



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

Friday, April 12, 2019

TONIGHT'S GAME: Binghamton vs. Rochester

Amerks coach Chris Taylor says he hasn't spoken to Sabres about job
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
April 11 2019

Rochester Americans coach Chris Taylor, whose name has been mentioned as a possible replacement for former Sabres coach Phil Housley, said he hasn't interviewed or talked with the team about the opening.

"I'm just concentrating on this year and our players and our team right now," Taylor said Thursday.

The Sabres fired Housley on Sunday following a disappointing 76-point season.

Having earned 96 points this season, the Amerks rank second in the North Division and third in the 31-team AHL.

Taylor, 47, has led them to the playoffs in both of his seasons as coach.

Taylor said hearing his name mentioned for the Sabres' job is "a reflection of how well our team has done."

"It comes from our leadership, it comes from our assistant coaches, it comes from our staff, it comes everybody who does their job," he said. "It's all because of our team success. . . . It's all a reflection on everybody in our organization."

Following Friday's regular-season home finale against the Binghamton Devils, the Amerks close the schedule with road games against the Syracuse Crunch on Saturday and the Belleville Senators on Sunday.

The Amerks begin their first-round playoff series against an opponent to be determined this weekend on April 19 at Blue Cross Arena.

Nylander update

Americans winger Alexander Nylander is day-to-day with a lower-body cut he suffered in his last appearance with the Sabres, Taylor said.

The Sabres sent Nylander, who hasn't played since April 2, back to the American Hockey League on Monday.

Taylor said Nylander, 21, has been skating on his own but wasn't on the ice Thursday.

Nylander compiled two goals and four points in 12 games with the Sabres. The Swedish prospect has scored 12 goals and 31 points in 49 contests with the Amerks this season.

5 things to know as Amerks wrap up regular season and gear up for playoffs
Rochester Democrat & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 11 2019

That Chris Taylor's name would be mentioned as a candidate to become the next head coach of the Buffalo Sabres is only logical.

In two seasons in charge of the Sabres' AHL affiliate in Rochester, Taylor has guided the Amerks to consecutive playoff berths, his team wracking up 91 points last season and 96 this season with three games to play.

But get him to elaborate about replacing the fired Phil Housley in Buffalo? Not a chance.

With back-to-back playoff teams, Amerks coach Chris Taylor is a viable candidate to take over for the fired Phil Housley in Buffalo.

Taylor is making it very clear that his focus is on winning the AHL's North Division title this weekend and then on winning a Calder Cup championship when the post-season begins a week from Friday.

But isn't the former Amerks captain and team hall of famer just a bit flattered his name is being bounced about on talk shows, social media and hockey rumor websites as the Sabres rev up their coaching search?

"That's just because of our team and what they've done, it has nothing to do with me," said the ever-humble Taylor. "It's the way the guys executed all year, put pucks in the net, the only reason my name has gotten there is because of the players."

Six-plus months of hard work has culminated with a weekend of high stakes, pitting Rochester against Syracuse for a division championship. Here are five things to know:

1. Race to the finish: The Amerks (45-22-4-2) trail the rival Crunch (45-21-4-3) by a mere point, 97-96, and each team has three games left, including Saturday at 7 p.m. when the teams face each other in Syracuse. Rochester hosts Binghamton Friday and is at Belleville on Sunday. Syracuse's other two games are against Laval and Utica. The Amerks last won a division title in 2004-05, which was the last season they won a playoff series. Their 2-1 win at Cleveland last Sunday was Rochester's league-leading 24th road victory. It guaranteed at least a second-place finish and secured home ice for their opening best-of-five series against either Toronto, Cleveland or Belleville. Games 1 and 2 are at 7:05 p.m. April 19 and 3:05 p.m. April 21 (yes, Easter Sunday). Game 5 if necessary would be played at 5:05 p.m. Sunday, April 28. Tickets are on sale.

2. Tower of power: It's no stretch to say that Tage Thompson, 21, who spent 65 games with the Sabres, is making a quick impact in Rochester. The 6-6 forward whose reach could grab someone's beer 10 rows into the stands has notched seven points in five games since being sent down. That includes five goals. Playing on a line with Kevin Porter and C.J. Smith, Thompson scored twice on perfect one-time blasts against Cleveland, atoning for a horrible giveaway goal two nights earlier against Syracuse. Thompson, a 2016 first-round pick, came over in the Ryan O'Reilly trade with St. Louis. "The two goals he scored in Cleveland, the puck was on his stick and off the stick, I don't think the goalie moved," Taylor said. "He definitely has an unbelievable shot, his release is great, his reach. We just need to keep seeing him improve and we know he can make a big impact on our team."

3. Reinforcements arrive: With the Sabres eliminated from the NHL playoffs for an eighth consecutive season, Victor Olofsson, Alex Nylander and defenseman Lawrence Pilut have rejoined the Amerks. Olofsson leads the Amerks in scoring with 27-33 – 60. He's one of six 20-goal men in Rochester's lineup; last season the team didn't have one. With a full complement of players, Taylor will be forced to rethink his line combinations and defensive pairings. He said he's already lost sleep. "That's the hard part, finding which guys click," he said. "A lot of guys who were in Buffalo are coming back, so there are a lot of moving parts." It's a good problem to have. "Depth in the playoffs is very important," Porter said. "It has been that way all year for us. We have lost some guys whether it's because of recall or injury, guys have stepped up and played very well. We have not really had too much of a dip in our play, but it's huge to get those guys back."

4. Dynamic duo: Olofsson (27 goals) and Smith (28) have a shot at becoming the first pair of Amerks to score 30 since Thomas Vanek (42) and Jason Pominville (30) in 2004-05. Smith, a second-year free agent out of UMass-Lowell is hotter than a Zamboni exhaust pipe, amazing 41 points (22-19) in his last 39 games. He's also a team-best plus-29. It will be hard for the Sabres to ignore Smith's production, especially with a deep playoff run. Meanwhile, Zach Redmond, who has 21 goals, a club record by a defenseman, was named an AHL first-team all-star on Thursday.

