



# ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

*Friday, January 31, 2020*

*Tonight's Game: Syracuse vs. Rochester*

Domenic Pittis inducted into Rochester Americans Hall of Fame as Class of 2020

Democrat & Chronicle

By: Brodie Inguaggiato

Jan. 31, 2020

Former Rochester Americans forward Domenic Pittis will be inducted into the Amerks Hall of Fame when the team hosts the Syracuse Crunch on Hall of Fame Night, Friday.

Pittis, 45, becomes the 65th member of the Amerks Hall of Fame as the Class of 2020.

The Calgary, Alberta, Canada-native played parts of three seasons with Rochester from 1998-2000 and 2003-04, recording 246 points in 204 games. Upon his final departure from the organization following the end of the 2003-04 season, Pittis was the franchise's all-time leader in playoff assists (54) and second in points (70).

His 246 career points rank him top-20 among forwards all-time in franchise history and his 171 assists put him at 17th all-time. Domenic Pittis celebrates a goal in 1999.

He won the John B. Sollenberger Trophy as the AHL's top point-getter for the 1998-99 season with 104 points on 38 goals and 66 assists in 76 games played, becoming just the sixth player in Amerks history to earn the honor.

That season, Pittis accomplished the rare feat of appearing in two games in one day. On March 28, 1999, Pittis played for the Buffalo Sabres in a 4-3 overtime win over the Pittsburgh Penguins before returning to Rochester later the same day to suit up for the Amerks in a 3-2 loss to the Cincinnati Mighty Ducks.

Pittis' 1998-99 campaign also helped Rochester reach the first of two consecutive trips to the Calder Cup Finals.

After retiring from a 19-year professional career in 2013, Pittis has spent the last five seasons as an assistant coach with Calgary Flames' AHL affiliate, the Stockton Heat.

Pittis will be formally inducted prior to Rochester's game against Syracuse 7:05 p.m. Friday at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

Marco Scandella returns to Buffalo amid 'amazing' experience with Canadiens

Buffalo News

By: Lance Lysowski

Jan. 30, 2020

Marco Scandella beamed inside the KeyBank Center visitors' dressing room Thursday morning as he described the pride with which he wears a Montreal Canadiens jersey.

Scandella did not express displeasure with his time in Buffalo and spoke glowingly of his former teammates, adding that a Sabres breakthrough is "inevitable." However, the 29-year-old defenseman always envisioned wearing Canadiens red, white and blue.

Scandella's dream became a reality Jan. 2, when he was traded by the Sabres to the Canadiens for a fourth-round draft pick. Two nights after walking out of KeyBank Center, Scandella was playing in front of an announced crowd of 21,302 inside Bell Centre.

"Surreal," Scandella said. "I felt like a lot of emotions in that building."

Scandella's return to Buffalo might be a footnote in a critical Atlantic Division matchup between Montreal and the Sabres. After all, the Sabres missed the playoffs during his two-plus seasons in Buffalo, and he struggled with injuries and ineffectiveness in 2018-19. The reunion comes at an interesting time, though.

The Sabres had one of their worst defensive games of the season in a 5-2 loss Tuesday against Ottawa and Buffalo needs a win over Montreal. Scandella's return also has some meaning to his former teammates.

Scandella became a beloved figure inside the Sabres' dressing room. He was a stabilizing force on defense during his 31 games with Buffalo this season, serving as a mentor to Henri Jokiharju and often providing an example of how coach Ralph Krueger wanted the Sabres to perform in the defensive zone.

"There's a lot of talent in that locker room," Scandella said of the Sabres. "Great coaching. I feel like it's inevitable it's going to happen soon. I wish them the best moving forward."

Scandella's bounce-back in Buffalo made him coveted on the trade market. He had three goals among nine points with a plus-9 rating while averaging 16:36 of ice time. The timing of the trade was somewhat unexpected.

Scandella arrived to KeyBank Center for a game against the Edmonton Oilers, only to be told he was traded to his hometown team. While he mentally prepared for a midseason move, Scandella was still surprised. He left the arena, packed his belongings and made the six-hour drive to the city in which he spends his offseasons.

"Growing up watching the Canadiens, just being a part of this franchise is huge," Scandella said. "It's amazing. Being home, being able to see my mom weekly. Going for dinner there. It's just great."

Scandella's stay in Montreal might be short. He could be among the Canadiens traded before the deadline because he's a pending unrestricted free agent. Montreal was 10 points out of a playoff spot entering Thursday.

Scandella has been a reliable presence on the blue line for Montreal. Entering Thursday, he had one assist with a minus-2 rating while averaging 19:15 of ice time over his 10 games.

"He's an experienced defenseman," Canadiens coach Claude Julien said. "He's a guy that, for the most part, is known for his defensive stability. He's got a good shot, offensively, good first pass. For us, it was about stabilizing the defensive part of our game. We needed some depth there. ... We needed somebody that was capable of maybe stabilizing the other part of our game, and he's done that."

### Amerks back from break

The Rochester Americans returned to practice Thursday in preparation for their first game out of the All-Star break, a Friday night faceoff against the Syracuse Crunch in Blue Cross Arena.

The Amerks (24-13-6) are second in the AHL's North Division, four points behind the first-place Belleville Senators. Casey Mittelstadt likely will have the opportunity to be an important part of a playoff push. The 21-year-old center has five goals among 10 points in 17 games since joining the Amerks.

"I've said it before, I believe that Casey can play in the National Hockey League right now," General Manager Jason Botterill said Tuesday. "But we want him to not just survive, we want him to excel. We have high expectations for Casey, and Casey does for himself, too. What we've really liked about his attitude in Rochester is he's being very proactive in what he needs to work on with the coaching staff, his new teammates there. Overall, it's been a good experience for him."

### Prospect watch

Forward Arttu Ruotsalainen, a 22-year-old Sabres prospect, has 12 goals among 31 points in 30 games with Ilves of Liiga, Finland's top professional league. Ruotsalainen was with the Sabres in training camp after signing a three-year contract with the team in May.

Sabres prospect Matej Pekar, a 19-year-old forward, has three goals among 14 points in eight games since joining Sudbury of the Ontario Hockey League. Meanwhile, Dylan Cozens has 28 goals among 59 points in 35 games for the Lethbridge Hurricanes, who have the fifth-most points in the 22-team Western Hockey League.

## Johansson gets first NHL call-up to replace Ullmark

Rochester First

By: Bill Hoppe

Jan. 30, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres announced Wednesday that goalie Linus Ullmark will be out 3-4 weeks with a lower body injury.

The injury occurred in the third period of the team's game Tuesday night against Ottawa. Ullmark's leg seemed to stay under his body as he fell backwards. He had to be helped off the ice.

"We're disappointed for him and for us because he was really building a good season here," Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said,

In response to Ullmark's injury, the Sabres recalled goalie Jonas Johansson from the Amerks. Johansson is coming off his appearance in the AHL All-Star game last weekend. He had a 13-3-3 record in Rochester with a 2.19 goals against average and a .925 save percentage.

It's been a whirlwind few days of travel. The Amerks were in Syracuse on Saturday. Johansson flew out to California for the AHL All-Star weekend Sunday and Monday. He returned to Rochester Tuesday night and got the call up. He drove to Buffalo Wednesday morning.

Johansson is excited to have his first shot to play in the NHL. "I was calling my parents, calling my family, it's something you only had in your dreams before and now it became reality," he said.

Ullmark's injury also gives goalie Carter Hutton a chance to return to form. He won his first six starts of the year and has lost his last 11.

"I'm excited to get in there. It's part of the game. There's injuries. I've been in this situation before," Hutton said. "I feel bad for (Ullmark) because he was playing great, rock solid all year. He was having a career year for sure. Right now, I just got to go in there and play hockey. It will be fun."

Coach Ralph Krueger said he will wait until Thursday to announce who will get the start against the Canadiens. Faceoff is 7pm at Keybank Center.

With Linus Ullmark injured, Sabres will likely turn to goalie Carter Hutton  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Jan. 30, 2020

While Sabres coach Ralph Krueger wouldn't reveal tonight's starting goalie, it's a safe bet he will utilize Carter Hutton against the Montreal Canadiens.

Throughout a three-month slump in which he has morphed into a spare part, Hutton, 34, has quietly gone about his business, expressing confidence in his ability to bounce back and showing support for his teammates.

With workhorse Linus Ullmark sidelined three to four weeks with a lower-body injury, Krueger has two options in goal: Hutton or AHL All-Star Jonas Johansson, who was recalled from the Rochester Americans for the first time Wednesday.

Remember, Hutton, who hasn't won a game since Oct. 22, started the season 6-0-0. The veteran has a 5-1-2 career mark against the Canadiens and beat them Oct. 9.

"We know that Carter can step up here," Krueger said following this Wednesday's practice inside KeyBank Center. "He had an excellent start of the season, some struggles of late. But it was more also the team performing differently in those games. There was some overtimes in there that didn't tip his way, so we're cheering for him as loud as anybody to get back on track result-wise.

"But he's always worked hard and has had some good weeks now with (goalie coach) Mike Bales, they've done a lot of extra work, and we feel Carter is ready to be the guy to step in here and carry the ball."

Hutton, of course, wants to keep a narrow focus for what could be his final opportunity. He knows he hasn't been awarded the net.

"If I don't play well, J.J. is going to play," said Hutton, who has lost 11 straight games. "There's no security in what we do. This is the NHL. In that sense, I'm just going to go out there and do what I do. It's hard to really look at the big picture in that sense. I'm not looking down the road or whatever. You just try to stay in the moment. It's just hockey. I leave the rink I've got a family to go to."

Hutton has endured a stunning in-season decline. Since his torrid start, he has compiled a wretched 0-7-4 record with a 4.22 goals-against average and an .867 save percentage.

That's the worst goals-against average and save percentage of any NHL goalie who has played at least six games since Oct. 23.

Krueger has mostly used Hutton in back-to-back situations for two months, starting him just two of the last 20 games.

So Hutton has spent time working closely with Bales to sharpen his game.

"We find different things to chip away at, kind of build your game," Hutton said. "It's been a bit of a roller coaster this year, obviously. Some stuff that goes on behind the scenes. You try to stick with it. It's such a long season, right? For me, nothing changes. I've been doing this for a while now. (I'm) just excited to get in there and play. It's the same game."

Hutton said he doesn't believe anyone in "this room has ever doubted me or anything."

"Sometimes the picture can get painted outside, you know what I mean?" he said. "But not everybody has the information, what's going on. For me, I played a lot of games. It's not like I just fell off a cliff here. It's been a rough go, but it's just hockey. I feel like for a long time I've felt good here, and it's just a matter of getting in."

"At the same time, I haven't played because Linus has played so well. It wasn't a lack of what I was doing in practice or anything like that. Linus has been . . . the backbone so far. Now I have time to get in there and just play my game."

Ullmark, who was injured late in Tuesday's embarrassing home loss to the Ottawa Senators, has become the Sabres' backbone.

"I've been in this situation before," Hutton said of being injured. "I feel bad for him because he was playing great. He's obviously been rock solid all year, and he's been having a great year, for sure. It's a tough injury."

