



# ROCHESTER AMERICANS

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*Tonight's Game: Toronto vs. Rochester*

Sabres offer Jean-Sebastien Dea much-needed stability  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Nov. 29, 2019

Sooner or later, it felt like Jean-Sebastien Dea would receive his first recall to the Sabres.

The Sabres, having lost seven forwards this month, sorely need help. Meanwhile, recalls and the Rochester Americans' own run of injuries whittled away their depth up front.

By last week, the AHL affiliate only had two or three healthy forwards with NHL contracts.

On Monday, the Sabres summoned Dea, who said he will play tonight against the Calgary Flames at KeyBank Center.

But make no mistake, the 5-foot-11, 168-pound Dea, 25, earned this trip to the NHL. He has scored two goals and five points in his last six AHL outings. Overall, he has compiled seven goals and 13 points in 18 games this season.

When the Sabres signed Dea to a two-year, one-way contract worth \$1.4 million July 1, it seemed like he would play NHL games or even have an opportunity to crack the big club out of training camp.

"I don't think I had the best camp, so I knew had to go back down there, find my game again and play well," said Dea, who knows Sabres general manager Jason Botterill from their days in the Pittsburgh Penguins organization. "I think it's been good the last couple weeks."

The Sabres recalled three forwards this season — Rasmus Asplund, Curtis Lazar and Tage Thompson — before summoning Dea, who joked he's "not going to toe-drag at the blue line."

"I'll probably keep it simple, use my speed, get on the forecheck, be annoying to play against, always be on the puck and stuff," he said. "That's my game."

Joining Buffalo's organization gives Dea some much-needed stability. Last season, he played for two NHL teams — the New Jersey Devils and Penguins — and three AHL clubs.

New Jersey claimed Dea on waivers in training camp before Pittsburgh reclaimed him in November. The Penguins then traded Dea to the Florida Panthers in February.

"I can breathe a little bit more," he said of having a two-year contract.

All together, Dea played 23 NHL games last season, scoring four goals and six points.

The Sabres scratched Dea for Monday's 5-2 road loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Sabres prospect Rasmus Asplund quickly acclimating to NHL  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Nov. 29, 2019

In the second period Wednesday, Sabres rookie Rasmus Asplund grabbed a loose puck in the right corner, spun off a defender in the circle and quickly cut to the net.

Calgary Flames defenseman Rasmus Andersson hectored the 5-foot-11, 190-pound Asplund in the slot, but he fended him off before creating a prime scoring chance goalie David Rittich stymied.

Asplund's seventh NHL game, a 3-2 overtime loss, was perhaps his best performance since the Sabres recalled him Nov. 15.

Despite playing on the fourth line and killing penalties — the Swedish forward skated under nine minutes — he was noticeable all night.

Asplund recorded his first NHL point, a short-handed assist on winger Jimmy Vesey's breakaway goal, by forcing a turnover inside the Calgary blue line.

If Asplund keeps roaring to the net with authority, he could score his first goal soon.

"They called me up for a reason and they thought I was ready, and that's what it feels like," Asplund said following Thursday's practice inside KeyBank Center, where the Sabres begin a home-and-home set Friday afternoon against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Asplund, who turns 22 on Tuesday, has played 88 AHL games over the last two seasons, establishing himself as one of the Sabres' top prospects with the Rochester Americans.

But Asplund started his pro career at just 16 in 2014-15, when he joined Farjestads BK Karlstad, a Swedish Hockey League team.

That helps explain Asplund's maturity. This is already his *sixth season* competing against men.

"You can just see how he's got the smarts of having played in the Elite League in Sweden and understanding the man's game that he had to play as a young kid already and adjusting it now to the North American surface," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said.

He added: "Very, very exciting, the future with Rasmus."

Asplund could have an opportunity to earn a permanent job. While his ice time has dipped, the Sabres still have four injured forwards.

Asplund's versatility — he usually plays center — could help him stay put. On Wednesday, Krueger shifted him to left wing beside center Jean-Sebastien Dea and Zengus Girgensons.

Krueger said he wanted Dea, who was summoned Monday, to take faceoffs. Asplund has won only 38.5% of his draws.

