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Injured Sabres prospect Matej Pekar making most of time in Rochester
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
March 28, 2019

At first, Sabres prospect Matej Pekar thought he was just being soft when he skated off the ice after getting leveled Jan. 10.

"It was just a bad angle of a hit, not even a dirty hit, I'd say," Pekar said last week in Blue Cross Arena. "I basically took the puck into two, three guys and one guy lifted my stick."

Then Pekar, who was in the midst of a standout rookie season with the Barrie Colts, looked down at the puck.

"All of a sudden, I get blindsided from the third guy coming off the back check," the winger said.

When Pekar got off the ice, the severity of the injury finally hit him hard.

"I was telling my trainer, 'Yo, Jimmy, I can't lift my arm, I don't what's going on,' " he said.

Colts trainer Jimmy McKnight informed Pekar that the hit from Sudbury Wolves defenseman Liam Ross broke his collarbone.

That's when Pekar, 19, said he "absolutely lost it on the way to the locker room" and screamed.

"I was absolutely devastated, to be honest," he said.

The Czech Republic player's first Ontario Hockey League season was over after only 33 games. He soon came to grips that he couldn't do anything about the injury.

"I told myself, 'I can't control it . . . can't be really crying over that,' " said Pekar, whose team missed the playoffs without him. After about six weeks, he said he started feeling OK again.

These days, Pekar, a fourth-round pick in 2018, 94th overall, is learning the ropes of pro hockey with the Rochester Americans.

After Barrie's season ended, he joined the Sabres' American Hockey League affiliate last week to continue his development.

The early plan is to have Pekar do off-ice work and join the Amerks on the ice following practice to work on his skills. He did, however, participate in Friday's morning skate and fill in for winger C.J. Smith during Tuesday's practice.

Off the ice, Pekar is working to finish his senior year of high school.

Whether Pekar plays games with the Amerks will be determined later.

"Lots of excitement," he said of coming to Rochester. "The plan (is) basically learn as much as I can, develop as much as I can, take from all of this as much as I can . . . and just improve myself by being around professional athletes, around guys that take hockey very seriously."

A mix of skill and tenacity has helped Pekar develop into one of the Sabres' top forward prospects over the last nine months.

Just days after the draft, his agitating style started earning him attention during Buffalo's development camp. When he arrived in Barrie, his "desire to compete and get better" endeared him to his teammates, coach Dale Hawerchuk said.

"He's an Energizer Bunny," said Hawerchuk, a Hall of Fame center who spent five of his 16 NHL seasons starring for the Sabres.

When the Sabres picked the 6-foot, 180-pound Pekar, he planned to play college hockey at Miami University in Ohio. Then he decided to return to the United States Hockey League's Muskegon Lumberjacks before choosing Barrie and the Ontario Hockey League.

"I'm really happy I made the decision," he said. "I think it kind of helped me to develop my skillset a little more."

After Pekar played 10 OHL games, the Sabres signed him to a three-year, entry-level contract. He compiled 14 goals and 36 points with Barrie, averaging 1.1 points per contest.

"My role was basically to play (the) first two lines, top minutes," said Pekar, who briefly left the Colts to represent the Czech Republic at the World Junior Championship in Vancouver. "I feel like my coach was putting an emphasis to be an offensive player. So I was trying to play that offensive guy with some kind of grit in me."

Hawerchuk said Pekar possesses the talent to morph into a dominant OHL player next season.

"Then you know how to handle being dominant when you start playing against men," Hawerchuk said. "To go and try to become dominant against men when you haven't done it at another level, it's difficult."

Pekar said playing for Hawerchuk, who amassed 518 goals and 1,409 points over his career, has been "so cool."

"He knows his stuff," he said. "He knows what it takes to make it, so it definitely makes it easier getting his experience sent to us."

Sabres Notebook: Tage Thompson sent to Rochester to play 'meaningful minutes'

Buffalo News

By: Lance Lysowski

March 28, 2019

As the Buffalo Sabres were leaving KeyBank Center early Thursday afternoon, Tage Thompson was stepping on the ice for his first practice in Rochester.

His first season in Buffalo likely came to an end when the 21-year-old winger was assigned to the Amerks. Thompson had seven goals and five assists with a minus-22 rating in 65 games during his first season with the Sabres.

Thompson had been expected to join Rochester at the end of the Sabres' regular season since they made him eligible for the AHL playoffs last month, and the assignment will allow him to become acclimated with his new teammates as they fight for a North Division title over the final eight games.

Rather than filling a bottom-six role in the NHL, Thompson will be given the opportunity to play what coach Phil Housley called "meaningful minutes."

"I think it's all part of his development and his plan," Housley explained. "He got some meaningful games up here, did a really good job, but it gives him a chance to get acquainted with his new teammates, get some meaningful minutes and get ready for the playoffs."

Thompson, a 6-5 former first-round draft pick, struggled with the physical demands of an NHL season. He did not forecheck with enough consistency and relied too much on his individual skill in the offensive zone. Thompson earned an audition on the Sabres' top line with a string of strong performances in early January, only to be demoted after one difficult game in Carolina.

One promising game was often followed by one with little contributions. In addition to struggling defensively, Thompson lacked strength along the boards since he has yet to fill out his lanky frame. He was acquired from St. Louis as part of the Ryan O'Reilly trade last July and had three goals with six assists during a 41-game stint with the Blues last season.

Thompson played just 12 minutes, 18 seconds in a 4-0 loss in Ottawa on Tuesday and averaged 12 minutes, 8 seconds this season. He had zero goals and one assist with a minus-12 rating in his last 22 games.

Rather than insert Scott Wilson into the lineup with Evan Rodrigues also day-to-day because an upper-body injury, the Sabres elected to promote winger Victor Olofsson from Rochester on Wednesday. Olofsson, 23, had 27 goals among a team-high 60 points in 64 games with the Amerks. A former seventh-round draft pick, he had a breakout season a year ago by scoring 27 goals as a teammate of Rasmus Dahlin's with Frolunda HC of the Swedish Hockey League.

"That I'm good enough to play up here," Olofsson said when asked what he hoped to show the Sabres in his first NHL opportunity. "This is going to help me out for next year too, so I'm just going to work as hard as I can and play my best."

McCabe returns

Defenseman Jake McCabe, who was expected to miss five-to-six weeks with an upper-body injury, participated as an extra in the Sabres' morning skate Thursday. He had not played in a game since a 5-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on March 14 but has skated with rehab and development coach Dennis Miller for roughly two weeks.

McCabe, who has four goals with 10 assists and a minus-7 rating in 55 games, is hopeful he can get enough practice time in to appear in one of the Sabres' final games this season.

"I'd like to get into a couple practices here," McCabe said. "We obviously don't have a lot of games here. It's been tough for me to at least get a practice with the team since we haven't been practicing a ton. Yeah, hopefully I'll practice tomorrow and take it day by day, really. It's gone really well to this point, so I'm just taking it day by day and improving every day."

Defensemen Zach Bogosian (lower body), Matt Hunwick (upper body) and Rasmus Ristolainen (illness) did not skate and were not available to play Thursday night against Detroit.

Pominville nominated for Masterton

Winger Jason Pominville was named the Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association's nominee for the Masterton Trophy.

The Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy is awarded annually to the NHL player who "best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to ice hockey." All 31 PHWA chapters nominate one player, and the winner will be chosen among three finalists in June.

"Definitely nice to be able to represent the team," Pominville, 36, said shortly after receiving the news Thursday morning. "I think it's a trophy that represents a lot of perseverance and dedication. So to have a chance to be nominated and represent the team, city is definitely an honor."

Tennyson recalled

With three Sabres defensemen unavailable Thursday against the Red Wings, defenseman Matt Tennyson was recalled from Rochester.

Tennyson, 28, had a minus-4 rating in four games with the Sabres earlier this season. He had four goals with 16 assists and a minus-7 rating in 45 games with the Amerks. Entering Thursday, Tennyson had 20 points in 124 NHL games with Buffalo, Carolina and San Jose.

Victor Olofsson, young Sabres 'bring a spark,' but comeback falls short in OT loss
Buffalo News

By: Lance Lysowski
March 28, 2019

Victor Olofsson came barreling down the left side of the ice with the puck on the blade of his left-handed stick and the game on the line. The Buffalo Sabres winger unleashed a shot that sent the puck soaring over Detroit Red Wings goalie Jimmy Howard's head and gave his opponent possession.