Sabres call up Jonas Johansson from Rochester  
ESPN Rochester  
By: Brayton Wilson  
*Jan. 29, 2020*

The Buffalo Sabres have called up goalie Jonas Johansson from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League on Wednesday after starting goalie Linus Ullmark suffered a lower-body injury in the third period of Tuesday night's 5-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators.

Johansson is getting his first career call up to the Sabres after being selected by the team in the third round (61st overall) in the 2014 NHL Draft.

The 24-year-old is having a stellar season with the Amerks this season, posting a 13-3-3-2 record in 20 games played with a 2.19 goals-against average, a .925 save percentage and two shutouts. His goals-against average currently ranks third-best in the AHL, while his save percentage has him ranked fourth in the league.

Johansson was named to his first career AHL All-Star Game this past weekend in Ontario, California where he was Rochester's lone representative on the ice. Amerks head coach Chris Taylor was behind the bench representing the Amerks for the North Division, while defenseman Lawrence Pilut had been named to his second consecutive All-Star Game, but he did not play after being called up to the Sabres on Sunday.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said on the Howard and Jeremy Show on Wednesday that Ullmark will miss at least a few games with his injury, but the question now becomes how many games will he miss? Ullmark was attempting to go side-to-side in his crease on Tuesday night when he got his right leg caught up under him.

Ullmark has really started to establish himself as the No. 1 goalie in Buffalo with his solid play in the past eight games. The 26-year-old has posted a 16-14-3 record this season in 33 games with a 2.72 goals-against average, a .914 save percentage and one shutout.

Carter Hutton will now take over in goal as Buffalo starting goalie, despite his recent struggles with losses in 11 consecutive starts. In the limited action he saw on Tuesday, Hutton turned aside all four shots that he faced.

Overall this season, Hutton is 6-7-4 with a 3.31 goals-against average, an .892 save percentage and two shutouts.

The Sabres will return to the ice for practice at noon on Wednesday at KeyBank Center.

Linus Ullmark to miss 3-4 weeks with lower-body injury

WKBW-TV

By: Jenna Callari

*Jan. 29, 2020*

Another injury has hit the Buffalo Sabres, this time to the goaltender position.

The team announced Linus Ullmark will miss 3-4 weeks with a lower-body injury. He went down in Tuesday night's game against the Senators in a fluke-like play and needed help off the ice, putting little to no pressure on his right leg.

Ullmark has started in 33 games this season, recording a 16-14-3 record, a 2.72 goals against average and a .914 save percentage. Carter Hutton will most likely get the start on Thursday when the team hosts Montreal.

The team also recalled Jonas Johansson from the Rochester Americans Wednesday morning. Johansson has posted a 13-3-3 record in 20 games played with the Amerks that includes a 2.19 goals-against average, a .925 save percentage, and two shutouts.

Sabres GM Jason Botterill says he's still in the market for forward help  
Buffalo News  
By: Lance Lysowski  
Jan. 28, 2020

While Ralph Krueger and the Buffalo Sabres focus on short-term goals, General Manager Jason Botterill is forced to take a macro view of the franchise.

If the Sabres gain ground in the playoff race over the next three weeks, Botterill will push to add to the roster ahead of the Feb. 24 trade deadline. Selling could be an option if they fail to take advantage of having nine of their next 10 games at KeyBank Center.

One aspect of his long-term view that's clear: Botterill wants to add a forward with speed to complement a core that received reinforcements Tuesday with the return of Jeff Skinner.

"That's what we're trying to do, we're trying to add to our group there," Botterill said Tuesday. "I think if we can add more to our offensive mix, we're certainly looking for it. Also, too, whenever you can add to just our team speed up front, it's another thing we can look at. We are excited tonight to get Jeff back in the lineup."

Regardless of short-term success, Botterill is working the phones to try to complete a trade. He acquired defenseman Brandon Montour from Anaheim ahead of the deadline last February, despite the Sabres having long odds at making the playoffs.

Botterill has already been aggressive on the trade front, dealing defenseman Marco Scandella to Montreal and acquiring forward Michael Frolik from Calgary on Jan. 2. The latter entered Tuesday with one goal and one assist in six games since joining the Sabres, but he's also buoyed their penalty kill and added another reliable defensive presence on the wing.

The Sabres need someone capable of scoring at a higher rate. While Frolik proved to be a capable replacement, and possible upgrade, over injured forward Vladimir Sobotka, Buffalo has lost two potential top-six forward solutions: Tage Thompson and Casey Mittelstadt.

Thompson, a 22-year-old forward, will miss the rest of the season after undergoing shoulder surgery. He had six goals among 12 points in 16 games with Rochester at the start of the season, only to suffer the injury at Chicago on Nov. 17 in his first game after being recalled from the Amerks.

"I thought there was a disappointment with him coming out of training camp, but it didn't affect his game at all," Botterill said of Thompson. "He knew exactly what he had to work on, was excited about working on those skills and you look at, not just his stats, goals and assists in Rochester, but how much offense he was creating down there. How many chances he was creating down there. ... When we did face some injuries up here, you go, 'Well, that could have been a situation where Tage could have gotten more ice time,' so it's disappointing he didn't get that experience."

Additionally, Mittelstadt struggled after an impressive 10-game stretch with the Sabres at the start of the season and was sent to Rochester last month. The 21-year-old center has five goals among 10 points in 17 games since joining the Amerks. Botterill, though, isn't in a rush to bring Mittelstadt back to Buffalo. The Sabres prefer the former seventh overall pick to thrive in the AHL, as opposed to treading water in the NHL.

A significant trade could be difficult for Botterill to swing. The Sabres are up against the salary cap and have been unable to deal Zach Bogosian or Evan Rodrigues, both of whom requested to be traded. The team's cap situation could force Botterill to trade an impact player off the NHL roster.

In addition to assessing short-term results, Botterill will monitor Skinner's production after returning from an upper-body injury. Skinner, who scored a career-high 40 goals last season, could help provide Buffalo with the secondary scoring it has lacked behind Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

The Sabres entered Tuesday 10 points out of a playoff spot, a deficit that grew during their bye week before the NHL All-Star Game.

"I think Ralph has really focused a lot with our group about short-term goals and that's great for our internal group," Botterill said. "From our standpoint, from a managerial perspective, we do have to take a little bit more from a longer-range perspective, and we'll certainly see how things progress here. I think it's exciting to have, what is it, eight of the next nine here at home. ... Now it's important to — starting here tonight against Ottawa — try to get the results but continue to improve as a group."

Sabres GM Jason Botterill would like to add forward before trade deadline  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Jan. 28, 2020

Even after acquiring Michael Frolik earlier this month, Sabres general manager Jason Botterill would like to add another forward before the Feb. 24 trade deadline.

The Sabres' depth up front, of course, was weak before Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson both suffered season-ending injuries in November.

Right now, Victor Olofsson is week-to-week with a lower-body injury. Evan Rodrigues has been a huge disappointment, scoring just two goals and often sitting out as a healthy scratch.

The Sabres don't many options.

Coach Ralph Krueger regularly dresses seven defensemen and 11 forwards, a lineup he utilized in Tuesday's 5-2 win against the Ottawa Senators at KeyBank Center.

"We're trying to add to our group there," Botterill said Tuesday morning of acquiring a forward. "I think if we can add more to our sort of offensive mix, we're certainly looking for it. I think also, too, when you can add to just our team speed up front, it's another thing you look at."

Frolik has meshed well with the Sabres, who have gone 3-4-0 with him in the lineup since dealing a fourth-round pick to the Calgary Flames on Jan. 2.

Frolik, who was acquired from the Calgary Flames for a fourth-round pick, has meshed well with the Sabres. The newcomer skated at right wing on the second line Tuesday beside center Marcus Johansson and Jeff Skinner.

This next stretch of games will likely determine whether the Sabres are buyers or sellers over the next four weeks.

The Sabres have a stiff challenge to roar up the standings and earn their first postseason berth since 2011. They're in fifth place, 10 points behind the Florida Panthers for the Atlantic Division's final playoff spot.

Sportsclubstats.com pegged the Sabres' chances of making the playoffs at just 3.7% entering Tuesday's game.

Still, fresh off their bye and the NHL All-Star break, the Sabres play nine of their next 10 games at home, where they've compiled a strong 14-7-3 mark.

So to Botterill, the Sabres' task feels a little less daunting.

Not only have they established KeyBank Center as a tough rink for visitors, they won three of their last four games overall before the break.

But they need to quickly go on a tear to get back in the race.

"It's an interesting dynamic," Botterill said. "You go last week without playing games and other teams are going to be winning and they move up in the standings from you and sort of pull away. But then you have to take a step back and realize . . . we've won three of the last four, and I thought especially against Vegas, Dallas, Nashville — three strong Western Conference teams — we played fairly well in those games and could've come away with six points."

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After Rodrigues requested a trade earlier this month, Krueger said the Sabres "will work with the players that want to be here."

But Rodrigues and defenseman Zach Bogosian, who also reportedly asked to be dealt, have kept playing, moving in and out of the lineup. Krueger scratched both players Tuesday.

Why do the Sabres keep dressing them?

"They're in the lineup at times because they can help our team," Botterill said. "In the situations they can help our team, we're going to do it. And whether a player makes his (request), we're going to continue to make an evaluation with it.

"Hey, if a player does go to the media, it's not going to change how we're going to dictate things. If something materializes that improves our team, we'll certainly make that move from that standpoint. But I also think that's something the coaching staff reflects on every day and sort of sees what is the group that can help us win?"

Botterill said Bogosian and Rodrigues "have worked hard and tried to find a role on this team."

"They had conversations with myself and, more importantly, with Ralph about just where their status is with our team here now and how we felt about some of their comments," he said.

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Following a slow start with the Rochester Americans — zero goals scored in his first six outings — center Casey Mittelstadt has found a groove, scoring five goals and eight points in the last 11 games.

Mittelstadt, who jumped from the NCAA to the NHL as a teenager in 2018, struggled defensively and produced four goals in nine points in 31 contests before the Sabres demoted him Dec. 15.

"Casey's done a good job of integrating himself with the team in Rochester, he's been very dialed in with the coaching staff there," Botterill said of youngster's first stint in the minors. "It's something I've said that one of my comfort levels of sending Casey to Rochester was his relationship with (Amerks coach) Chris Taylor, and I think that's blossomed here.

"I think over the last little bit he's done exactly what we've talked about, he's played in key situations."

Taylor spent nearly two months in Buffalo earlier this season subbing for assistant coach Don Granato. Mittelstadt also knows Taylor from development camps.

Botterill said the former eighth overall pick "can play in the National Hockey League right now."

"But we want him to not just survive, we want him to excel," he said. "We have high expectations for Casey, and Casey does for himself, too. What we've really liked about his attitude in Rochester is he's being very proactive in what he needs to work on with the coaching staff, his new teammates there. Overall, it's been a good experience for him."

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Botterill said losing Thompson, one of the Sabres' top forward prospects, for the season "was extremely disappointing."