Rochester Americans goalie Scott Wedgewood, right, and defenseman Lawrence Pilut, left, defend against a shot by Charlotte Checkers right wing Julien Gauthier. Wedgewood is a career-best 28-13-2 with a 2.67 goals against average and .908 save percentage.

5. Call him Wedgewood: Goalie Scott Wedgewood has proven to be a shrewd free agent signing by Amerks GM Randy Sexton. The young veteran has a career-best 28-13-2 record with a 2.67 goals against average and .908 save percentage. He made 36 saves against Cleveland, just missing his sixth shutout. Even so, he's the first Amerks netminder with five goose eggs since Ryan Miller had eight, also in the that historic 2004-05 campaign. With two wins this weekend, he'd be the first Rochester goalie to hit the 30-win mark since MVP David Leggio had 38 wins in 2012-13.

Minnesota-Duluth advances to third straight NCAA championship game

WGR 550

By: Paul Hamilton

April 11 2019

You had to feel bad for Sabres' fourth round draft pick Jacob Bryson. The Providence junior had a very good game for the Friars, but it wasn't enough as Minnesota-Duluth won 4-1 to earn its third straight NCAA finals birth.

The game was close throughout as Duluth scored twice into the empty net to become the first team to get to three straight Frozen Four finals since 2008 when Boston College turned the trick.

In the first period, Providence and Minnesota-Duluth pretty much felt each other out. We didn't see many chances, but we did see two disallowed goals and quite a few hits.

The Bulldogs just had bad luck on the first disallowed goal. Providence's Hayden Hawkey did not have the puck frozen, but the referee lost sight of the puck before Jade Miller put the puck in the net.

The second one went to a referee review that took around five minutes. The fans started booing and rightfully so. It was fairly obvious that Cole Koepke backed into Hawkey before the point shot got to him. Koepke swept the puck in on the rebound, but the damage was already done.

I think fans would accept replay a lot better in sports if they had just one minute to decide. If they can't decide by then, you go with the call on the ice.

Bryson played fast right off the bat. The kid is listed at 5' 9", which might be generous, but I was impressed after just 20 minutes.

On just his second shift, Bryson came from the bench down the slot, forcing Hunter Shepard into a save.

Later in the period, he flew up the left-wing wall and found Kasper Björkqvist in front with Shepard making his only tough save of the period.

Bryson also looked good in a 1-on-1 situation, standing up 6' 2", 185-pound Noah Cates and riding him harmlessly off the play.

I was hoping that a big hit by Louie Roehl of Duluth at center ice would wake the game up and it did from a physical standpoint, but not from an offensive standpoint.

Bryson was a key element in Providence tying the game in the second period. His power play rocket from the point led to Josh Wilkins' 20th goal of the season. Wilkins is an undrafted junior and will have NHL teams knocking on his door after the Frozen Four.

Minnesota-Duluth opened the scoring when Justin Richards took a shot from the right-wing wall and got it through the arm of Hawkey.

After the game, Bryson said he enjoyed the whole experience, especially since it was in his NHL city, "Playing in Buffalo tonight was fun and an awesome experience."

Bryson has taken a huge leap in his play since being drafted in 2017. He said, "A big thing has been consistency, trying to be the best player on the ice every night is something I'm trying to work on and making sure I'm holding my teammates accountable as well."

Thursday was my first opportunity to see Bryson live in a college game. He is very small, but has the strength to handle 6' 2" forwards. He said it comes from the legs, "It comes with experience, I've dealt with that my whole life and I've learned how to take advantage of those opportunities and I have to be physical especially at my size."

Bryson said it's too early to think about if he'll leave Providence a year early to sign with the Sabres. If he does, he would likely immediately join the Amerks.

Thompson settling right in with Amerks

Amerks.com

By: Erica Whyte

April 11, 2019

For someone who approaches nearly seven feet with skates on, newcomer Tage Thompson has done a pretty good job at blending into the Amerks lineup.

With seven points (5+2) in his first five games, including a three-point debut and both goals in the Amerks' most recent win over the Cleveland Monsters, the 21-year-old forward has quickly proven himself as an invaluable asset in Rochester's quest for the Calder Cup.

And after spending the majority of the 2018-19 season in Buffalo, where he tallied 12 points (7+5) in 65 games, Thompson is just happy he is helping to contribute to Rochester's win column.

"You want to come in and do the best you can, and I know what I'm capable of, and for me, helping the team win means providing offense," said the 6-foot-6 Phoenix, Arizona, native who joined the Amerks roster at the end of March. "I've got great guys I'm playing with, and the team has had success all year, which makes everything easier as well."

Although his NHL stats don't reflect it (yet), Thompson's goal-scoring abilities are what, according to him, provide the winger his biggest advantage.

"I'm a big power forward, I've got good offensive ability and I think my shot is probably my biggest asset," he said of his skill-set. "I'm still trying to round out the defensive side of my game and play a full 200-foot game, but offense is where I thrive."

However, Amerks head coach Chris Taylor insists that Thompson's size is what makes him a real standout, in more ways than one.

"His size and his reach are unbelievable," said Taylor of Thompson, who often towers over both his teammates and opponents. "He can keep guys to the outside, and the puck can be six feet on the other side and there's no way they can knock it off. It's a huge advantage and we've got to make sure he's using his body for every situation."

"He's a guy that can make a big difference in our game," continued Taylor, who coached Thompson in Sabres Development Camp and Prospects Challenge last summer. "He can take the puck and make things happen with it. He's a guy that also, defensively, can use his reach for penalty kill. He's a game breaker, and those are the type of players we want."

Although Taylor is looking to fine-tune some of his skills, Thompson's hockey sense and ability have been curated through an entire lifetime of living and breathing hockey.

"My dad was an assistant coach for the Islanders for two years, and I remember I'd always be around the locker room," Thompson explained of his father, Brent Thompson. After a 15-year playing career with the Los Angeles Kings, Winnipeg Jets and Phoenix Coyotes, Brent began a 14-year coaching career. He is currently the head coach of the Bridgeport Sound Tigers, the Islanders' American Hockey League affiliate for the last few decades.