Moments later, Red Wings winger Tyler Bertuzzi one-timed a shot over a sprawling Linus Ullmark to send the Buffalo Sabres to a 5-4 overtime loss Thursday night in KeyBank Center. The 62 minutes, 18 seconds leading up to Bertuzzi's game-winner were a microcosm of one of the many problems that have plagued Buffalo all season: the roster has young, tantalizing talent that is prone to costly mistakes.

Olofsson, the 23-year-old recalled one day earlier, had a team-high five shots on goal and recorded his first career NHL point by assisting on Jack Eichel's third-period goal, which erased their second two-goal deficit of the night. Yet, one mistake sent the Sabres (31-36-10) to their fifth consecutive loss and they are 3-15-3 over their last 21 games.

"Obviously, that's a big mistake by me," Olofsson lamented about missing the net in overtime. "I mean, that happens of course, but I've got to learn too."

Olofsson, a former seventh-round pick who was the Amerks' leading scorer, was one of three players to be recalled from Rochester this week and flourished while skating alongside Eichel and Sam Reinhart in his debut Thursday night.

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Lawrence Pilut, a 23-year-old defenseman recalled Sunday, had a plus-1 rating and played 21 minutes, 22 seconds with the Sabres missing Rasmus Ristolainen (illness) and Zach Bogosian (lower-body injury). A minus-2 rating was not indicative of how well defenseman Will Borgen, a 22-year-old who made his NHL debut Tuesday in Ottawa, fared during his 20 shifts against the Red Wings.

Though 21-year-old winger Alex Nylander was also a minus-2, he had four shots on goal and nearly scored from atop the crease during a first-period power play. Casey Mittelstadt, a 20-year-old rookie center who was a healthy scratch Monday in New Jersey, scored his 12th goal of the season at 15:01 into the third period to cut the deficit to one goal.

However, this was Olofsson's night. Shortly after Mittelstadt's goal, Olofsson collected a pass from Reinhart near the right-wing boards in the offensive zone, turned around to fire a centering pass once he heard Eichel call for the puck, and the Sabres' 22-year-old captain scored his 27th goal of the season and 100th of his career to tie the score, 4-4, with 4:18 remaining in regulation.

"They bring a spark this time of year," Eichel said. "We talked the other night, everyone's playing for something right now and I thought a lot of our young guys brought some really good energy and they fit right in. It was good to see that, on the back end all the way through up front. It's good that we didn't quit there, we were down two goals twice and we had some good resiliency, but it's unfortunate."

The Sabres were out-shooting Detroit, 11-1, before Johan Larsson, Pilut and Rasmus Dahlin took minor penalties in a span of five minutes, 35 seconds during the first period. Mistakes weren't limited to the rookies.

The Red Wings (29-38-10) out-shot Buffalo, 16-4, over the final 12 minutes of the first period and took a 1-0 lead when Casey Nelson failed to tie up Bertuzzi in front of the net, allowing the forward to redirect a pass behind Ullmark with 7:58 remaining.

Detroit defenseman Filip Hronek pushed the lead to two goals one minute into the second period when only Olofsson hustled down ice to backcheck following a Sabres turnover. Kyle Okposo and Marco Scandella scored to erase the two-goal deficit, but Buffalo continued to struggle with details in its own zone.

Dahlin, who has a minus-6 rating over his last five games, did not try to move Darren Helm from in front of Ullmark, when Dylan Larkin scored the go-ahead goal with a shot from the left circle at 6:44 into the third period. Dahlin then misfired a backhanded pass that hit off the side of the Sabres' net, and the Red Wings regained possession before Larkin scored again to give them a 4-2 lead with 6:56 remaining in regulation.

"I really liked the way our young guys played," coach Phil Housley said. "(Olofsson) had a really good, strong game. Made some plays. Had some opportunities. Hit the crossbar in the third. Will Borgen continued to just be steady back there. Casey Mittelstadt, it was good to see he had some jump in his step. Lawrence had a very solid game. Dahlin, for the most part, I think he'd probably want that one back in the third, but those are the things you have to continue to fight through and learn."

Mittelstadt and Olofsson helped the Sabres rally with two goals in a span of 41 seconds, only to lose on Bertuzzi's shot with 2:42 remaining in overtime. Still, it was a strong response after a 4-0 loss Tuesday in Ottawa.

General Manager Jason Botterill has expressed the importance of patience and player development for the organization's future success. Buffalo has the fewest points since the 10-game winning streak had it sitting atop the NHL on Nov. 28. Progress from young players will arguably be more important than results in the final days of the season, as Botterill and his staff evaluate who could be part of the solution.

"It's good to have young guys around, because they have short memories," Housley said. "They want to make a difference. All their intentions are in the right place, they're good people, they're good teammates and they're trying their hearts out."

Victor Olofsson thrilled to join Sabres: 'I'm good enough to play up here'

Buffalo Hockey Beat

By: Bill Hoppe

March 28, 2019

Rasmus Dahlin has never seen a shot as lethal as the one Sabres newcomer Victor Olofsson possesses.

"He's probably got the best shot I've ever seen in my whole life," the defenseman said of Olofsson, who will make his NHL debut tonight against the Detroit Red Wings. "It's unbelievable."

Dahlin, of course, knows Olofsson well. The rookies spent last season together starring at home in Sweden for Frolunda HC. Their time as teammates helped Dahlin, 18, appreciate Olofsson the player and man.

While Olofsson, 23, was an unheralded seventh-round pick by the Sabres in 2014, he led the Swedish Hockey League in goals a season ago, scoring 27 times in 50 games.

Off the ice, Dahlin said "everyone loves" Olofsson, a slick winger who has scored 27 goals and 60 points, both team highs, in 64 games with the Rochester Americans this season.

"He's an unbelievable guy," Dahlin said this morning inside KeyBank Center. "He's worked so hard. He really deserves to be here. He's one of a kind. He's a great guy in the locker room."

In a dreary season, the Sabres, who have lost 17 out of their last 20 outings, can at least show off some of their best prospects over the final six games.

"I was excited," Olofsson said of learning about his recall Wednesday. "It's a dream come true for me. This is what I've been working for my whole life."

The Sabres think so highly of Olofsson he skated at left wing on the top line this morning beside center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart and also on the No. 1 power play unit.

"I'm good enough to play up here," Olofsson said. "This is going to help me out for next year, too."

Dahlin said: "I'm going to give him the puck on the power play."

Olofsson joins the group of rookies – winger Alexander Nylander and defensemen Will Borgen and Lawrence Pilut have been playing – the Sabres have recalled this month.

"It's an exciting time for them," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "The youth and energy is going to be important these last games."

Olofsson has enjoyed a terrific season, ranking among the AHL's leading scorers since October. Why recall him now?

"You look at our group, especially managing the roster, we wanted to make sure his development was in a good spot," Housley said. "Obviously, at this point in the season, we're going to give him an opportunity. But that was part of his developmental plan."

It's good that he had created a lot of good chemistry with his linemates.

"They have a good vibe in Rochester, they're playing good hockey, they have a lot of confidence. It's just great to have him be a part of our group right now."

Check back later for more on Olofsson and his development.

The Sabres made one roster move this morning, sending winger Tage Thompson to the Amerks. Thompson, 21, was scheduled to join the team for the playoffs.

Apparently, the Sabres want to give the youngster a head start.

"It's all part of his development and his plan," Housley said of Thompson's assignment. "He got some meaningful games up here, did a really good job, but it gives him a chance to get acquainted with his new teammates, get some meaningful minutes and get ready for the playoffs."

Thompson hasn't played in the AHL since last season. He compiled seven goals, 12 points and a minus-22 rating in 65 games with the Sabres.

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Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe, out the last 11 games with an upper-body injury, skated with his teammates this morning and is now day-to-day, Housley said.

McCabe said he wants to practice a couple times before playing. The Sabres have six games left.

In other injury news, an upper-body injury will sideline Sabres center Evan Rodrigues tonight. Ottawa's Mark Borowiecki hit Rodrigues in Tuesday's 4-0 loss to the Senators.

Housley said defensemen Zach Bogosian (lower body), Matt Hunwick (upper body) and Rasmus Ristolainen (upper body) are all out tonight and day-to-day.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark will start tonight, his 35th appearance this season.

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Sabres winger Jason Pominville, 36, has been named the Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association Masterton Trophy nominee for the 2018-19 season.

The Masterton is awarded to the player "who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to hockey," according to the NHL.

Pominville, who played his 1,000th NHL game Nov. 1, has scored 15 goals and 28 points in 68 games this season.

Only three players 36 or older have scored more goals.

“Definitely nice to be able to represent the team,” Pominville said. “I think it’s a trophy that represents a lot of perseverance and dedication. So to have a chance to be nominated and represent the team, city is definitely an honor.”