Thompson, 22, underwent surgery on right shoulder earlier this month after injuring it in the waning minutes of his NHL season debut Nov. 17.

The Sabres kept Thompson up most of last season, playing him 65 times. After finishing on a tear in Rochester, he roared out of the gate this season with the Amerks.

While Thompson often struggled in the NHL, at least he was healthy and playing.

"That's a tough thing right now is he's just not playing in those games," Botterill said. "And the great thing Tague did last year when we challenged him at the end of the year is he did that, he implemented that through the entire summer. And I thought there was a disappointment in him coming out of training camp, but it didn't affect his game at all, (he) knew exactly what he had to work on, was excited about working on those skills."

The Sabres have said Thompson will need five to six months to recover.

Botterill is looking forward to the upcoming stretch of games  
WGR 550  
By: Brayton Wilson  
Jan. 28, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres find themselves 10 points back of a playoff spot in both the Atlantic Division and the Wild Card picture with 33 games remaining in the 2019-20 season.

After a 10-day break from game action, the Sabres will start their final stretch of the season on Tuesday night with a matchup against the Ottawa Senators at KeyBank Center.

With a 22-20-7 record and 51 points, the Sabres are still in shooting distance of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference, but there will be plenty of work that needs to be done to get themselves into serious contention for a top-eight spot in the playoff picture.

However, the Sabres will have an advantage on their schedule with nine of the next 10 games on home ice. Buffalo has played remarkably well at KeyBank Center this season, going 14-5-3 in front of the hometown faithful.

Not only is this upcoming stretch of games significant for their playoff chances, but it will also be important towards dictating the direction the team will take heading into the NHL Trade Deadline on Monday, Feb. 24 at 3 p.m.

Sabres general manager Jason Botterill has not yet determined whether or not he will take a buyer or seller's mentality towards the deadline, but he knows that these upcoming games at home will be of significant importance for the development of his group.

"I think ever since the game against Tampa Bay on New Year's Eve, which was certainly a disappointing game, you look at where we were at the mid-point of that game. I think Ralph is really focused a lot with our group about our short-term goals, and that's great for our internal group," Botterill said when speaking with the Buffalo media on Tuesday. "From our standpoint, from a managerial perspective, we do have to take it a little bit more from a longer range perspective, and we'll certainly see how things progress here.

"I think it's exciting to have [nine of the next 10 games] at home, which at the start of the year that was a challenge to our group here to have a strong home ice presence. For the most part, I think we've done a good job with that. [When] you look at our group from the Christmas break on, we've played fairly well, but maybe haven't gotten the results that we wanted to all the time. Now it's important, starting here tonight against Ottawa, to try to get the results, but continue to improve as a group."

The Sabres have not played a game since Jan. 18 when they dropped a 2-1 decisions against the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena. Following that loss, the Sabres found themselves behind just six points of the Florida Panthers in the Atlantic Division, while they trailed the Carolina Hurricanes by eight points in the Wild Card race. Heading into the All-Star break, those deficits sat at 10 points.

Although Buffalo ended up sliding back in the playoff race, Botterill has been pleased with his team's play and is hopeful that their stretch of play ahead of the break will continue to carry over.

"You go last week with not playing games and other teams are going to win and they move up in the standings from you and pull away. But then you have to take a step back and realize that we've won three of the last four, and I thought, especially against Vegas, Dallas and Nashville, three strong Western Conference teams, we played fairly well in those games," Botterill said. "We could have come away with six point but didn't, so that's what we have to work on. It's important that with a young group that we continue to develop, but it's important that in crucial situations like we have coming up that we earn points. It's what Ralph and myself are certainly excited about just in the last couple of days is just how the group has come back here. Now we have to go out there and perform that in the game, but guys are re-energized, guys are excited, and I think our execution certainly was a lot better in Day 2 of practice than in Day 1 of practice, but now let's go out there and see what we can do."

It may be a nice look to see the team starting to come together as a group and play better, but the unrest from some fans is starting to grow.

The Sabres currently hold the longest active streak of seasons without a postseason appearance, and with another slip up in the final 33 games, it could see the team extend its streak to nine consecutive seasons without the playoffs.

While the organization does not want to seem too desperate to end the playoff drought and return to the postseason, Botterill insists that the playoffs remain a top goal for the team in the long-term focus.

"I don't think our team is that much different from anywhere else. What team doesn't want to be in the playoffs? What team doesn't strive at the start of the year [to have] a good year?" Botterill said. "It's a situation where I think there's a difference between having that to be your focus every day of playoffs, playoffs, playoffs versus what we've realized with this group, and what Ralph has realized of the group, is when you keep it short-term and you can focus on the short-term goals, we seem to play better and focus better. In our conversations, the goal is to ultimately get to the playoffs. We understand the importance of our young players gaining that experience. It's what we've tried to create in Rochester, tried to create in Cincinnati is players gaining experience in the playoffs and in those situations. It's why we're ecstatic about Dylan Cozens being in the World Junior Championship and playing in the gold medal game. You get that experience of pressure situations. We want our young players to be in there. That's across the board here in our organization, but it's not something that we talk about every day because I think there's more short-term goals that we have to work on that will eventually lead to our long-term success and long-term goals."

The team has seemed to be relatively solid on the back end with a plethora of NHL ready defensemen on the roster. Linus Ullmark has looked much more solid in goal for the Sabres in recent games, and has certainly given Buffalo a chance to stay in the conversation.

Where the Sabres need some help is up front with the lack of depth scoring this season.

While Jack Eichel has proven his worth this season with a Hart Trophy caliber effort through 48 games (28+34), the team behind him has sorely lacked in support. Sam Reinhart is right behind Eichel with 41 points (17:24) in 49 games, followed by rookie Victor Olofsson with 35 points (16+19) in 42 games. However, those three have spent most of the season playing on the same line and driving the offense.

Marcus Johansson is the next closest forward with 21 points (6+15) in just 42 games. Jeff Skinner had slumped for an 11-game goalless drought before returning from an upper-body injury on Tuesday night, scoring just 11 goals and registering 19 points

in 39 games. Other players like Conor Sheary (16 points), Jimmy Vesey (14 points), Kyle Okposo (12 points) and Evan Rodrigues (five points) have all also underwhelmed offensively through the first part of the season.

That has led Botterill to try and find some help on the trade market with bringing in other assets to help find an offensive spark.

Michael Frolik was the first part acquired in-season by Botterill in a Jan. 2 trade with the Calgary Flames in exchange for a fourth round pick in the 2020 NHL Draft acquired from the Montreal Canadiens for defenseman Marco Scandella.

However, Botterill has made it clear that he is still in the hunt for more help offensively as they hope to inch closer to a playoff spot.

"I think we've been very honest from that standpoint," he said. "With some of the injuries to Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson, to some of the development of some of our younger players such as [Henri] Jokiharju or a Lawrence Pilut, that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to add to our group there. I think if we can add more to the offensive mix, it would certainly be good for it. I think also too whenever you can add to our team speed up front, it's another thing we can look at.

"We are excited tonight to get Jeff [Skinner] back in the lineup. That's going to be a huge addition, and now we'll see for the first time that sort of mix of Skinner, Johansson and Frolik. Do they have chemistry as a line there?"

Another piece to the long-term puzzle that started in Buffalo but struggled to stay afloat in the NHL as a 20-year-old and 21-year-old is forward Casey Mittelstadt.

The Sabres assigned Mittelstadt to the Rochester Americans back on Dec. 15 after scoring four goals and registering five assists in just 31 games played. The young center was not firmly grasping the professional game with the Sabres, and it was clear from the start that he needed some time in Rochester to regroup and re-gain his confidence going forward.

Since his assignment to the Amerks, Mittelstadt has started to play more of his game with five goals and five assists for 10 points in 17 games.

Botterill has liked what he has seen from the former first round pick (eighth overall) in the 2017 NHL Draft in his time with the Amerks under head coach Chris Taylor.

"I think Casey has done a great job with integrating himself with the team in Rochester," he said. "We've been very dialed in with our coaches down there. Something I've said that one of my comfort levels of sending Casey to Rochester was his relationship with Chris Taylor, and I think that's blossomed here. I think over the last little bit, he's played in key situations. I think last week in his game in Cleveland, him and Lawrence Pilut hooked up for the game-winning goal in overtime. I believe Casey could play in the National Hockey League right now, but we want him to not just survive, we want him to excel. We have high expectations for Casey, and Casey does for himself too. What we've really liked about his attitude in Rochester is he's been very proactive with what he needs to work on with the coaching staff, with his other teammates, and overall it's been a good experience for him."

A look at which Rochester players could potentially help out in Buffalo during the final months of the season  
The Athletic

By: Joe Yerdon

Jan. 27, 2020

We know the Buffalo Sabres are going to need help at some point in the second half of the season. We also know everyone is thirsty for trades to really change things up.

What we are sure of is that trades don't happen as often as some would like. That means casting an eye towards Rochester when it's time to get some help. The Americans have straightened things out with three straight wins after going winless in seven straight. But if the Sabres are going to go on a run that gets them more thoroughly into the playoff discussion, they'll need a helping hand from Rochester.

Let's take a look at which players are in the best position to possibly pitch in with some goals as well as those who can help prevent them.

Forwards

Andrew Oglevie

The speedy forward from Notre Dame has rebounded well after missing much of last season with two separate concussions that allowed him to play just 28 games. He's up to 13 goals (tied for best on the team) and 23 points in 36 games this season. He's scored three of his goals in the past two games and although he recently missed seven games this season, his latest offensive outburst has him back on the path the organization has hoped for after signing him out of college.

Should the scoring continue and his health keep up, Oglevie will very much be on the Sabres' radar for a recall. He'll have the opportunity to make the NHL debut he's been eager to have. He's a righty shot and naturally a center, although he plays on the right wing more often than not. Oglevie has always reminded me a bit of Conor Sheary. Considering Sheary is a UFA this summer and a player who could be moved at some point before the Feb. 24 trade deadline, that similarity could also lead him to take Sheary's place in the lineup if that happens.

C.J. Smith

We're familiar with Smith already from previous call-ups to Buffalo in recent seasons. We know the kind of player he is for the most part as well. When he was with the Sabres for a stint last season, he averaged a bit over 10 minutes of ice time per game and got some time on the penalty kill.

This season in Rochester, he missed over a month due to a lower-body injury in early November. Since returning in December, he's been getting his game back up to speed. Through 31 games, he has eight goals and 18 points, with eight of those points coming on the power play. We know he can fill the net in the AHL (he had 28 goals and 58 points last season) but he's needed more of an opportunity in the NHL (read: not play the fourth line) to generate offense.

But for Smith (and Oglevie), the AHL affords them the opportunity to get their games going again while still going through the recovery process.

## Jean-Sebastien Dea

We got a brief look at Dea earlier this season when injuries kicked in hard in Buffalo, as he provided depth support in the lineup for one game. In Rochester, he's been the solid producer the organization knew they were getting when they signed him to a two-year contract in the offseason.

