



# ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

*Saturday, February 8, 2020*

*TONIGHT'S GAME: Rochester @ Toronto*

Amerks start slowly, end up losing to Crunch  
Buffalo News  
By: Staff Report  
Feb. 7, 2020

Rochester's offense got off to a sluggish start and couldn't recover en route to a 5-2 loss at the hands of Syracuse at the Blue Cross Arena.

The Americans (27-14-2-4) logged just five shots on goal through the first period and 11 shots on goal through two.

The team poured on 14 shots in the third period but only a shot from Jean-Sebastien Dea hit home.

Casey Mittelstadt scored Rochester's only other goal of the night. He assisted on Dea's goal for two points.

Syracuse (22-21-3-3) was led by Gemel Smith with two goals. Mathieu Joseph, Alex Barre-Boulet and Danick Martel had one each for the Crunch.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen started strong in net but allowed two goals in the third period which put the game out of range.

Syracuse's third goal of the period was shot into an empty net.

Mittelstadt got the Amerks on the board late in the first period, finishing off a pass from Sean Malone.

The Crunch tied the game on a 5-on-3 opportunity to open the second period.

Rochester's offense went cold from there. The team did not register a shot on goal through the first 13 minutes of the second period as Joseph's goal put Syracuse up 2-1.

It remained a one-goal game through the first six minutes of the last period, when Barre-Boulet and Martel put the game out of reach.

Rochester is still in second place in the North Division with 60 points, six behind Belleville and three points ahead of Utica.

The Americans will play across the border at Toronto on Saturday at 4 p.m.

Prospect C.J. Smith believes he's still in Sabres' plans  
Buffalo News  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Feb. 7, 2020

Rochester Americans General Manager Randy Sexton likes that Buffalo Sabres prospect C.J. Smith feels comfortable engaging in frank conversations about his career.

"We know we can always expect a direct and honest response," Sexton said. "I know he knows, like all of our players, that we care about them as people, as players and that we're doing everything we can to reach their goals of playing in the NHL."

Smith, 25, has experienced a tough season, getting waived early in NHL training camp and suffering a lower-body injury Nov. 2 with the Amerks. Following a brief scoring outburst when he returned from an 11-game absence, he started slumping.

The 5-foot-10, 184-pound Smith has stayed in Rochester all season, watching the Sabres recall five other forwards.

"Sometimes it's easy to get down, and I've definitely had those moments where you get down on yourself," Smith said recently.

In those difficult moments, Smith said his talks with Sexton and Amerks coach Chris Taylor help him refocus.

"Tails does a really good job of recognizing that," said Smith, who has played 13 NHL games. "I got to give a huge shoutout to Randy Sexton. I think they kind of know when I get in those lulls. It happens, and they do a really good job of pulling me out and kind of clearing things up."

Sexton said Smith felt pain-free when he returned Dec. 11. Still, after compiling two goals and five points in his first three games back, he registered just one assist over his next eight outings.

"We didn't see the same kind of attacking C.J. that we knew and have seen before," Sexton said.

So Sexton said they "kind of talked through it three times." In the past several games, Smith has looked more like the 28-goal scorer from last season and has nine goals thus far.

"He's gotten really gotten back to what we've seen and expect from him in the past and he's gotten back to putting himself in the conversations for (a) recall," Sexton said.

Smith said he has "kind of found my game again."

"He's getting his jump back and he's getting confidence," Taylor said.

At his best, Smith said he stops cheating — "Sometimes I want to score too much," he said — and stays on the defensive side of the puck.

"When my game's playing well, I'm on the right side of pucks and winning the 50-50 battles, getting to the net, getting the pucks to the net and just overall being a team player," he said.

Smith compiled 45 goals and 102 points in 119 games over his first two seasons, making him one of the American Hockey League's top scorers. Last season, his exploits forced the Sabres to recall him, and he played 11 games.

The two-year contract Smith signed in July becomes a one-way deal worth \$700,000 next season, according to capfriendly.com.