Sabres' youngsters stand out in overtime loss to Red Wings
Buffalo Hockey Beat
By: Bill Hoppe
March 28, 2019

Rookie Victor Olofsson heard Jack Eichel calling for the puck, so he quickly spun around along the right boards and adroitly fed the Sabres captain as a zoomed down the slot.

A second later, an uncovered Eichel beat Detroit Red Wings goalie Jimmy Howard, tying the game 15:42 into the third period Thursday.

"I was just trying to get it in there in the middle," Olofsson said following his NHL debut, a 5-4 overtime loss inside KeyBank Center. "It was a great finish by him."

Olofsson, who looked terrific all night, had his first point. Eichel, meanwhile, had his 100th NHL goal.

The slick chemistry the new linemates showcased beside Sam Reinhart — Eichel, 22, and Olofsson, 23, haven't even practiced together yet — provided the Sabres an opportunity to win just their third game this month.

While they fell short in overtime — Tyler Bertuzzi scored his second of the night at 2:18 — the Sabres at least made Thursday's contest entertaining.

Fresh off Tuesday's embarrassing 4-0 road loss to the Ottawa Senators, they responded by pouncing on the Red Wings — they had an 11-1 shot advantage early in the first period — and erasing two two-goal deficits.

"Totally different game," said an upbeat Phil Housley, whose Sabres have lost five straight games and 18 of their last 21 (3-15-3).

Olofsson's presence clearly helped ignite the Sabres, who had been shut out four times in the previous nine outings.

"He brought a really good spark to our team," Eichel said.

Olofsson utilized his lethal shot early and often, pumping five shots on goal and also hitting the crossbar. The Swede looked comfortable from the get-go, generating a scoring chance on his first shift.

"I feel like it was a pretty good game," said Olofsson, who was recalled from the Rochester Americans on Wednesday.

Housley said: "He played his own game. He was shooting the puck, he was creating offensively, his wall play was very good. He was very poised."

Olofsson, however, missed the net in overtime, giving the Red Wings the possession that created Bertuzzi's goal.

"That's a big mistake by me," Olofsson said. "I mean, that happens of course, but I've got to learn too."

Olofsson, whose 27 goals topped the Swedish Hockey League a year ago, will likely stay up for the final five games before returning to Rochester for the AHL playoffs.

But next season, the winger could stick in the NHL for good.

So could some other youngsters. With the Sabres battling injuries and playing out the string, they've been examining some of their best prospects up close.

In addition to Olofsson, defensemen Will Borgen and Lawrence Pilut and winger Alexander Nylander also played against the Red Wings.

Rookie center Casey Mittelstadt, who has stayed in the NHL all season, scored the Sabres' third goal and also had an assist.

"It's good to have young guys around, because they have short memories," Housley said. "They want to make a difference. All their intentions are in the right place, they're good people, they're good teammates and they're trying their hearts out."

Eichel said: "They bring a spark this time of year. We talked the other night, everyone's playing for something right now and I thought a lot of our young guys brought some really good energy and they fit right in."

Of course, perhaps the smallest crowd of the season — the Sabres generously announced 16,236 — watched Thursday's game.

Chunks of blue seats were visible in the corners of the 300 level.

By the time Eichel tied it, many fans had already left.

Winger Kyle Okposo's power play goal 6:12 into the second period got the Sabres within 2-1. Defenseman Marco Scandella tied it later in the period.

Dylan Larkin scored twice for the Red Wings, his 29th and 30th goals. Filip Hronek had their other goal.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark made 29 saves.

Sabres' Olofsson has a successful NHL debut
WGR 550
By: Paul Hamilton
March 28, 2019

Victor Olofsson went right to work in his first NHL game. Sam Reinhart set the winger up in the slot, but Jimmy Howard stopped Olofsson and then robbed Reinhart on the rebound.

A few minutes later, Reinhart just missed sending Olofsson down the slot alone. I think nerves may have gotten in the way there as it appeared Olofsson lifted his stick before the puck got there.

Olofsson got set up in the right wing circle on the power play and Jack Eichel found him. Olofsson fired, but the shot went wide. It wasn't just offense for the rookie as Olofsson saved a goal by picking up Christoffer Ehn out front with Linus Ullmark trapped behind the net.

It really was a pretty good first period for the kid as he had four shots on goal in 4:44 of work.

The Sabres worked hard in the second period and carried most of the play, but this period wasn't as good for Olofsson. On the power play, he had a terrible pass, which turned into the bad entry, and then he gave the puck away, only to see the Red Wings send it down ice.

Later, I did like how Olofsson positioned himself around the net, giving Eichel a lane to pass to him.

The Sabres were down 2-0, but got second period goals from Kyle Okposo and Marco Scandella to tie it.

Buffalo got down again in the third period and Olofsson had a great chance to tie the game coming in open down the left slot, but he hit the crossbar. It was a 3-on-1 and the kid had Jimmy Howard beaten.

He did pick up his first NHL point a few minutes later, leading a 2-on-1 down the wall. Olofsson did a nice spin move and found Eichel streaking down the middle to make it 4-4. Eichel said he enjoyed playing with him, "I was really happy with it. He brought a spark to our team. The combination of his skill and his compete and an elite shot, it was really good getting to play with him."

You had to feel bad for the kid in overtime as he had a mini chance, but made a bad shot selection and missed the net. Detroit came back 3-on-2 and beat Linus Ullmark, who was all over the place in his own end.

Olofsson was selected the third star of the game for his effort. He played 16:25 on the night and had five shots on net, and four others that didn't make it to Howard. Olofsson was on the ice for one goal for and two goals against.

Olofsson was upset with himself for that overtime mistake, but I was glad to see that Housley put him out in overtime.

Olofsson has done a nice job of improving his game this season in Rochester. It was very obvious in the preseason that he wasn't near NHL ready and Chris Taylor and his staff have helped him learn the North American and the pro game. Olofsson, along with Will Borgen are a perfect examples of what proper development looks like. In my opinion, Tage Thompson's development is the complete opposite.

Sabres send Thompson to Rochester

WGR 550

By: Paul Hamilton

March 28, 2019

The Sabres have sent Tage Thompson down to Rochester. Thompson was going to join the Amerks for the playoffs, but I have to believe the last straw may have been when he was one of the forwards that stopped skating back on Ottawa's 4-on-2 goal on Tuesday night.

Thompson has struggled for most of the season, scoring seven goals and five assists for 12 points in 65 games.

Thompson had no goals and one assist in his last 23 games.

Victor Olofsson was called up on Wednesday to take his place.

Olofsson shines in first NHL game, but Sabres fall 5-4

13 WHAM

By: Tobias Motyka

March 28, 2019

Victor Olofsson's long-awaited NHL debut did not disappoint from a personal standpoint.

But the Sabres themselves continued to be a disappointment.

Olofsson assisted on Jack Eichel's game tying goal in the third period, but the Sabres fell 5-4 in overtime against the Detroit Red Wings Thursday night.

The loss was Buffalo's 12th in 14 games during the month of March.

The 23-year-old Olofsson led the Amerks in goals, assists, and points (27, 33, 60) before being recalled by the Sabres. He was able to create multiple opportunities early with his quick shot and savvy play-making ability.

But it wasn't until the final five minutes of the third, with Buffalo trailing by one, that Olofsson would find the stat sheet for the first time.

The assist by Olofsson was his first NHL point, but also marked Jack Eichel's 100th career goal.

Buffalo fell to 31-36-10 with the loss. The Sabres will return to the ice Saturday night against the Islanders. There are only five games remaining for Buffalo this season.

From AHL healthy scratch to full-time NHL player, Taylor Fedun earns Masterton nomination

The Athletic

By: Sean Shapiro

March 28, 2019

Being scratched from a game while fully healthy can be a sobering experience.

That status moves a player into a weird sense of team purgatory. They are part of the collective effort but also not important enough to help the team win that evening, for whatever reason.

The mind can wander in moments like this one. For Taylor Fedun, getting healthy scratched in five of the AHL Rochester Americans' first 14 games led to another question: *Am I getting close to the end of my career?*

"I started to think; I've got a wife now and we want to think about building a family, and I won't want to be moving them from city to city or be in that situation and I know there is life after hockey," Fedun said. "That was certainly a thought that crossed my mind at some point this year."

Four months later those thoughts are long gone. Fedun is an NHL regular for the first time in his career, he's likely going to get his first taste of the NHL postseason and he's been a bit of a lifesaver for a Dallas Stars defense that was rocked by injuries.