And the father-son duo aren't the only hockey players in the Thompson family. Tage's younger brother, Tyce, plays for Providence College, and is currently competing in the Frozen Four, which is being hosted at the KeyBank Center in Buffalo.

According to Thompson, having a little brother who shared his love of the game made all the difference.

"We're only 19 months apart, and being from a hockey family, hockey is kind of at the forefront of everything. We moved a lot, which was tough, but with him, being so close in age and having similar interests, it made those moves a lot easier."

"I don't know if it's too good to publicize this, but we would always skip school and go to the rink in the morning with my dad. We'd go on the ice before practice then the guys would come on, and we'd get off and watch, then once they were done, we would jump back on. We'd be at the rink for hours. That was something me and him loved to do."

Thompson and his hockey bloodline are just the most recent addition to the group of Amerks players who also share that same family background. Alexander Nylander, Dalton Smith, Lawrence Pilut and assistant coach Gord Dineen were all the sons of hockey players, giving them each an early taste of hockey life, but also a longtime understanding of the nomadic nature of this unique career field.

"My dad has been traded, signing with different teams, coaching for different teams as well," explained Thompson of his dad, who played on seven different teams before Tage's 10th birthday. "With hockey, you're always on the move, and that has been our lifestyle since I was born."

And just like some of his new teammates, Thompson has many early memories of interacting with hockey greats.

"I remember meeting Kyle Okposo when my dad was with the Islanders," said Thompson, "and as it turns out, five or six years later, I end up on the same team and playing on the same line for a few games, which is pretty crazy and something that I never would have thought have happened."

"Stuff like that has happened a lot, running into guys that my dad either played with or coached, and now I'm playing against them. It's bizarre and cool all at the same time."

As for the one person that Thompson hopes to one day share the ice with? His original teammate, his baby brother.

"Hopefully our paths will cross again one day, maybe we will play on the same team or play against each other. That's been a dream for both of us for a while."

Redmond named to AHL first all-star team

Amerks.com

By: Staff Report

April 11, 2019

The American Hockey League announced today that Rochester Americans defenseman Zach Redmond has been named to the 2018-19 AHL First All-Star Team.

The 30-year-old Redmond earns year-end honors for the second straight season after being named to the AHL Second All-Star Team in 2017-18, becoming the first Amerks defenseman to be selected in back-to-back years since Terry Hollinger in 1995-96 and 1996-97.

Redmond surpassed his 47-point output from last season in 10 fewer games during the 2018-19 campaign, recording career-highs in goals (21) and points (50) while adding 29 assists and a plus-14 on-ice rating in 56 games for Rochester.

The eighth-year pro currently leads all AHL defensemen in goals (21) and power-play goals (10) and ranks third in points heading into the final weekend of the regular season. He's also tied for the league lead with nine game-winning goals while his 196 shots are the most by an AHL blueliner this season.

Earlier this season, Redmond broke the 46-year-old franchise record for goals by a defenseman in a single season, surpassing Amerks Hall of Famer Rick Pagnutti, who set the original mark with 18 goals during the 1972-73 campaign. Since then, Redmond continued his record-setting season by becoming the first defenseman in team history – and first of six different Amerks skaters this season – to reach the 20-goal mark. Redmond, who is currently averaging just under a point-per-game and had an AHL-best nine-game point streak to end the month of October, reached the 50-point mark for the first time in his pro career with an assist Saturday in Syracuse.

Originally a seventh-round selection (184th overall) of the Atlanta Thrashers in the 2008 NHL Entry Draft, Redmond has amassed 197 points (65+132) in 312 career AHL games with Rochester, St. John's, San Antonio and Chicago. He's also totaled 38 points (9+29) in 133 NHL appearances, including three last season with the Buffalo Sabres.

Amerks 2019-20 Season Ticket Memberships, which start as low as just \$14 per game, are on-sale now. Full-season ticket member benefits include, but are not limited to, Riverside Club VIP Room access with Amerks Alumni, family meet and greet and annual Skate with the Players event, an exclusive preseason Ice Breaker Party and much more. For more information, visit www.amerks.com or call 1-855-GO-AMERKS.

Nathan Paetsch takes break from mentoring to play games for Amerks
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
April 10, 2019

Nathan Paetsch figured sooner or later his services would be needed. Defensemen are usually a precious commodity this time of year.

After six months and nearly a full season of games, injuries, recalls and trades weaken American Hockey League blue lines.

Earlier this season, Paetsch, 36, ranked 10th on the Amerks' depth chart. The affable veteran sat out the first 20 games as a healthy scratch.

Following his debut Dec. 1, the former Sabres player was scratched 40 of the next 45 contests. He made two of his five appearances at forward.

"I've been around long enough I know how quick things can change," said Paetsch, who played four straight games before sitting out the last three.

The Amerks' defense has been in flux for months. The Sabres recently sent down rookie Lawrence Pilut and Matt Tennyson. After spending nearly three months in Buffalo, Pilut returned in February and played 12 games before they recalled him. Rookie Will Borgen came back from his first NHL stint last week.

On Feb. 24, the Sabres traded AHL All-Star Brendan Guhle. Earlier in the season, the Sabres dished Taylor Fedun, who has earned regular duty with the Dallas Stars.

Zach Redmond, a league MVP candidate before suffering a lower-body injury Jan. 23, returned from a six-game absence Friday.

With the defense corps so depleted, Amerks coach Chris Taylor recently turned to Paetsch.

"Definitely rewarding for him, all his hard work and what he's brought all year, it's nice that he's playing some games on a regular basis," Taylor said last week.

Of course, Paetsch, a veteran of 640 AHL games, knew his role when he re-signed with the Amerks this year, his 16th pro season.

The Amerks wanted Paetsch to mentor Sabres prospects. Playing time would be probably be infrequent.

That was OK with him.

