



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

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TODAY'S GAME: Toronto vs. Rochester

North Division Semifinals Game 2

DUFFER: Looking ahead to Game 2 for the Amerks
Sabres.com
By: Brian Duff
April 20, 2019

There's only one way to look for the Rochester Americans and that's straight ahead into Sunday's Game 2 at Blue Cross Arena against the Toronto Marlies.

Toronto won Game 1 by a 4-1 score Friday night. Tage Thompson picked up the lone goal for the Amerks.

By the letter, here are where improvements can be made in their attempt to even the series:

A is for adjustments on the power play. With potentially lethal one-timers from both circles, the playmakers need to find the likes of Thompson and Victor Olofsson to make this happen. Avoiding the shot blockers, in all situations, is also important. Toronto clogged the shot lanes very well on Friday.

M is for matching the poise shown by the defending champion Marlies in the face of first-period adversity. Tough moments are bound to happen, they just can't lead to emotional let downs and unforced errors.

E is for experience, energy, and evening the score. They all know what to expect now, so empty the tank and go get it. Tweaking the fourth line may be warranted for the sake of slightly more skill. Toronto isn't going to run them out of the building physically.

R is for Rasmus (Asplund) and his ownership of game one chances gone wrong. His presence throughout his first North American playoff game was nearly everything you could have asked for, now he just needs to deliver, for himself and his linemates.

K is for Kasimir Kaskisuo. The Toronto netminders' regular-season numbers weren't great, but he found a groove in the final five games and now has allowed only seven goals in his last six appearances. The only Amerks goal was a snapshot of what needs to happen more - Taylor Leier with a big time screen, leaving the goaltender helpless to Thompson's shot (Oh and by the way, Thompson now has seven goals in nine games with the Amerks).

S is for Sunday, a successful day of the week on which Rochester went 6-1 during the regular season. It should also be for Smith, as in C.J., who could have easily played the role of hero. Breakaways, 2-on-1s, stripping pucks to turn nothing into something. Smith was all around it Friday, and a reoccurrence of that could turn this series in a hurry.

Tickets for Sunday's 3:05 p.m. faceoff are on sale now. Game 3 of the Calder Cup Playoffs quarterfinals series on Wednesday and Game 4 (if necessary) on Friday will air on MSG in both the Buffalo and Rochester markets.

Sabres prospect Tage Thompson thriving with Amerks
Buffalo Hockey Beat
By: Bill Hoppe
April 20, 2019

The numbers jump out at you. Through nine AHL appearances, Buffalo Sabres prospect Tage Thompson has already compiled seven goals and 10 points.

Sure, it's a small sample size. But Thompson, 21, has often been a dynamic presence for the Americans since the Sabres sent him down March 28.

"We're looking for him to be a big-time player for us," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said following Saturday's practice at Bill Gray's Regional Iceplex in Brighton.

In Game 1 of the North Division playoff semifinal, a 4-1 loss to the Toronto Marlies, Thompson scored the Amerks' lone goal late in the third period.

At this stage of his career, the 6-foot-5, 200-pound Thompson should be a lethal scorer in the minors. The former first-round selection spent nearly the entire season with the Sabres, playing 65 games. He has already made 106 NHL appearances.

"He's gaining more confidence and getting to the hard areas, coming out with pucks and using his body to his advantage, because it is an advantage," Taylor said after the Amerks prepared for Sunday afternoon's playoff contest at Blue Cross Arena. "I think he can use it even more. You get in guys' hands and use (your) body and shield guys off, it creates more scoring opportunities."

Thompson scored twice and added an assist in his Amerks debut March 29 before enjoying another two-goal night April 8. The winger has often utilized his wicked one-timer from the left circle, pumping 30 shots on goal with the Amerks.

"It's a tough league, there's guys on you quick," Thompson said. "I think maybe the NHL's a little more controlled, a little more positionally. Guys maybe run around a little bit more in the AHL, which in turn gives you a little bit more offensive chances."

Of course, very few AHL players Thompson's age possess his big-league experience. Joining one of the league's best teams has also contributed to his early success.

"I feel good, I feel pretty confident," Thompson said. "I think it's easy when the team's playing well, when the team's got success, it makes it easier to settle in right away. I'm playing with great players every night."

The Sabres sent Thompson to the Amerks late in the regular season to help him prepare for what they hope will be a long playoff run. Embracing his first stint in the minors since February 2018 with the San Antonio Rampage has helped him thrive.

"It's exciting," Thompson said. "I think it's the best time of the year. Obviously, every player wants to play in (the) playoffs. I've got a chance to do that here with Rochester. They've got a great team, they've been playing unreal hockey all year long. . . . Embracing it's pretty easy."

Thompson, a key piece of the Ryan O'Reilly trade with the St. Louis Blues, has accepted the Sabres' plan for him all season.

Instead of sending him to the Amerks in the fall, the Sabres kept Thompson and scratched him seven games early.

After earning regular duty and occasionally showcasing the talents of top forwards, Thompson struggled again late and sat out more contests. He had a 23-game goal drought when the Sabres sent him down.

Thompson played up and down the lineup in Buffalo, compiling seven goals and 12 points.

"To get an opportunity to play in all (facets), all different roles . . . you learn so much," Thompson said. "I think you learn more through adversity than you do through tons of success. That's kind of something we faced as a team up in Buffalo and I faced individually.

"It's hard being in and out of the lineup. It makes you hungry. From that, you learn a lot. I think you play with a chip on your shoulder, like you have something to prove. That's something that I've taken down here."

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Despite being the only Amerk to play all 76 regular-season games, Taylor scratched forward Eric Cornel for Friday's postseason opener.

"He's the consummate pro," Taylor said. "I had a good talk with him before the game (Friday). He's all about team. He's just (like), 'Whenever you need me, I'm ready.'

"That's what I love about our team. Everybody's ready for anything."

Based on Saturday's line combinations, Cornel could dress Sunday afternoon.

"I feel like I really worked hard for this team all season and worked for the playoffs," Cornel said. "It was tough watching, but this time of the year, it's all about the team, team first. So wherever they need me, when they need me, I'll be ready."

Amerks look to learn from Game 1 defeat

WGRZ

By: J.T. Messinger

April 19, 2019

Saturday morning in the Rochester, N.Y. suburb of Brighton, the Americans took the ice to shake off their playoff-opening 2-1 loss in Game 1 of the North Division Semifinals to the Toronto Marlies, a game in which Head Coach Chris Taylor counted the offensive chances as 23-10 in their favor.

For a team of players who someday hope to be NHL regulars, "You learn every day. You learn every shift," Taylor explained. "You learn you can't take one second off in these types of games or it can be in the back of your net."

Tage Thompson played 65 games in Buffalo this year, scoring just 12 points before joining Rochester for this playoff run. "Getting the opportunity to play playoff hockey, it's a whole other level," Thompson said. "It's a lot more physical, a lot faster, things are happening quick out there. So, I think just that in itself helps you make plays quicker. You have to be more intense every shift."

These games are immensely valuable to the development of players like Thompson and Will Borgen, who himself got 4 games up with the Sabres in addition to the 71 he played with the Amerks in his first full pro season.

"Just rounding out my game, just playing a 200-foot game," added Thompson. "I think when I'm physically engaged in puck battles and strong on pucks and good in the defensive zone, I think that's when you see the offensive chances start to come."

"Playoff hockey is a completely different level," Borgen replied. "It's like everyone's amped up times ten, and I think it helps out a lot just knowing what it takes."

And as educational as the experience alone can be, learning how to perform and win as the pressure rises is a skill the organization wants all these players to have as they make the jump to Buffalo.

"How guys can handle big games, how they can handle situations that we're in," Taylor detailed before bringing the focus back to the immediate challenge at hand. "We outplayed a team that we believe we outplayed them, and we end up short. So, we have to learn from that. How do we respond? How do we get better so that we don't let these games slide away from us?"

Victor Olofsson's transformation from overlooked prospect to Amerks leading scorer
Buffalo News
By: Lance Lysowski
April 19, 2019

The criticism still irks Victor Olofsson as he stands outside the Rochester Americans' dressing room inside Blue Cross Arena.

As a 19-year-old winger in the Swedish Hockey League, Olofsson was told repeatedly that he would never be big enough or strong enough to play professionally in North America. Those doubts weren't silenced when he was drafted 181st overall by the Buffalo Sabres in 2014.

Rather than planting a seed of doubt, those words fueled Olofsson to prove he belonged.

In the five years since being drafted, Olofsson has realized the dream many scoffed at. His left-handed shot was called "probably the best" by Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin and helped Olofsson score two goals in six NHL games this season.

Yet, Olofsson's transformation from overlooked prospect to leading scorer for the Amerks began with work without the puck. The 23-year-old's focus on becoming a well-rounded player has helped him kill penalties, shut down an opponent's top line and outmuscle bigger, strong defensemen along the boards.

"It's been everything," Sabres assistant general manager Randy Sexton told The Buffalo News of Olofsson's work defensively. "If you play the right way you get offensive opportunities. Early on he was just a guy with a cannon. He's a smart player, so he could get himself in good spots, but he didn't make as many good spots available and he didn't get as many puck touches as he does now because he was learning those nuances."

Waiting game

Olofsson's shot captured Sexton's attention long before the two were united in the Sabres' organization. Sexton, who joined Jason Botterill's staff in June 2017, was the Pittsburgh Penguins' director of amateur scouting when he first saw Olofsson play.

Olofsson, now standing at 5 feet, 11 inches, impressed Sexton with his speed and on-ice instincts, which allowed him to find space to unleash his shot. However, Sexton and Sabres management thought Olofsson was not ready for the physical grind of the American Hockey League last season.

Olofsson returned to Frolunda HC, where he was teammates with Dahlin, and proceeded to have his best professional season with 27 goals, 16 assists and a plus-8 rating in 50 regular-season games. Though the team's playoff run ended after only six games, Olofsson showed the Sabres' staff he was ready to make the move to Western New York.

Yet, Olofsson was not complacent. He vowed to spend his offseason physically preparing to play on a smaller ice surface against bigger, stronger competitors, particularly in the defensive zone.

"I always want to improve everything, but I felt like I really wanted to become a guy who can play every aspect of the game, whether it's power play, penalty kill, late when we're up by one or two goals when we're trying to close the game," Olofsson,

who played parts of four seasons in the SHL, said. "I want to be a guy the team can trust. ... That defensive part of my game, I really wanted to work on."

Olofsson did not make the Sabres' roster out of training camp this season. However, he showed tangible evidence he was ready for the next step, including his performance during a preseason game in Toronto on Sept. 21.

Though Olofsson was held without a point, he stripped a puck from an unsuspecting Maple Leafs forward in the Sabres' offensive zone and left a drop pass to Tage Thompson, whose shot was stopped by goalie Garret Sparks.

Though Olofsson's potential was on display throughout the offseason, from development camp to preseason games, the Sabres expected the transition would require time and patience given the International ice surface is 15 feet wider.

"Did we think he was going to score the way he has? No," Sexton, who serves as the Amerks' general manager, admitted. "We believed he could score, but it's not an easy process to adjust to the North American game and North American ice. It took some time, but Victor has an incredible attitude and an incredibly great work ethic, so we knew it would come. We just had to give it time to work through the process."

'All hands on deck'

Rasmus Asplund halted as soon as he heard Amerks second-year coach Chris Taylor's whistle Wednesday in Blue Cross Arena. Taylor stopped practice ahead of a first-round playoff opener to correct a mistake made by Asplund, who is Olofsson's linemate and a fellow Swede.

Rather than quietly delivering instruction, Taylor wanted everyone in earshot to know exactly what he wanted to see during the next practice rep. All turned their attention to Taylor, watched Asplund execute the drill to perfection following the whistle and the on-ice session continued.

Taylor uses that technique with every player, no matter their level of experience, to ensure mistakes aren't repeated in practices or games. Such instructions are one of several methods used by the coaching staff to further Olofsson's development, particularly when he doesn't have the puck.

"It's all hands on deck," Rochester assistant coach Toby Petersen said. "You keep an eye on [Olofsson] to look for trends in his game. Obviously, we watch him closely on video and Tails in particular is really good about practice. We've continue to focus with him on the 200-foot game, the little things away from the puck."

"Some of the things that give him an advantage when time and space close, like getting through hands, moving his feet on the walls, pushing off the walls. Little, little things to give him any sort of advantage because we want him to have the puck on his stick as much as possible because he's dangerous when it's on his tape."

The work does not stop when team practice drills are complete. Olofsson, Asplund and others are often on the ice long after the conclusion of most sessions. Many times a coach or staff member has to sternly tell them to end the workout.

There is a method to that madness.

Workouts in the gym helped Olofsson prepare for the adjustment to grueling, physical hockey. However, he has never lost sight of the skills needed to reach the NHL. Since there is little time for individual work during team practices, Olofsson will stay after to unleash one-timer slap shots and spend time on the nuances of his game.

That ice time also includes conversations with Asplund, whose defensive awareness and skill made him a second-round draft pick of the Sabres in 2016.

The two will exchange ideas on how to better execute on set plays, and Olofsson credited Asplund with his growth defensively. That routine helped Olofsson earn the coaching staff's trust in every situation, including the penalty kill.

Olofsson is now one of Taylor's most trusted penalty killers, despite the former estimating he received only "two or three shifts" shorthanded with Frolunda HC all of last season.

"A little bit of experience and [Taylor] started using me more on the PK around that time," Olofsson said of what helped improve his defensive play. "That helped me a lot, even 5-on-5. My offensive game — maybe it sounds crazy — but I feel like I gained confidence from that. It helped my defensive game and made me confident all over the ice. That makes it easier to play."

More than a cannon

Olofsson finished the regular season with a team-high 30 goals, becoming the first Amerks player with 30 or more in a season since Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville accomplished the feat when the NHL was locked out in 2004-05. Olofsson's total was tied for eighth in the league and his nine game-winning goals were tied for the most.

His longest drought without a goal was nine games but he had six assists during that span. Olofsson added 33 assists with a plus-12 rating in 66 games, remarkable numbers for an AHL rookie. And he production stems from much more than his shot.

"It's been unbelievable," Taylor said of Olofsson's defense following practice Wednesday. "That's been the biggest step from him. His speed, first and foremost, but he gets through people's hands and he knows how to get through guys' bodies, and he's playing away from the puck really well right now. Again, his 200-foot game probably elevated around Christmas time and sometimes you would think a guy coming over, his first year, would actually go the other way on that but, he's really improved and it's remarkable."

Despite the Sabres' struggles, management chose to remain patient with Olofsson until it felt he was ready to excel enough away from the puck. After posting six points in a back-to-back in Toronto, Olofsson was recalled by the Sabres on March 27.