For his perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey, Fedun has been chosen as the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy nominee by the Dallas Chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

Fedun's AHL scratches were the result of both a logjam of defensemen in the Buffalo Sabres system and an abundance of veterans in Rochester (AHL teams can only dress six players with more than 260 career games).

When the Stars were rocked by injuries, a natural trickle-down effect depleted the depth of the AHL-affiliated Texas Stars. There was a need for stability on the AHL blue line and the Stars made a no-risk trade for Fedun, sending a conditional seventh-round pick to Buffalo for the defenseman. To be frank, neither team really believed the conditions would be met for Buffalo to even get a pick back in the deal.

"We had five defensemen out so we knew we were going to need some more bodies," Stars general manager Jim Nill said. "So really he was brought in to be down in Texas."

But Fedun's stay in Cedar Park was short — three games in total — before he got called up to Dallas and went from emergency band-aid to full-time fill-in on the Stars' third pairing. After playing 46 career NHL games in his first seven pro season, Fedun has played in 49 this season.

"I had the opportunity to come up here and get some games and really the thought at the time I was filling a hole while guys were injured," Fedun said. "And then guys slowly started to get healthy again and (Dallas) made a couple trades and I just stuck around. So it went from being a roller coaster to finding some stability the last couple months, when I look back at this year I can't help but smile with how it's gone so far."

Committing to the roller coaster of pro hockey has been a common theme for the journeyman defenseman who never really had major aspirations of reaching the NHL. He wasn't drafted, and for Fedun, hockey was more of a path to a better education.

"Growing up my goal was always to get an education, and I really was playing hockey to get an education," Fedun said. "The first year I was there my D partner (Mike Moore), who I played with all year, ended up signing an NHL contract, he's actually still playing overseas now. That was the first time I realized that could be an opportunity for me because I saw that caliber of player he was and if I took care of four years of school that might be an option for me. That was the first time that door opened or it really opened my eyes."

After a four-year career at Princeton, Fedun signed with the Edmonton Oilers and nearly had his career derailed right away when he broke his femur in an NHL preseason game. It cost him the entire 2011-12 season and put him on a track where he was more of an AHL option over the next six seasons.

"He could have gotten mad at the game and it would have been easy to say, 'I'm gonna quit,'" Nill said. "But he stuck with it, he loves the game. He's got a great attitude for toward life and he's making the most of it."

That's one of the things that makes this season so rewarding for Fedun. He's not looking past it, but for the first time in his career, he has a significant NHL body of work and the resume to feel somewhat confident he'll get a job with an NHL team next season as well.

The trade to Dallas did create some family adjustments for Fedun and his wife Katie, who is finishing up the nursing program at the University of Rochester. While the couple maintains a long-distance relationship, Fedun said his wife watches every game and helps ground him during tough stretches of the season.

"She's pretty good on the mental side of being a professional athlete, she's really good at that," Fedun said. "We have some good conversations that get me back to neutral sometimes."

Katie is well-versed in athletic pressure and is a two-time Olympian who played midfield for the United States field hockey team in the 2012 games in London and at the 2016 games in Rio.

"It was incredible," Fedun said. "It's a bit of an eye-opening experience being the spouse in the stands, it's a whole different level of marriage. It was pretty cool to be there. And yeah, I was supporting the red, white, and blue even though I'm Canadian."

The Feduns have talked about finding the proper balance with Taylor's situation this season. It's important to celebrate the achievements, but it's also important to avoid complacency, especially on a team where two healthy defensemen are sitting out each night.

"Especially with the career I've had," Fedun said. "I like to try and remind myself to not get too comfortable, it allows me to stay focused and perform to the best of my ability by knowing I'm getting an opportunity and need to make the most of it. Not getting too comfortable is important because that's when you can start to slip."

Olofsson up, an OT loss; your Wednesday Amerks Six Pack
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija
March 27, 2019

For the second consecutive game, the Rochester Americans faced a multi-goal deficit in the second period.

For the second consecutive game, they rallied to force overtime.

But unlike Sunday, when a 4-1 deficit turned into a 5-4 victory at Toronto, the Amerks (41-21-4-2) lost on home ice to the Lehigh Valley Phantoms 4-3.

Here's your Wednesday Amerks Six Pack:

1. Is it good to come back, or bad you need to rally?

The Amerks chose to accentuate the positive.

"You're not going to be leading every game," said captain Kevin Porter. He scored the tying goal off a terrific fastbreak power play rush by Wayne Simpson into the zone, followed by a perfect pass to the deep slot by Kyle Criscuolo.

"We've shown we're not going to give up," Porter said.

2. That's 2 straight games going to the bullpen

Scott Wedgewood started in goal but played only 32 minutes and 27 seconds. After giving up a third goal (on 17 shots), he was replaced by Adam Wilcox.

Wilcox stopped 13 of 14 shots he faced, including two high-quality chances by former Fairport resident Cole Bardreau in the third period.

Wilcox also came on relief of Wedgewood early in the third period on Sunday at Toronto and stopped the seven shots he faced for the victory.

Coach Chris Taylor said there were one or two goals Wedgewood would have liked back in both games, which is why he made the switch.

3. Olofsson finally gets the call

First-year winger Victor Olofsson was promoted by the Buffalo Sabres late Wednesday afternoon and could make his NHL debut on Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings.

The 23-year-old Swede leads the Amerks with 27 goals and 60 points.

"I think that's awesome," Porter said of the callup. "He's played great all year for us and he deserves it."

It's actually surprising Olofsson hadn't joined the Sabres sooner, considering they can't score and he can. He led the Swedish league in goals last year with 27 in 50 games.

4. Lots of key parts were missing

Defensemen Will Borgen and Lawrence Pilut and winger Alex Nylander all are with the Sabres, defenseman Zach Redmond is still hurt and winger C.J. Smith didn't play a good portion of the second period or any of the third due to illness, according to Taylor.

"He had low energy and I felt it was best (for Smith not to continue to play)," Taylor said.

That meant Judd Peterson and Kurt Gosselin did play. Peterson has been with ECHL Cincinnati all year. Gosselin played at Alabama-Huntsville before signing with the Amerks earlier this season and reporting to Cincy.

The holes on defense also allowed Jack Dougherty and Brandon Hickey to play an abundance of minutes in different situations. Dougherty had a game-high six shots on goal and attempted 10.

"We need guys to step up in different roles," Taylor said.

5. Speaking of Gosselin

The undrafted Michigan native fit in quite well. He was one of the three Amerks on the ice for the winning goal, but it was a Criscuolo turnover that gave the Phantoms a two-on-zero breakaway.

"I'm just riding the wave right now and trying to acclimate," he said. "These guys can play hockey; just give them the puck and join in."

Said Taylor: "I thought he handled himself (well) against a really good team."

6. Making up for lost time

Phantoms rookie Pascal Laberge scored the final three Phantoms goals, including the game-winner 2:02 into overtime off a two-on-zero fastbreak.

A second-round draft pick (36th overall) by the Philadelphia Flyers in 2016, he didn't play his first game this season until Feb. 23 because of off-season hip surgery.

He scored at 2:20 and 12:27 of the second period on high shots past the glove of Wedgewood and then converted a pass from Chris Conner in overtime.

Amerks make push but fall to Lehigh Valley in OT

C&C Worldwide

By: Staff Report/Amerks.com

March 27, 2019

The Rochester Americans (41-21-4-2) erased a two-goal deficit and tied Wednesday night's game against Lehigh Valley Phantoms (33-27-4-3) before falling 4-3 in overtime at The Blue Cross Arena.

Despite the overtime loss, which gave Rochester a 6-6-1-0 record in its last 14 meetings with the Phantoms, the Amerks remain just three points behind the Syracuse Crunch for the AHL's North Division lead. The team also has earned 42 out of a possible 62 points in its last 31 games going into the final two games of March.

Forward and Amerks team-captain Kevin Porter notched his fifth two-point game of the season as he tallied his 10th goal of the season to go with an assist while Eric Cornel and former Phantom Taylor Leier each found the back of the net. Adam Wilcox (11-8-3) suffered the overtime loss despite making 13 saves in 30 minutes after replacing Scott Wedgewood with 7:33 left in the second period.

Pascal Laberge turned in his first-career hat-trick to go with a helper on Mark Friedman's goal to extend the Phantoms point streak to four games while Chris Conner added a season-high three assists. Goaltender Alex Lyon, who made a career-high 49 saves in the first meeting between the two teams earlier this year, stopped 40 of the 43 shots he faced to even his record to 15-15-3 on the season.

Lehigh Valley grabbed a 3-1 lead 12:27 into the second period to end Wedgewood's night, but the Amerks trimmed the deficit in half as Cornel tallied his eighth goal of the year with 5:00 to go in the middle stanza.