Smith, a free agent the Sabres' old regime signed from UMass Lowell, said he believes he is still in the team's plans.

"A two-year deal, I think there's obviously still some plans in the future," he said. "So it's a process, sometimes it's slow, sometimes it doesn't go the way you want. But like I keep saying, you got to stick with it."

While Smith acknowledged he can get down, he often speaks positively, saying he must pay his dues and expressing confidence an opportunity will materialize.

"I'm not frustrated at all," he said of his season. "Just keep doing what I'm doing."

In the past, Smith has said Yannick Gourde and Jonathan Marchessault — two high-scoring NHL forwards who spent years in the minors — illustrate patience is critical.

Last week, Smith mentioned Gerald Mayhew, the AHL's leading goal scorer with the Iowa Wild, recently made his NHL debut at 27.

"It just shows you sometimes it's a slow process and sometimes it's not as quick as you want it to be," he said. "But I think I'm still in the plans."

### Murray surging

Following a 16-game stretch in which he mustered just one goal and one point, Amerks rookie Brett Murray caught fire last weekend, recording two assists against the Syracuse Crunch before scoring two goals in Saturday's 3-2 win against the Binghamton Devils.

Murray compiled three goals and 14 points in his first 15 games before tailing off.

The 6-foot-5, 235-pound winger played with the Youngstown Phantoms last season in the junior United States Hockey League.

"You forget where he played last year," Taylor said. "He played in the USHL. All of a sudden, you're playing in the American Hockey League. It's not easy, you're going to have your ups and downs. It's a grind. It's a lot of games, it's practices every day. It's totally different.

"So I think obviously with four days off (late last month) might've helped him out just a little to take a deep breath and refresh and get back at it."

The Amerks, who have a six-game winning streak, host the Crunch again Friday before playing a road game against the Toronto Marlies on Saturday.

Amerks winning streak comes to an abrupt end  
Pickin' Splinters  
By: Kevin Oklobzija  
Feb. 8, 2020

They entered the night on a roll, using a six-game winning streak to mount a threat to regain first place in the American Hockey League's North Division.

They ended the night talking about poorly they played and that they must learn from their mistakes and move on.

Despite playing a team that has been a solid rival all season, and for most of a quarter century, the Rochester Americans displayed little passion and lost 5-2 to the Syracuse Crunch on Friday night at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

Gemel Smith scored two goals and Alex Barre-Boulet had a goal and two assists as the Crunch won for just the sixth time in the past 19 games.

"Tonight was probably one of the worst games we've played all year," said rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson, who assisted on both Amerk goals, by Casey Mittelstadt and Jean-Sebastien Dea.

Because the Amerks (27-14-2-4, 60 points) generated little offense — just 24 shots, and 13 were by defensemen — the first-place Belleville Senators again have a six-point cushion in the division.

"We needed a lot more energy," coach Chris Taylor said. "We just didn't have anything tonight."

That included the puck. The Crunch limited zone time for the Amerks and rarely allowed their goalie, Spencer Martin, to face sustained pressure. Or even pressure.

"I thought we were fumbling pucks all over the place, we lost a lot of 50/50 battles," Taylor said. "We tried to complicate things. We tried thinking something better instead of what was open."

As a result, shots were blocked or never even attempted and Martin had an easy night in goal.

His counterpart, Amerks goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, faced 29 shots and, while he made good saves, gave up at least one not so great goal.

"You can't blame him for the loss but he'd probably want one or two of those back," Taylor said.

In four games with the Amerks, Luukkonen has a 3.20 goals-against average, .895 save percentage and 1-2-1 record. Considered one of the best prospects in the Buffalo Sabres system, he ranks third in the ECHL in GAA (2.16) and seventh in save percentage (.916).

The Amerks actually led after the first period, using Mittelstadt's power-play goal off a give-and-go with Sean Malone to produce the game's first goal at 16:46.

It came off the rush, and they capitalized on knowing the tendencies of the opponent, Mittelstadt said. Because the Crunch defensemen like to stand up at the blue line to deny or slow the puck-carrier, the Amerks made the quick give-and-go at the line and Mittelstadt was behind the defense.