"We also want to see Rasmus on the wing as a potential move up the lineup," he said. "I think he's shown quick progression here in a lot of different facets. We liked his game (Wednesday). Everybody knows we like to have six forwards who are centermen in our lineup, if possible. Rasmus is showing that ability right now."

Krueger said Asplund's play this month has confirmed the potential they saw in him during his strong training camp.

"He's so mature on the ice — both with and without the puck," Sabres center Marcus Johansson said. "He's very smart. I think as everyone can see he can play big minutes and he's responsible and smart and strong. He's got all the stuff."

Earlier this week, Asplund moved the belongings he brought with him from Rochester to winger Victor Olofsson's place. The two Swedes became close friends last season with the Amerks.

When Asplund arrived in Buffalo earlier this month, he spent a few days at Johansson's house.

"It makes it easier for him, maybe helps him feel like he's welcome and comfortable and all that," said Johansson, who has skated with Asplund the last two summers in Sweden. "He's a great kid."

—

Firing Mike Babcock on Nov. 20 quickly ignited the Leafs, who are 3-0 under new coach Sheldon Keefe.

They finished the Babcock era on a six-game losing streak.

Toronto torched the Red Wings 6-0 on Wednesday in Detroit, outshooting them 54-25.

In the Leafs' three wins under Keefe, who was promoted from the Toronto Marlies, their AHL affiliate, they've outscored their opponents 14-4.

"Every D-man's involved, they attack in a group of five," said Krueger, who has never coached against the Leafs with the Sabres.

Krueger said the weekend set against their fiercest rival has "been highlighted on the calendar for a while."

"You can feel the energy in the group," he said.

Krueger expects the rivalry will create an emotional atmosphere.

"We know it'll be a mix of people from Canada and Buffalo supporting both sides, which will create a bit of an atmosphere like I'm used to often in Europe, when there's lots of road fans," he said. "It'll certainly give a spark to the game."

One spark from the past, however, will be missing.

Toronto traded center Nazem Kadri, who had some memorable battles with Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, to the Colorado Avalanche on July 1.

To Ristolainen, Kadri's absence won't matter.

"They all look the same — same sweater, same helmet," he said. "So they're all enemies."

The Leafs have won five straight meetings. The Sabres last defeated them on March 26, 2018, a 3-2 win in Toronto.

Sabres goalie prospect Jonas Johansson exceeding expectations with Amerks  
Buffalo News  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Nov. 29, 2019

Before winger Victor Olofsson emerged as one of the Buffalo Sabres' top prospects, their 2014 draft ranked among the worst in franchise history.

Other than Olofsson, a rare seventh-round gem, only winger Sam Reinhart, the second overall pick, has paid dividends.

In the last five years, the Sabres have traded or let go of six other selections. None of them ever played in Buffalo.

Still, that weak 2014 class could produce one more NHL player.

Goalie Jonas Johansson, 24, has quietly developed into a strong prospect, starting eight of the Rochester Americans' first 18 games this season.

The affable Johansson has performed so well, he has stolen a little playing time from veteran Andrew Hammond.

Right now, the Amerks don't have a designated No. 1 goalie.

"It is hard to say a No. 1 or 2 or 1A, 1B," said assistant coach Gord Dineen, who served as interim coach for seven weeks. "The good thing I love to see is that Jonas is really getting an opportunity at the American League level, and he's made the most of it."

Johansson's opportunity materialized, in part, because top goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, 20, wasn't ready to play until earlier this month after undergoing hip surgery in April. Luukkonen has been with the Cincinnati Cyclones, their ECHL affiliate, to continue his recovery.

Meanwhile, the 6-foot-5, 219-pound Johansson has seized his chances in Rochester, winning his last three starts.

In 10 total appearances, he has compiled a 5-2-2 record with a 2.35 goals-against average and a .916 save percentage.

"He's steady," winger Andrew Oglevie said. "He's never too high, he's never too low. He's been making some fabulous saves. For the most part, I think he's doing a good job of just staying focused."

Comfort and familiarity in the AHL have helped buoy Johansson's success.

"You know what to expect," said Johansson, who played 19 AHL games over the previous three seasons. "I just know how it works, I would say. That's a big deal."