He recorded his first NHL point in his debut, assisting on Jack Eichel's second-period goal against the Detroit Red Wings, and scored in his second game with a wrist shot from the right circle in a 5-1 loss to the New York Islanders.

Olofsson would score two goals among four points with a plus-2 rating in six games while showing he was capable of playing alongside Eichel, the Sabres' 22-year-old captain.

"What really pleased us was his ability to play with guys higher in our lineup," Sexton added. "He looked very comfortable with Jack Eichel and looked very comfortable with Casey Mittelstadt. Why? Because he has a great skill set and he's got great hockey sense. He works."

Olofsson returned to the Amerks knowing he belongs in the NHL, and he'll get the opportunity to prove that again when the Sabres opening training camp next fall. Until then, he will try to help the Amerks win their first Calder Cup since 1996.

Though Olofsson was pleased with his production in Buffalo, he beamed when discussing the one aspect of his game that doubters never thought would be possible.

"There were always times growing up when people have said I'm too small, especially for North American hockey where there are a lot of physical, big defensemen," he said. "They thought it would be too tough for me to come over here. A lot of people thought that. I always wanted to prove people wrong. I think I've been doing that."

Amerks start strong, fall flat to drop Game 1 to Toronto
Buffalo News
By: Lance Lysowski
April 19, 2019

There were no signs of dejection inside the Rochester Americans' dressing room late Friday night in Blue Cross Arena.

Victor Olofsson, the Amerks' leading scorer, proclaimed he and his teammates were "happy with the way we played," and not a negative word was spoken about two periods in which they allowed four goals.

However, the Amerks are facing a harsh reality after their 4-1 loss to the Toronto Marlies in Game 1 of their best-of-five first-round Calder Cup playoff series before 7,502 at Blue Cross Arena. Firing 15 shots on goal, not including three that hit the post, in the first period has Rochester one loss away from the brink of elimination.

There isn't much time to dissect how the night unraveled, either. The Amerks will attempt to win the franchise's first playoff game since May 2, 2014 when the two teams play Game 2 on Sunday at 3 p.m.

"Deep down they know we let one slip away," coach Chris Taylor lamented. "Again, we had it in our grasp, especially in the first period. It could have been 3-0. They're on their heels. . . . We just didn't capitalize and we have to get better. We have to execute."

The Amerks, whose 46 regular-season wins were the third most in the American Hockey League, had 30 shots on goal, failed to convert on two breakaways and hit the post on four occasions. They also went 0-for-3 on the power play and missed an empty net twice in the first period.

Yet, their only goal came with 1:08 remaining in regulation, when Tage Thompson's wrist shot from near the right-wing boards beat Toronto goalie Kasimir Kaskisuo to cut the deficit to three goals.

The defending Calder Cup champion Marlies scored four consecutive goals, beginning at 2:53 into the second period when former Buffalo Sabres prospect Nick Baptiste corralled a rebound off Scott Wedgewood and released a quick snap shot that found the back of the net for a 1-0 lead.

Rochester responded with a furious push into Toronto's zone and successfully cycled the puck to defenseman Lawrence Pilut, who skated to the high slot and released a wrist shot that hit the post.

The Amerks had only two shots on goal through the period's first 10 minutes but were controlling possession when they went on the power play with 9:29 remaining. However, they struggled to generate scoring chances and wound up shorthanded when Danny O'Regan was called for slashing less than two minutes later.

Thompson, the winger whom the Sabres acquired in last June's Ryan O'Reilly trade, broke up a pair of passes on the penalty kill, only to watch as the Marlies took a two-goal lead. Toronto defenseman Rasmus Sandin's slap shot was tipped by winger Chris Mueller, a West Seneca native, to beat Wedgewood with 2:46 remaining in the second period.

Mueller pushed the Marlies' lead to 3-0 with 9:10 remaining in regulation when he capitalized on a rebound in the crease, and Adam Brooks added a wraparound goal less than four minutes later.

"This time of year there's no need to hang your head or wonder what if or think anymore about tonight," Amerks defenseman Zach Redmond said. "We take the positives. I thought we were actually the better team for a lot of the game. We had a lot of chances that we missed. We just really need to move on."

The score wasn't indicative of how well Rochester played or how all involved on the home side felt about the performance. Taylor thought the Amerks were playing well enough to roar back from a three-goal deficit, though Brooks' shorthanded goal spoiled that chance.

Though there were few scoring opportunities after the first period, Rochester still controlled possession for much of the night. It simply struggled to retrieve the puck following a shot attempt on net.

When the team reconvenes for practice Saturday, it will attempt to harness all it did well in the first period, when the Amerks out-shot Toronto, 15-6.

Redmond hit the crossbar a little over one minute into the game, and Olofsson would hit the post on two separate occasions, including a breakaway with less than three minutes remaining in the first period.

Asplund also missed a wide-open net, and defenseman Will Borgen opted to pass to Olofsson rather than attempting to shoot over Kaskisuo, who was sprawling on his stomach because of a scramble around the net.

"Creating chances isn't good enough," Olofsson said. "Obviously we have to score. I had a couple good chances there in the first where I have to score. We just have to execute."

The performance was in stark contrast to the Amerks' first-round series a year ago, when they allowed 18 goals in a three-game sweep at the hands of Syracuse. Even Rochester's most skilled forwards were physical against the Marlies, and tight defensive coverage led to few quality scoring chances on Wedgewood, who made 19 saves.

Rochester has not lost more than three games in a row all season, and won five of six meetings against Toronto during the regular season. However, for all the Amerks did well, they are aware of what is at stake Sunday.

"You could call it a must win. Going back to Toronto 1-1 would obviously be ideal," Redmond said.

Despite early blitz, Amerks fire blanks and lose opener to Marlies
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija
April 19, 2019

Forget about the Mueller Report. The Rochester Americans need to worry about the (Chris) Mueller report.

The veteran centerman from Buffalo, whose slippery net-front presence has bedazzled American Hockey League foes for 11 seasons, scored two back-breaking goals as the Toronto Marlies stunned the Amerks — aka, the gang that couldn't shoot straight — 4-1 on Friday night in the opening game of the Calder Cup North Division semifinals.

With an energetic crowd of 7,502 in the stands of Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial, the Amerks hit four goal posts and misfired on two empty nets — all in the first 22 minutes — and then couldn't respond to adversity once they fell behind.

And thus, just like that, the Amerks, who finished with 46 wins, 99 points and the fourth-best record in the AHL, are in a precarious position in this best-of-five opening round series.

They trail 1-0 and, if they don't win on Sunday when Game 2 is played 3:05 p.m., they'd face the improbable task of needing to win twice in Toronto next week and then again back in Rochester on April 28 in order to end the franchise playoff drought.

The last time the Amerks won a playoff series was in April of 2005. Since then, they've lost seven series, including 3-0 sweeps by the Marlies in 2011 and 2012. Lose Sunday and Marlies fans will be chanting "2005" when the Amerks take the ice at Coca-Cola Coliseum.

"We have to win three, they have to win — you could call it (Sunday) must win," Amerks defenseman Zach Redmond said.

The Amerks surely were having difficulty processing their position. They dominated the first period in shots, shot attempts, zone play, puck possession and any other stat you want to cite. Yet it was 0-0.

And it was scoreless even though they were shooting against a goalie who, if you perused the AHL goaltending leaders, wouldn't be found with a search warrant. Kasimir Kaskisuo finished the regular season with a 3.07 goals-against average and .896 save percentage.

"It sucks but that's the game sometimes," winger C.J. Smith said. "It seemed we didn't get any puck luck in the beginning.

That's despite having Kaskisuo beat several times in the first period alone. Like Victor Olofsson, who hit two posts.

"If I execute those couple shots, it's a different game," Olofsson said.

Rasmus Asplund had the puck at the right of the crease with an open net but somehow managed to shoot it wide of the far post.

"I missed — I have to score those in the playoffs," Asplund said.

Nick Baptiste, the former Amerks now playing for the Marlies, then showed how to execute with an empty net early in the second period. Goalie Scott Wedgewood made the initial save on a Mueller shot but defenseman Andrew MacWilliam fanned in an attempt to sweep the rebound to the corner.

Baptiste pounced and slammed it into the open net at 2:53 of the second period.

"It's exciting to score against them," Baptiste said of the Amerks, "but it's more exciting to get that first game because we know they're a good team."

When Mueller scored at 14:31, deflecting in a Rasmus Sandin point shot just as a Marlies power play ended, the Marlies had a 2-0 lead and the Amerks were depressed.

"I think the second goal really put a downer on it," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said.

That goal also exposed what you could say has been a season-long problem for the Amerks. They haven't handled adversity well in front of big crowds on home ice.

Some teams respond immediately when they fall behind. The Amerks didn't on Friday, and often haven't done so. They become tentative, or overzealous, which leads to turnovers or easy zone-clears for the opposition.

The game essentially ended at 10:50 of the third period when Mueller slipped free in the goal crease and swatted in a puck as it slithered toward the goal line.

By the time Tage Thompson ended the Kaskisuo shutout bid, just 1:08 remained and it merely cut a four-goal deficit to 4-1.

"Deep down they know," Taylor said, "we let one slip away."

Big crowd

The 7,502 was the largest crowd for an Amerks playoff game in Rochester since May 8, 2004, when 8,486 watched a second-round series against Hamilton.

Hit of the night

Amerks defenseman Andrew MacWilliam laid out Marlies top gun Jeremy Bracco with a heavy body check in the neutral zone 6:36 into the game.

Bracco stayed on the ice momentarily, then went to the Marlies dressing room and/or training room and didn't return until the second period.

"Any time I get a chance to lower the boom on somebody, I'm going to take it," MacWilliam said.

Family ties to a Calder Cup

One of Friday's referees, Beaudry Halkidis, is the son of former Amerks defenseman Bob Halkidis, a member of the 1987 Calder Cup championship team.

Missed opportunities costly for the Amerks
C&C Worldwide
By: Craig Potter
April 19, 2019

The defending Calder Cup Champion Toronto Marlies demonstrated why they are champions with a 4-1 victory over the Rochester Americans on Friday night before 7,502 fans at the Blue Cross Arena in the Rochester Community War Memorial.

Toronto leads the best-of-5 North Division semifinal series, 1-0.

Despite having their lowest regular season finish in third place in the North Division this season, the Marlies withstood being outshot 15-6 in the first period to emerge with a scoreless tie.

The Amerks were unable to cash in on the chances they created as they hit the post 4 times, missed an open net, and had a breakaway stopped by Toronto goalie Kasimir Kaskisso, who entered the game with an .892 save percentage and a 2.66 goals against average.

"I thought there was a lot of nerves going on there," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. When asked why, Taylor responded, "When you miss an empty net. You feel you were in close when you're not. We were trying so hard that it just didn't happen."

"It's disappointing not to get those bounces," said Smith when talking about the multiple missed scoring chances. "That's the game sometimes, though. We just have to stick with it and keep getting those opportunities. Eventually they will go in."

Kaskisso turned aside 29 shots and was beaten until the final 2 minutes of the game by Tage Thompson. Taylor Leier and Yannick Veilleux picked up assists on the play.

"We have to be able to capitalize on the chances," said Taylor said about all the posts, missed empty-net shots and scoring chances. "If we can score on those chances, it might have been a different outcome."

"I thought we had a good start to the game, but there are no moral victories in the playoffs," said Andrew MacWilliam. "We have to give Toronto credit; they scored on their chances and we did not."

"In the playoffs you need to have a short memory, regroup and come back the next game."

This is the third meeting between the Amerks and Marlies in the playoffs. Toronto swept the first two times (3-0), both of which were opening round matchups with the Marlies as the division champs.

Former Amerk Nick Baptiste opened the scoring for the Marlies in the second period. Toronto also had a power play and a shorthanded goal.

"We need to get results on special teams," Taylor said. "There is nothing worse than giving up a shorthanded goal, no matter the score. We have been very good all year not allowing one and I still thought we had a chance despite being down 3-0. We have had comebacks all season, including a 4-1 deficit against them, but our power-play has to be better."

The series continues Sunday afternoon with a 3:05 pm faceoff before switching to Toronto for Game 3 and, if necessary, Game 4 next week. Game 5, if necessary, would be played at the BCA on Sunday, April 28.

"Sunday's game is just that much more important," said Zach Redmond. "Some may want to call it a must-win game, but we have to win three and they have to win two. Going to Toronto 1-1 would be a much better scenario."

"We know it's going to be a long series," said Taylor. "We knew we would face adversity and one thing I liked about our group all year is we have responded well. This is a time where we are facing adversity. I know it's tough losing the first game at home, but that happens, and we have to respond."

***NOTES** — The Amerks announced that MSG Network will carry Maple Leafs Sports & Entertainment's (MLSE) live broadcast of the team's first-round road playoff games against the Toronto Marlies, beginning with Game 3 of the best-of-5 North Division Semifinals on Wednesday, April 24 at Coca-Cola Coliseum. Coverage will be available to all SMG subscribers in both the Buffalo and Rochester markets. MSG Network will also have coverage of Game 4, if necessary, on Friday, April 26, courtesy of MLSE. . . Amerks coach Chris Taylor still is that elusive first Calder Cup playoff victory in his second season at the helm. The Amerks were swept by the Syracuse Crunch a year ago in the North Division semifinals. . . Rochester has not won a playoff series since 2005 when the team had current NHL players Jason Pominville and Ryan Miller as well as current Sabres GM Jason Botterill and Amerks coach Chris Taylor. Rochester swept Hamilton to advance to the second round. . . The Amerks have been a part of 84 playoff series, compiling a 212-203 record in 415 games. . . Rookie defensemen Will Borgen and Kurt Gosselin both played in their first-career professional playoff game.

Amerks continue playoff drought against Toronto with ringing pipes, leaky defense in Game 1
Rochester Democratic & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 19, 2019

In two previous Calder Cup playoff series, the Toronto Marlies never lost a game to the Rochester Americans. They're still perfect.

Paced by Buffalo native Chris Mueller's two goals and the solid goaltending of Kasimir Kaskisuo, who turned back 29 shots, Toronto beat Rochester 4-1 Friday at the Blue Cross Arena at the Community War Memorial, taking Game 1 of the AHL's North Division series.

The Marlies, who swept a pair of earlier five-game series, are now 7-0 all-time in the postseason against the Amerks with a 26-12 edge in goals.

So much for history not meaning anything when the playoffs are at hand. Rochester, which was swept a year ago in the first round by Syracuse, is 0-4 in playoff games under coach Chris Taylor.