It was about all that worked well. The Crunch had as many goals, two, as the Amerks had shots in the first 15 minutes of the second period.

"They came out strong," Dea said, "and we didn't show up."

Amerks win streak snapped in loss to Syracuse  
C&C Worldwide  
By: Staff Report  
Feb. 8, 2020

Despite a pair of power-play points from Casey Mittelstadt (1+1) and Jacob Bryson (0+2), the Rochester Americans (27-14-2-4) dropped a 5-2 contest to the North Division rival Syracuse Crunch (22-21-3-3) Friday at the Blue Cross Arena.

With the loss, the Amerks were unable to extend their season-long win streak to seven games, but remain in second place in the AHL's North Division standings behind only the Belleville Senators.

Mittelstadt tallied his seventh goal of the season to go with an assist while Bryson added his 16 and 17th helpers of the campaign for Rochester, which owns an 11-6-1-1 record in its last 19 contests against the Crunch dating back to the 2017-18 campaign. Forward Jean-Sebastien Dea notched his team-leading 14th marker in the third frame while rookie netminder Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (1-2-1) made 25 saves but suffered the loss.

Alex Barre-Boulet collected a game-high three-point night with a goal and two assists while Gemel Smith and Cal Foote collected two goals and two assists, respectively. Mathieu Joseph and Danick Martel completed the scoring. Goaltender Spencer Martin stopped 22 of the 24 shots he faced to improve to 8-11-3.

After Mittelstadt gave the Amerks a 1-0 lead they carried into the first intermission, the Crunch responded with the game's next four goals and boasted a 4-1 advantage at the 11:40 mark of the third period.

"We just didn't have it tonight," explained Amerks head coach Chris Taylor. "It's unfortunate because it was at home and against a divisional rival and you want to be ready for the game."

"I thought we were fumbling pucks, lost a lot of face-offs, lost a lot 50-50 battles, and they were just more determined," Taylor continued.

"We didn't seem to have our legs," admitted Bryson. "It was probably one of our worst games we've played this season."

Smith evened the tilt at 1-1 in the dying seconds of a 5-on-3 advantage while Joseph redirected a shot just inside the left post to give the Crunch their first lead of the night with 5:02 to go in the middle period.

After Rochester was called for icing, Barre-Boulet wired his 19th goal of the slate 6:07 into the third stanza before Martel snapped in a shot to push the score to a three-goal margin five minutes later.

"If we want to win games and have success, we have to stay out of the penalty box, including myself," Bryson said. "I took an unlucky penalty in the second period, but as the season continues and then into the playoffs, special teams gets more important. You saw that tonight as there were a lot of special teams goals."

Rochester did not go away quietly, though, as they drew its third man-advantage of the evening, and much like the first, capitalized with the extra skater to bring the Amerks within a pair of goals with just over seven minutes left in regulation. After

receiving a pass from Bryson, Mittelstadt dished a cross-ice, one-time feed to Dea atop the left face-off dot and the forward, who just returned from his second recall with Buffalo, blasted a shot past the blocker of Martin.

"We got into a little bit of penalty trouble in the second period," Mittelstadt said. "We sat back on our heels, and when we have success, we are team that plays on our toes. We have to play faster and generate offense, two things we did not do tonight."

Facing a 4-2 deficit, Taylor pulled his rookie netminder, but moments later Smith sealed the 5-2 win as he added his 19th of the season and second of the game into the empty net.

"It happens during the course of the season," said Dea about the loss. "We lost a lot of games in a row and then won a bunch in a row. We are not going to win every game, but we have to take the lessons on why we lost tonight and make sure not to repeat them again moving forward."

The Amerks conclude the weekend north of the border on Saturday with a 4 pm matchup against the Toronto Marlies at Coca-Cola Coliseum.