"I had no intention of ever even asking to go somewhere," said Paetsch, who lives in Rochester year-round and recently was named the Amerks' "Man of the Year" for his community service. "It was only here."

Not surprisingly, Paetsch said his timing was a little off when he played March 24, his seventh appearance this season.

"Then the second game got a little bit better, and then by the third and fourth game, I fully got to really settle in and started making plays I know I'm capable of making again," Paetsch said.

In the Amerks' 6-4 road win over the Binghamton Devils on March 30, Paetsch scored his first goal this season, an empty-netter, and added an assist.

The Amerks went 3-0-1 with Paetsch in the lineup. But with Borgen and Redmond back Friday, he was scratched again.

Newcomers Casey Fitzgerald and Kurt Gosselin, both of whom recently left college, played over Paetsch.

Despite the change on the blue line, the Amerks have kept winning.

"Everybody's just buying into what we're doing," Taylor said. "They're just continuing to play the right way. If we get down a goal or two goals, we're not putting our heads down, we're just continuing to do what we're doing and we're finding ways to get some points right now."

The first time Amerks center Kyle Criscuolo returned from an injury this season, he said he "never really found my spot."

After missing 19 games, Criscuolo, 26, played 19 games before another injury shelved him 14 contests.

But Criscuolo has started finding his groove over the past few weeks, scoring two goals and five points over a recent five-game stretch.

Criscuolo set up Eric Cornel's late winning goal in a come-from-behind victory March 30. The Harvard product had a goal and two points in a 5-2 road victory against the Toronto Marlies on March 23. The next day in Toronto, he scored the tying goal with 22 seconds left in regulation, helping the Amerks win 5-4 in overtime.

"I feel like right now, I'm letting the game come to me and not forcing anything," Criscuolo said recently. "It's just good to string a couple together."

Criscuolo enjoyed a terrific season a year ago, his first in Rochester, compiling 15 goals and 34 points in 51 outings. He also earned a nine-game look with the Sabres.

Redmond, 30, has played only 15 of the last 32 games. Friday's contest was his first appearance since March 16.

"For his first game in a long time, I thought he played well," Taylor said. "I thought he skated well, I thought he did a lot of different things well. It's tough coming back and playing a team like this."

Following a torrid three-month run, Redmond has cooled down, compiling zero goals and five points in his last 12 outings.

Overall, Redmond has scored a team-record 21 goals and 50 points in 56 games this season.

Roth: Botterill lucky he's got second shot at ending Sabres' coaching carousel
Rochester Democrat & Chronicle
By: Bill Hoppe
April 10, 2019

As the Buffalo Sabres embark on another head coaching search, two of life's axioms that apply frequently to sports come to mind.

1. The more things change, the more they stay the same.
2. The definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

In case you've lost count, the Sabres have burned through five head coaches in the eight full seasons Terry and Kim Pegula have owned the team.

That's Lindy Ruff, Ron Rolston, Ted Nolan, Dan Bylsma and now Phil Housley.

Ruff took the Sabres to a Stanley Cup final, Bylsma won a Cup with Pittsburgh.

Rolston won NCAA titles, coached the Rochester Americans to the playoffs, and was a highly respected coach with USA Hockey's National Team Development Program.

Nolan was a top motivator and former NHL coach of the year with Buffalo. Housley, a Hockey Hall of Fame player with the organization, was one of the hottest coaching candidates out there after his work as an assistant with Nashville.

However, somewhere between their hiring and firing — at least we are led to believe — Ruff, Rolston, Nolan, Bylsma and Housley forgot what a stick and a puck were.

They forgot how to put lines together, run a power play, communicate and motivate. They became dumb overnight.

So out with the old, in with the new and let's do this every 1 ½ to two years until we get it right.

And, eventually, the Sabres will get a coach who takes Buffalo back to the playoffs and maybe even wins the franchise's first playoff series since 2007. It's bound to happen.

But whether it's former San Jose and Edmonton coach Todd McLellan, the rumor mill's front-runner, or someone else, he'll be the beneficiary of years of front office turnover, personality conflicts, bad trades, impetuous decision making, tanking, and general dysfunction at KeyBank Center.

They'll erect a statue in his honor, right next to the French Connection's in Alumni Plaza.

Or, two years from now, he'll join the list of former Sabres coaches which right now is rivaling the list of fired Pegula Sports and Entertainment executives.

The new Sabres coach who was introduced with much fanfare and hope, will have become dumb overnight, too. The latest victim of hockey's Death Valley.

The Pegulas made sure everyone knew this wasn't their call this time. It was general manager Jason Botterill's decision to let Housley go and they're backing their GM.

"We support the decision made by Jason," the statement read. "It wasn't an easy decision, but we know Jason is operating in the best interests of the organization both short- and long-term."

Knowing how itchy the Pegulas' trigger finger is, Botterill is fortunate he has been afforded a second swing at a head coach. His pairing with Housley produced seasons of 62 and 76 points, which were worse than the Tim Murray-Bylsma years.

Buffalo keeps adding high first-round picks to its roster like Rasmus Ristolainen, Sam Reinhart, Jack Eichel, Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Dahlin. And yet the skates keep on slipping.

Trading for 40-goal man Jeff Skinner was a huge score for Botterill and he deserves all the credit for focusing on rebuilding the Sabres' farm system so prospects can develop in a winning culture in Rochester.

On the flip side, the Ryan O'Reilly trade, while justifiable in terms of locker room environment and salary structure, isn't so easily lived with.

While St. Louis got its leading scorer – O'Reilly had a career year with 28 goals and 77 points – Buffalo got virtually nothing in return.

Patrick Berglund quit the team, Vladimir Sobotka scored five goals, Tage Thompson scored seven before being shipped to the minors, and the 2019 first-round pick in the deal has yet to be made.

Botterill, to his credit, admitted he handed Housley a flawed roster, one without enough "tools to have success out there." In fact, had the Sabres' second-half swoon not been so ghastly, Housley may have earned a third year with a few more tools to work with, like Amerks leading scorer Victor Olofsson on a permanent basis.