Game 2 is Sunday at 3:05 p.m. back at Blue Cross where fans began heading to the exits after a tip-in goal by Adam Brooks with 5:15 left put the Marlies up 4-0. And just to make the rainy night a bit more miserable, ex-Amerk Nick Baptiste had Toronto's other goal. This was a hard loss to take for a Rochester team that finished third in the AHL with 99 points and vowed there would not be a repeat of last season's early exit.

Perhaps Tage Thompson's late goal for Rochester that snapped the Marlies' shutout bid and a rare fight by captain Kevin Porter will give the Amerks the spark they need.

Here are my takeaways:

Blue Cross Arena was cranking

Given the Amerks and Marlies posted better road than home records during the regular season, how much of an advantage home ice will be in this series is up for debate. But what can't be debated is that Amerks fans are starving to cheer a championship team. After all, it's been 23 years.

The old hockey barn on Exchange was rocking with a near sellout of 7,502. Only the lobby end corners and Zamboni end zone had empty seats, the scoreboard "noise meter" got into the red, and the July 4 bunting separating the upper and lower bowls was a nice touch.

Now let's see what the Amerks draw for Game 2 on Easter Sunday. Whomever thought that was a good idea gets no jelly beans this year.

The offense went clank, clank

The Amerks deserved better, outshooting the Marlies 30-23 and hitting a handful of posts behind Kaskisuo. Rochester's line of Rasmus Asplund between Victor Olofsson and Danny O'Regan had dominating stretches of play, especially when skilled

defensemen Zach Redmond and Lawrence Pilut were at the points. Oloffson hit a post on a breakaway and Pilut hit one from out front.

There was less clanking of iron when they laid the Transcontinental Railroad. And instead of being up 3-0 or 4-0, the Amerks trailed 2-0 after two periods. Kyle Criscuolo's line (Taylor Leier and Thompson on the wings) earned the playoff start and also had its moments. The 6-6 Thompson had a shift where he broke up ice, dangled the defenseman, got a pass off to Leier in front, one-timed a rebound that was saved, then hit Toronto's Michael Carcone as he skated off the ice.

A first-round pick of St. Louis who came over in the Ryan O'Reilly trade, Thompson is making the most of his AHL assignment. He's got a cannon shot and his Condor-like reach is especially useful on the penalty kill.

Rochester's defense was leaky

It wasn't good enough by any stretch as Toronto's first three goals were all the result of rebounds that weren't cleared around goalie Scott Wedgewood (19 saves), who also has been sharper. Mueller swatted in a goal in traffic for his first score to make it 2-0 in the second period. On his second, he got behind both Amerks defensemen and Wedgewood at the side of the net to corral a point shot that seemed to be going wide, tucking it home into an empty net. The Amerks have a lot to clean up.

Put me in, coach

Taylor scratched 11 players Friday so he's got plenty of options when it comes to juggling his lineup. I'm not sure drastic measures are needed, though. The team's many marksmen just need to tune their sights.

Nil for Nylander

If any player could use a nice, long productive playoff run in front of Sabres' brass it's Amerks forward Alex Nylander.

However, the third-year pro who scored a career-best 31 points this year was a scratch. He's still nursing the hockey classic "lower body" injury, apparently a cut suffered during a 12-game recall to Buffalo. I get not wanting to give an opponent an anatomical chart of what's hurting. But teams do players no favors by being so secretive with injuries because the optics don't look good when a first-round pick that's been slow to develop misses a playoff game.

Turning point

First period. Rochester hit four posts and O'Regan missed on an empty net. Too bad, because the Amerks had set the tone with some crunching hits, led by Andrew MacWilliam's center ice blast on Marlies' leading scorer Jeremy Bracco, who didn't return until the start of the second period.

Player of the game

Mueller. The 11th year pro scored a career-high 33 goals in the regular season and hasn't cooled off, picking up three points total. He was the game's first star followed by Kaskisuo and Marlies' defenseman Rasmus Sandin (two assists), the Maple Leafs' 2018 first-round pick.

Amerks fall to Marlies 4-1 in first game of Calder Cup Playoffs

WKBW

By: Jenna Callari

April 19, 2019

Despite winning five of their six matchups during the regular season the Rochester Americans opened the postseason with a loss, falling to the Toronto Marlies 4-1.

Former Sabre and Amerk Nick Baptise opened the scoring for Toronto in the second period.

In the final minutes of the middle frame, West Seneca native Chris Mueller redirected a shot from Rasmus Sandin to double the Marlies lead. Mueller scored again in the third period on the power play to make it 3-0. Adam Brooks added a shorthanded goal for Toronto in the final minutes to give the Marlies their fourth of the evening.

Tage Thompson scored the lone goal for the Amerks late in the game.

The two teams meet again for game two on Sunday at 3:05 p.m. once again at Blue Cross Arena. Game three and four [if necessary] will be in Toronto. If needed, the Marlies and Amerks would return to Rochester for the deciding game five of the series.

Bad bounces, opportunistic Marlies doom Amerks in playoff opener 4-1

13 WHAM

By: Toby Motyka

April 19, 2019

The Rochester Americans came out firing in the first period of their Calder Cup Playoff opener. There was just one problem. The puck wouldn't go in.

And by the time it finally did, it was too late.

Rochester outshot the Marlies 15-6 in the first period, hitting multiple posts and crossbars and missing a few open nets, but ended the period without a goal. When the Marlies got their opportunities in the second and third period, they didn't miss them.

Toronto took a 2-0 lead into the second, then put it away scoring the first two of the third period, beating the Amerks 4-1 in game one of their playoff series.

Tage Thompson scored a late goal for Rochester to spoil the shutout bid.

The Amerks will return home for game two on Easter Sunday, with puck drop scheduled for 3:05 pm.

Amerks fall to Marlies in Game 1 of North Division semifinal
WGR 550
By: Brayton Wilson
April 19, 2019

After an electrifying start to Game 1 of the North Division semifinal, the Rochester Americans stumble down the stretch in a 4-1 loss to the Toronto Marlies on Friday night at Blue Cross Arena.

The opening period was everything that one could anticipate from this series - fast-paced action from end-to-end, strong, physical play, and a sense of urgency from the start of the game.

The Amerks ended up out-shooting the Marlies in the first by a 15-6 total, but they generated a majority of the offensive zone time and hemmed Toronto in their own end. In addition to the shots on goal, Rochester had a few more good chances that just missed the net. In the opening two minutes of the period, defenseman Zach Redmond rang a shot off the cross bar. Later in the period, forward Victor Olofsson got a good look on a shot to the right of the Toronto net, but his shot hit the post.

Olofsson's line with Rasmus Asplund and Danny O'Regan had a spectacular first period with a number of quality chances, including five shots on goal from Asplund. The Amerks forward also had a chance where he got a nice cross-ice feed off to the left of Kasimir Kaskisuo in net for the Marlies, but his shot just slipped through his legs and wide of the net. Moments after that missed chance, Olofsson was sprung for a breakaway and ended up hitting the left post.

The Amerks get another great chance at the start of the second period when C.J. Smith got in behind the defense for a breakaway, but his shot ended up being blocked away by Kaskisuo.

The Amerks let off the gas a bit at the start of the period, and it ended up costing them just 2:53 into the period. After a shot from West Seneca native Chris Mueller was turned aside by Amerks goalie Scott Wedgewood, no body came in to clear the rebound chance, allowing former Amerks forward Nick Baptiste to poke the rebound in to make it a 1-0 game for the Marlies.

Rochester's last real glorious opportunity came less than three minutes later when defenseman Lawrence Pilut waited out the Marlies defense for a lane to open up for a shot. He let go of a nice wrist shot from the top of the faceoff circle, but his shot hit the iron to the right of Kaskisuo.

Later in the period near the end of an Amerks power play, O'Regan took an unnecessary penalty when he slashed the stick out of a Marlies defenseman in front of the net. Just as the penalty expired to O'Regan, Mueller was able to get a piece of a Rasmus Sandin shot from the point and the puck managed to just trickle in over the line past Wedgewood.

Rochester ended up out-shooting the Marlies again in the period, 8-7, and held on to the overall advantage, 23-13.

The third period got off to a slow start for the Amerks as Toronto went into shutdown mode, content to sit on the lead.

Rochester only picked up two shots on goal in the opening 10 minutes of action, and went nearly eight minutes between their second and third shots of the period.

The Amerks got into more penalty trouble at the halfway point of the period as Dalton Smith went to the box for interference. Just 49-seconds into the power play for Toronto, Mueller found himself uncontested in-behind Wedgewood as he came out to challenge a shot from Jeremy Bracco. Wedgewood got a piece of the shot, but let it squeak through his body and his blocker side, and all Mueller had to do was guide the puck in over the line.

Rochester had a chance to get on the board and make things interesting with a power play at the 13:17 mark of the third, but the Amerks ended up shooting themselves in the foot with a shorthanded goal against with 5:15 remaining in regulation.

Marlies forward Adam Brooks ended up taking the puck from behind the Amerks net, and ended up wrapping it around the far-side leg of Wedgewood on his right side and in for the 4-0 lead.

Tage Thompson ended up playing spoiler to Kaskisuo's shutout bid, scoring with just 1:08 remaining in regulation to get the Amerks on the board. His shot to the left of Kaskisuo ended up beating the Marlies netminder over the short-side, glove hand with Taylor Leier setting a screen in front of the net.

Rochester ended up being out-shot in the final period by a 10-7 total, but ended up with the 30-23 shots advantage despite the loss.

Kaskisuo ended up with 29 saves on the night, while Wedgewood struggled in the third period and ended up with 19 saves total on 23 shots faced.

For the Amerks, their home woes continue with their fifth loss in the last six games played at Blue Cross Arena.

As for their playoff woes, the Amerks have not won a playoff game since the 2014 Calder Cup Playoffs against the Chicago Wolves. Chicago ended up winning the best-of-five series in five games. In addition to their winless streak in the playoffs, the Amerks have yet to win a playoff game against the Marlies in seven games played. Rochester was swept in both of their playoff appearances with the Marlies in the first round of both the 2012 and 2013 playoffs.

The Amerks will look to even the best-of-five series with the Marlies on Easter Sunday with a 3:05 p.m. faceoff in Rochester. You can catch all of the action with Don Stevens and Ric Seiling on the call on 95.7 FM and 950 AM, ESPN Rochester.

Amerks begin quest for the Calder Cup

WHEC

By: Staff Report

April 19, 2019

On Friday, the Rochester Americans begin their quest for the Calder Cup when they host the Toronto Marlies at Blue Cross Arena.

This will be game one of their best of five playoff series.

This is the second consecutive year that the Amerks are making a playoff appearance.

Last year, Rochester was swept in the opening round, falling in three straight games to the Syracuse Crunch. This time around, Rochester is the higher seed in the match up, having earned the second seed in their division.

Despite the home ice advantage, they still understand that getting a fast start is important this time around but being able to shake off mistakes is just as crucial to their success.

"We want to get off to a good start, obviously, and so does Toronto. There's no secret on that in this short series but whatever happens, we can't look at the negatives. It is a five-game series and that's the way we have to look at it. After one shift, if they score a goal, how do we respond to that? Mistakes are going to happen but it's how we respond and how we get our heads up and do what we do," says Chris Taylor, Amerks head coach.

Game two of this best of five series will also be played in Rochester. That will take place Easter Sunday at 3:05 p.m.

Chris Mueller, Marlies beat Americans 4-1 in playoff opener

The Canadian Press

By: Staff Report

April 19, 2019

Chris Mueller had two goals and an assist as the Toronto Marlies beat the Rochester Americans 4-1 on Friday in the opener of their American Hockey League best-of-five first-round series.

Nicholas Baptiste and Adam Brooks also scored for the Marlies while Rasmus Sandin chipped in with three helpers. Kasimir Kaskisuo stopped 29 shots for the win.

Tage Thompson broke up Kaskisuo's shutout bid at 18:52 of the third period for the Americans, who got 19 saves from Scott Wedgewood.

Toronto went 1 for 3 on the power play while Rochester failed to score on three chances with the man advantage.

The Americans host Game 2 on Sunday.

As Sabres continue to look for their next coach, Chris Taylor is padding his resume in Rochester
The Athletic
By: John Vogl
April 19, 2019

The day before the playoff opener, with way too many players kneeling around him at the red line, coach Chris Taylor explained the situation. It was clear that now, more than ever, the Rochester Americans would need to live by their motto of being all in and going all out.

"We have a lot of players not playing tomorrow — a lot of fucking good players," Taylor told the group Thursday. "At this time of year, it's team first. We need results. It's all about getting results."

He implored the guys who'd be scratched to stay positive and build up their teammates. He told the Amerks who'd be playing that they needed to perform.

As Taylor talked, the 47-year-old had the players' attention. No one was fiddling with tape on a stick, flipping pucks or blowing snot rockets, common sights during the Sabres' practice gatherings.

"We respect each other in that regard," Taylor said in Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial. "Whenever they have something to tell me, I'm making sure I'm really listening. Not just hearing it, but I'm listening and understanding what they're going through. I expect the same, and they do. There's never been a gray area in that."

There is gray area in Taylor's future. He's completely focused on the Amerks and their pending postseason, but he also knows the parent club in Buffalo has an opening at head coach. It makes sense for Taylor to at least be a candidate once Rochester's season is over.

"He's built for this job," said Amerks defenseman Nathan Paetsch, who played alongside Taylor for three seasons in Rochester during the mid-2000s. "He's very similar to what he was as a player. He was a very intelligent player. He was a great guy to be around, and he was a great leader. He was my captain here."

"It couldn't be more of a natural transition from the way he played, the way he acted in the room to being a coach. He's the same guy."

As a player, Taylor did whatever was needed to carve out a 19-year career. The center was an offensive star in the minor leagues and Germany, totaling 1,055 points in 1,148 games. He embraced a fourth-line role whenever he was summoned to the NHL, skating in 149 games for the Islanders, Bruins and Sabres.

He explains to players that they'll need to adapt to have success.

"He knows what he's talking about," Paetsch said. "He's not making stuff up. He's lived it."

Rookie defenseman Lawrence Pilut, who arrived from Sweden this season, never shared a dressing room with Taylor or watched the center play. But he echoes Paetsch's sentiments.

"He's a really engaged coach and wants to develop guys," Pilut said. "He's just been trying to push everybody. I think that's a big thing with a coach that you need, keep pushing everybody every day to get better. I think that's one of his good qualities out there. He's been pushing everybody, and we've been having a great run so far."