\*NOTES — Back in Rochester following his second recall of the season with the Buffalo Sabres earlier this week, Jean-Sebastien Dea is the only Amerk to reach the 30-point plateau in 41 games and is tied with Andrew Oglevie for the team lead in goals (13). Coming into weekend, Dea, who is also second among all Amerks forwards with 84 shots on goal, has 12 points (3+9) in his last 16 games dating back to Dec. 20... Casey Nelson is tied for sixth among all blueliners with a team-best plus-20 on-ice rating through 42 games this season... 31-year-old defenseman Zach Redmond hasn't gone more than 5 games without a point all season. The 2-time AHL All-Star, and reigning Eddie Shore Award winner, presently is 13th in scoring amongst all defensemen with 27 points, and he ranks 11th with a team-high 22 assists, 9 of which have come on the power-play.



## Syracuse Crunch pushes aside Rochester

Syracuse.com

By: Staff Report

Feb. 7, 2020

After giving up the first goal, the Syracuse Crunch rattled off four straight on its way to a 5-2 victory over the Rochester Americans on Friday at Blue Cross Arena.

Gemel Smith put up two goals, while Alex Barre-Boulet had a three-point effort with a goal and two assists. The win advances the Crunch to 22-21-3-3 on the season and moves it to 2-3-2-0 in the 12-game season series against the Amerks.

Goaltender Martin Spencer recorded the win with 22 saves in net for the Crunch. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped 25-of-29 between the pipes for the Amerks. Syracuse went 1-for-3 on both the power play and penalty kill.

The Amerks opened scoring with a power-play goal late in the first period. Casey Mittelstadt tipped Sean Malone's left-wing shot as he cut down the slot.

The Crunch tied the game with a power-play goal of its own 7:23 into the middle frame. Barre-Boulet skated the puck into the zone, paused and passed down to Smith along the goal line. He flipped it to his backhand and shoveled the puck past Luukkonen. Cal Foote recorded the secondary helper.

At 14:48, Syracuse took the lead. Mathieu Joseph got a stick on Foote's right-point shot to redirect it off the post and in. Barre-Boulet made it a multi-point night with an assist on the go-ahead tally.

The Crunch added two more in the third period before the Amerks responded. At 6:07, Ross Colton poked the puck ahead for Barre-Boulet at the blue line. He toe dragged around a defender in the left circle and sniped a shot into the far corner. Five minutes later, Danick Martel got out ahead and netted one on the breakaway. Assists went to Boris Katchouk and Logan Roe.

Rochester stole one back with another power-play goal at 12:37. Jean-Sebastien Dea was in the top of the left circle to one-time a cross-zone feed from Mittelstadt.

With 4:21 remaining, Smith tallied his second of the night into an empty net to lock in a victory.

The Crunch travel to face the Utica Comets tomorrow at 7 p.m.

In other news Friday, Syracuse defenseman Cameron Gaunce was recalled to Tampa Bay.

Sabres notes: Jonas Johansson looks solid in first NHL start  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Feb. 6, 2020

In the midst of an awful stretch during another lost season, goalie Jonas Johansson's first NHL start Thursday should've given the Sabres a spark.

Johansson's arrival has created some excitement and intrigue. The Swede, 24, has enjoyed a terrific season with the Rochester Americans, winning 13 of his 20 appearances and receiving AHL All-Star honors.

While Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has been tabbed the Sabres' goalie of the future, Johansson, a third-round pick in 2014, has developed into a strong prospect.

On Thursday morning, coach Ralph Krueger said he hoped Johansson's presence against the Detroit Red Wings could help the Sabres settle down and "think about our game . . . play within that game more consistently."

Well, that certainly did not happen. The Sabres fell behind 2-0 early to the hapless Red Wings and lost a 4-3 shootout inside KeyBank Center, suffering one of their most embarrassing defeats in recent memory.

The Red Wings began Thursday on a nine-game losing streak (0-8-1) and with just 12 wins all season.

Center Dylan Larkin scored 4:23 into the game on the Red Wings' third shot, beating a screened Johansson from the far edge of the left circle. Larkin scored again with 0.2 seconds left in the period, roofing a shot past Johansson on a two-on-one after winger Sam Reinhart coasted up the ice.