Dea leads the Americans in scoring with 30 points in 41 games. He's tied with Oglevie for the team lead in goals at 13. He's a center who plays wing, joining Casey Mittelstadt's line on the right side since his arrival in Rochester. It's a good spot to be in while Mittelstadt gets his confidence and his game back, because they log high-leverage minutes to drive offense.

Dea is versatile and if there's one thing Ralph Krueger has proven to be a big fan of, it's the ability to hop around the lines and not lose a step.

## Rasmus Asplund

His return to Rochester may not be for long, but if he's needed back in Buffalo there are some improvements to be made. He was scratched for three of his last four games with the Sabres before the bye week and he's very comfortable being a key contributor with the Americans. He'll be back in Buffalo and part of the lineup, but it's possible that might not happen until Evan Rodrigues is dealt elsewhere now that Curtis Lazar has established himself with the Sabres.

## Casey Mittelstadt

It's wild that it's been over a month since the 2017 eighth overall pick was sent to Rochester. He's been enjoying his time getting his game together, but the likelihood of him returning to Buffalo this season seems low. It's vital they get Mittelstadt's game to a level where when he gets back to the NHL, it's for good as a point producing playmaker. Getting that time in the AHL is the best place to do it as opposed to playing 11 minutes a game in the NHL in low-leverage situations.

## Scott Wilson

We just recently saw Wilson in Buffalo before the bye week and All-Star break. By now we know what he's capable of. He's a solid depth player who can score on occasion and he gets involved in the play. We might see him back in Buffalo very soon, but we know he's on the short list of guys who are ready to go back to the NHL at a moment's notice.

In a more normal world, he's probably in Buffalo full-time as the 13th forward, but when the NHL team is tight against the cap and spending into LTIR with eight defensemen on the roster, well, some guys go to the AHL because cap life is cruel. Wilson will be back, but he's helpful to the developing players in Rochester and productive (15 points in 25 games) when he hasn't been battling injuries.

## Remi Elie

Unfortunately for Elie, Phil Housley isn't here anymore to give him a very fair crack at showing what he can do at the NHL level. Elie is who he is and he's a pretty productive AHL player. His season has also been hampered by injury, but he has nine points in 18 games. He's the left wing next to Mittelstadt these days and, like with Dea, it's a great spot to be.

He's a hard worker, he gets up on the forecheck, but he also struggles to score at the NHL level (seven goals in 106 career games). If there's a need or a reason to replace a player like Zemgus Girgensons in the lineup, then Elie's chance to get back to Buffalo would be there. If offense is needed, however, Elie's best chance to provide that remains in Rochester.

## Defense

### John Gilmour

Gilmour was the darling coming out of training camp, impressing fans and opponents with his speed and knack for driving offense. Things got a bit more difficult when the regular season started. He wound up not seeing a lot of action and played in four games, one of which came at forward. He has 12 points in 26 games in Rochester and he's leaned into his desire to push things offensively, which sometimes makes life defensively a bit trying as he's a team worst minus-10 in plus-minus (I know, I know, it's a bad stat – shush).

All that said, if injuries pop up in Buffalo and trades are (finally) made to clear up the logjam on the blue line, he could be the next man up depending on who stays and who goes. That said, with Lawrence Pilut now in Buffalo, his opening to sneak back into the Sabres' lineup may be closed.

### Casey Nelson

Nelson is the most experienced of eligible defensemen who could get the call if things are loosened up in Buffalo, but the right side is still stacked. Nelson has had a good season as a steady defenseman for the Americans with 11 points in 39 games. He does whatever he's asked to do and he's a loyal soldier in that respect. We know he can hold his own a bit in the NHL (52 percent CorsiFor last season – via NaturalStatTrick.com) and that gives some comfort to management should it come down to making a decision on who to recall. But the most likely scenario is he'll be key in trying to help the Americans go far in the Calder Cup playoffs.

### William Borgen

The thing about Borgen that makes the possibility we'll see him this season is he provides the muscle and nastiness that's not currently part of the defensive crew. There are puck movers, there are shooters, there are guys that enjoy laying the body – but there's not someone who feeds off laying the big hit the way Borgen does. He leads the Americans in penalty minutes because he's willing to engage physically via fists. We know that part of the game has gone by the wayside, but it's not all Borgen is capable of doing. He can handle himself well in the defensive zone and clear the front of the net. If nothing else, he'd make for a good call-up to provide a change of pace, but you can't stunt his development (read: call him up and not play him) to do it.

## Goalies

### Jonas Johansson

To say Johansson's AHL All-Star season is a surprise would be downplaying it. His numbers in the organization the first couple seasons weren't stellar either in Rochester or Cincinnati, but he's been a very different player the past two seasons, especially this year. He has a .925 save percentage and has won 13 of 20 games he's played in and seized the starting role with the Americans. For a bit it was believed he was the guy keeping the seat warm until Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen was ready to join

Rochester, but now Johansson has supplanted Andrew Hammond as the guy next in line for a recall to Buffalo if injury occurs or Carter Hutton can't snap out of his lengthy funk. If Johansson doesn't get to make his NHL debut at some point this season, it would be stunning.

### Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen

There's a plan in place for how to get Luukkonen accustomed to play both as a pro and as a guy coming off double-hip surgery. His most recent recall to Rochester was scheduled even though it happened to come at a time when the Americans were in the middle of a losing streak in which both Johansson and Hammond were struggling. That said, Luukkonen was an All-Star in the ECHL this season and his trajectory is very much on the way up. It's very possible we see him get a game in the NHL this season, but he might also be the guy to help the Americans in the Calder Cup playoffs as well.

Wheeler's 2020 NHL prospect pool rankings: No. 16 Buffalo Sabres  
The Athletic  
By: Scott Wheeler  
Jan. 28, 2020

This is an interesting moment in the course of the series because the Sabres represent a shift into a new class of prospect pool. There are a few clear divisions throughout the ranking, where one cluster of teams breaks apart from another. For me, it broke down into five tiers of prospect pools. They are: 1-5, 6-16, 17-22, 23-26 and 27-31.

You'll notice that one of those groups (this new one we're beginning today) is not like the others. There are four tiers there with just handful of teams and another that runs 11 organizations deep.

So while it may look like the Sabres are in the bottom half of the league as a prospect pool, I don't view it that way. They're much closer to a few teams in the top 10 than they are to any of the teams in the bottom 10.

The problem the Sabres face with their prospect pool relative to the teams ahead of them is a problem depth, not of the strength of their top prospect. Most of the teams we'll see in the days that follow boast pools that run upwards of 20 prospects deep. Buffalo's doesn't.

#### 1. Dylan Cozens, C, 18 (Lethbridge Hurricanes)

One of the interesting internal debates I've had with myself in the last couple of month centres around hockey's top prospect. When I put together my annual top 50 drafted prospects rankings every summer, the top few players are easily identified. Last summer, Jack Hughes, Kaapo Kakko, Cale Makar and Quinn Hughes were in a stratosphere of their own. Spoiler alert: Alexis Lafreniere is going to be No. 1 when I do it all over again in July. But what happens when those players graduate? Then things get murky. If I were to put together a midseason list (which I'm not, sorry!), there's more than half a dozen players I'd probably consider for the top of the ranking. Coincidentally, none of those players belonged to teams 31-17. Enter Cozens, who would be in that conversation.

My fourth-ranked prospect ahead of the 2019 draft, Cozens has turned a shortened summer due to injury into an excellent first half, with his 19th birthday around the corner in February. He's a rare blend of size, speed, hands, playmaking ability and finishing touch. He can fly north-south, he's always going to be a major factor as a forechecker and backchecker and because his decision-making can keep up with his feet, he's extremely dangerous off the rush. If I have one concern with his toolkit, it's that his shot isn't a major threat. I've been particularly impressed by the development of his creativity this season. Cozens has begun to make more plays below the goal line and off the cycle both by surprising defenders with a slick pass through their feet or with a quick cut through traffic.

He was in good spirits throughout the world juniors — and looked confident on the ice.

"It was disappointing getting hurt at development camp and having to miss a lot of my summer training. The big thing my injury helped me with was just my lower body strength. I wasn't really able to work on my upper body so it was just all focussed on explosiveness and power down low and I think it helped a lot. You've got to take the positives out of the negatives and I think I did," Cozens said.

Keep an eye on his Hurricanes because they currently are fifth in the 22-team WHL and this could be his last year in the league.

"I want to win. I think we have a team that can go all the way so my goal is to win the whole league and then hopefully go to the Memorial Cup and win there. We're not looking at anything less than that," Cozens said.

## 2. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, G, 20 (Cincinnati Cyclones/Rochester Americans)

Luukkonen has put together a good first year of pro for a 20-year-old. He's huge, even relative to other goalies who are 6-foot-4, with broad shoulders and a bulky build. That can work against some goalies, who tend to be leaner these days, but he moves well in his net. He makes most saves along the ice and does a good job getting into his butterfly or pokechecking to avoid getting beat five-hole. He's also got solid rebound control, pushing low hard shots to the corners and swallowing most medium danger shots up high. If I were to complain about one area of his game, it would probably be his reflexes on high danger opportunities in the slot. He can freeze when he's challenged by NHL-level shooters.

## 3. Erik Portillo, G, 19 (Dubuque Fighting Saints)

You can count on one hand the number of NHL teams that have two legitimate goalie prospects. You can also count on one hand the number of goalies prospects I'd be willing to rank this high in a system. I tend to be cautious with my goalie projections, in part because I haven't played the position but also because of the volatility of the position. But when a goalie is 6-foot-6, he's not slow in the net and he's got a track record of standout numbers, it's hard to ignore him. He also doesn't play an overly aggressive style, which means he doesn't box himself into having to make too many scramble saves. He's a calm, deep-in-his-net goalie who has worked to condense how active he is in the crease (something that every goalie his size needs to work on). When he's on, he can steal games. And when he's not on, he rarely has a stinker (he has given up more than four goals just once this season). I've seen him let in some soft goals but that's not uncommon for a young goalie with his size (they often look awkward technically at times). Between Portillo and Luukkonen, I wouldn't be surprised if the Sabres have their future starter.

## 4. Rasmus Asplund, C, 22 (Rochester Americans)

Asplund is a bit of a throwback in that he's the kind of player every team used to prefer over the slick, come-and-go playmakers. He's the hard-working, diligent, puck-pressure forward who finishes his checks, endears himself to coaches and plays fast. He's not a pest type, but he's always on the puck, working to win it back and making smart, low-risk plays. That isn't to say there's no talent there, or that he can't make plays through seams. His passing is actually his strength offensively, he does a good job getting the puck to teammates in dangerous areas. But he's not a dynamic offensive threat, nor is his shot particularly dangerous. He's the kind of player who has always had the tools to drive a third line or complement a second line. And though he probably projects closer to that third line role than the second line one, I like his versatility. He goes to the quote-unquote dirty areas (a term I usually hate but fits the bill).