Johansson, who came to North America late in the 2016-17 season, has spent the bulk of his career with the Cyclones, playing 54 games. While Luukkonen is regarded as the Sabres' goalie of the future, the organization views Johansson as a prospect.

They awarded him a period of NHL action in each of the last two preseasons. Last year, he was playing so well in the ECHL that he earned a recall to AHL when the Amerks had two healthy goalies.

"I love to see his development," Dineen said. "The one thing about him is he's really motivated, and he really works his tail off. So, I love to see him garner more opportunity because of that."

Johansson might have played more AHL games last season if he hadn't undergone season-ending surgery in February to repair a torn meniscus.

"It was not one specific situation to where it happened," Johansson said. "It was more nagging over time, and suddenly it was torn."

Johansson, who had fully recovered by training camp, said he set a goal of playing as many AHL games as possible this season.

"It made it really simple to just narrow it down and focus on myself," he said. Some of Johansson's success can be traced to his personality. He always seems to be smiling.

Hammond said he has never seen him in a bad mood.

"That reflects on the ice that he just has the same approach every day," he said. "He's been very consistent from Day One."

The relationship Johansson and Hammond, 31, have quickly established has also helped.

"He's exactly like you want your goalie partner to be — supportive, competitive and just a nice guy," Johansson said.

The duo often spends time on the ice together before practice.

"We both enjoy the extra stuff, the details of getting out before practice and working on our skating," said Hammond, who has compiled a 7-1-1 mark with a 2.63 goals-against average, a .902 save percentage and two shutouts in nine games. "It's definitely a lot easier. It's almost like in the gym having a workout partner."

But how much longer will they be partners? The Sabres want to take their time with Luukkonen, so he could stay in the ECHL a little longer.

At some point, the Amerks will summon Luukkonen. When that happens, they might have a good problem.

"You deal with it when it comes," Dineen said of possibly having three goalies.

### Nelson finds his groove

After Casey Nelson spent a season and a half in Buffalo, the Sabres waived the defenseman at the end of camp and sent him to the Amerks.

Right away, Nelson, 27, tried to embrace the demotion.

"I'm just happy and playing – playing the game that we love," he said. "That's all that matters."

Nelson adjusted slowly – "He was feeling his way back into it," Dineen said – before finding a groove.

"Sometimes it's harder to play at this level, especially for a defenseman," Dineen said. "It's maybe not as structured. (It's) more frenetic, (there's) more action. The NHL can be a little more positional. ..."

"It took him a little while to get back to his game."

Nelson has developed a more offensive style this season, regularly moving the puck.

"I'm using my feet more and more and just getting up leading the rush," he said.

Nelson, who has a knack for getting pucks on net from the point, also said he's shooting more often.

"You just get more comfortable with fake shots and moving laterally," he said.

Nelson has scored three goals and nine points in 16 games.

#### Amerks notes

After spending nearly two months in the NHL, the Sabres assigned John Gilmour to the Amerks on Saturday after he cleared waivers. Gilmour, who recorded an assist in Saturday's 4-2 road win over the Binghamton Devils, gives the Amerks 10 defensemen. ... Injuries forced the Amerks to use two defensemen – Brandon Hickey and Nathan Paetsch – as wingers in their 3-2 overtime win against the Cleveland Monsters on Nov. 15. While Paetsch has regularly played forward during his career, Hickey said he hadn't played up front since a brief run when he was 15. "I just kind of tried to not think and just go out there and play," said a smiling Hickey. ... With five forwards injured, the Amerks signed Brady Vail, 25, to a pro tryout on Thursday. Vail played 18 games with Rochester in 2016-17. ... The Amerks host Toronto at Blue Cross Arena on Friday, their first look at the Marlies since coach Sheldon Keefe was promoted to the Maple Leafs. The Amerks then travel to Cleveland on Saturday.

## Taylor Eager to Pick Up Where He Left Off

Amerks.com

By: Suzie Cool

Nov. 25, 2019

At the beginning of the Rochester Americans 64<sup>th</sup> American Hockey League season, things seemed to be “business as usual” with head coach Chris Taylor heading into his third year behind the bench. However, after a week of training camp underway and the Amerks first game of the 2019-20 season just four days away, there was a sudden change in the initial game plan to start off the new campaign.