Where he failed – and where his players failed themselves – was not being able to turn around a downward spiral that began right after their history-tying 10-game winning streak in November.

Buffalo went 16-33-8 the rest of the way including a 2-12-2 March with an eight-game losing streak.

"When things went bad, guys were looking for answers and I think things spiraled a bit," Eichel said. "What was going on at the beginning of the year, we couldn't quite find it again and it spiraled. I don't think there was a disconnect. At the end of the day, we just didn't get it done on the ice."

Players complimented Housley for his honest communication, his preparedness, the way he conducted himself as a proud connection to the Sabres' past. He's a good man and respected.

Compared to his first year, Housley's team scored more and gave up less. Still, when a club finishes 22 points out of a playoff spot, everything a coach with a year on the job tried without success is called into question. Especially after the Sabres' hot start raised expectations.

For Housley, it was things like his constant line juggling, his lack of teaching a defensive system that anybody could recognize, his overuse of Ristolainen (25 minutes a night), his playing Thompson and Sobotka so much (insiders wonder if it was to justify the O'Reilly trade at Botterill's urging), how the players didn't respond after he called them "soft."

That proved the ultimate blow. But why Olofsson and Alex Nylander weren't summoned sooner, that's on Botterill.

The Sabres' new coach won't be walking into a desperate situation, not with Eichel and Dahlin on the roster. But the gap between this team and the eight playoff teams in the NHL's rugged Eastern Conference is still as wide as the Niagara River is long.

Six of those eight teams finished with 100 or more points and the others finished with 99 and 98.

Could Housley have done better with one more year? With continuity intact? With another high-scoring forward, better goaltending? Yes. But who can afford patience in this den of thieves?

Given the limits of what can be done in one off-season to improve a team, it's just as likely Housley would be fired next November were the Sabres to start slowly. And then they're scrambling for a replacement, maybe even ruining Amerks coach Chris Taylor's future were he handed the job under that kind of duress.

"We're all responsible for the success and failure of this organization," Botterill said. "We're not pleased with where we're at and we all need to be accountable and not make excuses."

Botterill has another chance to end the Sabres' coaching carousel. With any luck, the more things change the more they won't stay the same.

Amerks Anxiously Awaiting The Postseason

Amerks.com

By: Ryan J. Harr

April 10, 2019

With three games left in the 2018-19 regular season, the Rochester Americans currently hold the second spot in the American Hockey League's North Division. By virtue of a 6-4 road-victory over the Binghamton Devils this past Saturday, the Amerks officially punched their ticket to the 2019 Calder Cup Playoffs. It will be Rochester's second straight appearance to the postseason after ending a three-year absence last year and sixth in the last 10 seasons.

Of the Amerks current roster, 21 players have appeared in at least one game in the postseason, including the likes of two-time Calder Cup champion Nathan Paetsch. With five more players back from the Buffalo Sabres that are eligible to participate in the Calder Cup Playoffs, this year's Amerks squad collectively has combined for nearly 400 man-games in the postseason.

"Last year, I think some of the younger guys realized exactly how tough playoff games are and much the intensity ramps up," said team captain Kevin Porter, whose resume includes back-to-back Stanley Cups with the Pittsburgh Penguins. "Everyone says it, but playoff games are a different game as guys come out much harder, everyone finishes their checks, every shift counts, and you can't take a shift off. For guys getting that sample, really was huge for them."

"As playoffs are looming, as a team I think we can agree we are more confident going into them this season versus last year," said C.J. Smith, who made his professional postseason debut last spring. "This year we know what to expect going into it (the playoffs). The excitement level is still very high because as a player you want play in the postseason."

While it remains to be seen who Rochester will face in the first-round, it will undoubtedly be one of their North Division rivals from Toronto, Cleveland, or Belleville, who are looking to claim the final spot. The Amerks are guaranteed at least a second-place finish or better in the North Division and sit just one point back of Syracuse for the division lead heading into the final weekend of the regular season. But no matter the opponent, the Amerks know the stakes are just as high.

"With each game that you play and the farther you go, it's much harder to win," said forward Remi Elie, who reached the Calder Cup Finals last season with the Texas Stars. "To move on in the playoffs takes a lot of hard work and you have to come ready to play every night. One bad period or game can end your season."

Paetsch was part of the last Rochester team to win a playoff series back in 2005. That same team also featured current NHL stars like Jason Pominville and Ryan Miller as well as Buffalo Sabres general manager Jason Botterill and current Amerks head coach Chris Taylor.

"My first playoff experience was during the 2004 run," said Paetsch, who has skated in a team-high 104 playoff games over his AHL career. "We had a nice run, especially in the opening round. We were down three games to one before coming back and winning in overtime in Game 7. It was a pretty exciting way to begin my career."

After making it to Conference Finals that Spring and a second-round appearance the following year, no other Amerks team has gone further than the first-round since 2005.

Over a best-of-five or best-of-seven series, two teams become more accustomed to playing one another, more so than during the regular season. Teams get a better understanding of their opponents' tendencies, thus making the rivalry that much greater.

"It can be tough not to get too wrapped up in the rivalry of playing the same team so many times during the playoffs," Wayne Simpson explained. "It's still a hockey game and you have to stick to what got you to that stage. Everyone gets amped up for it, but you have to be smart when picking your battles."

The Amerks players are not the only ones with Calder Cup experience. Their three coaches also have been a part of the postseason on several different occasions, including last spring's playoffs.

Assistant coach Toby Petersen has won the league's most prized possession twice, once as player and once as a coach, while both head coach Chris Taylor and assistant Gord Dineen have been part of many playoff runs.

"I have been part of teams that seemed to just roll along in the playoffs," said Petersen, who won a Calder Cup as a player with Texas Stars in 2014 before leading the Cleveland Monsters to their first AHL title just two years later as an assistant coach.

"Those teams, when we won it, never felt out of games even when trailing in a game or series. Having confidence in games will carry-over from game to game. The games themselves are much tighter than those in the regular season. Guys aren't trying different things that they may attempt during the regular season because they don't want to be that guy who costs his team the game."

