accepted the conditioning assignment because there is no other way to get acclimated to game speed.

"It will be good to get a couple games in before joining the team again," Hunwick said. "The NHL game at the start of the season is maybe a hair slower than it is at the midpoint and obviously the playoffs are another step up. Joining kind of halfway through will be like getting right in the fire. This will be a good opportunity to kind of get my feet wet."

Sabres goalie prospect Jonas Johansson gets a shot with Amerks
Buffalo News
By: *Bill Hoppe*

Goalie Jonas Johansson figured he could earn a recall to the Americans this season.

The Sabres' prospect had already played 14 AHL games, including some big matchups down the stretch in March and April. The Sabres also awarded him a long look during NHL training camp, boosting his confidence.

Still, when Johansson, 23, learned last Monday the Amerks were summoning him from the Cincinnati Cyclones, their ECHL affiliate, the news was unexpected.

"I try to stay ready if it would happen," Johansson said after making 25 saves in Wednesday's 5-2 win against the Utica Comets in Blue Cross Arena. "I don't want to say I was surprised about it, but I wasn't really expecting it. I was just trying to have it in mind that it might happen sometime during the season."

That it happened in early December with two healthy goalies on the roster and the Amerks in first place surprised some observers. But Amerks coach Chris Taylor insisted Johansson's presence isn't a reflection of Scott Wedgewood and Adam Wilcox, his regular goalies.

"I'm not sending a message, definitely not," Taylor said.

The Sabres recalled Wedgewood on Friday, so Johansson, the only goalie prospect in Rochester or Cincinnati, could earn more action as Carter Hutton recovers from his upper-body injury. The Sabres' old regime drafted Johansson in the third round in 2014, 61st overall.

Johansson played again in Friday's 2-1 home win against the Providence Bruins, making 26 saves. Taylor said the start would've been Wedgewood's and he wanted to keep his goalie schedule.

Wilcox was scratched Wednesday before playing in Saturday's 4-3 road win against the Syracuse Crunch.

Taylor said it was organizational decision to recall Johansson, who had won six of his last eight starts with the Cyclones.

"He played well and he's a big part of our organization," Taylor said. "So we wanted to get him a game and we felt this was the right time to get him a game."

Johansson stopped the first 23 shots he faced Wednesday and lost the shutout with 4:14 left in the third period.

Taylor said he chose to play the Swede against Utica because he liked the way he practiced Tuesday and the team has a busy schedule.

The Amerks have three games a week the rest of December.

"We thought this was a good opportunity with how many games we have coming up, a good opportunity to get into action against a good team," Taylor said. "He played very well."

The 6-foot-5, 214-pound Johansson said he has "found a better consistency" this season, his second full North American campaign.

In his last eight appearances, he has compiled a 1.74 goals-against average and a .940 save percentage.

"I'm trying to work more on my fundamental part of my game a little bit, because I feel like I have the strength and the speed but maybe I didn't find the consistency yet," Johansson said.

Overall, he is 7-3-1-1 with a 2.49 goals-against average, a .910 save percentage and two shutouts in 12 games with the Cyclones. "It's great for goalies to get an opportunity to play down there, because it's a scrambly league, a lot of things can happen," Johansson said. "If you manage to play good on that level, I think that can help you the rest of your career."

Johansson's long stay in Buffalo during camp, including his first NHL exhibition appearance Sept. 17, clearly helped him.

"That was really cool," Johansson said of his 20-minute relief stint. "I took a lot of confidence. It's great to feel you have done it, you have it with you. I got to play against NHL players, it's great to have that in your stomach that you can handle."

Bailey ends goal drought

Amerks winger Justin Bailey ended a six game-goal drought Friday, getting an early power-play marker before scoring again thanks to "playing good structure," Taylor said.

Later in the first period, Bailey intercepted a pass just inside the blue line and beat two defenders down the slot to score his seventh goal this season.

"If he took care of those details away from the puck, he'd get those scoring opportunities, and that's how he creates offense," Taylor said.

Bailey, who didn't score his first goal until his 12th game, also utilizes his speed to create offense.

"When I'm moving my feet, I put a lot of pressure on the D," the Williamsville native said. "I find, especially in the first 10 minutes, if I'm moving, it creates a lot of bad gaps later in the game, the D start to back off a little bit. That's when the holes and things like that open up."

Notes

Wilcox has recorded three of his wins this season against Syracuse, his former team. Saturday's victory stopped the Crunch's 13-game point streak. . . . Defenseman Zach Redmond ended a season-long four-game goal drought Saturday, scoring his 14th in the Amerks' 24th game. Redmond scored a career-high 15 times last season in 66 appearances.