The Buffalo Sabres released earlier this season the conditions as to why an immediate coaching change was needed to take place just days before both the Sabres and Amerks opened their respective seasons.

“Buffalo Sabres Assistant Coach Don Granato has been hospitalized with severe pneumonia and will be taking a medical leave from the team.”

Following the Oct. 1 announcement, the immediate changes were made. Taylor got the call-up to the National Hockey League and served as Buffalo’s interim assistant coach while Gord Dineen assumed the head coaching duties in Rochester. Additionally, Sabres development coach Adam Mair was added to the Amerks coaching staff for the beginning of their regular season.

A close-knit organization from top to bottom, there was no question as to what needed to be done in order to make this abrupt transition as smooth as possible. In Granato’s time of need, many helped fill the gap created by his absence, and now 56 days later everyone has finally returned to their respective positions without missing a beat, and most importantly, with Granato in good health.

“We are a family. We do things together and we support each other. When one of our family members became ill in Buffalo, no one batted an eyelash about doing what was required to do to support the organization and support each other,” stated Amerks general manager Randy Sexton when addressing the media about Taylor’s return earlier this week.

Support and continuity were exactly what was needed from every angle in the Buffalo organization over the last two months, and more specifically, for the team here in Rochester. After losing their head coach, it seemed almost surprising that things still remained “business as usual” when Dineen took over, but it really shouldn’t be shocking at all.

Dineen has extensive National Hockey League experience, playing 18 years professionally and most of that time was at the highest level. And, no, Dineen wasn’t new to the coaching game either. This season marks the assistant coach’s 18<sup>th</sup> year on a coaching staff and his third in the Flower City. To top it off, Dineen had an eight-year stint with the Toronto Marlies and during their 2014-15 campaign, he helped lead the team to a 40-27-9 overall record, good for second place in the AHL’s North Division and a berth in the Calder Cup Playoffs.

Following his return, Taylor immediately made sure to take the time to acknowledge and thank Dineen for the work that the assistant coach put in behind the bench during his absence.

"First and foremost, we're great friends. When I hired Gord, you know, I knew that he was something that I needed, especially as a first-time head coach. He's been unbelievable to me and what he's done here, he's continued on the same process that we started two years ago. It's great."

The Amerks are now 18 games into their season and Dineen has helped lead the team to a 12-3-1-2 record over the last two months.

As of Monday, Taylor returned to his head coaching responsibilities with the Amerks and Friday night will be his first game back at The Blue Cross Arena since their 2018-19 Calder Cup Playoffs run. Taylor is no stranger to Rochester as he's spent 14 seasons here as a player and a coach, and over his last two seasons behind the bench, he's compiled an overall 83-61-8 record while leading his team to consecutive playoff appearances.

Going into Friday the pressure will be on as Taylor's first game back will be amidst Rochester's current five-game win streak. But due to the double duty he pulled while up in the NHL, Sexton is more than confident that the transition back to the "old normal" will be just as seamless as the team has already seen earlier this season.

"He really did double duty, even though we asked him not too. In Buffalo, he was staying up and watching the Amerks games and he was in constant contact with Gord and the coaches. There was great continuity during the time that he was away. All the drills, the nomenclature, the terminology, everything has stayed the same."

After countless nights of pulling double-duty, time away from his family and countless drives up and down I-90, Taylor is back in the Flower city and more than ready to finally embark on his third season as the Amerks head coach. Before he can completely take back the reins, though, Taylor knows that he has some catching up to do and that he needs to try and continue on what these guys have already started.

"You're not going to know everything about what goes on. Interacting with the guys again and going over practices, we use the same practice plans and everything's the same. So, we're just continuing to get caught up a little bit here and continuing what these guys have started here," commented Taylor when asked about just how much catching up he needs to do upon his return.

Overall, Taylor is more than excited to be back in his normal position as head coach of the Amerks, just the 12<sup>th</sup> former Amerk to be named head coach and the 32<sup>nd</sup> overall in the 64-year history of the franchise. He loves this job and the continuity between the entire Buffalo organization has made this time just as seamless for him as it has been for everyone else.

Don't worry, coach, we're happy to have you back, too. Now let's keep things rolling.