As Porter was sprung into the offensive zone thanks to an outlet pass from Jack Dougherty, the veteran center dished a pass to Cornel in the right circle. Cornel calmly kicked the puck from his skate to his stick before tucking a shot in-between the left pad and right post to make it one-goal game going into the third.

Rochester continued to eye the equalizer as they fired a game-high 15 shots on Lyon during the final period and were rewarded as Porter deflected a centering pass from Kyle Criscuolo 4:01 into the frame while on the power play.

"As the power-play was winding down, 'Simmer' (Wayne Simpson) kicked the puck out to 'Crisco' and I just drove towards the net," described Porter of his eighth goal of the season. "Crisco made a great pass and I didn't really do much as the puck just banked off my stick, but I'll take it."

The two teams traded chances over the final 16 minutes of regulation, but the game required overtime to determine a winner for the second straight game.

"I thought we had lot of chances," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "We just couldn't get the puck behind their goaltender. I loved our energy for coming home as it was better than the last couple of games here."

"We had chances to win the game but just came up short as we had a lot of new players in the lineup and I thought they played well."

Neither the Amerks nor the Phantoms generated much in the early portion of the extra frame, but Lehigh Valley caught a break as they picked up a loose puck inside their own and quickly skated away on a 2-on-0 rush towards Wilcox.

Conner and Laberge exchanged a series of passes, and despite an impressive last-ditch back-checking effort by Remi Elie, Laberge slipped the puck over the goal-line at the 2:02 mark to give the Phantoms the 4-3 overtime victory.

The two clubs went into the first period tied at one as Leier, who became the fourth different Rochester skater this season to join the 20-goal club, and Friedman each scored 42 seconds apart.

"It felt good to score against them," said Leier, who appeared in 226 games with Lehigh Valley to begin his pro career prior to the midseason trade that landed him in Rochester. "We had the puck in their zone for quite a bit of time, and after (Matt) Tennyson's shot got blocked, it came right to me in the slot and I kind of got lucky as it went five-hole."

Laberge added a pair of tallies to give Lehigh Valley a 3-1 cushion at the 12:27 mark of the middle stanza, but the Amerks recorded a pair of markers in the final two periods to force the game beyond regulation.

"I felt pretty comfortable out there," said rookie defenseman Kurt Gosselin, who made his Amerks/AHL debut after earning a promotion from the Cincinnati Cyclones (ECHL) yesterday. "As the game went on, I started to get my own feel for it out there. It's disappointing as we didn't get the results we wanted, but I'm glad to get the first game out of the way."

The Amerks close out the home portion of the month as they host the Laval Rocket on Friday, March 29 at the Blue Cross Arena before closing out March on Saturday against the Binghamton Devils at Floyd L. Maines Veterans Arena. Both matchups are set for 7:05 pm.

Pink the Rink

The fifth annual "Pink the Rink" Breast Cancer Awareness Night, presented by Gilda's Club Rochester, is set to take place on Friday, April 5 when the Rochester Americans play host to the Syracuse Crunch at 7:05 pm at the Blue Cross Arena.

A portion of the proceeds from the game will be donated to Gilda's Club Rochester, a non-profit organization committed to providing free networking and support groups, workshops, education and social activities for men, women teens and kids people of all ages affected by cancer.

"We're thrilled to be able to partner with Gilda's Club Rochester again this year in support of such a terrific cause," said Amerks Vice President of Business Operations Rob Minter. "We look forward to hosting Pink the Rink Night each year as it gives us an opportunity to not only raise awareness but offer our endless support for those affected by this terrible disease."

"We are thrilled to again be partnering with the Rochester Americans on this year's "Pink the Rink" game," said Melinda Merante, CEO of Gilda's Club Rochester. "With so many people affected by cancer in Rochester, this is a fun opportunity to raise awareness; our community is so fortunate to have the Amerks as great ambassadors for this type of event."

As part of the annual Pink the Rink game, the Amerks players will again wear special-edition jerseys to promote breast cancer awareness. Fans will have the opportunity to purchase these jerseys through a silent auction held during the game on The Blue Cross Arena concourse. Following the game, the winners of the auction will be able to take the ice and be presented with a "jersey off the back" from the Amerks players.

The Amerks will also be selling a limited number of special Pink the Rink-themed Mystery Pucks, autographed by various Amerks players, for \$10 on the main concourse during the game.

**NOTES* — The Buffalo Sabres announced the team recalled forward Victor Olofsson from the Amerks on Wednesday. Olofsson (23, 5-foot-11, 181 lbs.) joins the Sabres for his first career recall in the midst of a three-game point streak during which he has recorded seven points (3+4) with the Americans. In his first season in North America, Olofsson has recorded a team-high 60 points (27+33) through 64 AHL games, leading all Rochester skaters in goals and assists. He is tied for the AHL lead with nine game-winning goals in 2018-19 and also ranks in the top 10 in the league in points (T-5th) and goals (T-10th). Olofsson was selected by the Sabres in the seventh round (181st overall) of the 2014 NHL Draft. He signed a two-year contract with the team in April of 2018 after finishing his third full SHL season with career highs in both goals (27) and points (43) for Frölunda, leading all SHL players in both goals and power-play goals (14). The Ornskoldsvik, Sweden native totaled 60 goals in 200 career SHL games from 2013-14 to 2017-18, converting on 15 percent of his 400 shots in Sweden's top professional league.

Amerks lose first after Olofsson call-up by Sabres

Buffalo News

By: Staff Report

March 27, 2019

Pascal Laberge scored his third goal of the game at 2:58 of overtime Wednesday night to give the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, a 4-3 victory over the Rochester Americans before 4,232 at Blue Cross Arena.

The hat trick gave the 20-year-old right winger from Chateauguay, Que., only four goals for the season. Laberge was activated from the non-roster injury list by the Philadelphia Flyers last month and loaned to Lehigh Valley. Laberge has been sidelined all season with a hip injury. He missed much of another season, 2016-17, with a concussion.

In their first game with team goals and points leader Victor Olofsson, who was called up to the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday, the Amerks overcame a 3-1 deficit. They tied the game on Kevin Porter's goal at 4:01 of the third period with Mike Vecchione of the Phantoms in the penalty box for high sticking.

Taylor Leier's 20th goal of the AHL season gave Rochester a 1-0 lead but Mark Friedman tied it for the Phantoms before the first period was over.

Laberge scored unassisted and with assists from Vecchione and Chris Conner to make it 3-1 in the second. Erik Cornel of the Amerks cut the deficit to one goal with 5 minutes to go in the second.

Scott Wedgewood made 14 saves and Adam Wilcos 13 in goal for Rochester. Yale graduate Alex Lyon had 40 saves for the Phantoms.

Rochester missed an opportunity to gain a point on first-place Syracuse in the North Division of the AHL. The Crunch lost at Belleville, 2-1, on a shootout.

It was Lehigh Valley's only visit to Blue Cross Arena this season. The Amerks will be home against the Laval Rocket at 7:05 p.m. on Friday then travel to Binghamton on Saturday to face the Devils at 7:05 p.m.

Sabres recall winger Victor Olofsson from Rochester
Buffalo News
By: Lance Lysowski
March 27, 2019

After watching the Buffalo Sabres score only one goal in road losses to New Jersey and Ottawa, General Manager Jason Botterill recalled Rochester's leading scorer, winger Victor Olofsson, on Wednesday.

Olofsson, 23, has a team-high 60 points, including 27 goals, in 64 games during his first season with the Amerks. He will likely be in the Sabres' lineup when they host the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center on Thursday night.

The Sabres have been hit with a rash of injuries and illness over the past four days, forcing them to recall defensemen Lawrence Pilut and Will Borgen from Rochester. It remains unclear what led to Olofsson's promotion.

Evan Rodrigues left after being hit in the second period during Tuesday's 4-0 loss in Ottawa but returned to take six shifts in the third period. Tague Thompson also left early for the dressing room in the second period, only to finish the game with six shifts over the final 20 minutes.

Sabres defensemen Zach Bogosian (lower body) and Matt Hunwick (upper body) were unavailable during the two-game road trip because of injury, while an illness prevented Rasmus Ristolainen from playing Tuesday night.

There is also the possibility that Botterill wants to see if Olofsson can help the struggling Sabres. They are amid a 13-game winless streak away from KeyBank Center, have not won back-to-back games since Dec. 13 and were shut out in four of their previous nine games.

The Sabres' only goal during the road trip was Sam Reinhart's dump-in from center ice Monday in New Jersey. Though they had 46 shots on goal in a 3-1 loss to the Devils, the offense barely threatened Ottawa goalie Craig Anderson on Tuesday night.