The Amerks finished third overall in the AHL with a 46-23-7 record, bringing Taylor's two-year total in Rochester to 83-45-24. Sabres general manager Jason Botterill hired him for the job after watching Taylor for a season in the Penguins' organization. Taylor was the assistant coach in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton in 2016-17 after holding the same position in Rochester the previous four years.

Upon returning to Rochester, Taylor was tasked with building a family atmosphere. The Amerks had been as dysfunctional as the Sabres, failing to make the playoffs for three seasons. Though they suffered a three-game playoff sweep to Syracuse last spring, the turnaround was underway.

The goal this season was to expand the camaraderie and improve the on-ice product. The Amerks scored in both regards, and they credit a daily routine.

Before and after practice, the team gathers for meals. They have scrambled eggs with a side of laughs, turkey sandwiches topped with stories.

"Guys just bond over that," Taylor said. "We talk about everything, about our kids, about family, what they did last night. It just brings the team close."

"When we eat lunch and we eat breakfast, it's got nothing to do with wins and losses or anything like that. When we get up to the video room, that's when we start talking about the game. Other than that, we make sure that everybody is taken care of and everybody is good away from the rink, and we want to know more about them."

"It's been a great relationship between the players and the coaches, and that's what we like. We want them to be open. We want them to be comfortable wherever they're at."

Amerks captain Kevin Porter, an 11-year pro who's played for four NHL teams, has been impressed.

"You BS for half an hour while you're eating lunch, and not every team does that," Porter said. "That's a big plus for guys getting to know each other, especially early on in the season. Then late in the season, like I said, it's kind of BSing, hanging around each other and having a laugh. I think that's important."

"When you hang out with guys a lot and you see them away from the rink and you're not worried about hockey, you're happy when someone does well. When (Victor Olofsson) scores 30 goals or when C.J. (Smith) gets his 55 points or (Scott Wedgewood) has a shutout, you're happy for him. I know guys are competing to get to Buffalo, but it's also that family atmosphere and you're happy for guys."

One of the attributes Botterill wants in Buffalo's next coach is the ability to communicate and connect. Taylor has done that in Rochester.

"I grow every day," he said. "I learn a lot from the players. I keep going back to them. I keep asking them questions. I keep seeing what other teams are doing. I watch the NHL all the time. You're always learning. You're always trying to figure things out.

"You're always trying to figure things out with how to treat guys, too, in different circumstances. You look back and you're like, 'Oh, I wish I would have done something different there.' But it's fun. I always ask for feedback — good or bad. And I get the good and bad, you know? What they like, what they don't like, what gets them going. That's what it's all about. It's a two-way street."

Talking is great, but head coaches need to do more. When the Amerks draw up a power play, Taylor explains what the penalty killer will do with his stick and why the next pass needs to be on the ice or saucer style.

"He just knows the game so well, and he's good at teaching those little things," Porter said. "All three coaches (including assistants Gord Dineen and Toby Petersen) have been great about our systems and tweaking them midgame. If something isn't going right and a team has adapted to what we're doing, we're going to adapt to what they're doing."

The main knock to Taylor's candidacy in Buffalo is his lack of NHL coaching experience. Taylor certainly hasn't learned it all in just two years as an AHL bench boss and there may be hesitancy by Botterill to promote someone so quickly. The GM saw that Phil Housley's excellence as an NHL assistant failed to translate to the top job, so it could be fair to wonder if Taylor could jump to the next level — especially with players who've proved to be as fickle as those in Buffalo's dressing room.

But there's no denying what Taylor has accomplished in Rochester. As Paetsch suggested, the coach seems built for this.

"I just love having fun," Taylor said. "I love coming to the rink and having fun. I love competing. I love to win. I love to see what guys do each and every day. It's awesome. Every day is something different at the rink, and it's fun.

"That's what it's all about."

DUFFER: 5 Amerks to keep an eye on
Sabres.com
By: Brian Duff
April 18, 2019

The Rochester Americans open up their first-round Calder Cup Playoff series against the Toronto Marlies on Friday at Blue Cross Arena.

The Amerks roster features many interesting names - including Defenseman of the Year Zach Redmond and 30-goal scorer Victor Olofsson - so here are five players I'll be watching closely during the postseason who could make a big impact.

LW - C.J. Smith

One of only three players in the organization to score 30 (28 AHL, 2 NHL) this season, Smith leads all Amerks in goals over the last two years (45) and must be a candidate to infuse more offense into Buffalo's lineup next season.

A pending restricted free agent, the 24-year-old Smith has been impressively consistent all season, including 17 points (10+7) in his final 21 games that followed his last recall to the Sabres.

Skating often with veterans Kevin Porter and Wayne Simpson, Smith is an all-situations player for coach Chris Taylor, ranking first in shorthanded points (5), tied for first in even-strength points (38 with Olofsson) and fifth on the team in power play points (15).

C - Rasmus Asplund

Now with five seasons of pro hockey under his belt (four in Sweden's SHL and one in the AHL), Asplund will still be only 21 when he comes to Sabres camp in the fall. It's possible that no forward in the organization showed more growth over the course of the past seven months than Asplund, who plays with a tremendous amount of pride and self-determination.

With 18 points in his first 53 games, Asplund was grinding through what he openly suggested was his worst statistical season. But his adaptation to the North American game and coachability helped lead him to a team-leading 23 points over the final 22 games.

He will start the postseason with season-long linemates Olofsson on his left, and Danny O'Regan on his right.

LW/RW - Tage Thompson

When the Sabres season came to an end, it marked the beginning of a new and significant opportunity for the 21-year-old Thompson. Saddled with expectations that came in part from being acquired in a deal for Ryan O'Reilly, Thompson battled inconsistency in all zones at the NHL level.

And while the 200-foot game is most important for Taylor and the Amerks when every game matters, Thompson's confidence will always come from how he handles the puck.

To that end, Taje led the Amerks with six goals in his eight-game end-of-season cameo. Two were on the power play, three were game-winners, and his shooting percentage was 23.1 percent.

The fact that he averaged 3.25 shots per game (compared to 1.54 over his first 106 NHL games) is a step in the right direction. Playing with speedy linemates in Kyle Crisculo and Taylor Leier should also benefit Thompson and Rochester's overall depth.

LHD - Lawrence Pilut

After leading the SHL in points by defensemen last season (38 in 52 games), Pilut produced 32 points in 63 games (AHL and NHL) during his first year in North America while shuttling back and forth on the thruway.

Despite only 2 points over his final 9 games with the Amerks, the 23-year-old still led all AHL defensemen with 0.87 points per game. Among those who played in 30 or more games with the Sabres, Pilut ranked tops in 5-on-5 Shot Attempt Percentage at 53.22.

An early season leader for this team, it will be imperative for Pilut to regain his edge, which can often be triggered by feeding off physical confrontations.

Entering his first Calder Cup playoff series, will Pilut emerge - at the very least - as the most talked about Swedish defenseman? The Marlies employ Rasmus Sandin, Timothy Liljegren, and Andreas Borgman, and could have Calle Rosen back from the Maple Leafs as well.

Perhaps patriotic and professional pride will propel the puck-moving Pilut to post-season prosperity.

RHD - William Borgen

"Intriguing and limitless." Those words, from Amerks assistant coach Gord Dineen in an earlier season Americans Made feature on Borgen, continue to resonate with me whenever I watch the 22-year-old defenseman in action.

And while his sample size with the Sabres was small (four games played) his body of work as a first-year pro was pretty impressive. Not unlike Asplund, Borgen's growth was obvious to the eye-test and on the stat sheet.

No one was overly concerned with five points in his first 49 AHL games. But nine more over the final 22 games, along with a couple of fights and an increased presence in all areas make Borgen a critical piece for the Amerks now, and a somewhat unique piece for the Sabres down the road.

Depending in part on how this spring plays out, it is no longer unrealistic to think that Borgen could barge into Buffalo's top six this fall.

Roth: Reeling Sabres desperately need Amerks to have a deep playoff run
Rochester Democratic & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 19, 2019

Spring hockey is a very rewarding thing.

It means your team had a successful regular season and you have made the playoffs. You head to the rink in shorts and flip-flops, play a little golf after practice. Life is good.

And then the games begin.

The skating is faster, the hits are harder, the passes crisper, the shots more accurate. For their part, goaltenders become brick walls, those little openings that existed in February having been sealed shut with spray foam insulation.

During the long grind of a six-month season, there were nights when players could put it on autopilot. Now everything is on manual control, a player's career in his own hands and yet so dependent on the guy next to him.

Spring hockey is a very unpredictable thing.

The Rochester Americans, shut out of the American Hockey League's Calder Cup party for three consecutive seasons, are back in the dance for a second consecutive year and motivation is the least of coach Chris Taylor's concerns.

His Amerks, who made a 24-point leap in the standings last year, were swept in the first round of the North Division playoffs by the Syracuse Crunch, who were in turn swept by the eventual champion Toronto Marlies.

Rochester (99 points) is aching for a rematch with Syracuse (102 points), which captured the division title on the final weekend of the season and faces Cleveland (84). But the Amerks would be blind to history, ancient and recent, to overlook Toronto (91) in their opening-round best-of-five, which begins Friday at Blue Cross Arena.

In 2004-05, the Amerks — their roster like everyone else's loaded with future NHL stars including Ryan Miller in net during a labor lockout — won 51 games and set a franchise record with 112 points. By the second round of the playoffs, however, injuries had taken out 30-goal men Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville among others. Rochester wound up losing in five games to Manitoba.

Fast forward to this week in the NHL.

Columbus and its 98 points bounced 128-point Tampa Bay from the Stanley Cup playoffs like a ball in a squash court, four games to none. Pittsburgh and the great Sidney Crosby fell in four to the New York Islanders.

Reminders all of how the regular season is for show and the playoffs are for dough.

"These are bigger games and you have to get results," said Taylor, who led that great-but-no-cigar '05 Amerks team in scoring. "We can't be happy with 'Hey, we played really good, we did a lot of good things.' No, we got to get the results. You watch the NHL playoffs and see what's happening. It's not what you do in the regular season, it's what you do in the playoffs that count."

Rochester won the season series with Toronto 5-1. Rochester has home ice advantage but was a better road team than home team. These analytics have the usefulness of swimming trunks in winter.

"It doesn't matter what happened in the regular season," captain Kevin Porter said. "They're the defending champs. They know how to win, they went all the way last year, so we have our work cut out."

Spring hockey is a very intense thing.

Taylor said blocking shots and takings hits to make plays are "non-negotiables" this time of year. He said his team seems calm and focused. For now.

"We're going to learn a lot about different players and players are going to learn a lot about themselves," he said. And the parent Buffalo Sabres are going to find out if Taylor is ready to take over as coach in Buffalo for the fired Phil Housley.

Rochester, which has won six Calder Cups, hasn't won one since 1995-96 when John Tortorella, a Stanley Cup winner with the New York Rangers who hasn't lost his touch with the Blue Jackets, took a 37-win team all the way. That's a 23-year drought rivaling a front lawn in Death Valley.

Brian McCutcheon took two Amerks teams to the finals in 1999 and 2000 and Randy Cunneynworth's 2004 club lost in Round 3. But 2005 was the last time a Rochester team even won a playoff series.

There were seven missed playoff years and six first-round exits in the 13 seasons before this one. Engulfing two parent teams, three owners, numerous GMs and seven head coaches.

Spring hockey is a very judgmental thing.

Through draft picks, free agents and trades, the trio of GMs Jason Botterill and Randy Sexton and Taylor has done a masterful job of rebuilding the Sabres' farm system. But anything less than a deep playoff run by the Amerks will call into question the entire master plan after Buffalo's epic derailment this season.

Until some late-season cups of coffee for Alex Nylander, Victor Oloffson and William Borgen, Botterill mostly kept the Amerks roster untouched. Prospects who play in a winning environment and taste a lot of playoff hockey make better NHLers.

It's a time-proven philosophy that Botterill and Taylor know well from their days in Rochester and Scranton-Wilkes Barre.

But was it worth impacting, even sacrificing, the Sabres' season for? Helping cost Housley his job? Buffalo fans who haven't seen playoff hockey in eight years will be watching closely.

With the Sabres' skates and sticks packed away, Rochester's roster is loaded.

Taylor has 32 players at his disposal, including six 20-goal scorers: Olofsson, C.J. Smith, Danny O'Regan, Wayne Simpson, Taylor Leier and Zach Redmond. The Amerks had no such marksmen last year. Towering Tage Thompson, who stayed with Buffalo too long, has nine points in eight games with Rochester, including six goals.

"Jason and Randy have done a great job with our depth," Taylor said. "We've got a lot of guys who can step in the lineup and play. It's disappointing but some guys won't be able to play on Friday, but that's the way it is. That's hockey. But we do need everyone to do their jobs and if everyone plays the right way, everyone will be in the lineup at some point in these playoffs." It takes as few as 19 games to win a Calder Cup, and as many as 26.

Spring hockey is a very demanding thing. Those in the arena wouldn't have it any other way.

Calder Cup Gameday: Marlies at Amerks
Buffalo News
By: Lance Lysowski
April 18, 2019

On the eve of their first practice ahead of the Calder Cup Playoffs, the Rochester Americans gathered for a team dinner to discuss the road ahead.

The Amerks also reflected on how to avoid what befell them one year earlier, when they were swept in the first round by the Syracuse Crunch. The bitter taste from that series still lingers with the coaching staff and returning players.

That small taste of postseason hockey will serve as motivation when the Amerks open the first round Friday night against the Toronto Marlies in Blue Cross Arena.

Puck drop for Game 1 is 7 p.m.

Rochester (46-23-7) finished second in the North Division and its 99 points were the third-most in the AHL, yet coach Chris Taylor reminded those unfamiliar with playoff hockey that past accomplishments no longer matter.

"These are bigger games," Taylor said following practice Wednesday. "You have to get results. You can't be happy about, 'Hey, we played really good, we did a lot of good things but didn't get the result.' ... It doesn't matter what you do in the regular season. It matters what you do in the playoffs here."

The Amerks are seeking their first Calder Cup since 1996, and they have not won a playoff series since 2004-05, when injuries led to a second-round defeat. Roster depth is no longer an issue for Rochester.

In addition to having three capable goalies, they had five players score at least 20 goals, including Victor Olofsson's team-leading 30 in 66 games. Rather than limping into the playoffs, Rochester should be at full strength with defenseman Zach Redmond back from injury, though winger Alex Nylander remains day-to-day with a lower-body injury.

Still, the Marlies are not an easy first-round draw. Toronto finished third in the North Division and is the defending Calder Cup champions.

"It's really exciting," Amerks winger C.J. Smith said. "It's a whole new mindset after how long of a season it is. You get a start of a new season and playoffs are a whole different beast."