John Gilmour embraces joining Amerks after being waived by Sabres  
Buffalo News  
By: Lance Lysowski  
Nov. 25, 2019

In his first three pro seasons, American defenseman John Gilmour played for three awful Hartford Wolf Pack teams, never coming close to the playoffs.

In Gilmour's rookie year, the New York Rangers' affiliate finished last in the 31-team American Hockey League, winning just 24 games. Last season, the Wolf Pack won 29 games.

That's why Gilmour, who cleared waivers Friday and was assigned to the Amerks, is so excited about his new opportunity. Having started the season 12-3-1-2, the Amerks rank second in the North Division. They've won five consecutive games heading into Friday's home game against the Toronto Marlies.

For the first time in his AHL career, Gilmour is playing for a winner.

"No offense to my teams in the past, but we were at the bottom of the standings," an upbeat Gilmour, 26, said following Monday's practice in Blue Cross Arena. "It's nice to be on one that's toward the top and with such a good group of guys in there, a great leadership group. I think it's going to be a fun team to play on."

Gilmour, of course, likely will earn loads of ice time in Rochester. He enjoyed a successful AHL season in 2018-19, scoring 20 goals and 54 points in 70 games, and is coming off seven weeks with the Sabres despite only playing in four of the first 22 games.

"He jumps in the play," said coach Chris Taylor, who rejoined the Amerks on Monday after filling in for Sabres assistant Don Granato since the beginning of the season. "He's a guy, his hockey smarts are really good, but his speed, he can recover well. He joins a play offensively, he can get back defensively. He's a player that we trusted in Buffalo."

Taylor said he expects Gilmour to be brimming with confidence.

"He made the team out of training camp, and that's hard to do," he said. "Anything you do, you make an NHL team out of training camp, you've done something really good, and he did."

"He made everybody take notice of him. I thought he was great."

But Zach Bogosian's return from offseason hip surgery gave the Sabres nine healthy defensemen. Gilmour knew something could happen — "You're always looking at the numbers," he said — but tried to keep it in the back of his head.

On Thursday, Gilmour was waived for the first time in his career. Instead of worrying about being claimed, he said he tried to focus on joining the Amerks.

"Honestly, I was just more worried about my travel day, leaving from Florida, making my way to Binghamton, it was a long travel day," he said. "I was just focusing on that and then wrapping my head around playing the next night."

Gilmour played in Saturday's 4-2 road win over the Binghamton Devils, recording an assist on forward Eric Cornel's game-winning goal.

His presence gives the Amerks incredible depth.

In Gilmour, Lawrence Pilut and Zach Redmond, they possess three of the AHL's most talented offensive defensemen. Right now, they have 10 blue liners on the roster.

"It's a good problem to have," Taylor said. "It makes our internal competition that much better, pushes guys."

The Amerks hope Gilmour will make their power play much better. For a high-scoring team loaded with talent, they've been dismal on the man advantage, converting only 12.5% of their chances.

"We didn't expect that we would struggle on the power play, and we have," Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton said.

Sexton said the Amerks "expect that John can bring the mobile, transitional, puck-moving style of play that we want organizationally."

"We also think he's capable of scoring goals," he said. "He's got a great shot from the point, he's got great vision. So we're hopeful that he might be one of the sparks to ignite our power play."

### Taylor's return

Sexton said Taylor, who spent the first 22 games with the Sabres, "absolutely" has the qualities to be an NHL head coach someday.

"He showed firsthand that he can handle the role of an assistant coach in the National Hockey League," he said. "I really believe he's got what it takes, with some more experience and some more work, to be a very successful NHL head coach."

The Sabres promoted Taylor on an interim basis Oct. 1 after Granato was hospitalized with severe pneumonia.

During his time in Buffalo, Taylor said he would watch Amerks games and communicate with interim coach Gord Dineen every day.

Dineen was back running the defense Monday as an assistant.

"He handled it with dignity and grace," Sexton said of Dineen's job filling in for Taylor.

Sexton said Adam Mair, who took over Dineen's assistant duties, will return to his regular role as a player development coach.

"It certainly was as seamless as we ever could have hoped for on all fronts," Sexton said.