A previous recall, winger Alex Nylander, has contributed since being promoted on the even of Jack Eichel's two-game suspension this month. Nylander, 21, has two goals and two assists with a plus-2 rating in eight games but was called for a pair of minor penalties in the shutout loss to the Senators.

Olofsson has blossomed since beginning his career in North America. A seventh-round draft pick in 2014, his stock rose significantly last season, when he scored 27 goals as a teammate of Rasmus Dahlin with Frolunda HC of the Swedish Hockey League.

Olofsson's left-handed shot has terrorized opposing goalies since he joined the Amerks. He is tied for the AHL lead with nine-game winning goals and ranks in the top 10 in points and goals. Olofsson signed his two-year, entry-level contract with the Sabres last April after finishing with 60 goals in 200 career games in the SHL.

The timing is unfortunate for the Amerks, who are three points behind Syracuse for first place in the AHL's North Division with nine regular-season games to play. Rochester hosted Lehigh Valley on Wednesday night and has two games this weekend.

Prospect Victor Olofsson joins reeling Sabres
Buffalo Hockey Beat
By: Bill Hoppe
March 27, 2019

High-scoring Sabres prospect Victor Olofsson has finally earned a look from the big club.

The reeling Sabres, who have lost 17 out of the last 20 games, recalled Olofsson from the Rochester Americans on Wednesday.

The Swedish winger will likely make his NHL debut Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center.

Olofsson, 23, has enjoyed a terrific first season with the Amerks, scoring 27 goals and 60 points, both team highs, in 64 games.

That offense could certainly help the Sabres, who have scored just one goal in the last two games and been shut out four times in nine outings.

Olofsson, a seventh-round pick in 2014, 181st overall, led the Swedish Hockey League with 27 goals last season. He roared into the AHL this year, scoring five goals and 15 points in the first nine games and solidifying his place as one of the Sabres' top prospects.

His presence should make Thursday's game a little more interesting. The Sabres, losers of four straight contests, are playing out the string. Six games are left this season.

Four months ago today, the Sabres rattled off their 10th consecutive win and stood atop the NHL. Their resurgence was the talk of the league.

After years of futility, they had finally arrived, right? Sure, they probably wouldn't finish first overall, but they would make the playoffs, a major accomplishment by their standards.

You know what transpired over the next 51 games. Since Nov. 28, the Sabres have compiled a wretched 14-30-7 mark, the league's worst record.

Their tumble down the standings has been nothing short of stunning.

Thursday's ugly 4-0 loss to the hapless, 31st-place Ottawa Senators cemented March as one of the worst months in franchise history.

"We stunk up the building tonight," Sabres coach Phil Housley told reporters in Ottawa. "We have a game plan in place, we didn't execute it. ... That's not winning hockey."

Incredibly, that was the Sabres' 13th consecutive road loss, the most since the Chicago Blackhawks dropped 16 straight in 2003-04.

Just a few weeks ago, unless the Sabres totally imploded, Housley's job seemed safe. But what do they do now?

Speaking to reporters Tuesday at the NFL owners' meetings, Sabres owner Terry Pegula said he can justify bringing Housley back for a third season.

"He's a young coach," Pegula said. "He was a great player and I think he can grow as a coach."

Despite Housley's lack of success, Pegula, who has had five coaches in just over six years, might finally be realizing the Sabres must commit to something and stick to it.

Less than two years ago, Housley, a Hall of Fame defenseman, was the league's hottest assistant as the Nashville Predators roared to the Stanley Cup final.

"I think (general manager Jason Botterill) has said it pretty well when he supports Phil," Pegula said. "Phil communicates with the players well. Are we happy with how the season is going? Absolutely not. You can ask anybody on the team.

"So something has to change. We don't know what. But we're all going to put our heads together and talk about it."

The Sabres haven't made the playoffs since 2011. If the Carolina Hurricanes make it this season for the first time since 2009, the Sabres will own the NHL's longest drought, a dubious distinction.

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The Sabres had Wednesday off.

Amerks tripped up in OT by Lehigh Valley
Rochester First
By: Staff Report/Amerks.com
March 27, 2019

The Rochester Americans (41-21-4-2) erased a two-goal deficit and tied Wednesday night's game against Lehigh Valley Phantoms (33-27-4-3) before falling 4-3 in overtime at The Blue Cross Arena.

Despite the overtime loss, which gave Rochester a 6-6-1-0 record in its last 14 meetings with the Phantoms, the Amerks remain just three points behind the Syracuse Crunch for the AHL's North Division lead. The team has also earned 42 out of a possible 62 points in its last 31 games going into the final two games of March.

Forward and Amerks team-captain Kevin Porter notched his fifth two-point game of the season as he tallied his 10th goal of the season to go with an assist while Eric Cornel and former Phantom Taylor Leier each found the back of the net. Adam Wilcox (11-8-3) suffered the overtime loss despite making 13 saves in 30 minutes after replacing Scott Wedgewood with 7:33 left in the second period.

Pascal Laberge turned in his first-career hat-trick to go with a helper on Mark Friedman's goal to extend the Phantoms point streak to four games while Chris Conner added a season-high three assists. Goaltender Alex Lyon, who made a career-high 49 saves in the first meeting between the two teams earlier this year, stopped 40 of the 43 shots he faced to even his record to 15-15-3 on the season.

Lehigh Valley grabbed a 3-1 lead 12:27 into the second period to end Wedgewood's night, but the Amerks trimmed the deficit in half as Cornel tallied his eighth goal of the year with 5:00 to go in the middle stanza.

As Porter was sprung into the offensive zone thanks to an outlet pass from Jack Dougherty, the veteran center dished a pass to Cornel in the right circle. Cornel calmly kicked the puck from his skate to his stick before tucking a shot in-between the left pad and right post to make it one-goal game going into the third.

Rochester continued to eye the equalizer as they fired a game-high 15 shots on Lyon during the final period and were rewarded as Porter deflected a centering pass from Kyle Criscuolo 4:01 into the frame while on the power play.

"As the power-play was winding down, 'Simmer' (Wayne Simpson) kicked the puck out to 'Crisco' and I just drove towards the net," described Porter of his eighth goal of the season. "Crisco made a great pass and I didn't really do much as the puck just banked off my stick, but I'll take it."

The two teams traded chances over the final 16 minutes of regulation, but the game required overtime to determine a winner for the second straight game.

"I thought we had lot of chances," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "We just couldn't get the puck behind their goaltender. I loved our energy for coming home as it was better than the last couple of games here."

"We had chances to win the game but just came up short as we had a lot of new players in the lineup and I thought they played well."

Neither the Amerks nor the Phantoms generated much in the early portion of the extra frame, but Lehigh Valley caught a break as they picked up a loose puck inside their own and quickly skated away on a 2-on-0 rush towards Wilcox.

Conner and Laberge exchanged a series of passes, and despite an impressive last-ditch back-checking effort by Remi Elie, Laberge slipped the puck over the goal-line at the 2:02 mark to give the Phantoms the 4-3 overtime victory.

The two clubs went into the first period tied at one as Leier, who became the fourth different Rochester skater this season to join the 20-goal club, and Friedman each scored 42 seconds apart.

"It felt good to score against them," said Leier, who appeared in 226 games with Lehigh Valley to begin his pro career prior to the midseason trade that landed him in Rochester. "We had the puck in their zone for quite a bit of time, and after (Matt) Tennyson's shot got blocked, it came right to me in the slot and I kind of got lucky as it went five-hole."

Laberge added a pair of tallies to give Lehigh Valley a 3-1 cushion at the 12:27 mark of the middle stanza, but the Amerks recorded a pair of markers in the final two periods to force the game beyond regulation.

"I felt pretty comfortable out there," said rookie defenseman Kurt Gosselin, who made his Amerks/AHL debut after earning a promotion from the Cincinnati Cyclones (ECHL) yesterday. "As the game went on, I started to get my own feel for it out there. It's disappointing as we didn't get the results we wanted, but I'm glad to get the first game out of the way."

The Amerks close out the home portion of the month as they host the Laval Rocket on Friday, March 29 at The Blue Cross Arena before closing out March on Saturday against the Binghamton Devils at Floyd L. Maines Veterans Arena. Both matchups are set for 7:05 p.m.

Sabres call up Olofsson from the Amerks
WGR 550

By: Brayton Wilson
March 27, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres announced on Wednesday that the team has called up forward Victor Olofsson from the Rochester Americans.