Faceoff: 7 p.m., Blue Cross Arena.
Radio: WGR 550, ESPN Rochester 95.7 FM.

Records: Rochester (46-23-7), Toronto (39-24-13).

Season series: The Amerks won five of the six regular-season meetings between the two teams, including two of three at home. They finished the series with two road wins during a back-to-back last month, capped by a 5-4 overtime win in which Danny O'Regan scored the deciding goal.

This is the third postseason meeting between the two teams since 2012.

Shorthanded: The Marlies' starting goalie, Michael Hutchinson, is currently on the Maple Leafs' roster for their series against the Boston Bruins, so the start will likely go to Kasimir Kaskisuo with Eamon McAdams backing up.

Additionally, this team is far different than it was one year ago. Defensemen Justin Holl, Calle Rosen and Martin Marincin, forwards Andreas Johnsson, Trevor Moore and Frederik Gauthier, and goaltender Garret Sparks were part of last season's Calder Cup win but are now with the Maple Leafs.

But the Marlies still have winger Jeremy Bracco, who finished second in the AHL in scoring with 22 goals among 79 points, a Marlies single-season record. Center Chris Mueller, 33, had 33 goals during the regular season.

Home 'struggles': Following a 4-3 overtime loss to Binghamton last week, Taylor lamented about his team's inconsistent play at home. That might seem as nit-picking considering the team's success, however, Taylor did have a point.

Rochester went a league-best 25-9-4 with a plus-22 goal differential on the road, compared to 21-14-3 with a plus-14 goal differential at Blue Cross Arena. Luckily for the Amerks, Toronto has the same issue. The Marlies were just 16-15-7 with a negative-26 goal differential at home, compared to a plus-31 goal differential on the road.

Wedgewood's net: Goaltending was partly responsible for the Amerks' first-round sweep against Syracuse last season. Linus Ullmark had a league-worst .800 save percentage and 5.50 goals-against average in those three games.

Scott Wedgewood, 26, will likely be in goal Friday night against the Marlies. The pending unrestricted free agent ranked second in the AHL in shutouts (five) and wins (28), while posting a .908 save percentage.

Full strength: The Amerks were slowed a bit by call-ups and injury over the past month, but the Sabres failing to qualify for the playoffs led to the return of Olofsson, Nylander and Lawrence Pilut.

Those are no small additions considering Olofsson led the team with 30 goals and was one of six players with 20 or more. Nylander could rejoin the team soon after suffering a cut on the back of his leg during his stint with the Sabres.

The question is who will sit now that Taylor has a number of options, particularly on the blue line, which added Providence defenseman Jacob Bryson on an amateur tryout.

Special teams: The Amerks' power play will also benefit from the lineup being at full-strength, though they still ranked eighth in the league at 20.4 percent during the regular season. Rochester was also effective on the penalty kill, ranking 12th at 81.7 percent.

The Marlies ranked third in the AHL on the power play but were 14th on the penalty kill.

Tale of Taylor: Taylor became the first Amerks coach with 40-plus wins since Benoit Groulx (44) in 2009-10 and became the first Amerks coach to lead his team to 30 or more wins in each of his first two seasons since Randy Cunneynorth accomplished the feat in 2000-02.

Series schedule

Friday, April 19 – Toronto at Rochester | 7:05 p.m. at The Blue Cross Arena

Sunday, April 21 – Toronto at Rochester | 3:05 p.m. at The Blue Cross Arena

Wednesday, April 24 – Rochester at Toronto | 7:00 p.m. at Coca-Cola Coliseum

* Friday, April 26 – Rochester at Toronto | 7:00 p.m. at Coca-Cola Coliseum

* Sunday, April 28 – Toronto at Rochester | 5:05 p.m. at The Blue Cross Arena

**if necessary*

Amerks ready for Marlies in first round of playoffs

13W ham

By: Staff Report

April 18, 2019

After a successful regular season tallying 99 points and one of the best records in the entire AHL, now none of that matters as the Amerks embark on the post season. Rochester earned the privilege of hosting the Toronto Marlies in the opening round of the playoffs. It's the first time since 2010 the Amerks clinched home ice. Last year Rochester had an early exit out of the playoffs after the Syracuse Crunch ended the Amerks season. Now in 2019 the Amerks are relying on that tough experience to help push them past the defending Calder Cup Champion Marlies.

Game One of the best of five will be Friday April 19th at Blue Cross Arena, puck drop scheduled for 7:05PM. While Game Two will be on Sunday, April 21st at 3:05pm also at Blue Cross.

Sabres Prospects Begin AHL Playoff Push

Spectrum News

By: Ted Goldberg

April 17, 2019

While the Sabres finished far out of the playoff race, the Amerks clinched a postseason spot weeks ago. Sabres prospects couldn't get playoff hockey in the NHL, so this is the next best thing.

"It's kind of a whole new mindset," says CJ Smith, who played in a career-high 11 NHL games this season. "After a long season, you get the start of a new season. Playoffs are a whole different beast. It's a fresh mindset for everybody, and it's exciting to be out there."

"We're just so excited. Everyone in this locker room is super excited and can't wait for Friday," says Victor Olofsson, who earned a six-game callup at the end of the year. "The pace is going to go up, it's going to be more physical. We gotta be ready for that right away."

The Amerks have home-ice advantage in a series for the first time since 2010, when Chris Taylor, the team's head coach, was still a player on the team. He understands firsthand what kind of opportunity lies ahead for prospects to impress the Sabres management.

"We're gonna learn a lot about a lot of different players, and a lot of players are going to learn a lot about themselves," he says. "They gotta step up and make a big contribution to our team. You're gonna have to do things you don't normally do, like blocking shots. Some guys don't normally block shots, but everybody's gotta block shots. Non-negotiable."

"I think every team wants players than can perform in the playoffs. It's super important. I'm very excited. I'm confident, too. I felt like I've been playing really good hockey lately. I'm just gonna bring that energy into the playoffs," says Olofsson.

Players are hoping for a better showing than last year, when they were swept out of the first round - we'll find out soon as the Amerks host Toronto for Game One Friday.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Jacob Bryson to watch, learn with Amerks
Buffalo News
By: Lance Lysowski
April 17, 2019

As the Rochester Americans skated through a special teams drill Wednesday morning in Blue Cross Arena, goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen sat on the bench and waited to be told when he should join the team on the ice.

Meanwhile, in a hallway adjacent to the Amerks' dressing room, Jacob Bryson, a 21-year-old defenseman, was having his headshot taken and did not arrive from Providence, R.I., in time to participate in the on-ice session.

Neither is likely to make a tangible impact in the Amerks' bid for their first Calder Cup since 1996 or to be in the lineup when the playoffs open Friday night against the Toronto Marlies in Rochester.

Instead, Luukkonen and Bryson, draft picks of Buffalo Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill who arrived this week on amateur tryouts, are receiving a formal introduction to professional hockey and the city in which they will play next season.

"At this point, we're just seeing where they're at," Amerks coach Chris Taylor told reporters following practice. "Obviously, you always want three goalies in the playoffs and see what happens. With Bryson, same thing. He's going to come in, get his feet wet, get used to the guys and get introduced to pro hockey."

Advertisement

Taylor already has a sense of where Luukkonen's game is. The 20-year-old joined the Amerks on an amateur tryout only two days after his junior team, the Sudbury Wolves, were eliminated from the Ontario Hockey League playoffs last Thursday.

Luukkonen made 60 saves in the 3-2, triple-overtime loss to the Ottawa 67s, and had little time to get acclimated to professional hockey before getting into his first game. Since the regular-season finale held no playoff implications, Taylor rested several players, including starting goalie Scott Wedgewood, and chose to start Luukkonen in Belleville on Sunday.

A second-round draft pick in 2017, Luukkonen made 32 saves in a 4-2 road win, though he acknowledged the transition was not as seamless as it may have looked from afar.

"I think the start of the game was scrambling around for me and just getting used to the speed of the game, but after 10 minutes or so, I got used to the speed and how the two teams were playing," Luukkonen said. "It was a good first game for me."

No moment over the past year has been too big for Luukkonen. He led Finland to a gold medal with a .932 save percentage at this year's World Junior Championship and was among the OHL's best goalies, ranking first in the league in shutouts (six) and regular-season wins (38), the former a franchise record for Sudbury.

Luukkonen, who stands 6 feet, 5 inches, and his teammates swept Mississauga in the first round of the OHL playoffs before enduring the same fate against Ottawa. Despite this being his first year of North American hockey, Luukkonen's plan was to turn pro following his season in Sudbury, and he is ready to step into a starting role next season with Wedgewood and Adam Wilcox both unrestricted free agents this summer.

Luukkonen was ranked by TSN as the sport's 12th best NHL-affiliated prospect in January and did not participate in most of Wednesday's practice. He began to work with goalie development coach Seamus Kotyk when Wedgewood was about to come off the ice.

"It solidifies in his mind that he's ready to play professionally in North America and that's huge, particularly as he trains this summer," Sabres assistant general manager Randy Sexton told The Buffalo News in a phone interview Wednesday. "He's going to be training every day this summer with a very positive frame of mind versus he comes in, he gets shelled, he loses five games and his confidence could be shaken.

"He'll be putting in his work this summer from a very, very solid foundation and that's critical, I think. You need a belief in the back of your mind that, 'You know what, I can do this.' ... I know it's only one game, but I was there and he played great. It's going to be very helpful for him."

Bryson, drafted two rounds after Luukkonen in 2017, told reporters in KeyBank Center ahead of the Frozen Four last week that he was unsure if this would be his last season at Providence College because he hoped to complete his finance degree.

Bryson and the Friars lost to eventual national champion Minnesota Duluth in the semifinals, and said he took one day to begin contemplating his future. After conversations with Sabres management and Providence coach Nate Leaman, Bryson thought it was in his best interest to begin his development with the Amerks.

Standing 5-9 with a left-handed shot, Bryson will skate with the Amerks on Thursday and will need to earn a playoff opportunity in a deep group of defensemen that includes Lawrence Pilut, Will Borgen and Zach Redmond.

"It took a lot of time," Bryson said of his decision. "I had some good conversations with my coach, Leaman, who I give a lot of credit to for my three years I was there. ... I just think as far as development goes, I know Rochester is one of the best teams in the AHL. This is a place I want to play at. I think I can get better this year, at the end of this year, and next year as well."

Bryson, one of Providence's three captains this year, had 11 goals and 62 assists with a plus-30 rating over three seasons at the school, including three straight NCAA Tournament appearances. His three-year, entry-level contract will not start until next season, and he is on an amateur tryout for the duration of Rochester's playoff run.

The Amerks used a mixture of veterans and rookies such as Victor Olofsson to earn home-ice advantage, and the roster is equipped with remarkable depth after the Sabres' failure to qualify for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Though change is inevitable this offseason with the likely promotion of Olofsson, the Amerks are reloading early with two prospects whom Botterill selected to be part of the Sabres' ongoing rebuild.

"From juniors to pro, the step up is big," Luukkonen said. "The biggest difference was the 5-on-5 game and how the two teams can play. There is so much skill on the ice that you really see the difference."

Nylander still out

Winger Alexander Nylander did not practice again with the Amerks and remains day to day after suffering a cut on the back of his leg while playing with the Sabres, Taylor said.

Nylander, a 2016 first-round draft pick, has not played since April 2. He had two goals with two assists in 12 games with the Sabres. Prior to his promotion to the NHL in March, he had 12 goals and 19 assists in 49 games with the Amerks.

Defenseman Casey Fitzgerald, who had one goal with two assists in four games after signing an entry-level contract with the Sabres, has returned to Boston College to complete coursework, but is expected to return to the team during the postseason, Taylor said.

Eichel nominated

Center Jack Eichel was selected as the Sabres' nominee for the King Clancy Memorial Trophy, which is given annually to the NHL player who "best exemplifies leadership qualities on and off the ice and has made a noteworthy humanitarian contribution in his community."

Eichel donated a suite at KeyBank Center to local charitable organizations for all 41 home games, which included postgame meet and greets. He also autographed more than 300 jerseys to raise \$48,000 for the Courage of Carly Fund at Roswell Park and Best Buddies of Western New York.

The three finalists for the trophy will be announced Tuesday and the winner will be revealed at the NHL Awards on June 19 in Las Vegas.

Top Sabres' draft picks Bryson, Luukkonen join Amerks for playoff run
Rochester Democratic & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 17, 2019

Things move fast when you're a young hockey player moving up the ranks.

Just ask Jacob Bryson, 21, and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, 20.

Just a week ago, Bryson was playing in the NCAA Division I Frozen Four in Buffalo with Providence College while Luukkonen was playing in the Ontario Hockey League playoffs with Sudbury.

Now each has turned pro, joining the Rochester Americans for their Calder Cup playoff drive after signing entry-level contracts with the parent Buffalo Sabres.

Bryson, a 5-9, slick moving defenseman and Hockey East first team all-star, was Buffalo's fourth-round draft pick in 2017 (the Casey Mittelstadt year) while Luukkonen, the top-rated European goaltender in that draft, was selected in Round Two.

For elite players, it's all about timing and after long conversations with their coaches, family members and the Sabres, the time was right to make the jump.

What you need to know about Jacob Bryson

"I just think as far as development goes, Rochester is one of the best teams in the AHL and it's a place I want to play at," said Bryson, a native of London, Ontario who was teammates with Rochester's Jack Dugan at Providence. "I think I can get better through the end of this year and next year for sure, so that was a big part of it, getting better every day."

From Midget AAA in Canada to prep school in Connecticut to junior hockey in Omaha to college hockey in Rhode Island, Bryson has proven at every stop there's a place for defenseman who happen to be on the smaller side. NHL teams today covet players who can move the puck quickly out of their end of the rink.

The Sabres are cultivating a group of such defensemen with the likes of Rasmus Dahlin and Lawrence Pilut.

Bryson is adept and playing his angles and separating larger opponents from the puck without having to plant their faces against the glass.

"I think the way I play is going to fit with the way they do it here," he said after practice Wednesday at Blue Cross Arena where the Amerks were preparing for Game 1 of their playoff series against Toronto. "The game is changing to the way guys like me play. I've always been a small guy and I've learned to overcome those challenges smaller players might face. The big thing is body position; if I can get in the way of them, create separation, that's how I get the puck back."

In three years at Providence, the two-time Len Leglarski Sportsmanship Award winner did it very well, along with scoring 72 points in 120 career games. He also brings a winner's attitude to Rochester.