Sexton also credits the Amerks' leadership group for the team's success without Taylor.

"They did a phenomenal job making sure that there were no excuses, that there was entire focus on the task at hand," Sexton said. "When you look at the number of recalls we've had, the injuries we've had, we haven't missed a beat."

Randell, Smith get their chances

Injuries up front – the Amerks have only 11 healthy forwards – have pressed tough guys Tyler Randell and Dalton Smith into regular duty.

Randell, 28, has scored in consecutive games and three of his last five appearances. Through seven outings, he has already equaled his goal total output from last season in 29 fewer games.

In Friday's 4-0 win against Hartford, Randell was one of the best players on the ice. After getting stopped on a nifty scoring chance he generated, he one-timed a bounce off the end boards in from the right circle.

"The ones that you don't expect to go in sometimes end up going in," Randell said.

The 6-foot-1, 198-pound Randell possesses some notable talent. He scored six goals during a 27-game run with the Boston Bruins in 2015-16.

"I've been tagged as a tough guy, and obviously the game's changed over the years and I've had to adjust," he said. "Every summer I'm working on the skills. ... If I can play and produce at the same time, it's a big asset."

When Randell scored Friday, the entire Amerks bench erupted.

"The whole group was really happy for him after the game," Dineen said. "He's got a lot of skill. He's shown that at different times. It's tough sometimes when you don't get a lot of rhythm out there in the game and ice time.

"With our lineup being the way it is, he's making a strong statement for himself that he wants to stay in the lineup."

Amerks goalie Andrew Hammond said: "He's got some ability that will definitely surprise people."

Sexton said the Amerks want to be patient and stick with the players they have.

"Those guys have worked very hard to get an opportunity," he said. "You look at the way that Tyler Randell is scoring and you look at the way Dalton Smith has played, you looked at the way Eric Cornel has stepped up, those guys have earned that opportunity. I don't think you can build loyalty and commitment and ask the players to do what we ask them to do on a daily basis if as soon as there's a little bit of adversity we want to run outside the organization and bring someone new in."

Sabres recall Jean-Sebastien Dea from Amerks  
Buffalo News  
By: Lance Lysowski  
Nov. 25, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres recalled forward Jean-Sebastien Dea from the Rochester Americans this morning.

Having lost center Evan Rodrigues to an undisclosed injury in Sunday afternoon's 5-2 road win against the Florida Panthers, the Sabres needed to summon a forward before tonight's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Right now, the Sabres have four injured forwards. They dressed 11 forwards and seven defensemen Sunday. Curtis Lazar, a healthy scratch against the Panthers, was their only extra "spare" forward.

The 5-foot-11, 168-pound Dea, 25, has scored seven goals and 13 points in 18 games with the Amerks this season.

Dea has compiled five goals and seven points in 29 NHL contests with the Pittsburgh Penguins and New Jersey Devils.

The Sabres signed Dea to a two-year, one-way contract worth \$1.4 million July 1.

Lower-body injury forces Evan Rodrigues out of Sabres lineup against Tampa Bay  
Buffalo News  
By: Lance Lysowski  
Nov. 25, 2019

The lower-body injury Evan Rodrigues sustained Sunday night against the Florida Panthers will keep him out of the Buffalo Sabres' lineup for at least one game.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger told reporters ahead of a game against the Tampa Bay Lightning in Amalie Arena on Monday that Rodrigues' injury is not thought to be "long-term" and Rodrigues will be evaluated when the team returns to Buffalo on Tuesday.

Rodrigues skated slowly off the BB&T Center ice following his 40-second shift in the first period of a 5-2 win over the Panthers. His absence forced Krueger to use defenseman Brandon Montour at forward and Casey Mittelstadt moved to center.

The Sabres recalled center Jean-Sebastien Dea with Rodrigues unavailable against the Lightning. Dea has excelled in the faceoff circle during his 18 games in Rochester and provided Krueger with another right-handed option at center.

"The dream is to have six centermen in a lineup of 12 forwards, just because of all the different options it gives you and moving people around and putting people on the wing for instance," Krueger said. "Like, Mittelstadt's been outstanding off the wing and then shifting back to center six minutes into a game, I thought he did a really good job of that [Sunday]. Having centermen, if it's a tie, I'd always take the centerman from Rochester to come up."