With the return of Victor Olofsson, Alexander Nylander and Lawrence Pilut, all whom have spent the last few weeks with the Buffalo Sabres, Rochester will have some depth that they have relied on all season.

"Gaining players who have spent time with the Sabres is huge," Smith explained. "They have all helped us get into the position we are currently in, but we all have to play our roles and not try to do too much."

"Depth in the playoffs is very important," Porter offered. "It has been that way all year for us. We have lost some guys all year whether it because of recall or injury, guys have stepped up and played very well. We have not really had too much of a dip in our play, but it's huge to get those guys back."

Rochester's current lineup is now the strongest its been all year, which will force the coaching staff to make some difficult decisions regarding who will play. Nonetheless, though, Taylor admits it's a good problem to have.

"I will be faced with some very tough decisions to make," said Taylor when talking about the potential playoff lineup. "I already have lost sleep over it. Everyone in the room has given everything they have over the season and is more than deserving to be in. I respect everyone in the dressing room but there is nothing worse than telling a player he is not going to play."

A long, successful playoff run can span into the early parts of June, and while not every player may get a chance to play in a game or series, the depth of a team only makes it much more dangerous over its quest to the Calder Cup.

"Once the playoffs begin, you quickly realize how special that opportunity is," said Taylor Leier. "A lot of players don't always get the chance to play in the postseason. It's an exciting time and one of the best of the year."

"The playoffs are a special time because you see the importance of a team," veteran blueliner Zach Redmond said. "Guys come really close to one another over the stretch. During the regular season you play to get into the playoffs, but once the postseason gets underway, you prepare more, do more homework on your opponent as the details of the game become much finer."

"Every second, every game, every shift counts, and it will not be easy," Elie added. "It is a grind, but it will be worth it."

Tage Thompson scored both goals in Amerks' win in Cleveland
Buffalo News
By: Staff
April 8, 2019

Tage Thompson scored his fourth and fifth goals in only his fifth game with the Rochester Americans on Monday night in a 2-1 victory over the Cleveland Monsters before 5,915 at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland.

Thompson, who spent most of the season with the Buffalo Sabres, scored the game's first goal at 2:31 of the second period with assists from C.J. Smith and Jack Dougherty.

The former University of Connecticut forward then scored on the power play at 10:34 of the third for a 2-0 Rochester lead. Matt Tennyson, also down from Buffalo, and Wayne Simpson assisted on the goal.

Cleveland closed to within a goal when Mark Letestu scored with 2:56 left in regulation. Derek Barach assisted.

Scott Wedgewood had 36 saves in goal for the Amerks. Brad Thiessen had 24 saves for Cleveland.

The win drew Rochester (45-22-6) within one point of first place Syracuse (45-28-7) in the North Division of the American Hockey League. Syracuse has 97 points and Rochester 96. Each has three games left in the regular season.

Rochester and Syracuse will meet one more time in the regular season, on Saturday night at the OnCenter in Syracuse.

The Amerks received more reinforcements from the Sabres on Monday. Buffalo returned forwards Alexander Nylander and Victor Olofsson, and defenseman Lawrence Pilut to Rochester, where they have spent most of the season before they were called up to Buffalo. None of the three played in Monday night's game, however.

Amerks hold off Cleveland, 2-1
C&C Worldwide
By: Staff/Amerks.com
April 9, 2019

On the strength of a pair of goals from newcomer Tage Thompson and 36 saves by goaltender Scott Wedgewood, the Rochester Americans (45-22-4-2) picked up their league-leading 24th road win of the season with a 2-1 victory over the Cleveland Monsters (36-28-7-2) Monday night at Quicken Loans Arena. Rochester is now guaranteed at least a second-place finish or better in the American Hockey League's North Division, securing the Amerks home ice for the best-of-five first-round series of the 2019 Calder Cup Playoffs.

With the win to close out their season series with the Monsters, the Amerks improved to 26-7-2-3 over Cleveland since the start of the 2011-12 campaign. Additionally, Rochester inched just one point behind the Syracuse Crunch for the AHL's North Division lead with three games remaining in the 2018-19 regular-season.

Thompson netted his fourth and fifth goals of the season to help the Amerks improve to 8-2-0-0 over the last their last 10 road games, which includes five straight. The club has also collected 50 out of a possible 72 points in the last 36 games overall. Wedgewood, who came within three minutes of earning his sixth shutout of the season, stopped 36 of 37 shots he faced to push his record on the campaign to 28-13-2, including a 5-1-0 in six games against the Monsters this season. He remains on pace to become the first Amerks netminder to reach 30 wins in a season since former two-time MVP David Leggio reached the mark in 2012-13.

Cleveland, who is clinging to the fourth and final playoff spot in the North Division, got on the scoreboard thanks to Mark Letestu's 20th goal of the season late in the third period while goaltender Brad Thiessen (11-7-3) took the loss.

Following a scoreless opening period of play where each team was unsuccessful on its lone power-play opportunity, the Amerks broke through as Thompson tallied his first goal of the night just 2:31 into the second stanza.

Jack Dougherty collected the puck in-between his own face-off dots and quickly hit Kevin Porter with an outlet pass in the center of the neutral zone. Rochester's captain left the puck for C.J. Smith, who entered the Monsters blueline and turned a cross-ice feed to Thompson atop the left circle. Thompson fired in the one-timer overtop the right shoulder of Thiessen to give Rochester a 1-0 lead that they took into the second intermission.

With the secondary assist, the 100th of his career as an Amerk, Porter extended his current point streak (1+7) to six games and is one point away from reaching the 40-point mark for the third consecutive season.

After a pair of penalties to begin the final period of regulation, Rochester cashed in on the second infraction as Thompson again received a perfect one-time feed from Matt Tennyson to double the Amerks lead.

The power-play goal from Tennyson and Wayne Simpson at the 10:34 mark was the Amerks' seventh tally while on the man-advantage in the last six meetings versus Cleveland, and third in as many games.