Under former SUNY Cortland player Nate Leaman, the Friars have qualified for six consecutive NCAA tournaments, winning the national title in 2015. This year, they were eliminated in the semifinals by eventual champion Minnesota Duluth, 4-1.

"He's got a good stick, he moves the puck up the ice very well and joins the rush. But he's also got a little grit in him, too, and handles himself very well defensively,"

Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. "We had him in development camp, he's a great kid, and again, he's one of those guys that has been a winner. Providence has had good teams, so he's played in big games. He's a great addition. I don't know if he'll play this year (in the playoffs), we'll see what happens. But we'll get him ready for next year."

What you need to know about Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen
Luukkonen, from Espoo, Finland, already has a big leg up on next year.

After Sudbury was eliminated in its playoffs with a 3-2 loss to Ottawa in triple overtime (he made 60 saves), he joined the Amerks in time to start last Sunday's regular-season finale at Belleville, Ontario. Luukkonen recorded his first professional win with 32 saves in Rochester's 4-2 victory.

"First of all, the team played well which made it easier for me," Luukkonen said. "Of course, the speed is quite different here in the AHL and the skill level."

Luukkonen, who is 6-5, 212 pounds, led Finland to the gold medal in the U18 World Juniors.

With Sudbury, he was 38-11-2 with a 2.50 goals against average and .920 save percentage, then went 4-3 in the playoffs with 3.27 and .906. The Sabres will give him plenty of time to develop his game in Rochester, like they did Linus Ullmark.

"He's a big goalie, obviously. He made a lot of big saves in Belleville. That wasn't an easy win," Taylor said. "He's very happy to be here, he had a tremendous season in junior and it's nice for him to be here. You always want three goalies in the playoffs."

Calder Cup Playoffs

Rochester (46-23-5) faces defending champion Toronto (39-24-9) in a first-round, best-of-five North Division series and has home ice advantage.

Game 1: at Rochester, 7:05 p.m., Friday.

Game 2: at Rochester, 3:05 p.m., Sunday.

Game 3: at Toronto, 7 p.m., Wednesday, April 24,

Game 4: at Toronto, 7 p.m., Friday, April 26, if necessary.

Game 5: at Rochester, 5:05 p.m., Sunday April 28, if necessary.

Amerk playoff tickets

Rochester home playoff games range from \$14 to \$28 and are available at the Blue Cross Arena box office or through Ticketmaster.

Where to listen, watch

Radio: 95.7 FM and 950 AM ESPN Rochester. TV :AHLTV offers all-playoff game access for \$24.99 and daily playoff game access for \$7.99.

5 things to know about the Amerks playoff series vs Toronto
Rochester Democrat & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 17, 2019

A year ago, the Rochester Americans could pat themselves on the back for ending a three-year playoff drought.

But after a three-game, opening-round sweep at the hands of the rival Syracuse Crunch, the Amerks could only kick themselves in the butt.

It goes without saying that coach Chris Taylor and his players have plenty of reason to focus on a much deeper American Hockey League playoff run this spring.

Working to their advantage against the defending champion Toronto Marlies is owning home ice advantage for their opening series, their reward for finishing second in the North Division and third overall in the AHL standings with 99 points.

Game 1 is at 7:05 p.m. Friday and Game 2 is at 3:05 p.m. Sunday, with both games at the Blue Cross Arena.

Also working in the Amerks' favor is the return of 13 players who experienced the disappointment of last year's early exit. Memories die hard when a Calder Cup is on the line.

And the Amerks, six-time champs, haven't won one in 22 years.

"As a team I think we can agree we are more confident going into (the playoffs) this season vs. last year," forward C.J. Smith, who was a rookie last spring, told reporters. "This year we know what to expect going into it. The excitement level is still very high because as a player you want to play in the postseason."

Here are five things to know about the Amerks-Marlies series:

1. Calder Cup drought

Rochester last held the cup in 1995-96. That third-place division finisher under coach John Tortorella went on an unlikely 15-4 post-season run, led by Craig Charron, Dixon Ward, Scott Metcalfe and Steve Shields in goal.

The last Amerks team to win a playoff series was Randy Cunneyworth's powerhouse 2004-05 squad. That team, whose leading scorer was Taylor and featured a half-dozen players who became NHL standouts with the Buffalo Sabres, set franchise marks for wins (51) and points (112), only to lose a second-round series to Manitoba in five games when injuries mounted. Top scorers Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville were among those sidelined.

With seven missed playoffs and six first-round exits in the ensuing 13 seasons, the Amerks are due. Right?

2. Season series

Rochester won five out of six games against Toronto, including a weekend set late last month in Toronto by scores of 5-2 and 5-4 in overtime. Home ice may not mean much in this series. The Amerks had the league's eighth-best home record (21-14-2-1) but its best road mark (25-9-3-1). The Marlies were the AHL's 14th-best home team (16-15-6-1) but third-best on the road (23-

9-3-3). "They won it all last year and have guys returning, the coaching staff, the organization, they're on a high from last year and they know how to win," Taylor said. "It doesn't matter what happened in the regular season, this is a different time and we have to be ready."

3. Marlies leaders

With 39 wins and 91 points, coach Sheldon Keefe's club isn't quite the powerhouse it was a year ago when it won 54 games and led the league with 112 points. But the Marlies still have plenty of firepower and the AHL's second-best power play (21.8 percent).

Second-round draft pick Jeremy Bracco (22-57 – 79) was second in points and assists in the league while 33-year-old Chris Mueller (33-32 – 65), a Buffalo native and 12-year veteran, had a career season coming off a great playoff. Former Amerk Nick Baptiste (14-15 - 29) has played in 18 games for the Marlies after a February trade.

Two players to watch on defense are 19-year-old rookie Rasmus Sandin (6-22 – 28), the Maple Leafs' 2018 first-round pick, and Jordan Subban (3-15 – 18), the younger brother of Nashville star defenseman P.K. and Vegas goalie Malcolm. With the Maple Leafs in the NHL playoffs against Boston, the Marlies are without winger Trevor Moore, one of five 20-goal scorers, and defenseman Calle Rosen, but goaltending has also been impacted. Marlies' starter Michael Hutchinson (16-8-5, 2.85 goals against average, .909 save percentage) was recalled April 5 to give struggling Leafs No. 2 man Garret Sparks, the hero of last spring's Marlies' championship, a chance to find his game. The Marlies will go with either Kasimir Kaskisuo (12-9-5, 3.07, .896) or Eamon McAdam (9-5-4, 2.99, .897) against Rochester.

4. Amerks leaders

In just two seasons, GMs Jason Botterill and Randy Sexton have done a nice job of building a cup contender. The core of the roster for the playoffs will consist of six Sabres draft picks, 14 free agents, four players acquired in trades and one claimed off waivers.

The team's six 20-goal scorers reflect this mixed bag: Victor Olofsson (30-33 – 66), draft pick; C.J. Smith (28-30 – 58), college free agent; Zach Redmond (21-29 – 50), trade; Danny O'Regan (20-28 – 48), trade; Wayne Simpson (21-24 – 45), free agent; Taylor Leier (22-20 – 42), trade.

The Amerks, who have the No. 8-ranked power play (20.4), were a plus-36 in goal differential. Goalie Scott Wedgewood, the team's free agent workhorse, led the league in wins (28), was second in shutouts (5), and fifth in minutes (2,711). He went 28-14-2, 2.68, .908 percent.

5. New comers

The Amerks have signed two promising Sabres draft picks, defenseman Jacob Bryson of Providence and Finnish goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen of Sudbury of the OHL. Both were at practice Wednesday. Bryson, a slick puck mover, led Providence to the Frozen Four in Buffalo last weekend. Luukkonen, who stands 6-5, made 32 saves in his pro debut in the Amerks' season-ending 4-2 win at Belleville. The 2017 second-round pick had a big junior year, going 38-11-2, 2.50 and .920. He won't play over Wedgewood or Adam Wilcox, but Taylor said it was important to have three goalies for the playoffs.

Quotes to note

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

— Amerks forward Remie Elie, who reached the Calder Cup finals with the Texas Stars last season.

“We’re going to have to be really good in all areas of the game if we’re going to compete against a team as deep and talented as this Rochester team is, one of the top teams in the league, and they get their lineup bolstered pretty good by Buffalo not making the playoffs. We know we are going to be in for a challenge here so there’s no one particular area. We’re going to have to be really strong in every area of the game.” – Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe.

Amerks thinking big as playoffs approach

13W ham

By: Toby Motyka

April 17, 2019

Last season, it was good just to see the Rochester Americans make it back to the playoffs.

But this year, the Amerks are thinking big.

Rochester is back in the postseason for the second straight year, but holds home ice advantage in the first round for the first time in nearly a decade, as they look to advance in the Calder Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2005.

It starts Friday night against the defending champs, and Rochester's old rival, the Toronto Marlies.

Jenna Cottrell caught up with the Amerks on Wednesday.

Amerks Emphasize "Blue Collar" Mentality Heading Into Playoffs

Spectrum News

By: Staff Report

April 17, 2019

Playoff hockey will be played in Rochester for the second straight season as the Amerks prepare to face the defending Calder Cup champion Toronto Marlies.

- Rochester vs. Toronto in best of five series for first playoff round
- First game is at Blue Cross Arena Friday night, puck drops at 7:05 p.m.
- Amerks adopt postseason motto "Blue Collar Built"

The Amerks are coming off one of their most successful regular seasons in recent memory. They won 46 games, finished with 99 points, and were third overall in the AHL.

The front office honored the team's effort by adopting the motto "Blue Collar Built" for the upcoming postseason, and that's just fine with head coach Chris Taylor.

"I think the office staff and our team have looked at our team and felt this is what our team identity is and I kind of like that," Taylor said. "I think our players had a little bit of input, but a lot of it came from our office and that's a reflection on all of us and that's great."

The Amerks have used that theme to celebrate wins all during the regular season. After the horn sounds, the team salutes the fans, and then a special presentation takes place in the locker room. The player of the game is awarded the Victory Helmet.

"Most teams are doing it. It's just a fun way to celebrate after wins and point out a guy who had a good game," said captain and center Kevin Porter. "It's not only just points, it's who blocked a big shot at the end of the game or chipped a puck out and did the little things or had a big shift to get the team going. It's not just the points, that's what's special about it."

"For me, I hold a lot of pride in that thing," said defenseman Andrew MacWilliam. "It's kind of an award for unsung hero sometimes. Most of the time that's when I'd be getting it; I just think it's nice. It's something to look forward to after a nice win. It helps us with real team camaraderie, that's for sure."

The Amerks open the Calder Cup playoffs Friday at home against Toronto. Game one of the best-of-five North Division semifinal starts at 7:05 p.m. Tickets are available online.

Amerks' Redmond earns Eddie Shore Award
The AHL
By: Staff Report
April 16, 2019

The American Hockey League announced today that Zach Redmond of the Rochester Americans is the winner of the Eddie Shore Award as the AHL's outstanding defenseman for the 2018-19 season.

The award is voted on by coaches, players and members of the media in each of the league's 31 cities.

Redmond finished the 2018-19 regular season with career-best totals of 21 goals (tops among all AHL defensemen) and 50 points, along with a plus-13 rating in just 58 games for the Americans, who finished with the fourth-best record in the AHL. He tied for the overall league lead with nine game-winning tallies and ranked first among blueliners with 10 power-play goals (tied) and 200 shots on goal. Redmond, who broke a 46-year-old franchise record for goals by a defenseman in a single season, was also voted a First Team AHL All-Star this season following a Second Team selection in 2017-18. He joins AHL Hall of Famer Steve Kraftcheck (1959) and Hockey Hall of Famer Al Arbour (1965) as the only Amerks ever to receive the Eddie Shore Award.

An eighth-year pro from Traverse City, Mich., Redmond has totaled 65 goals and 132 assists for 197 points in 314 career AHL games, as well as nine goals and 29 assists in 133 NHL contests with Buffalo, Montreal, Colorado and Winnipeg. Redmond, who has successfully resumed his career following a potentially life-threatening laceration to his femoral artery in 2013, was drafted by the Atlanta Thrashers in 2008 and was acquired by Buffalo in a trade with Montreal on Oct. 4, 2017.

This award was first presented by the AHL in 1958-59 in honor of the late Eddie Shore, a member of both the Hockey Hall of Fame and the American Hockey League Hall of Fame who is widely regarded as one of hockey's greatest defensemen. Shore won a total of seven Calder Cups in his career, including two as the general manager of the Buffalo Bisons and five as the longtime owner of the Springfield Indians. Previous recipients of the Eddie Shore Award include Steve Kraftcheck (1959), Bob McCord (1961, '67), Al Arbour (1965), Jim Morrison (1966), Noel Price (1970, '72, '76), Brian Engblom (1977), Terry Murray (1978, '79), Dave Farrish (1982), Brad Shaw (1987), Dave Fenyves (1988, '89), Eric Weinrich (1990), Darren Rumble (1997), John Slaney (2001, '02), Niklas Kronwall (2005), Johnny Boychuk (2009), Mark Barberio (2012), Justin Schultz (2013), T.J. Brennan (2014, '16), Chris Wideman (2015), Matt Taormina (2017) and Sami Niku (2018).

In operation since 1936, the American Hockey League continues to serve as the top development league for all 31 National Hockey League teams. Nearly 90 percent of all players competing in the NHL are AHL graduates, and through the years the American Hockey League has been home to more than 100 honored members of the Hockey Hall of Fame. Sixteen clubs will continue to vie for the league's coveted championship trophy when the 2019 Calder Cup Playoffs get underway Wednesday.

Amerks Redmond named AHL's best D-man, but he's focused on playoffs
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija
April 16, 2019

When the Rochester Americans' 2017-18 season came to a yet another premature end, Zach Redmond was prepared to explore his free-agent options.

He wasn't getting any younger, and NHL teams weren't as interested in his talents as they once were. Europe was becoming an appealing alternative.

But then in mid-June the Buffalo Sabres made him an offer he couldn't refuse — with one catch: He'd get two years of financial security with the Rochester Americans, but he'd be on an American Hockey League contract.

He said OK.

Now, with the 2019 Calder Cup playoffs about to begin, Redmond knows he made the right decision. So does the entire AHL.

The 30-year-old native of Traverse City, Mich., on Tuesday was named winner of the Eddie Shore Plaque as the league's best defenseman after voting by coaches, players and media.

Amazingly, he's the first Amerk to win the award since Hockey Hall of Famer Al Arbour — 54 years ago.

"I've heard of that guy," Redmond said, pretending naivety. "That's pretty neat."

The only other Amerk named the AHL's best defenseman was Steve Kraftcheck in 1958-59.

"There's so many good defensemen out there these days," Redmond said, "so it's such a nice honor."