## 5. Ryan Johnson, LHD, 18 (University of Minnesota)

Johnson was definitely a bit of a reach for my liking at the end of the first round and he hasn't followed it up all that well either. But he has also been asked, on a team filled with lefties, to play his off-side, on a second pairing, as a true freshman. It's not hard to understand why the Sabres liked him. His skating grades at A, if not A-plus, not only forwards as he's escaping pressure to make a pass but backwards in transition as he gaps and side-to-side on light, fluid crossovers and sidesteps. Though he's not the type to hang onto the puck and weave through the neutral zone or attack behind the goal line as a carrier, he can make

plays when he has to. I'm not entirely sure what he might look like in the NHL because I don't think there's much power play upside to his game but I do think he has more to offer and will blossom into a dangerous college player over time. He'll have to rely on his mobility to continue to elevate as a defender, driving possession by closing on players quick and moving the puck in transition.

#### 6. Arttu Ruotsalainen, C/LW , 22 (Ilves)

Ruotsalainen could end up being one of those players that makes the Sabres scouting department look really good. And if he doesn't work out, there was little-to-no risk in the decision to sign him in the first place. He has become one of Liiga's most consistently-dangerous players this season. After missing more than a month with an upper-body injury, he has also played the best hockey of his career since returning, with 11 points in his last seven games. The big concern — and the reason he went undrafted in the first place — has always been his size (he's 5-foot-8). But he just keeps producing and he's stronger on his feet than he looks, which is enough to make him intriguing as a potential middle-six creator at the next level. On the year, his 1.03 points per game now leads all under-23 Liiga players, just ahead of Jesse Puljujarvi (0.97).

Note: He's No. 22 in green in the clips below. All of these plays are also from that recent stretch I talked about, rather than hand-picked across his career.

His shot is lethal when he has the time and space to lean into it, which you don't often see in players his size (another indication of that aforementioned strength):

He's also got a nice touch with the puck and a knack for making plays under pressure.

And then there's a skill level that you can't teach ...

His skating does need some work, though. He's quick from a standstill but his top speed is average. That's because his feet splay backwards, rather than out and through his stride, a pretty ineffective mechanic. Watch for it here:

(Smart play defensively there with his stick, too.)

There will also be questions when (or if) he comes over to play in North America as to his position. He still plays centre in Liiga but I wouldn't be surprised in the Sabres view him as a winger.

#### 7. Linus Weissbach, LW / RW , 21 (University of Wisconsin)

Like Ruotsalainen, Weissbach is a 5-foot-8 forward who has always produced but still faces the same, tired questions of size. He dominated SuperElit and then the USHL and now he's in his third year as a standout in college, where he leads the Badgers in assists. His skating is his biggest asset. He can push tempo with the puck, win races without it, dart in and out of traffic, change directions and make a lot of small area plays to his teammates. He lacks the finishing ability of Ruotsalainen but he's more evasive. There's a boom or bust element to his game, if only because of his size and the fact that's he's not much of a scorer, which could limit the kind of role he can play at the pro level.

#### 8. Mattias Samuelsson, LHD, 19 (Western Michigan University)

Samuelsson, like Johnson, is a player I felt the Sabres reached on. I also expected more out of him at the world juniors, too. But as with Johnson, it's not hard to understand why they did. He's huge, he's got a meanness and physicality to his game that is still coveted — even if it's less valuable than it used to be — and he's an adequate skater. All of those things help him cover a lot of ice and force opposing forwards to get rid of pucks instead of trying to go through him. But he also seems stilted when he has the puck and his ability to make plays beyond powering shots through traffic isn't really there. He's not bad with the puck, at least not enough to say "this kid doesn't have the skill to make it" but I do believe he's going to struggle to execute on breakouts and entries once pace of play picks up at the pro level. He may become a fine shutdown player who can kill penalties and give a group of six defencemen a bit of a different element, but I wouldn't expect him to drive possession and he'll probably need a partner he can defer to with short passes.

#### 9. Oskari Laaksonen, RHD, 20 (Ilves)

Laaksonen has made waves in the last couple of years, following up some strong showings with Finland at the under-20 level with a breakout year as a 19-year-old in Liiga. Though he lacks weight on his 6-foot-2 frame (which can show up in man-on-man battles despite a willingness to engage physically), Laaksonen has a lot of interesting qualities. Chief among them is an ability to both identify and execute east-west plays that most defencemen can't:

And while he doesn't have a hard wrist shot, he can blast his slap shot thanks to good technique and follow-through, as well as strong footwork:

Even when the wrist shot isn't falling, he's also not afraid to activate into open space and use it. Watch here the way he pushes through the neutral zone to make himself available for the pass (I spy with my little eye a Ruotsalainen too):

His challenge is that defensively he's just fine — and he needs to bulk up to turn a smooth stride into a powerful one, or hold his own on smaller ice in a more physical style of game. I think there's enough offence in his game to progress to the NHL if the rest can catch up.

#### 10. Matej Pekar, C/LW, 19 (Sudbury Wolves)

For a long time, I thought Pekar projected relatively safely as a potential third-line forward. He can be a pain in the ass, he's got decent speed, he plays a north-south, net-driven style and though he's not a scorer or a dynamic playmaker he can do a little bit of both — maybe enough to get by at the next level in time. But when he's not engaged he can get lost in games. He was one of the bigger disappointments of the world juniors, a tournament he began on the top line and he only began to produce at the level you'd expect of him in the OHL recently, after a trade from Barrie to Sudbury. So my positive take on him has definitely begun to sour a little.

#### 11. Marcus Davidsson, C, 21 (Växjö Lakers HC)

After two impressive seasons relative to his age and league with Djurgårdens, Davidsson hasn't had the same impact with Växjö this year. He has always been a relied upon defensive player because he anticipates the play well, he tracks the puck aggressively, he's strong on his feet and he's not going to burn his team with a turnover in a bad area of the ice. There's some offence to his game, too, though. He's not the fastest player on the ice but he plays quickly, he's got decent top speed and if — or when — he decides to give Rochester a try I suspect he'll quickly become a contributor who has depth upside at the NHL level. He's not

going to be a point producer if he ends up with the Sabres in the next couple of years but I could see him as one piece of a good fourth line.

#### 12. Casey Fitzgerald, RHD, 22 (Rochester Americans)

After a good — though not great — college career, Fitzgerald began his pro career with a lower-body injury. He's having a decent year, all things considered. Fitzgerald's four-way skating ability is always going to make him a fine player at just about any level. His defensive game, which includes a physical element, is also good for a 5-foot-11 defender. Though his offensive game never really took the steps forward some expected after a standout freshman and sophomore year, part of that was also driven by the tougher minutes he was asked to play after he was named BC's captain. I still don't think he's skilled enough to be a top four guy but I could definitely imagine him playing a modern, smooth role as a No. 5-7 at some point in the next couple of years.

#### 13. Jacob Bryson, LHD, 22 (Rochester Americans)

Bryson isn't what you might expect out of a 5-foot-9 defenceman. It's easy to look at his size from afar and think "he's probably dynamic offensively" but "he probably struggles defensively." The reverse is actually true. Bryson has shown yet again in the AHL this year that he can defend at a high level, particularly off the rush (though he's good with his stick along the boards too). He's not going to take over a game offensively, though, or pull you out of your seat with his shot or his hands. He is, however, a smooth skater who can pull away from pressure with his feet, carry it through the neutral zone, walk the blue line laterally or stretch the ice with a pass.

#### 14. Lukas Rousek, RW/LW, 20 (HC Sparta Praha)

Rousek has progressed nicely over the last couple of years, going from a dominant junior player who didn't belong to a dangerous offensive threat in the Czech Republic second division and now to the top tier, where he has continued to prove he can contribute against pros. He's a slight 5-foot-11 winger who slows the game down to make his plays, can execute in transition and does a good job jumping around pressure while hanging onto the puck. He can fade in and out of shifts, though, and I question whether he's talented enough to be more than a PP2 guy. He also hasn't been a particularly dominant player on the international circuit, which gives me pause. He's putting up good numbers in Extraliga for his age but I'd like to see him in North America before I draw any hard conclusions on his upside.

#### 15. Brett Murray, LW, 21 (Rochester Americans)

Murray has followed a weird progression, going from dominant CCHL forward at 17 to good USHL player and bad college player at 18, ineffective college player at 19, a return to predictable dominance in the USHL last year during a gap year move to Miami (one he never made) and he's now, against my better judgment, having a decent rookie season in the AHL. Some of the concerns with his game that played out in college remain evident, though. While he has good touch with the puck for a 6-foot-4 winger, which he was able to show off against weaker competition, he doesn't skate well enough to be able to get to the net and make those plays when the pace is ratcheted up. There may be a fourth-line player in there somewhere but I have my doubts.

#### 16. Aaron Huglen, RW, 18 (Fargo Force)

After losing his summer to a back injury, Huglen has yet to play a game for the Force this season. He gets a mention because of his skill level, even if there are some lingering unknowns at this point. He was a terror on the Minnesota high school circuit last season, showing off A-level hands and creativity with the puck. Before that, he also did this:

### The Tiers

Each of my prospect pool rankings will be broken down into team-specific tiers in order to give you a better sense of the talent proximity from one player to the next (a gap which is sometimes minute and in other cases quite pronounced).

If the Sabres' prospect tiers highlight anything, it's the drop-off after Cozens. As good as Luukkonen and Portillo are, goalies are extremely hard to project and there's major risk there. After that, you've got a couple of little forwards with major skill, a couple of big forwards that lack it and low-upside players like Samuelsson and Asplund who look like they'll be NHLers but likely won't play high in a lineup. A lost season for Huglen doesn't help, either.

Prospect Rasmus Asplund could return to Sabres soon  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Jan. 26, 2020

As expected, the Sabres recalled defenseman Lawrence Pilut from the Rochester Americans on Sunday after the NHL All-Star break ended.

But what about forward Rasmus Asplund, who was sent to the Amerks with Pilut and winger Scott Wilson when the Sabres started their bye last week?

Coach Ralph Krueger said winger Jeff Skinner's status for Tuesday's game against the Ottawa Senators and whether the Sabres use seven defensemen will determine if the Sabres summon Asplund.

Skinner practiced Sunday inside LECOM Harborcenter, his first session since suffering an upper-body injury Dec. 27. The veteran has missed the last 10 games.

Krueger sounded optimistic Skinner can play Tuesday.

Eleven Sabres forwards skated Sunday. Center Jack Eichel missed the practice after playing in Saturday's NHL All-Star Game in St. Louis.

Asplund, an NHL regular for nearly two months, played three times with the Amerks during the NHL break.

"Rasmus deserves a little bit of a break right now, too," Krueger said. "He went down, played some games and hasn't had a break. He's on the edge of coming back here depending on our needs, but at the moment, we'll look at this group again tomorrow and make a call probably on the game day whether we add to the roster or not."

Meanwhile, Pilut was scheduled to play in Monday's AHL All-Star Classic in Ontario, Calif., before the league announced he was "unavailable" for the game.

Pilut played one game with the Amerks last week, scoring the overtime winner in Wednesday's 3-2 road victory over the Cleveland Monsters, which ended their seven-game losing streak.

The Amerks scratched him for their games on Friday and Saturday.

Pilut has compiled zero points in six games with the Sabres this season. He has scored six goals and 22 points in 30 contests with the Amerks.