Johansson wasn't beaten again until winger Tyler Bertuzzi's power-play goal in front of the net 13:56 into the third period.

The rookie did not make any spectacular stops, but he looked comfortable throughout the night, making 18 saves before Larkin and winger Andreas Athanasiou scored in the shootout.

"I felt comfortable," Johansson said. "It's a faster pace, for sure — it's the fastest pace I've ever experienced."

Johansson said he felt some nerves during the day but they disappeared when he got to the rink and the game started.

"I just tried to enjoy it and have fun out there," he said.

Johansson relieved Carter Hutton in Tuesday's ugly 6-1 home loss to the Colorado Avalanche, stopping 13 of the 14 shots he faced in his NHL debut.

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An upper-body injury sidelined Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin for the second straight game. The Swede is day-to-day.

Meanwhile, centers Johan Larsson (upper body) and Curtis Lazar (illness) returned after missing Tuesday's game.

The Sabres dressed six defensemen and 12 forwards against the Red Wings. They scratched forward Rasmus Asplund and defenseman Zach Bogosian.

Winger Scott Wilson, who was recalled from the Amerks on Wednesday, skated at left wing beside Larsson and Zemgus Girgensons.

Wilson, 27, recorded three goals and four points in five contests after the Sabres sent him down following a two-game recall last month.

He tied the game at 2 8:29 into the third period, tipping defenseman Colin Miller's shot past goalie Jonathan Bernier, his first goal since March 8, 2018.

Wilson appeared to score in the first period Thursday before Detroit challenged and officials ruled he interfered with goalie Jonathan Bernier.

The Sabres returned forward Jean-Sebastien Dea to the Amerks when they summoned Wilson.

"It was more what Wilson has been doing in Rochester, he's really on a hot streak right now," Krueger said of the move. "Just the way he has been playing has really impressed us. We sent him down with a to-do list, and it was less against J-S than we don't have a lot of movement right now here within the guys that are set here, and we just feel that he has the potential to be a spark plug for us right now."

In dreary season, Jonas Johansson's first NHL start offers Sabres freshness  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Feb. 6, 2020

In what has become another dreary season, goalie Jonas Johansson's first NHL start tonight offers the Sabres some freshness.

Johansson's arrival has created some excitement and intrigue. The Swede, 24, has enjoyed a terrific season with the Rochester Americans, winning 13 of his 20 appearances and receiving AHL All-Star honors.

While Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has been tabbed the Sabres' goalie of the future, Johansson has developed into a strong prospect.

The former third-round pick earned tonight's game against the Detroit Red Wings.

Coach Ralph Krueger said he hopes Johansson's presence helps the Sabres settle down and "think about our game tonight and to play within that game more consistently."

"Often when you have a young player starting his first National Hockey League game, it's definitely an opportunity for us to work hard to stay consistent with that game, which is what we've been lacking since the break, is just consistency within the game which makes us strong, which makes us difficult to play against, which takes away the space of teams," he said inside KeyBank Center.

"Detroit has a lot of speed, they work hard as a group. We need that game here today, and hopefully with Johansson in goal the guys just tighten that game up right through from the first to the last minute."

Johansson relieved Carter Hutton in Tuesday's ugly home loss to the Colorado Avalanche, stopping 13 of the 14 shots he faced in his NHL debut.

After Colorado scored on its first shot, Johansson settled down.

"I got a taste of it a little bit, so it's a positive thing, for sure," Johansson said. "But that's in the past now, too, it's a new game today, new performance that we got to have. So I just left that game behind and focused on the next one."

The Red Wings are downright awful, perhaps the worst team since the NHL implemented the salary cap in 2005.

Imagine how surly the crowd could become tonight if the Sabres fall behind or lose.

Having mustered only 28 points (12-38-4) through 54 games, the Red Wings are on pace for a 43-point season, which would be the lowest of the cap era. The 2016-17 Avalanche endured a brutal 48-point campaign.