Redmond led AHL defensemen in goals with 21 and, together with 29 assists, finished third in points with 50 in just 58 games. His 0.86 points-per-game average was best among AHL defensemen, and his nine game-winning goals tied for first overall among all skaters.

He also broke Rick Pagnutti's franchise record of goals by a defenseman (18), which had stood for 46 years.

When told on Tuesday that he had won the award, he said he really didn't reflect too much because he was in the middle of strategy preparations for the playoffs.

His solid play at both ends of the rink helped the Amerks finish 46-23-5-2, the fourth-best record in the league. The best-of-five first-round playoff series against the defending Calder Cup champion Toronto Marlies begins at 7:05 p.m. Friday in downtown Rochester.

He did miss 17 games due to a lingering lower body injury, and while he maybe didn't look as sharp down the stretch as he had before he was hurt, he said he's good to go.

"I'm good enough to be ready to play," he said. "Health isn't an issue."

The eight-year veteran defenseman has found a home with the Amerks. He was voted the team's MVP by his teammates and most popular player by the booster club. The feelings are mutual, too.

"I've been with four different organizations now (Atlanta/Winnipeg, Colorado, Montreal and Buffalo) and it isn't every day you get to play for people that you love," he said. "All the way through the organization, they care about the right things. There's just a bunch of good people and they care about us.

"And at the AHL level, they're trying to win."

It's now up to the players to do the rest. The Amerks haven't won a playoff series since 2004-05. The last of six Calder Cups for the franchise came in 1995-96, John Tortorella's rookie year as a head coach.

"During the long regular season, you can forget why you're doing it all," Redmond said. "But this time of year is why you're doing it. This is why we played the regular season and no one is ready to go home."

Offering another chance to ex-head coach could benefit Sabres
Buffalo Hockey Beat
By: Bill Hoppe
April 16, 2019

Coaches often evolve or reinvent themselves following their failures. Sometimes they swallow their pride to do it. They might return to junior hockey or the minors and start riding buses again. They might take an assistant or development job.

Remember that as general manager Jason Botterill searches for the Sabres' sixth coach in barely six years after firing Phil Housley on April 7.

Sometimes the best candidates aren't the names being bandied about. Going "off the board" is popular these days. Perhaps Botterill wants to examine experienced coaches who have learned from their mistakes.

Mike Sullivan became an NHL head coach in 2003 at 37, just two years after his playing career ended. Following two seasons in Boston – the Bruins earned 104 points in Sullivan's first season – he bounced around as an assistant for seven years.

When Botterill interviewed him for the Pittsburgh Penguins' AHL vacancy in 2015, thoughts of Sullivan's disastrous one-year run as an assistant under John Tortorella with the Vancouver Canucks ran through his head.

But Sullivan, who was working as a development coach with the Chicago Blackhawks, changed Botterill's impression of him. Botterill hired him.

The Penguins promoted Sullivan after just 24 games with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. Six months later, he led the Penguins to the first of two straight Stanley Cup victories.

It took almost 10 years, but Sullivan earned another shot as an NHL head coach.

So did Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy, who endured a rough 107-game run during his first stint.

When the Washington Capitals hired Cassidy in 2002, he was the league's youngest coach at 37. Other than 36 games as a player, he had no other NHL experience.

The Capitals fired him less than a week after he apologized to the team's veterans for questioning whether their family lives were hurting their play, according to The Washington Post.

Cassidy experienced a rough road back to the NHL. In 2007, the Ontario Hockey League's Kingston Frontenacs fired him after barely a year on the job.

He wound up as an AHL assistant with the Providence Bruins before becoming their head coach in 2011. He moved up to Boston as an assistant in 2016.

When the Bruins stumbled months later, they hired Cassidy to replace Claude Julien. Since Cassidy took over the Bruins, they have a sparkling 117-52-22 record.

There are probably other Sullivan- and Cassidy-type coaches out there.

Consider these names:

Kevin Dineen

Dineen, 55, has a notable history with Buffalo, having served as the Sabres' AHL coach during their successful three-year affiliation with the Portland Pirates.

In each of those seasons, the Pirates made the playoffs and boasted the AHL's top rookie.

Dineen, a former 40-goal scorer who played 1,188 NHL games, has a knack for getting the most out of his players. Just look at the terrific rookie seasons forwards Luke Adam, Tyler Ennis, Nathan Gerbe and Tim Kennedy enjoyed under Dineen.

Paul Byron was an undersized and unheralded sixth-round pick by the Sabres who developed into an NHL prospect under Dineen. These days, Byron is one of the Montreal Canadiens' top forwards.

After signing with the Sabres in 2009, forward Cody McCormick returned to the AHL and developed into a well-rounded asset in Portland.

Following his career season with the Sabres in 2010-11, McCormick signed a three-year NHL contract.

Dineen parlayed his work in Portland into his first NHL head-coaching gig with the Florida Panthers, who won the Southeast Division in 2011-12, his first season.

While the Panthers fired Dineen 16 games into his third season, he's one of the few coaches who has had success in Florida.

Dineen also won a Cup in 2015 with the Chicago Blackhawks as Joel Quenneville's assistant and led the Team Canada women to an Olympic gold medal at the 2014 Sochi Games.

He hasn't coached since the Blackhawks fired him with Quenneville in November.

Dineen's brother, Gord, is an assistant with the Rochester Americans, the Sabres' current affiliate.

Scott Gordon

With a big assist from rookie goalie phenom Carter Hart, Gordon, 56, helped the hapless Philadelphia Flyers roar into the playoff race, leading them to a 25-22-4 mark after replacing Dave Hakstol as their interim coach in December.

Gordon is known for being a clear communicator.

But instead of giving Gordon the job, the Flyers hired Alain Vigneault, a veteran coach the Sabres were possibly interested in, Monday.

The Flyers, who promoted Gordon from their AHL club, the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, told him he can return to that gig next season.

Gordon, a former NHL goalie, received his second chance after lasting 181 games with the New York Islanders. He missed the playoffs twice before getting fired 17 games into the 2010-11 season.

Todd Richards

Richards, 52, has been as assistant with the powerhouse Tampa Bay Lightning the last three years.

While the Minnesota Wild missed the playoffs in its two seasons under Richards, he quickly found another head job.

Just months after the Columbus Blue Jackets hired Richards as an assistant, they promoted him to replace Scott Arniel during the 2011-12 campaign.

Richards, a former NHL defenseman, led Columbus to the playoffs once, lasting until seven games into the 2015-16 season. Richards was Wilkes-Barre/Scranton's coach in 2007-08 when Botterill joined the Penguins organization.

—

Amerks star Zach Redmond, who scored a franchise-record 21 goals this season, was named the 2018-19 winner of the Eddie Shore Award as the AHL's most outstanding defenseman on Tuesday.

Redmond, 30, also compiled 50 points and a plus-13 rating in 58 games.

The Michigan native is the third Amerk to win the award, joining Steve Kraftcheck (1959) and Al Arbour (1965).

The Amerks begin their best-of-five first-round playoff series against the Toronto Marlies on Friday at Blue Cross Arena.

Amerk overcame 2 life-threatening injuries in career, today he wins best AHL defenseman
Rochester Democratic & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 16, 2019

After his record-setting season for the Rochester Americans, veteran defenseman Zach Redmond will need to clear shelf space for all his awards.

His latest he might just sleep with under his pillow.

On Tuesday, the American Hockey League announced that Redmond is the recipient of the 2018-19 Eddie Shore Award, given to the league's top defenseman.

The prestigious honor is voted on by coaches, players and media members in each of the AHL's 31 cities, and Redmond is just the third Rochester player to win the award in the franchise's 63 seasons.

AHL Hall of Famer Steve Kraftcheck won in 1959, the first season for the award named in honor of Shore, who starred 14 seasons for the Boston Bruins in the 1920s and 1930s and is regarded as one of the game's greatest defenseman ever.

Hockey Hall of Famer Al Arbour won in 1965 during Rochester's Calder Cup halcyon days.

Redmond put together a spectacular regular season for Rochester with 21 goals and 50 points, both career highs, in 58 games to go with a plus-13 rating.

His goal total broke a 46-year-old franchise record for a defenseman held by Rick Pagnutti and led all AHL defenders. His nine game-winning goals tied for the overall league lead and he ranked first among blueliners with 10 power play goals, helping the Amerks (46-23-5-2) record the third-best overall record with 99 points.

Last week, Redmond was named an AHL First-Team All-Star and at Friday's Fan Appreciation Night at Blue Cross Arena, he took home the Amerks' Booster Club's Most Valuable Player and Most Popular Player awards. His MVP was voted on by teammates.

A native of Traverse City, Michigan, Redmond was acquired in a trade with Montreal by the parent Buffalo Sabres in October 2017 for Nicolas Deslauriers.

He has proceeded to play the best hockey of his eight-year pro career, scoring 15-32 – 47 in 66 games for the Amerks last season, which earned him a new two-year contract.

"He's thought of very highly in this organization, as a leader and a player," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said.

Part of the reason is Redmond's inspirational story.

Twice he has overcome life-threatening injuries to resume his playing career, the first occurring when he was 15 and suffered a stroke while playing midget hockey for a team in Detroit.

Ten years later in 2013, a Winnipeg Jets' teammate accidentally sliced Redmond's femoral artery and vein with his skate blade. Redmond lost half the blood in his body and needed 200 stitches.

"I definitely look at things a bit differently," Redmond told the *Democrat and Chronicle*. "When something like that happens and life becomes more a living experience, it puts things in perspective about what's important."

Of course, Eddie Shore would appreciate Redmond's toughness and determination. After his NHL playing days, Shore won a total of seven Calder Cups, two as GM/coach of the Buffalo Bisons and five as owner of the Springfield Indians.

Four other defenseman who wore the Amerks sweater won the Eddie Shore Award with other teams: Richie Dunn, Binghamton, 1985; Jim Wiemer, New Haven, 1986; Dave Fenyves, Hershey, 1988 and '89; and T.J. Brennan, Toronto, 2016.

The Amerks open the playoffs with a best-of-five series against Toronto and host Games 1 and 2 Friday and Sunday.

Amerks playoff schedule: Games 1 and 2 are at home vs. Toronto
Rochester Democratic & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
April 16, 2019

With their best season in 14 years in the books, the Rochester Americans are set to open the American Hockey League's Calder Cup playoffs.

Rochester (46-23-5) faces defending champion Toronto (39-24-9) in a first-round, best-of-five North Division series and has home ice advantage.

The playoff schedule

Game 1: at Rochester, 7:05 p.m., Friday.

Game 2: at Rochester, 3:05 p.m., Sunday.

Game 3: at Toronto, 7 p.m., Wednesday, April 24.

Game 4: at Toronto, 7 p.m., Friday, April 26.

Game 5: at Rochester, 5:05 p.m., Sunday April 28, if necessary.

Amerk playoff tickets

Rochester home playoff games range from \$14 to \$28 and are available at the Blue Cross Arena box office or through Ticketmaster.

Where to listen, watch

Radio: 95.7 FM and 950 AM ESPN Rochester. TV: AHLTV offers all-playoff game access for \$24.99 and daily playoff game access for \$7.99.

The Amerks finished their regular season with a 4-2 victory at Belleville. The win was their 25th on the road this season and tied a franchise record set in 1998-99.

Taylor Leier (2 goals, 1 assist) and Wayne Simpson (0-3) had three-point nights and newly signed goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen recorded 32 saves for his first professional win. Luukkonen is a 2017 second-round pick of the parent Buffalo Sabres and just completed his final junior season in the OHL with Sudbury.

Rochester's 99 points under coach Chris Taylor are the most by an Amerks team since the great 2004-05 club set franchise records with 51 wins and 112 points.

That team, which lost in the playoffs in the second round to Manitoba in five games, featured future Sabres' stars Ryan Miller, Thomas Vanek, Jason Pominville, Derek Roy and Paul Gaustad. Taylor was the team's leading scorer with 21-58 – 79.

Rochester is pursuing its seventh Calder Cup title and first since 1995-96 under coach John Tortorella.

Good former NHL coaches just aren't in great supply right now
WGR 550
By: Paul Hamilton
April 16, 2019

The last person the Flyers hired as their coach came from college hockey and North Dakota in Dave Hakstol. Despite making the playoffs in three out of four seasons, he was fired three-and-a-half years in.

Now, Philadelphia is dipping into the old boys network by hiring former New York Rangers coach Alain Vigneault.

In addition to five seasons with the Rangers, Vigneault coached in Vancouver and Montreal. In 1,216 games, Vigneault has a points percentage of .588. The playoffs is where Vigneault has had his problems as his playoff winning percentage is .489.

The reason I bring all this up is I can't wrap my head around any of the experienced coaches that are out there, including Vigneault or Todd McLellan.

The reason Vigneault was fired in New York is when they traded their good players and went young, he was like a fish out of water. Young players tend to regress under him and that's not what the Sabres need.

Quite honestly, I'm not real excited about any of the former head coaches that are out there.

Many fans have told me they want Lindy Ruff back. I don't understand that type of thinking. It seems, in some people's minds, that they just want to keep going back to the old guard. I think all that is over with and for this organization to move forward, they can't take steps into the past.

In addition to that, Ruff was not all that successful in Dallas after leaving Buffalo, and right now is quite happy being an assistant with the Rangers.

Jason Botterill is looking for a good communicator and somebody with presence.

I'm starting to wonder if the second part of that is even out there. Mike Yeo, Todd Richards, Kevin Dineen, Kirk Muller, Michel Therrien, really? None of those names excite me in the least to bring into Buffalo to turn this team around.

Buffalo could go overseas and try to convince Ralph Krueger to get back into coaching, or see if Swedish National coach Rikard Grönberg would want to come over after leaving the national team, but how much respect would they get from Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Rasmus Ristolainen and Zach Bogosian?

I sit here wracking my brain and in the end, I think I would probably head in this direction. I might explore a college coach that was just here in Buffalo and won a National Championship. Scott Sandelin has led Minnesota Duluth to two straight Frozen Four titles.

Sandelin has been coaching the Bulldogs for 19 years and is 21-6 in the NCAA Tournament, 7-2 in the Frozen Four. In the last three seasons, he's coached Minnesota Duluth to an 82-34-12 record and three consecutive Frozen Four championship games. He has been to five Frozen Fours and won three of them.

Sandelin knows the NHL as he played with Montreal, Philadelphia and the Minnesota North Stars.

Sheldon Keefe has coached the Toronto Marlies since 2015. Keefe is known to coach with puck possession in mind. In Toronto, Keefe has helped develop Will Nylander, Kasper Kapanen and Connor Brown.