Sabres recall Lawrence Pilut from Amerks after break ends  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
*Jan. 26, 2020*

The Sabres recalled defenseman Lawrence Pilut from the Rochester Americans this morning.

Pilut, 24, will likely practice with the Sabres this afternoon at LECOM Harborcenter, when they resume their season following their bye and the NHL All-Star break.

The Sabres assigned the Swede to the Amerks when their break began last week.

The Swede was scheduled to play in Monday's AHL All-Star Classic in Ontario, Calif., before the league announced he was "unavailable" for the game.

Pilut played one game with the Amerks last week, scoring the overtime winner in a 3-2 road victory over the Cleveland Monsters, which ended their seven-game losing streak.

The Amerks scratched him for their games on Friday and Saturday.

Pilut has compiled zero points in six games with the Sabres this season. He has scored six goals and 22 points in 30 contests with the Amerks.

Dea's short-handed goal is winner for Amerks  
Buffalo News  
By: Staff Report  
Jan. 26, 2020

Jean-Sebastien Dea's short-handed goal in the third period turned out to be the winner for the Rochester Americans in a 3-2 American Hockey League victory over the Syracuse Crunch at the Upstate Medical University Arena in Syracuse.

It was the third win in a row for the Amerks following a seven-game losing streak.

Goals by Eric Cornel, his eighth, in the first period and Andrew Ogilvie, his 13th, in the second gave Rochester a 2-0 lead. Daniel Martel scored for the Crunch to cut the deficit to 2-1 with 5:01 left in the second.

Dea scored unassisted with 10 seconds left on a tripping minor to Jacob Bryson to make it 3-1.

Cal Foote made it 3-2 with a power-play goal for the Crunch with 1:42 left. Foote, who assisted on the first Syracuse goal, was the game's first star.

Rochester goalie Andrew Hammond, who made 35 saves, was the second star. Third star was Taylor Raddysh, who assisted on Foote's goal.

Spencer Martin of the Crunch had 36 saves in the free-wheeling game which saw two rough penalties called against each side and one boarding penalty to each.

With the win and Utica's loss at Belleville, the Amerks (24-13-2-4 for 54 points) moved into a tie with the Comets (25-17-2-2) for second place in the North Division of the AHL. Belleville (27-14-3-1) leads the division with 59 points.

Rochester will be off for the AHL All-Star break until a home game against Syracuse on Friday night at the Blue Cross Arena. The Amerks will then travel to Binghamton for a game on Saturday night.

Amerks hold off Syracuse for 3rd straight win  
C&C Worldwide  
By: Staff Report  
Jan. 26, 2020

The Rochester Americans (24-13-2-4) scored once during each period before holding off the Syracuse Crunch (20-19-3-3) for a nail-biting 3-2 victory Saturday night at Upstate Medical University Arena.

The contest served as the front-end of a home-and-home series between the two teams that concludes on Friday, Jan. 31 after the annual AHL All-Star break. Additionally, it was the fifth meeting between the two clubs this season and all five have been one-goal outcomes.

The win gives Rochester three in a row going into the break and keeps them within four points of first place in the AHL's North Division standings while holding two games in hand against the top-seeded Belleville Senators.

Forward Eric Cornel bagged his eighth of the season late in the first period while Andrew Oglevie and Jean-Sebastien Dea each scored their 13th goals of the slate during the second and third stanzas, respectively. With his goal, Dea (13+17) becomes the first Amerk skater this season to reach the 30-point mark. Goaltender Andrew Hammond entered the game winless in his last eight appearances but made a season-high 35 saves to improve to 11-9-2. The victory was the 100th of his professional career.

Cal Foote had a goal to go with an assist for the Crunch and Danick Martel rounded out the scoring as he added his 14th of the season. Netminder Spencer Martin (7-11-3) stopped 36 of the 39 shots he faced but suffered the loss.

Holding a two-goal lead with nearly four minutes left in the contest, it appeared the Amerks were on their way to making it a 4-1 advantage as C.J. Smith left a pass for Rasmus Asplund just outside the Crunch blueline. With Martin on the bench for the extra attacker, a Syracuse skater dove at the last second, forcing Asplund to shoot high and the puck missed the vacant net.

Rochester then was whistled for a pair of penalties 67 seconds apart and the Crunch had a 6-on-3 advantage for the final 2:03 of regulation. Mathieu Joseph and Foote exchanged passes atop the point before Foote snapped a shot past the glove of Hammond that trimmed the score to 3-2 with 1:42 to play.

The Amerks still had to kill off the second infraction before holding on for the victory and were able to do so, giving them three straight after going winless in the previous seven prior to this week.

The scoring started late in the first period as the matchup was scoreless in the final two minutes of the stanza. With the face-off to the right of Martin, Sean Malone won the draw and tied up the Crunch center at the dot. As the puck sat amid the battle for possession, Cornel scooped it up and fired it into the cage for his eighth of the campaign with 1:38 to go in the opening frame.

After taking the 1-0 lead into the dressing room, the Amerks quickly doubled their advantage as Oglevie skated with the puck through the neutral zone and inside the Syracuse blueline. While Asplund broke towards the left pad of Martin, Oglevie attempted to send a pass to the Swedish forward but the puck glanced off the inside skate of the goaltender to give Rochester a 2-0 cushion 61 seconds into the frame. It was Oglevie's third goal in two games after the second-year pro scored twice last night against Laval.

The Crunch got on the board at the 14:59 mark of the second period but Dea restored the two-goal lead midway through the final frame while on the penalty kill. While the Amerks were serving a tripping penalty, Will Borgen cleared the puck the length of the ice and in-behind Martin. The Syracuse goaltender attempted to play the puck only to have it stolen away by Dea, who wrapped around the cage for his 13th of the campaign.

Syracuse scored late in regulation but Rochester held on for the 3-2 victory.

The Amerks return from the All-Star break on Friday, Jan. 31 with another go-around against the Crunch as the home-and-home series shifts to The Blue Cross Arena in Rochester. Game time is slated for a 7:05 pm.

## Syracuse Crunch stumbles against Rochester

Syracuse.com

By: Staff Report

Jan. 25, 2020

The Syracuse Crunch was downed by the Rochester Americans, 3-2, Saturday at the Upstate Medical University Arena.

The loss snaps a four-game points streak and moves the team to 20-19-3-3 on the season and 1-2-2-0 in the 12-game season series against the Amerks.

Goaltender Spencer Martin stopped 36-of-39 shots in net for the Crunch, while Andrew Hammond recorded the win with 35 saves between the pipes for the Amerks. Syracuse converted on 1-of-4 power play opportunities and went a perfect 2-for-2 on the penalty kill.

Rochester opened scoring with 1:38 remaining in the first period. After a tie up following a left circle faceoff, Eric Cornel found the puck and fired in a wrister. Sean Malone earned the assist.

The Amerks doubled their lead 1:01 into the second stanza. Andrew Oglevie threw a cross-zone pass from along the left-wing boards that ricocheted off a skate and in.

The Crunch responded and stole one back with 5:01 remaining in the second period. Cal Foote passed down to Alex Barre-Boulet positioned at the post. He quickly dished it over for Danick Martel to chip in backdoor.

The Amerks regained their two-goal lead shorthanded after capitalizing on a mishandled puck 8:39 into the third period. Jean-Sebastien Dea stole the puck from Martin when he went behind the net to play it and wrapped around to tuck it across the goal line.

Syracuse started a late comeback with 1:42 remaining in the game when Foote sent home a shot from the high slot while on the power play, but the team couldn't find the equalizer.

The Crunch is back in action on Friday when they travel to Rochester to rematch the Amerks.

Slumps end for Oglevie, Malone as Amerks defeat Laval  
Pickin' Splinters  
By: Kevin Oklobzija  
Jan. 24, 2020

The Rochester Americans billed Friday as Seneca Niagara Legends Night, with Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly signing autographs for fans before the game.

The Amerks players themselves apparently decided to proclaim it something else. Like end-a-slump night.

Andrew Oglevie and Sean Malone finally found the net again as the Amerks, scuffling for better than two weeks, defeated the Laval Titan 5-2.

Losers of seven straight before a 3-2 overtime victory in Cleveland on Wednesday, the Amerks continued their return to a more passionate style of play by dispatching of Laval in convincing fashion.

Oglevie scored twice, his first goals since Dec. 11, Malone was credited with his first since Jan. 3, and goalie Jonas Johansson made key stops when necessary as the Amerks improved to 23-13-2-4.

"We're at our best when we have an identity, and it feels good to get back to playing the way we can," Malone said.

Before any goals were scored, Johansson made maybe his best save of the game just 6:36 after the opening faceoff. Charles Hudon, he of 19 goals this season and 119 NHL games in his career, was alone in the slot and fired for the top corner but Johansson snared the shot with his glove.

"The goal for a goalie is to come up with a save when your team needs one," said Johansson, who will be the Amerks lone playing representative in the AHL All-Star Classic Sunday and Monday in Ontario, Calif.

Oglevie then put the Amerks ahead at 12:32 with his 11th goal, redirecting John Gilmour's thigh-high wrist shot past goalie Keith Kinkaid. The deflection ended up being a quick one-hopper that even All-Star shortstop Francisco Lindor would have had a difficult time grabbing.

The second-year winger had gone 10 games without a goal, and along the way in that slump were another seven games missed because of injury.

So to say he was elated when the goal light went on would be a bit of an understatement.

"I was pretty fired up scoring that one," said Oglevie, whose empty net goal with 1:25 to play clinched the victory.

Then at 16:21, Malone was credited with his eighth goal, but he had little to do with the puck actually entering the net.

He dumped the puck in from the neutral zone and turned to head to the bench for a line change.

At the same time, Kinkaid was gaining control of the puck and trying to fire an outlet pass from just above his crease.

He instead hit his own defenseman, Josh Brook, who was maybe 12 feet away, and the puck caromed right back into the net.

Malone had no idea why the 6,039 began cheering wildly.

"I had no idea it went in," the third-year centerman said. "I think it all evens out eventually. Good karma."

Like Oglevie, Malone hadn't found the net on a regular basis in ages. He went eight games without a goal and had scored just once in his past 16 games.

C.J. Smith and Scott Wilson also scored for the Amerks, who play at Syracuse Saturday night.

Notes: Defenseman Lawrence Pilut, who scored the overtime goal in Cleveland on Wednesday, is not hurt but did not play. Taylor didn't provide a precise explanation of why, other than saying they have a lot of defensemen. . . . Captain Kevin Porter (lower body) and winger Remi Elie (lower body) also couldn't play, and won't on Saturday at Syracuse, either.

Amerk fans flock to see Jim Kelly  
Pickin' Splinters  
By: Kevin Oklobzija  
*Jan. 24, 2020*

Jim Kelly signed autographs at the Rochester Americans game on Friday night.

And signed. And signed.

Kelly hasn't taken a snap for the Buffalo Bills since 1996, but the Hall of Fame quarterback remains one of Western New York's most popular athletes.

He appeared at the Amerks game as the first of two Seneca Niagara Legends Night. The second is next Friday when former Amerks star Domenic Pittis is inducted into the Amerks Hall of Fame.