As the third period was dwindling down and the Monsters facing a 2-0 deficit, Letestu had the puck in the right corner of Wedgewood. The forward threw the puck towards the goal-mouth as a teammate was crashing the net, resulting in a fortuitous

bounce for the home team as it glanced off the stick of an Amerks defenseman at the top of the crease and in to make it a one-goal game.

Things got interesting in the final 2:43 of regulation as both teams took coincidental roughing penalties before Smith was whistled for interference, but Wedgewood remained strong and closed out the 2-1 win despite Cleveland pulling its goaltender.

The Amerks wrap up the 2018-19 campaign with three games in three nights beginning on Friday, Apr. 12 at 7:05 pm when they host the intrastate rival Binghamton Devils in the regular-season home finale at the Blue Cross Arena. Rochester will then close out the year with a return trip to Syracuse on Saturday before visiting Belleville on Sunday afternoon.

**NOTES* — Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton announced on Monday that defenseman Arvin Atwal has been reassigned to the Cincinnati Cyclones of the ECHL.

Thompson pair carries Amerks
Rochester First
By: Thad Brown/Amerks.com
April 8, 2019

On the strength of a pair of goals from newcomer Tage Thompson and 36 saves by goaltender Scott Wedgewood, the Rochester Americans (45-22-4-2) picked up their league-leading 24th road win of the season with a 2-1 victory over the Cleveland Monsters (36-28-7-2) Monday night at Quicken Loans Arena. Rochester is now guaranteed at least a second-place finish or better in the American Hockey League's North Division, securing the Amerks home ice for the best-of-five first-round series of the 2019 Calder Cup Playoffs.

With the win to close out their season series with the Monsters, the Amerks improved to 26-7-2-3 over Cleveland since the start of the 2011-12 campaign. Additionally, Rochester inched just one point behind the Syracuse Crunch for the AHL's North Division lead with three games remaining in the 2018-19 regular-season.

Thompson netted his fourth and fifth goals of the season to help the Amerks improve to 8-2-0-0 over the last their last 10 road games, which includes five straight. The club has also collected 50 out of a possible 72 points in the last 36 games overall. Wedgewood, who came within three minutes of earning his sixth shutout of the season, stopped 36 of 37 shots he faced to push his record on the campaign to 28-13-2, including a 5-1-0 in six games against the Monsters this season. He remains on pace to become the first Amerks netminder to reach 30 wins in a season since former two-time MVP David Leggio reached the mark in 2012-13.

Cleveland, who is clinging to the fourth and final playoff spot in the North Division, got on the scoreboard thanks to Mark Letestu's 20th goal of the season late in the third period while goaltender Brad Thiessen (11-7-3) took the loss.

Following a scoreless opening period of play where each team was unsuccessful on its lone power-play opportunity, the Amerks broke through as Thompson tallied his first goal of the night just 2:31 into the second stanza.

Jack Dougherty collected the puck in-between his own face-off dots and quickly hit Kevin Porter with an outlet pass in the center of the neutral zone. Rochester's captain left the puck for C.J. Smith, who entered the Monsters blueline and turned a cross-ice feed to Thompson atop the left circle. Thompson fired in the one-timer overtop the right shoulder of Thiessen to give Rochester a 1-0 lead that they took into the second intermission.

With the secondary assist, the 100th of his career as an Amerk, Porter extended his current point streak (1+7) to six games and is one point away from reaching the 40-point mark for the third consecutive season.

After a pair of penalties to begin the final period of regulation, Rochester cashed in on the second infraction as Thompson again received a perfect one-time feed from Matt Tennyson to double the Amerks lead.

The power-play goal from Tennyson and Wayne Simpson at the 10:34 mark was the Amerks' seventh tally while on the man-advantage in the last six meetings versus Cleveland, and third in as many games.

As the third period was dwindling down and the Monsters facing a 2-0 deficit, Letestu had the puck in the right corner of Wedgewood. The forward threw the puck towards the goal-mouth as a teammate was crashing the net, resulting in a fortuitous

bounce for the home team as it glanced off the stick of an Amerks defenseman at the top of the crease and in to make it a one-goal game.

Things got interesting in the final 2:43 of regulation as both teams took coincidental roughing penalties before Smith was whistled for interference, but Wedgewood remained strong and closed out the 2-1 win despite Cleveland pulling its goaltender.

The Amerks wrap up the 2018-19 campaign with three games in three nights beginning on Friday, Apr. 12 at 7:05 p.m. when they host the intrastate rival Binghamton Devils in the regular-season home finale at The Blue Cross Arena. Rochester will then close out the year with a return trip to Syracuse on Saturday before visiting Belleville on Sunday afternoon.

Sabres load up Amerks with return of Olofsson, Nylander, Pilut
Rochester Democratic & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 8, 2019

Another premature conclusion to the Buffalo Sabres season means good news for the Rochester Americans.

As expected, the Sabres bolstered the Amerks' lineup for their upcoming AHL playoffs with the return of leading scorer Victor Olofsson, former first-round pick Alex Nylander and all-star rookie defenseman Lawrence Pilut on Monday.

The Sabres (33-39-10) missed the playoffs for an eighth consecutive season, 22 points out of playoff spot, and fired coach Phil Housley on Sunday.

The Amerks (44-22-4-2), however, are loading up for what the organization is hoping is a long Calder Cup playoff run. They last won a playoff series in the American Hockey League in 2005.

Rochester entered Monday night's game at Cleveland trailing Syracuse (45-21-4-3) for first place in the North Division. A Rochester victory would close Syracuse's lead to one point with three games to play. The Crunch will host the Amerks on Saturday.

It wasn't immediately known whether Olofsson, Nylander and Pilut would join the Amerks in Cleveland or come directly to Rochester.

Olofsson, 23, a seventh-round pick of the Sabres in 2014, leads the Amerks in scoring with 27 goals, 33 assists and 60 points. A veteran of the Swedish elite leagues, he earned his first NHL action in March. In six games in Buffalo, he impressed fans with his speed and shot, scoring 2-2 – 4 and was a plus-1.