This is his fourth season in Toronto. He won the Calder Cup once, and is 189-87-28 with the Marlies.

Before arriving in Toronto, Keefe coached the Soo Greyhounds and went 98-29-9 in his two full seasons. If you want a coach that coaches to analytics, Keefe is your man.

Chris Taylor would be the other coach I'd consider. He has guided the Amerks to the playoffs in both his seasons behind the bench. Overall, he's 83-45-24. I think Taylor has done an excellent job in developing Victor Olofsson, C.J. Smith, Rasmus Asplund, Lawrence Pilut and Will Borgen.

If we flip that coin, Brendan Guhle regressed under Taylor, and Linus Ullmark didn't have a great rookie season in the NHL either.

Taylor has worked hard with Alex Nylander and has made him better. He's more responsible and seems to have a better attitude, but it remains to be seen if anybody can bring out the best in Nylander. Taylor worked with Tage Thompson as soon as he got down there and Thompson is playing with a lot of confidence. The Sabres are hoping that will translate in the upcoming playoffs.

None of those coaches have coached in the NHL, but all three have played there. This just doesn't seem to be a good time to be looking for a coach, but the best three candidates may be Sandelin, Keefe and Taylor.

Depleted Marlies open Calder Cup defence
National Post
By: Lance Hornby
April 16, 2019

Back-to-back champions are rare in the American Hockey League, never mind a dynasty.

In a development league, personnel can change quite dramatically from one season to the next and if the parent NHL team is in playoffs, then good luck figuring out an accurate post-season roster for AHL purposes.

But the Toronto Marlies are eager to try and buck the odds, starting with this week's opening best-of-five round against the Rochester Americans.

When you last saw the Leafs' affiliate at Coca-Cola Coliseum, they were spraying each other with champagne and pouring the remnants into the Calder Cup.

Now, they have to take on an Amerks' team bolstered by talented players sent down from the Buffalo Sabres, while Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe can't yet access Trevor Moore, Calle Rosen and Martin Marincin from last year's title team and is without No. 1 goalie Michael Hutchinson.

Since he was hired in 2015, Keefe's teams finished first or second in the regular season and could approach the early series with a mindset of getting through by utilizing strengths up and down the lineup. But the Amerks are a tough opponent to draw first, having dominated the season series against Toronto and owning home-ice advantage.

"It's different for sure in terms of how you prepare," Keefe said Tuesday. "We have to look for an edge here or there if we can. The depth they have, line over line, is a challenge, but I'm excited. This is a great opportunity for our staff and our players.

"There is still a lot of pride in the jersey, the organization and what was accomplished in the past. You've got a mix of guys who were significant pieces of the (2018) team and others who were a supporting cast who now have an opportunity to play a larger role. The experience gained from last year, that will never leave you."

Keefe started the season with half his team either promoted (Andreas Johnsson, Travis Dermott, Garret Sparks, Frederik Gauthier) or moving on to new opportunities in the AHL or Europe. As the NHL playoffs approached, Mike Babcock summoned Moore to the Leafs, kept stay-at-home defencemen Juston Holl and Marincin in reserve and when Sparks faltered, the Leafs promoted Hutchinson.

"It was an adventure, all sorts of ups and downs, twists and turns," said Keefe of a season-long juggling act complicated by injuries. "But credit to our players for riding it and coming out the other side.

"Our goaltending stabilized, our special teams became better and we just found ways to get points in overtime, to score or win a shootout. Now that our playoffs have come, you're not going to be able to win on the backs of extra points or shootouts. You have to really be good 5-on-5."

Full-timers returning from the Calder club include Chris Mueller, Dmytro Timashov, Pierre Engvall, Adam Brooks, Mason Marchment and the most intriguing of the forward group, winger Jeremy Bracco. Hardly used in last year's playoffs, Bracco had a breakout year, the second-round pick from 2015 hitting 79 points, second highest in the AHL.

"What Bracco's figured out is how to produce at this level," Keefe said "The timing, the spacing and the differences how teams penalty kill and defend. We're still working with Jeremy on the other areas of his game (which the coach says Moore grasped more quickly)."

On defence, Timothy Liljegren, the first-round pick from 2017, is back in the playoffs, while countryman Rasmus Sandin, last year's No. 1, will be get his first taste.

Zach Redmond becomes offensive force for Amerks from the blue line
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
April 15, 2019

Had Zach Redmond stayed healthy, he likely would've made a run at the American Hockey League's single-season record for most goals by a defenseman.

The Rochester Americans' star scored a whopping 13 goals in the first 19 games. Redmond, of course, couldn't keep up that torrid pace, but he kept producing at an elite level well into the winter.

The mark of 30 goals set by John Slaney with the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins in 1999-00 was within reach.

On Jan. 21, Redmond scored his 19th goal in the 41st game, breaking the Amerks' single-season defenseman scoring record set by Rick Pagnutti in 1972-73. Later that night, Redmond suffered a lower-body injury, temporarily halting one of the greatest offensive campaigns in franchise history.

Redmond missed the next 11 games. Another lower-body ailment sidelined him for six games last month.

The injuries – he possibly hurt his ankle twice – helped slow down Redmond.

"Is it like it was coming off of a fresh summer and hopping on the ice?" Redmond said of the injury. "No, it's good enough and it's nothing to worry about."

The Michigan native has a 13-game goal drought going into Friday's playoff opener against the Toronto Marlies. He last scored Feb. 22.

Still, Redmond, who was rested in Sunday's regular-season finale, scored 21 goals in 56 games.

"There's always next year," Redmond said of Slaney's record.

Cooling off shouldn't diminish Redmond's prolific year. He enjoyed an MVP-type regular season and has been an electrifying presence from the start.

On Friday, he was named the Amerks' MVP and Most Popular Player. A day earlier, he earned AHL First-Team All-Star honors, becoming the first Amerks defenseman to be named a first or second all-star in consecutive seasons since Terry Hollinger in 1995-96 and 1996-97. Redmond was an AHL Second-Team All-Star a year ago.

Redmond, 30, usually doesn't pay attention to his stats. He only knows he hit the 50-point mark because he has been congratulated for cracking the prestigious number.

But Redmond wonders whether he would've approached Slaney's record had he remained in the lineup.

"It's definitely crossed my mind," said Redmond, a veteran of 133 NHL games, including three with the Sabres last season. "I'm not sure what it was, but I know I was on a pretty good pace for a while and kind of caught the injury bug, cooled off in that regard."

"I can't sit here and ask myself why and if I would've broken it."

Redmond has been a notable offensive contributor in the past. Last season, his first in Rochester, he compiled 15 goals, 32 assists and 47 points in 66 games, setting career highs across the board.

Why did Redmond develop into a greater scoring threat this season, his eighth as a pro?

"He has an elite ability to shoot the puck and he has been used the right way," said one scout who has watched Redmond all season. "He has had good people to play with on a good team. He has a lot of experience to draw from and he got off to a good start."

"Confidence breeds confidence, plus he is a very smart player. I think everything just fell into place."

Redmond said Amerks coach Chris Taylor and his staff are "putting me in a position to succeed."

"The past couple years, they've shown me a lot of respect and played me a lot, put me on the power play and kind of let me do what I think I'm able to do best," Redmond said. "For me in the NHL, it was always kind of a depth pairing and never really on the power play, so I never really had the points."

Taylor said: "He's being humble about the positions that he's being put in."

Redmond has helped put the Amerks in a prime playoff position. Thanks to their second-place finish in the North Division, they have home-ice advantage in their first-round playoff matchup against Toronto. The best-of-five series opens Friday at Blue Cross Arena with Game 2 on Sunday in Rochester.

Redmond, who signed a two-year AHL contract to return to Rochester, knows the Amerks have a special opportunity this spring that rarely materializes.

Since reaching the Calder Cup final with the St. John IceCaps in 2013-14, he has only played seven AHL playoff games.

"In the American League, where it can become so developmental, to have a staff that cares so much and wants us to succeed, it's not an opportunity you get all the time," Redmond said. "So I think we know how special this is and how special it can be."

"It's just kind of a feeling in the locker room. No one's even close to being ready to go home. You have years where it's like, 'Wow, the regular season's almost over.' You can kind of feel guys thinking about home or summer. You get talking to buddies, talking about golf."

"But it's like we're geared for a long run. Nobody wants to go home. I think this year it's all in our hands. We're all excited."

Amerks soar

Thanks to a 46-23-5-2 regular-season mark, the Amerks earned 99 points, their highest total since a 104-point campaign in 2004-05.

The Amerks finished with an AHL-best 25-9-3-1 road mark, tying their franchise record for most away victories set in 1998-99.

But the Amerks' 21-14-2-1 home record concerns Taylor.

"We shouldn't be playing better on the road," a frustrated Taylor said following Friday's 4-3 overtime loss to the last-place Binghamton Devils. "We should be playing the same way everywhere we play. I just don't know what it is. We try to do different things. We try to do everything we do on the road here and change that up.

"For some reason, we're not clicking for all three periods.

On Friday, the Amerks blew a 2-0 first-period lead.

Taylor said the Amerks often make an extra pass and "don't play simple hockey" at Blue Cross Arena.

"There's a couple turnovers, and then all of a sudden, you're chasing, getting tired," he said.

"I know the guys want to play well here. We kind of make a point of it. I think it's almost we're putting a lot of pressure and they're getting a lot of pressure on them instead of just relaxing and playing."

Schmelzer finds a spot

After center Ryan Schmelzer finished his college career at Canisius a year ago, he signed a tryout with the Adirondack Thunder, an ECHL team in Glen Falls.

Then Schmelzer, 25, enjoyed a huge postseason, scoring seven goals and 17 points in 17 games. That created an opportunity for the Buffalo native to sign an AHL deal with the Devils.

"No one really knew who I was, another player coming out of college, another player playing in the ECHL," Schmelzer said. "I did pretty well there in the playoffs."

Schmelzer said Thunder coach Brad Tapper, a former Amerks assistant, "put in an extremely generous recommendation for the GM here in Binghamton."

In a rough season for the Devils, Schmelzer was one of their few constants, scoring 14 goals in 66 games.

Binghamton honored Schmelzer and defenseman John Ramage with the "Seventh Man Award" for their locker room leadership this season.

Notes

Sabres wing prospect Victor Olofsson scored twice in Saturday's 4-3 road loss to the Syracuse Crunch, becoming the Amerks' first 30-goal scorer since Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek in 2004-05. Olofsson's 60 points also led the Amerks. ... Center

Rasmus Asplund was named the Amerks' Rookie of the Year and Most Improved Player prior to Friday's game. Other award winners: 21-goal winger Wayne Simpson (unsung hero), winger Danny O'Regan (Sportsmanship) and defenseman Nathan Paetsch (Community service, Man of the Year). . . . Forward Eric Cornel was the only Amerk to play all 76 games.

Sabres sign Providence's Jacob Bryson to entry-level contract

Buffalo News

By: Staff Report

April 15, 2019

Fresh off an appearance in Buffalo in the Frozen Four, Providence College defenseman Jacob Bryson has signed a three-year entry level contract with the Sabres.

Bryson will sign an amateur tryout contract and report to the Rochester Americans, who begin preparations Wednesday for the first round of the American Hockey League playoffs. Game 1 against Toronto is Friday night.

Bryson's entry-level deal will start with next season.

Bryson, a Sabres' fourth-round pick in 2017, had four goals and 24 assists for 28 points in 42 games and was Providence's team captain this past season. His assist and point totals were career highs. He finished his Friars' career with 73 points (11 goals and 62 assists) in 121 games.

During the Frozen Four, Bryson said he remains in regular contact with the Sabres' development staff.

"They give me things that they want me to do every game," Bryson said, "and I think it's my job to kind of get to those expectations every game, because you don't want to have one good game, one bad game. You want to play every game at your best. I try to reach those expectations of what they give me, just little tips here and there. I get tips from [Providence] Coach [Nate] Leaman and I get tips from them, too, so I kind of get the best of both worlds and that's what makes the best players.

"The development staff, they're amazing. They come out to a lot of games during the year and they do such a good job of keeping tabs on their players and making sure that you can get better every day by their help."

Sabres sign Jacob Bryson to entry-level contract

Buffalo Hockey Beat

By: Bill Hoppe

April 15, 2019

Less than a week after Jacob Bryson's college career ended in Buffalo, the Sabres have signed the defense prospect to a three-year, entry-level contract, the team announced today.

Bryson, who spent three years at Providence College, will play the rest of this season with the Rochester Americans on an amateur tryout. His deal will kick in next year.

Providence lost to eventual champion Minnesota Duluth in Thursday's semifinal of the Frozen Four at KeyBank Center.

The 5-foot-9, 187-pound Bryson recorded four goals and a career-high 28 points in 42 games as a junior and was named a Hockey East Second Team All-Star. He also captained the Friars this season.

Bryson compiled 11 goals and 73 points in 121 career NCAA games. He earned second-team All-American honors in 2017-18.

The Sabres drafted Bryson in the fourth round in 2017, 99th overall.

Providence blueliner Bryson gives up senior year, signs deal with Sabres
USCHO

By: Staff Report

April 15, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres announced Monday that the team has signed Providence junior defenseman Jacob Bryson to a three-year, entry-level contract.

Bryson will sign an amateur tryout and report to the AHL's Rochester Americans.

The entry-level contract will begin with the 2019-20 season.

Originally selected by the Sabres in the fourth round (99th overall) of the 2017 NHL Draft, Bryson earned Hockey East Second Team All-Star honors in 2018-19 after recording 28 points (four goals, 24 assists) in 42 games and serving as a team captain for the Friars.

The London, Ont., native was the recipient of Hockey East's Len Ceglarski Sportsmanship Award in 2018 and 2019. Bryson also earned CCM/AHCA Second Team All-American honors at the conclusion of the 2017-18 season.

He finishes his collegiate career with 73 points (11 goals, 62 assists) in 121 games.

Sabres sign defenseman Jacob Bryson to entry-level contract
WKBW

By: Jenna Callari

April 15, 2019

Fresh off a Frozen Four appearance, Jacob Bryson is taking the next step in his hockey career.

The former Providence defenseman has signed a three-year, entry-level contract with the Buffalo Sabres which is set to begin starting with the 2019-2020 season.

Bryson will sign an amateur tryout contract and reporting to the Rochester Americans ahead of the AHL playoffs.

Bryson recently wrapped up his junior season with the Friars where he set new career highs in both assists and points. He finished his collegiate career recording 73 points in 121 games.

Bryson was selected by the Sabres in the fourth round as the 99th overall pick of the 2017 NHL Draft.