Rodrigues, 26, has two assists with a minus-two rating in 14 games this season. He was a healthy scratch on nine occasions but was elevated to a top-six role with Marcus Johansson (upper body) out of the lineup. Rodrigues elevated his game over the past two weeks and was robbed of a potential third-period goal last Thursday in Boston on what he later called "arguably the save of the year" by Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask.

Entering Monday, Mittelstadt had started three games on the wing, a move made by Krueger to try to coax more offense from the 21-year-old. Mittelstadt shifted back to center following Rodrigues' injury and recorded one shot on goal in 15:20 of ice time against Florida.

Johansson has missed the past seven games, and Krueger hopes the 29-year-old will be able to return to the Sabres' lineup sometime this week. Johansson has four goals among 10 points in 17 games this season.

Dea is the fifth player recalled from Rochester this month, joining Lawrence Pilut, Rasmus Asplund, Curtis Lazar and Tage Thompson. Andrew Oglevie and Scott Wilson are the only healthy forwards with an NHL contract on the Amerks' roster.

In addition to Rodrigues and Johansson, the Sabres are without Thompson (upper body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body) and Kyle Okposo (concussion).

"There's definitely a lot of depth and you're still seeing it now with the guys that are sitting out right now," Jeff Skinner said. "They're for sure good enough to be playing. It still seems like we've got some bodies to spare, but anytime you have injuries, it opens up opportunities. I think guys have done a great job of stepping up and trying to sort of capitalize."

## Skills competition

The Sabres will host a skills challenge inside KeyBank Center for a second consecutive season on Jan. 5, the team announced Monday. The roster will split into two teams to compete in hardest shot, accuracy showdown, puck control relay, power play challenge, shootout challenge and passing challenge.

To commemorate the Sabres' 50th anniversary, players will wear custom jerseys in recognition of the 1978 All-Star Game, which was held in Buffalo's Memorial Auditorium. The jerseys will be auctioned off after the event with all proceeds benefiting the Buffalo Sabres Foundation.

Tickets will cost the general public \$10 and will be available for purchase online Dec. 3. Season ticket holders will have the opportunity to purchase tickets for \$5 on Dec. 5. Doors will open for the event at 9 a.m., and an autograph session with alumni will begin at 9:30 a.m.

## Taylor returns

Rochester coach Chris Taylor, who served as an interim assistant on Krueger's staff during Don Granato's medical leave, returned to practice with the Amerks on Monday inside Blue Cross Arena.

Taylor did not join the Sabres during the second leg of their three-game road trip, but he was unable to coach the Amerks on Saturday in Binghamton. Rochester hosts the Toronto Marlies on Friday night.

"I didn't really know him much; I had met him a couple times in training camp, but I thought he was great," Skinner said of Taylor. "He's really smart. You could tell he was a smart player, just the way he thinks the game. He's really positive, which is nice. I thought he did a great job here."

## McKee gone

Jay McKee, a former Buffalo Sabres defenseman, was dismissed as coach of the Ontario Hockey League's Kitchener Rangers on Monday. McKee was amid his fourth season as the Rangers' head coach and led them to three consecutive playoff appearances.

Following his playing career, McKee spent one season each as an assistant coach with Niagara University, the Rochester Americans, Erie Otters and the Rangers. He played 582 games during his 10 seasons with the Sabres.

## Stephens trade

There was more to the Sabres' trade Sunday night than acquiring defenseman Matthew Spencer from Tampa Bay. Assistant General Manager Randy Sexton explained that the organization wanted to give defenseman Devante Stephens an opportunity to play in the American Hockey League.

Stephens is expected to join the Syracuse Crunch after being acquired by the Lightning. The former fifth-round draft pick had appeared in only three games for the Cincinnati Cyclones this season and his path to Rochester was blocked by a number of talented defensemen.

"The highest priority was to give him an opportunity," Sexton said of Stephens. "He's been a great Sabre and Amerk for us since the day we drafted him. He's worked hard at his game, but at this stage, he hasn't had the opportunity to play at a higher level that every player aspires to. It was really as much about giving a very loyal person an opportunity to play somewhere else."