Nylander, 21, has enjoyed his best pro season and earned his longest recall to the Sabres, appearing in 12 games, also scoring 2-2 – 4. He was sidelined briefly by an injury. Buffalo's first-round pick in 2016, Nylander has scored 12-19 – 31 in 49 games for Rochester.

Pilut, 23, a rookie free agent defenseman, appeared in 33 games for Buffalo (1-5 – 6) to go with 28 games in Rochester (4-22 – 26). He's tied with Kevin Porter for second in plus-minus rating with plus-21, behind C.J. Smith with plus-28.

The Sabres send three to the Amerks

WGR 550

By: Paul Hamilton

April 8, 2019

The Sabres have sent three more back to Rochester. Victor Olofsson, Alex Nylander and Lawrence Pilut have been returned for the stretch run.

In 33 games, Pilut had one goal and five assists for six points. Nylander played 12 games before getting cut on the back of the leg. He had two goals and two assists for four points. Olofsson netted two goals and two assists in just six games played. Matt Tennyson went back on Saturday.

The Amerks have a game in Cleveland on Monday night.

Recap: Monsters fall to the Americans, 2-1, but still control their own playoff destiny

SB Nation The Cannon

By: Elaine Shircliff

April 8, 2019

The Cleveland Monsters fell tonight in a pivotal game against the Rochester Americans. Mark Letestu scored the lone goal for the Monsters in the third period. While, Tage Thompson got the best of the Monsters, not once, but twice, with his laser beam shot.

Head Coach John Madden spoke highly of Thompson stating, "there aren't many goalies in the league who could stop him". Yet, knowing this, the Monsters continued to leave him unattended throughout the game. Leaving highly talented opponents to their own devices has been one of the Achilles tendons of the Monsters this season. Tonight, was not the first time this has happened.

If the Monsters want to get into the playoffs, applying pressure to star opponents is imperative. Not allowing prolific scorers time to breathe or think will prove beneficial to the team in the long run.

Another area the Monsters struggled with tonight was scoring. They fired a barrage of shots, 37 to be exact, at Scott Wedgewood.

There were very few good looks on net. As Coach Madden said, "We put a few muffins on net." They are at the point in the season where "muffins" could mean the difference between paying until June and ending in April.

The one goal the Monsters scored was actually knocked in by the American's winger, Taylor Leier. So, if we want to get technical, the Americans scored all three goals tonight.

The Monsters also struggled on the power play. There were multiple times where it looked like they were killing a penalty instead of having the man-advantage. The good news is Coach Madden is hopeful that Sonny Milano and Alex Broadhurst will be back in the lineup on Thursday. According to Madden the return of those two "will boost our lineup and obviously power play."

While tonight's loss was a huge blow to the Monsters lead over the Belleville Senators in the standings, all is not lost. As the season winds down, they still control their own destiny. "We don't have a game in hand, but we have one point up," said Coach Madden, "We're still in the driver's seat".

The Monsters take on the number one team in the league, the Charlotte Checkers, on Thursday and Friday. They must bring their "A" game against the Checkers. It's one of two ways they will make it out of the regular season alive. The other involves the Senators losing their last three games of the season. Since they are battling with the Monsters for the last playoff, dropping their last three games is highly unlikely.

Rochester trips up Monsters, 2-1; race for final playoff spot tightens

The News-Herald

By: Jeff Schudel

April 8, 2019

The Monsters' grip on the final playoff spot in the AHL North got a little slippery April 8.

Rochester, with a playoff spot already clinched, nipped the Monsters, 2-1, at Quicken Loans Arena in a game that, had they won, would have given the Monsters more breathing room in their race with the Belleville Senators. Instead, their lead over the Senators is still one point. Both teams have three games remaining in the regular season.

"Coming off a road trip, the boys had a good effort," Monsters coach John Madden said. "It was there for us. We just didn't execute on the plays we needed to.

"We're back where we started. We don't have a game in hand. We're only one point up. We're still in the driver's seat. We just have to take care of business against Charlotte and then go into Toronto. It's still in our hands."

The Monsters finish the season hosting the Charlotte Checkers, owners of the best record in the AHL (49-17-7-1) on April 11 and 12 and then play in Toronto on April 14.

Belleville finishes by hosting Toronto on April 10, at Toronto on April 13 and hosting Rochester on April 14.

The race could easily come down to the last day of the regular season. The Rochester at Belleville game begins at 2 p.m. The Cleveland at Toronto game starts at 4 p.m.

"I'm not getting too far ahead," Madden said. "We'll have some good practices before Thursday. We'll definitely work on special teams a little bit. I'm not looking to see what Belleville's doing. We're just going to control our own destiny, and that's by winning hockey games. If we do that, everything else takes care of itself."

Madden said he expects Sonny Milano and Alex Broadhurst to return from injuries to play against the Checkers on April 11.

The only goal credited to the Monsters in the one-goal loss to Rochester was actually scored by Americans left wing Taylor Leier when a pass from Cleveland center Marc Letestu to the front of the Rochester goal deflected off Leier's stick into the net, cutting the Americans' lead to 2-1 with 2:56 remaining.

The Monsters started a 4-on-3 power play with 2:06 left. Goalie Brad Thiessen was pulled with 1:12 remaining, but the extra attackers were not enough.

Rochester goalie Scott Wedgewood spit back 36 of the shots the Monsters launched at him. There were times the Monsters didn't finish off rebounds. Sometimes shots went just wide of the net, but the end result was the Monsters went back-to-back games (they were beaten in Belleville, 3-1, on April 6) without a point for the first time since losing three straight on Feb. Feb. 1, 2 and 5.

"We just couldn't score," Madden said. "We put 37 up there. Our power play's run a little dry. We needed a kill when they scored their second goal. The puck just wouldn't go in."

Tage Thompson scored both Rochester goals, one on a one-timer from the top of the right circle in the second period and the other on a power play midway through the third.

"Tage Thompson lasered two top shelf," Madden said. "There aren't many goalies that can stop them."

Brad Thiessen made 24 saves for the Monsters.