The line of Kelly autograph seekers stretched from the landing in the atrium, where he signed, through the concourse along the river side of Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial and continued all the way to the Caraglio's pizza stand in the southeast corner of the building.

And while he has signed tens of thousands of autographs since he first arrived in Buffalo to play for the Bills in 1986, he understands how much one signature can mean to a young fan.

"I remember my first autograph: L.C. Greenwood (the menacing defensive end from the 1970s and a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers All-Time team)," Kelly said. "I know how I was as a little boy when I got that."

Kelly was given an Amerks sweater (No. 12, of course), which he wore while signing. He said he has been a hockey fan since his childhood days in East Brady, Pa.

"I love the Sabres, I have Sabres season tickets," he said. "I grew up a Pittsburgh Penguins fan and I still am a Penguins fan — unless they're playing the Sabres."

His one wish for the Bills: "I love what I see but I would like to see them draft a nice, tall wide receiver . . . like Andre Reed," he said.

Amerks finally get back-to-back wins, beat Laval  
Buffalo News  
By: Staff Report  
Jan. 24, 2020

The Rochester Americans earned back-to-back wins for the first time since Dec. 13-14 with a 5-2 victory over Laval at the Blue Cross Arena on Friday night.

Andrew Oglevie scored twice to lead Rochester (22-13-2-4). Sean Malone, C.J. Smith and Scott Wilson had the Amerks' remaining goals.

Laval's goals came from Gustav Olofsson and Kevin Lynch. Rochester outshot Laval, 35-33.

Jonas Johansson made 31 saves in net for Rochester. His counterpart, Keith Kinkaid, had 30 saves for the Rocket.

Rochester opened on a fast note, scoring its first goal 12 minutes into the game on Oglevie's goal.

He finished off a shot from Zach Redmond on a power play.

Four minutes later, Rochester got lucky as an errant puck was deflected by a Laval defenseman into the visitors' net. Malone was credited with the goal after he got the puck into the Rocket's zone.

The game remained 2-0 until six minutes left in the second period when Smith found the back of the net.

Laval pulled within two goals on Olofsson's wrist shot from Johansson's right side, but that was as close as the Rocket would get.

Wilson's goal added insurance midway through the third period and made it 4-1. Laval scored once more with just over two minutes to spare but Oglevie scored on an empty net to ice the game.

Rochester still sits in third place in the AHL's North Division behind Utica and Belleville.

The Amerks will travel to Syracuse for a 7 p.m. game tonight.

Former Bills quarterback and NFL Hall of Famer Jim Kelly was in attendance as the Amerks' hosted "Seneca Legends Night."

As Jonas Johansson heads to AHL All-Star Game, here's where Sabres stand in goalie depth  
Buffalo News  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Jan. 25, 2020

Hours before Americans goalie Jonas Johansson earned his ninth consecutive victory earlier this month, coach Chris Taylor called the Swede into his office and relayed some news.

Taylor told Johansson that he had been selected to represent the North Division in the American Hockey League All-Star Classic in Ontario, Calif.

"I absolutely had not thought of it," Johansson, 24, said of being named an all-star.

At that point on Jan. 3, the Buffalo Sabres prospect had compiled a sterling 10-2-2 record and ranked second in the AHL in goals-against average and save percentage.

Still, Taylor said Johansson "was very surprised."

"It was one of those humbling moments to give a player that he acted so surprised and couldn't believe it," Taylor said of informing Johansson of his honor. "It just tells you what type of person he is and how grounded he is."

When the season started, Johansson had played just 19 AHL games and was coming off knee surgery that required four months of rehabilitation.

The 6-foot-5, 219-pound Johansson spent most of his first two seasons in North America in the ECHL, only occasionally earning recalls to the Amerks. Last February, a torn meniscus ended his strong campaign with the Cincinnati Cyclones.

So Johansson, given his minimal experience and recent injury history, might rank as the unlikeliest of the 48 AHL All-Stars for Sunday's game.

"He fought for his career, and that's what I like," said Seamus Kotyk, the Sabres' goaltending development coach. "He laid it out on the line. . . . and he didn't quit."

Johansson, a third-round pick in 2014, 61st overall, has quietly developed into one of the AHL's top netminders. He said this season has been the "most fun hockey of my career so far."

Not only has Johansson morphed into a notable prospect, he and veteran Andrew Hammond, who has slumped recently, have formed a strong partnership.

"I really like it here," Johansson said. "I like the team and my teammates and my colleague, Hammy. It's just been really, really fun so far."

Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton acknowledged Johansson's exploits — he finally lost a game Jan. 8, ending a streak that started Oct. 30 — have surprised him "a little bit."

"We weren't sure he would be ready to perform to the same level he has this soon this season," he said. "We thought it might take him until Christmas to get comfortable, keep his confidence. But he came to training camp in unbelievable shape, he was ready."

"This kid does everything the right way, and he does everything we ask him to. So it's really gratifying to see him have so much success."

Sexton and Taylor have spoken about how much the organization values Johansson as a prospect. But Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, the Ontario Hockey League's MVP and top goalie last season, receives most of the attention from outsiders.

Johansson hasn't been labeled the Sabres' goalie of the future.

"People around maybe had lower expectations, and that probably helped me . . . to be a little underdog, I guess," said Johansson, who has compiled a 12-3-3 mark with a 2.21 goals-against average, a .924 save percentage and two shutouts in 19 games this season. "It's a little easier to play. I just try to not think about the expectations."

Johansson said he has felt like an underdog most of his career. He spent most of 2016-17, his last season in Sweden, playing for Almtuna IS, a second-division team. He played 54 ECHL games before graduating to the AHL.

Kotyk said consistency had been Johansson's "biggest issue."

"He plays a few good games and then he's off for a couple, and it felt like this year the consistency got stronger," he said. "The gaps between a poor goal against or a poor game were smaller. He was regrouping."

"I like to say that he was eliminating those thoughts from his mind that were maybe there in the past. He just looked strong, he looked confident. There was a purpose, whether it was practice or a game, it was like he was set out to do something."

"That's really what I noticed is right out of the gate the consistency was there, game in, game out."

Johansson said he has tried to revamp his approach this season by blocking out any outside noise.

"I have no focus at all about what people think or expect," he said. "I just try to . . . focus on myself. I feel like I'm finding my way there to have the right mindset."

Johansson said he had no idea how much he would play this season.

"I just try to put everything like that aside and just be happy for every game I get," he said. "So I don't know if I exceeded expectations, really. I'm just really happy with how the season has gone so far."

## Updating UPL

Seamus Kotyk said Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen's short recall to the Amerks — the Finnish rookie played two games, going 0-1-1 — "was a good litmus test."

"Coming up midyear ... the league always takes a step, and it was noticeable," he said of the level of play. "The details, the habits, the foundational aspects of his game were just a step behind or a little bit off in practice.

"But that's good, because it's an eye-opener as to how do we want to restructure when we're working with him when he's with Cincinnati."

Luukkonen, 20, posted a 3.38 goals-against average and a .887 save percentage during his brief stint.

"Overall, we're happy, we're satisfied," Kotyk said. "It was a great test to see where he's at. I'm sure there'll be more opportunities moving forward."

Randy Sexton has said the Sabres want Luukkonen, an ECHL All-Star with Cincinnati, to play more AHL games later this season.

### Hammond's status

Five weeks ago, Andrew Hammond, 31, was perhaps the AHL's hottest goalie. But since recording his fourth shutout in eight outings on Dec. 14, the veteran has lost seven consecutive starts.

Throughout his recent slump, Hammond said he has maintained the same approach he had earlier this season.

"I'm a person that tries staying very even-keeled when it's going well and also when it's not going well," he said.

Hammond believes getting "too wound up either way" will take away from enjoying success.

"Even when things are going really well, and say you're reading the news clippings or something, and everyone's praising you, it's easy to get caught up in that," he said. "And then maybe you stop working as hard and worrying about the details of what makes you successful."

Kotyk said Hammond's demeanor has "been extremely valuable to him."

"He has a level of professionalism that you always hope you see within your players," he said. "He has an understanding of himself as a goalie, he knows what he wants to do, the style he wants to play and how he wants to practice and prepare.

"And he also understands because it's not going as well as he wants in the results ... he's not going to break any of his foundation, any of his habits, any of his preparation to change the results."

### Upcoming schedule

The Amerks ended their seven-game losing streak Wednesday in Cleveland by beating the Monsters 3-2 in overtime.

They host the Laval Rocket on Friday before playing a road game against the Syracuse Crunch on Saturday.

Olgevie's 2 goals spark the Amerks win over Laval  
C&C Worldwide  
By: Craig Potter  
Jan. 25, 2020

Andrew Oglevie scored his first 2 goals Friday night, since returning to the lineup following an injury, to pace the Rochester Americans to a 5-2 victory over the Laval Rocket before 6,039 fans at the Blue Cross Arena.

The win was the second straight for the Amerks, who were winless in their previous 7 games.

"We're at our best when we have an identity, and it feels good to get back to playing the way we can," said Sean Malone, who ended his slump with a goal.

Oglevie opened the scoring in the first period as he tipped a shot by John Gilmour from the left point for a power play goal.

About 4 minutes later, Malone dumped the puck in on Rocket netminder Keith Kinkaid. As he started the transition, Kinkaid shot the puck off the leg of a defenseman as it deflected back and trickled through his legs. Malone got credit for the goal, his first since Dec. 11.

"I didn't even see what happened," said Malone, who was headed for the bench when the puck went in. "Sometimes it seems those are the types of bounces that have gone against us lately. It was good to open the flood gates as you would say. It feels good to help the team any way I can."

The Amerks outshot the Rocket, 14-8, in the opening stanza.

"I thought the first period we came out strong," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "We dictated the game how we wanted to play and we got off to a great start."

CJ Smith gave Rochester a 3-0 advantage in the second period when Will Borgen's shot rebounded off Kinkaid's pads and the forward tucked it under the crossbar.

The Rocket answered shortly thereafter to spoil the shutout bid by Jonas Johansson on a rebound shot by Gustav Olofsson.

"Tonight and Wednesday night I thought we had the consistency for the full 60 minutes," said Johansson, who finished with 31 saves. "It has been a little bit of a struggle lately but the last two games we have been able to do that well as a team."

In a penalty-filled third stanza, the Amerks increased the lead to 4-1 when Scott Wilson scored on a rebound of Jacob Bryson's shot midway through the period.

Johansson came up huge with the Rocket playing shorthanded and had a 2-on-none breakaway with a save from point-blank range.

"The goal for a goalie is to come up with a save when your team needs one," said Johansson, who will be the Amerks lone playing representative in the AHL All-Star Classic Sunday and Monday in Ontario, CAL.

The Amerks picked up 2 more penalties, and the Rocket pulled Kinkaid for a 6-on-3 advantage for 25 seconds. Rochester killed off the first penalty, but Laval scored with a 6-on-4 advantage to cut the lead in half, 4-2.

Oglevie fired a backhander into the empty Laval goal to secure the victory.

"I was pretty fired up scoring that one," he said.