The 23-year-old has had a fantastic first season in the American Hockey League with the Amerks, scoring 27 goals and registering 33 assists in 64 games played. As of Wednesday, Olofsson was tied for fifth place in league scoring with his 60 points, was ninth in the league with 183 shots on goal, and 23 points on the power play.

Olofsson started his 2018-19 season with 15 points (5+10) in the first 10 games, which earned him the honor as the CCM/AHL Player of the Month of October. Since then, his role on the team has grown drastically as he has found himself playing some key minutes on the power play, penalty kill and in key last minute situations. He has found a majority of his success playing this season on Rochester's second line with Rasmus Asplund and Danny O'Regan.

This move is likely a chance for Olofsson to showcase himself with the Sabres in the final handful of games in the regular season.

Buffalo has six games remaining in the 2018-19 season, while the Amerks have nine remaining in the regular season.

The Amerks can clinch a playoff berth in the Calder Cup playoffs on Wednesday with a win over the Lehigh Valley Phantoms and a Belleville Senators loss to the Syracuse Crunch.

Last season in the Swedish Hockey League with the Frölunda Indians, Olofsson scored a league-high 27 goals in 50 games before signing his entry-level contract with the Sabres on April 24. He was originally selected by the Sabres as a seventh round pick (181st overall) in the 2014 NHL Draft.

'A pretty surreal moment': Borgen, a former Moorhead hockey player, discusses NHL debut
Inforum

By: Chris Murphy

March 27, 2019

Former Moorhead High School hockey player Will Borgen was eating breakfast at the rink in Rochester, N.Y., on Tuesday when he was called up to the office of Rochester Americans coach Chris Taylor. Borgen is in his first full professional hockey season with the Americans, an affiliate of the Buffalo Sabres.

Borgen began his Tuesday expecting to go to practice, go home and get ready for a game Wednesday. Turns out he had to get ready for a game that night, as Taylor informed him the Sabres had recalled the defenseman and he may have to play that night.

He was going to the NHL.

"I was really excited, obviously nervous too," Borgen said. "I didn't know if I was playing for sure, but I had a feeling I was. They told me to be ready. I was nervous the entire time, but obviously still super excited. The NHL was a longtime goal."

Borgen drove home to pack, calling his mom, dad and siblings on the way. A car was called to drive Borgen to Ottawa, Ont. He had five hours to sit and think about what was happening.

Borgen's phone had other plans, as it was flooded with text messages on the drive.

"It's a pretty cool thing because you get so many texts from family and friends that are excited for you and congratulating you," Borgen said. "It's really nice to have all the support. You think back to the people who help you get here like your coaches, family and parents. It's just a cool thing to have all the people involved."

Borgen found out when he got to Ottawa that he was going to play. He's not sure if it was the players or the equipment manager, but his helmet was hidden from him during warmups. The team also let him go out on the ice alone for a few laps during the warmup, which a lot of teams do for a player's first game.

"It's cool. You're just out there in your first NHL game alone," Borgen said. "It's a pretty surreal moment. It's also kind of weird because you're out there alone and it's funny."

Borgen had 21 shifts, 14 minutes, 54 seconds of ice time and three hits in a 4-0 loss for Buffalo. He was not on the ice for any of the four goals. It only took Borgen a few seconds to get his first hit.

"I just tried to get into the game early and the best is to go out there and get a hit," Borgen said. "I saw an opportunity to give a guy a little bump and tried to do it right away to get into the game. Once that first shift happened, the nerves went away."

Borgen became the seventh former Moorhead hockey player to play in the NHL. The 2015 Moorhead graduate joined former Spuds Jason Blake, Ryan Kraft, Matt Cullen, Mark Cullen, Brian Lee and Chris VandeVelde to play in the NHL. He was the 54th Minnesota native to play in the NHL this season as well.

The Moorhead boys hockey coaching staff went to Buffalo Wild Wings in Moorhead to watch the game. Moorhead head coach Jon Ammerman was supposed to buy a car Tuesday, but cancelled once he heard Borgen was going to play in his NHL debut. The staff ran into some former players at Buffalo Wild Wings, who were also there to see their former teammate play in the NHL.

"It was fun to watch. I think that'll be the first of many NHL games he'll get to play," Ammerman said. "You want to see the kids succeed in whatever their dreams are. Will's dream was to play in the NHL. But (former Moorhead hockey player) Alex Mehnert was talking to me last night about him wanting to be a pilot and the steps he was taking for that. No matter what, it's just cool seeing kids you coached get their dreams."

Borgen isn't sure if the Sabres are going to keep him up for the rest of the season, but he said he'll be back in Rochester for the American Hockey League playoffs either way. The meeting with Taylor was the one thing he said he would never forget.

"As soon as my coach called me up and told me, I got really excited," Borgen said. "It was a pretty crazy moment. I wasn't expecting it at all. It was out of the blue. To get told you'll be up in the NHL, it's a pretty awesome moment."

Pascal Laberge nets hat trick as Phantoms knock off Rochester

The Morning Call

By: Staff Report

March 27, 2019

Rookie winger Pascal Laberge netted his first career hat trick, including the overtime game-winner as the Phantoms knocked off the Rochester Americans, 4-3, at Blue Cross Arena.

Laberge only had one goal in eight games this season, but he exploded in his ninth game of the year with a four-point effort that also included a terrific between-the-legs assist to set up Mark Friedman's first-period tally.

He followed that up with a pair of snipes over the glove of Americans goalie Scott Wedgewood in the second frame.

Chris Conner racked up three assists on the night including the hand-off on the team's 2-on-0 in overtime to set up Laberge's game-winner from the right of the cage to finally finish off Rochester. Zach Palmquist had a long stretch pass from the defensive zone to set up the 2-on-0 break. Alex Lyon racked up 40 saves in an impressive performance.

The 20-year-old Laberge also became the first Lehigh Valley player to register an overtime winning goal while completing a hat trick. It was the 12th hat trick in Lehigh Valley history. Only three other times in the 23-year history of the Phantoms franchise has a player recorded a hat trick with an overtime goal, the most recent coming on November 9, 2007 when Ryan Potulny of the Philadelphia Phantoms accomplished the feat against Bridgeport.

Lehigh Valley closed to within six points of the last two teams holding playoff positions, Providence and Hershey. The Phantoms have nine games remaining in the regular season.

Sabres Notebook: Will Borgen a 'little nervous' before NHL debut in Ottawa
Buffalo News
By: Lance Lysowski
March 26, 2019

In the bowels of Canadian Tire Centre late Tuesday afternoon, assistant coach Steve Smith retrieved Will Borgen from an adjacent room and turned the hallway outside the Buffalo Sabres' dressing room into a makeshift classroom.

With only a few hours to prepare Borgen for his NHL debut against the Ottawa Senators, Smith set a white board on top of a high-seated stool and sketched out a few teaching points about the Sabres' structure. Borgen, a 22-year-old defenseman, was eating breakfast less than 12 hours earlier when he was told of his promotion from Rochester.

After a five-hour car ride and no morning skate, Borgen had only a few hours to physically and mentally prepare for his assignment of filling in for Rasmus Ristolainen, who fell ill and was unavailable for the first time this season.

"It was kind of a surprise," Borgen beamed. "I was downstairs having breakfast and [Amerks coach Chris Taylor] called me up and told me the news up in his room. It was pretty crazy. I got a little nervous right away, but excited, too."

Borgen, who was paired with Marco Scandella against the Senators, was an ideal fit to fill in since he is a right-shot defenseman like Ristolainen, however, the former fourth-round draft pick also earned the opportunity by flourishing with the Amerks. Borgen has two goals with 10 assists with a plus-7 rating in 66 games during his first full season with Rochester.

He began his professional career one year ago, following three seasons at St. Cloud State, and became the second defenseman in three days to be promoted by the Sabres. Lawrence Pilut joined the team Sunday in Newark because neither Zach Bogosian (lower body) nor Matt Hunwick (upper body) would be available to play in the Sabres' 3-1 loss to the New Jersey Devils on Monday.

Pilut, 23, played 20 minutes, 42 seconds and had three shots on goal against the Devils — his first NHL game since Feb. 19. Ristolainen's minutes have dropped over his last three games, he played only 20 minutes, 3 seconds against New Jersey.

With Bogosian and Hunwick unavailable Tuesday in Ottawa, the Sabres called upon Borgen, a defensive-minded prospect whose stock rose by finishing checks and playing with the type of snarl Buffalo has lacked for much of the season.

"Will brings a physical element to the game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He's a shut down guy, plays very well in his own end. Defensively, boxes out tremendously well. Plays a simple game. Makes that first pass on the tape and that's what we're looking for tonight."

While the Amerks and Sabres run a similar defensive structure, Smith had to quickly teach Borgen the team's tendencies on the penalty kill while going over a brief game plan on the Senators. There were also conversations with the equipment staff and teammates, many of whom he had not played with since the preseason.

Housley expressed excitement for watching another prospect join the team, adding that Borgen's enthusiasm could "rub off" on the Sabres. It is unclear how long Borgen could stay — after all, Alex Nylander earned a full-time role during Jack Eichel's suspension — but he doesn't intend to change what earned him that call from Taylor.

"I just try to finish my checks," Borgen said. "That's always been a part of my game. Being physical is just part of my game. In front of the net, move guys out. I do a defenseman's job."

Fitzgerald signs, will join Amerks

Casey Fitzgerald, a 22-year-old defenseman, signed a two-year, entry-level contract with the Sabres on Tuesday and will report to Rochester on an amateur tryout. Fitzgerald had 17 goals and 65 assists in four seasons at Boston College, serving as team captain in his junior and senior seasons.

The right-shot defenseman was a third-round draft pick of the Sabres in 2016 and won a gold medal with the United States at the 2017 IIHF World Junior Championship. His contract won't begin until next season.

Sobotka sits for Mittelstadt

Casey Mittelstadt spent only one game as a spectator in the press box. The 20-year-old center was back in the Sabres' lineup Tuesday night after he sat out against the Devils. It was the first time the rookie had been a healthy scratch and only the fifth game he had missed all season.

Vladimir Sobotka, who has five goals among 13 points with a minus-19 rating in 68 games this season, was a healthy scratch against the Senators after he was called for two minor penalties Monday in New Jersey.

Botterill at World Championships

Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill is joining former Carolina Hurricanes General Manager Ron Francis and former Philadelphia Flyers General Manager Ron Hextall on the management team for Canada's 2019 team in the World Championships. The tournament will be held May 10-26 in Slovakia, and will also involve former Sabres captain Chris Drury, who was named the general manager for Team USA.

"We are excited to welcome these three gentlemen and their extensive experience in the NHL and international hockey, both as general managers and players," Tom Renney, chief executive officer of Hockey Canada, said in a statement. "We know Jason, Ron and Ron will represent our country with a tremendous amount of pride, and we look forward to working with this group as we set our sights on bringing home a gold medal at the 2019 IIHF world championship."

Sabres sign defenseman Casey Fitzgerald to entry-level contract

Buffalo News

By: Lance Lysowski

March 26, 2019

Following the recalls of Lawrence Pilut and Will Borgen to the NHL, the Buffalo Sabres signed defenseman Casey Fitzgerald a two-year, entry-level contract Tuesday night.

Fitzgerald, 22, recently completed his senior at Boston College, where he was a two-time captain and recorded 17 goals with 65 assists in 151 games over four seasons. He will immediately join the Rochester Americans on an amateur tryout and his contract will officially begin next season.

A third-round draft pick in 2016, Fitzgerald has a right-handed shot and won a gold medal with the United States at the 2017 World Junior Championship. He had two goals with 12 assists and a minus-6 rating as a senior this season, earning which led to a Hockey East All-Star Honorable Mention selection.

Fitzgerald was one of the Sabres' two third-round draft picks in 2016, following Cliff Pu, a forward who was traded to Carolina in exchange for Jeff Skinner in August. Fitzgerald's entry-level deal has an average annual value of \$925,000.

Sabres prospect Taylor Leier finding Rochester is a good fit
Buffalo Hockey Beat
By: Bill Hoppe
March 26, 2019

After spending his entire career in the Philadelphia Flyers organization, Taylor Leier has quickly acclimated to the Americans and his new surroundings.

On the ice, Leier has scored nine goals and 16 points in his first 24 games since arriving in a Jan. 17 trade that sent Justin Bailey to the Flyers organization.

Off the ice, Leier, a self-proclaimed "foodie," has found some local restaurants he enjoys. He also frequents Wegmans, a grocery store he discovered in Pennsylvania.

"I was real happy when I saw that was here," Leier said recently.

Rochester also offers Leier, 25, an opportunity to pursue one of his passions, fishing. "I'm like a fishing fanatic," Leier said.

Leier said he has gone ice fishing with Amerks teammate Dalton Smith six or seven times on Irondequoit Bay.

"As soon as the ice froze over, I got out there," Leier said.

Smith owns a portable hut they secure by pounding pegs in the ice. They also bring along a heater and some chairs. "Next thing you know, nice and cozy," Leier said.

Sitting for hours at a time on the ice offers Leier a much-needed respite from the grind and pressure of pro hockey. He said the peacefulness he experiences fishing has helped his transition to the Amerks "100 percent."

"I want to do the best I can in hockey," Leier said. "Sometimes I get, like, obsessed. When I get the chance to do different things I like to do, too, like ice fishing and kind of not think about hockey, I think that helps (me) come back to the game feeling more refreshed and not so overwhelmed sometimes."

In Rochester, Leier loves catching perch he can fry and eat. At home in Saskatchewan, he invites his friends, packs a lunch and takes his boat out looking for pike, trout and walleye.

"I love ... having my phone off and just doing me," he said.

Leier developed his love of fishing growing up. After school ended, his family would leave Saskatoon and spend the summer about two hours north at a cabin on Emma Lake.

He and his father, Tim, would go out every morning. Meanwhile, his mother, Cindy, and brother, Keaton, would stay back. "I would wake my dad up in the morning," Leier said. "Me and him would go together with our dogs every day."

Leier would eventually grow more interested in fishing than his father.

"I think he really just liked being with me more than fishing sometimes," Leier said. "But I was obsessed with it."

Leier and his family still spend summers on Emma Lake. He bought his own boat when he was 18 and started earning his own money. Two summers ago, he sold it and purchased a 2017 Pro Angler Smoker Craft, the boat he always wanted.

"I usually train in the morning and I'll go (fishing) for the rest of the day or the evening," Leier said. "You just don't worry about anything other than fishing. It's a good mind break. I think the rush-and-go lifestyle, it's everywhere now. I just really try to give my mind a break sometimes and it helps a ton."

Leier has contributed a ton to the Amerks, compiling six goals and nine points in the last eight games.

After spending all of last season with the Flyers, Leier took a positive approach to returning to the American Hockey League. The experience, he believes, has been valuable for his confidence.

The last two months, of course, have been a whirlwind for the former fourth-round pick. He left the organization he grew up in and the AHL team, the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, where he played 226 games over four seasons.

"I've adjusted well," Leier said of coming to Rochester. "I kind of just go with the flow and just try to stay true to my game and not really change too much. I'm playing with a lot of good players and I'm pretty happy with my game as of late. The coaches are kind of giving me a pretty long leash to do my thing."

Given his age, versatility and production, Leier could earn a recall to the Sabres someday, perhaps as a third- or fourth-liner. Overall this season, he has scored 19 goals, one off his career high.

Leier has been playing center regularly instead of left wing for the first time in his life. Taylor watched video of him taking faceoffs with Lehigh Valley and became intrigued.

But Leier was only in the circle because his regular center had a sore wrist.

"He reads plays very well, he's a guy I think that he looks at his wingers and he can make plays," Taylor said. "He's a good passer. So I felt like I could trust him more than anybody at that time to play center. It's worked out."

Leier said it took him a little time to find a rhythm in the middle.

"You get a lot of touches on pucks," Leier said. "I like being engaged right off faceoffs. I've probably played around 20 games now at center my whole life. I grew up playing defense, then I liked scoring too much, so I switched to forward."

Sabres recall Will Borgen from Amerks

Buffalo News

By: Bill Hoppe

March 26, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres recalled Will Borgen from the Rochester Americans this morning, meaning a defenseman was possibly injured in Monday's 3-1 road loss to the New Jersey Devils.

The Sabres play another road contest tonight against the Ottawa Senators. Coach Phil Housley will have an update later in the day.

Borgen could make his NHL debut.

The 6-foot-2, 187-pound Borgen, 22, has compiled two goals, 12 points and a plus-7 rating in 66 games as an AHL rookie this season. He played eight games with the Amerks a year ago after leaving St. Cloud State following his junior season.

The Sabres drafted Borgen in the fourth round, 92nd overall, in 2015. Borgen represented Team USA at the Pyeongchang Olympic Games in 2018.

Update: Housley told reporters in Ottawa Borgen will be in for Rasmus Ristolainen, who is under the weather.

"Will brings a physical element to the game," Housley said. "He's a shutdown guy, he plays very well in his own end. Defensively, (he) boxes out tremendously well. (He) plays a simple game, makes that first pass on the tape."