"We put a lot of pressure on their defensemen," said Oglevie. "We made it difficult for them to get out of their zone, and as a result, we forced a lot of turnovers and generated some quality offensive chances."

\*NOTES — AHL All-Star Jonas Johansson (12-3-3) made the start in the net for Rochester, stopping 23 of the 25 shots that he faced in net to improve to 10-1-1 in his last 12 appearances. . . The win put Rochester within 4 points of first place in the North Division coming into this weekend's slate of games. . . The Amerks close out the weekend on Saturday in Syracuse against the Crunch at 7 pm. . . Rochester is 12-3-0 all-time record against Laval and winners in 8 of the last 9 games dating back to the 2017-18 campaign. . . Laval rookie goalie Cayden Primeau is the nephew of former Amerk Wayne Primeau, who was a member of the 1996 Calder Cup-winning team. He was the backup goalie tonight. Cayden also is a cousin of current Rochester forward Dalton Smith. . . Laval's roster includes former two-time team MVP and Rookie of the Year Phil Varone, who spent parts of his first five seasons (2011-16) in Rochester. He appeared in 306 career games with the Amerks and is tied for 19th all-time with 156 assists. He had an assist on the Rocket's first goal.

As their Sabres teammates take the week off, Rasmus Asplund and Lawrence Pilut put in work in Rochester The Athletic

By: Joe Yerdon

Jan. 25, 2020

Even if you've started to carve out a niche for yourself, part of being a prospect means always working to prove yourself. Although Rasmus Asplund and Lawrence Pilut have shown themselves capable in the NHL, a little more time in the AHL never hurts.

In fact, it's welcomed.

While the Sabres headed into both their bye week and the All-Star break, the two Swedes (and forward Scott Wilson) were sent back to Rochester to keep their legs moving and get a few more games in.

Some players might sulk at the prospect of not being able to head to a beach for a week or lament going back to the AHL in the first place. But for both Asplund and Pilut, they see the opportunity to improve themselves as a means to establish themselves in the NHL and maybe get those island getaways down the road.

The first half of this season was perhaps a bit unexpected for both players. Asplund was called up earlier in the season due to the team's rash of injuries. He seized the opportunity to stay in the lineup once players got healthy and played 28 games with the Sabres.

"I got a big taste of how it's like with the travel and everything," Asplund said. "I've been playing against the best players in the world in the last couple of months and I've learned how to treat myself and all that off the ice. I just pushed my pace on the ice and you have to play 100 percent every game, every night. When I didn't do that, I didn't get to be in the lineup the next game."

In three of the last four games before the break, Asplund was a healthy scratch. It's always talked about how guys are able to get a look at the game from the press box for some perspective, but that's what Asplund was eager to do when he wasn't playing.

"When you step back from a game and you watch it, because when you're down the bench it's live and you're playing it, it's so fast and the reaction is so quick," Americans coach Chris Taylor said. "If you don't play a game and you see it from up top it helps you out a lot. You feel you understand, 'Oh he is open, I do have time there, I do have time and space, oh, this is where that's at.'

"Video can't (replicate) what it's like to sit out a game and watch it. Sometimes that's what you need to settle down a little bit and watch it and see we understand it a little bit better. That's why we do it as coaches and it's not easy for the player at that time, but after the fact, it's a great learning experience."

The sense of realism about where he's at as a player is what's striking about Asplund. Players are often brimming with confidence in regard to their abilities and sometimes that comes off as being cocky. Asplund knows he's good, but he knows there's always more he can do to become a full-time NHL player and that means excelling in Rochester.

"I still think I have a couple more steps to take before I can play an 82-game season in the NHL," Asplund said. "With being here now for, I don't even know how long, but (I'm) just (going to) take the opportunity to keep developing. Being a lead player on this team, it's going to be great for my development to be back here."

Having players like Asplund, Pilut, and Wilson go back to Rochester comes at a necessary time. Until Rochester's overtime win in Cleveland on Wednesday, in which they blew a 2-0 lead but came out on top thanks to Pilut's goal in the extra period, the Americans had dropped seven straight games.

After he played in 33 NHL games last season, Pilut was recalled to Buffalo this year only after the Sabres moved Marco Scandella to Montreal. With Pilut's return, there are eight defensemen fighting for ice time.

He excelled after returning from offseason shoulder surgery and was named an AHL All-Star for the second straight season. He's not going to play in the game for the second straight year because he'll be "unavailable for the event," which ought to read "is returning to Buffalo." Even if that's somehow not the case, keeping active with the Americans is fine by him.

"I'm a type of guy that likes to work a lot and even when we have breaks, I can't not keep working a little bit," Pilut said. "Obviously you take time off, but I really like to stay fresh like that and just go to the gym and everything like that. I don't mind taking it off but at the same time I like to work."

That kind of drive helped make him defenseman of the year in the Swedish Hockey League in 2017-2018 and how he feels about his game between this season and his first in North America last season shows he's learning.

"I think I was more responsible with the puck up there," Pilut said. "I made smart plays and I think also just like the D-zone work. I thought I was on the right side of guys and made the right plays — just smart reads and stuff — and I think my game was stable."

In six games with the Sabres he's been tasked with more defensive zone starts than offensive, starting nearly 60 percent of the time in the defensive zone. Although his best traits come in handling the puck, he's showed more of a knack to get involved physically. Whether he's in Rochester or Buffalo, what he can do is being a positive influence on the game.

"Pilut with his offensive habits and five-on-five, he can be really good at getting pucks down and just simplifying the game and always in good position," Taylor said.

Jim Kelly optimistic about Josh Allen, Bills outlook  
Rochester First  
By: Staff Report  
*Jan. 25, 2020*

Before tonight's Amerks game, local Bills fans were treated to a meet and greet with Jim Kelly.

Fans were able to meet the hall of fame quarterback and get memorabilia signed as well.

Before Kelly met the masses, he spoke to local media about the recent Bills season and Josh Allen's progress, and he had nothing but good things to say.

"Josh had a pretty good year. I think going from [his] second to third [season], I think, and I pray, that we see a big improvement there," said Kelly. "I love what they're doing. I love what the Pegula's have done, what Brandon Beane has done. Such a super job. But we're a couple of players away. I think we get those players, we get Josh to the next level... look out. Because January is coming, and home games in January is coming."

Kelly, like many Bills fans, thinks that Buffalo would be wise to draft a big wide receiver in the upcoming NFL Draft.

Laval @ Rochester recap & highlights: Defensive miscues cost Rocket in a crucial game  
Habs Eyes on the Prize  
By: Scott Malta  
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Earning a major 3-2 victory over the Syracuse Crunch on Wednesday in Laval, the Rocket rolled into Rochester on Friday just a win behind the Americans for third place in the North Division. The clash was much more than just a divisional contest; the Amerks came into this game having just snapped a seven-game losing skid, while the Rocket were cruising along having won seven of their previous 10 games.

Struggles or not, the Amerks presented a dangerous lineup with 2017 first-round pick Casey Mittelstadt joining a talented group also boasting Jean-Sebastien Dea, Zach Redmond, and, while he was scratched, Lawrence Pilut, who was also a big part of stopping their losing skid. In net was AHL All-Star Jonas Johansson, whose stellar 12-3-3 record would be put to the test. The Rocket countered with Keith Kinkaid, looking to get the veteran back on track after he was shelled for five goals against Manitoba last weekend.

The contest began slowly, with both sides failing to establish much offence off their dump-ins, but Laval did end up getting the best looks prior to the first TV timeout. The fourth line wore the Amerks down as Kevin Lynch and Michael Pezzetta worked a grinding style down the boards. They gave way to the top line, and a nifty bit of work freed up Charles Hudon in the slot, but his wrist shot was gloved in close by Johansson to keep the game scoreless.

Rochester returned the Laval pressure in kind, forcing the Rocket to try to jam passes through, and they cut them off at every chance. Kinkaid stood tall despite the lengthy attack from the Amerks, turning away shots through multiple screens and keeping Rochester off the board.

By the halfway point of the period, the goaltender had turned away eight shots, but the Rocket had the first penalty of the game to kill off thanks to a Nikita Jevpalovs hook. While the Rocket repelled the early waves from Rochester's top unit, a point shot by John Gilmour was deflected over Kinkaid's shoulder by Andrew Oglevie to put the Amerks up by a goal.

Things only got worse, as a dump-in was set to be played by Kinkaid, and he turned to fire it as Josh Brook was moving in to take it. The defenseman put his hands and stick up when he saw the goalie was playing it up instead, directing it right by the goalie to make it a 2-0 game.

The next puck on Kinkaid was bobbled, first drawing a crowd and then a very angry Christian Folin as someone appeared to jab his netminder's hand with a stick, sending him to the bench shaking his hand in pain.

The two goals held into the first intermission, leaving Laval with a lot of work to do in period two.

It continued to be a struggle for Laval. While they started strong, the Americans soon put their pressure back on. Kinkaid shook off a rough ending to the first period to keep the deficit at just two. Any Rocket attack, even when they managed to create traffic, was fended off by Johansson or swept aside by a collapsing defender in front.

Rochester's pressure eventually broke through once again, as Kinkaid fought off a rising shot by Will Borgen but directed the rebound right to the stick of C.J. Smith, who wired his shot over a sliding Kinkaid to make it 3-0.

Laval fought back right away, and after a scramble in front of the net the puck kicked out to Christian Folin. Folin almost immediately fired a pass across the zone to a pinching Gustav Olofsson, who while stumbling, tucked it by Johansson's sprawling pads.

An interference penalty put Laval down a man late, but some heady work by Lynch and timely clears from Folin kept the Amerks from adding to their lead. The two-goal advantage lasted into the intermission, leaving Laval with a big third period in front of them once again.

The final frame contained many of the earlier struggles once again. Laval was pushing hard, attacking with speed, but failing to generate quality zone time to mount an effective attack. Many of their chances were one-and-done, narrowly missing set plays toward the net.

The Amerks, on their first long shift on offence, then added another deflection by Scott Wilson to push the Rochester lead to three.

Then it all came unglued. After being shoved into the boards by Dalton Smith, Hudon lined up Casey Fitzgerald, who was still looking back at his pass, leveling him with a hit to the chest. Everyone on the ice grabbed a partner and punches were tossed, and when all was settled Hudon had been ejected for his hit and Karl Alzner was given a misconduct for continuing an altercation in defense of his teammate.

The Rocket penalty-killers still pushed looking to battle back at least a bit in a lost game, eventually drawing a penalty for their hard work. While they struggled to generate an attack there, they drew a second call, putting them five-on-three, then pulling Kinkaid to double the opponent's manpower for a short time.

With the first penalty over, the Rocket still were looking to add another goal, and thanks to a Brook setup they got it. Brook worked off the wall, firing a shot in that Lynch deflected by Johansson to make it a 4-2 game.

A Rochester empty net goal sealed the loss for Laval, a stinging defeat in a crucial game in the standings.

Final Score: Rochester 5, Laval 2

The team doesn't have long to lick their wounds though, as they clash in Binghamton with the Devils on Saturday night.