The Red Wings have lost nine straight games (0-8-1). They have a minus-96 goal differential!

"We have a lot of respect for the potential of the group," Krueger said. "They've had a tough run of late. But what we do see is there's a danger in their game and in their ability to take advantage of teams if you give them that space."

In lineup news, Krueger said an upper-body injury will sideline defenseman Rasmus Dahlin a second straight game. Dahlin is day-to-day.

Meanwhile, center Johan Larsson will return after an upper-body injury shelved him for Tuesday's 6-1 loss to the Colorado.

Krueger said the Sabres will dress 12 forwards and six defensemen tonight. Defenseman Zach Bogosian will be a healthy scratch.

Thirteen forwards will warm up, including Scott Wilson, who was recalled from the Rochester Americans on Wednesday. Wilson, 27, recorded three goals and four points in five contests after the Sabres sent him down following a two-game recall last month.

Krueger said center Curtis Lazar, who has been out sick, was being evaluating this morning.

The Sabres returned forward Jean-Sebastien Dea to the Amerks when they summoned Wilson.

"It was more what Wilson has been doing in Rochester, he's really on a hot streak right now," Krueger said. "Just the way he has been playing has really impressed us. We sent him down with a to-do list, and it was less against J-S than we don't have a lot of movement right now here within the guys that are set here, and we just feel that he has the potential to be a spark plug for us right now."

Sabres look to take advantage of the abysmal Red Wings  
ESPN Rochester  
By: Staff Report  
Feb. 6, 2020

After a 6-1 drubbing at the hands of the Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday, the Buffalo Sabres will wrap up their five-game homestand on Thursday night when the team welcomes the Detroit Red Wings to KeyBank Center.

The Sabres suffered one of the worst losses of the season on Tuesday against Colorado, where they completely imploded in the second period while trailing 2-1. After Sam Reinhart had scored with 0.9 seconds remaining in the first period to cut the deficit to 2-1, the Avalanche responded with four goals in the opening 13 minutes of the second to put the game far out of reach to the Sabres.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger had called the second period 20 of the most disappointing minutes of the entire season.

However, the Sabres can take advantage of their opponent on Thursday night as the Red Wings enter the game as, by far, the worst team in the National Hockey League.

This season has been an abysmal one for the Red Wings this season as the team has gone 12-38-4 in 54 games played. Their 28 points is 15 points behind the Los Angeles Kings for 30th in the overall NHL standings, while 15 teams in the league have as many or more wins this season than the Red Wings currently have in points.

The team is currently on pace to finish the 2019-20 season with an 18-58-6 record, which would be good for 42 points and the worst season in the NHL's salary cap era. The 2016-17 Avalanche currently holds that place as the worst NHL team in the salary cap era, finishing the season with a 22-56-4 record and 48 points.

Detroit ranks at the bottom of almost every major statistical category from a team perspective, ranking dead-last in goals-for (110), goals-against (206), penalty kill (73.2%) and shots-for per-game (27.9), while ranking 30th on the power play (14.5%) and 26th in shots-against per-game (32.7). The Red Wings also provide the worst goal differential in the league at minus-96, which is 47 goals worse than the New Jersey Devils in 30th place. The Red Wings also boast the worst road record in the NHL at 4-20-2.

The Red Wings enter Thursday night's game riding a nine-game losing streak, dating back to the last time these two teams faced off on Jan. 12 in Detroit at Little Caesars Arena. Since this losing streak began, the Red Wings have gone 0-8-1 while being outscored 37-12 and being shut out in the last two games against the New York Rangers and Philadelphia Flyers at home.

Overall this season, Detroit has endured five losing streaks of at least four games, which includes a 12-game losing streak from Nov. 14 to Dec. 10 that was part of a stretch of losses in 18 of 20 games.

Despite their recent struggles, the Sabres cannot take a desperate team like the Red Wings lightly.

"We have a lot of respect for the potential of [the Red Wings]," Krueger said Thursday morning. "They've had a tough run of late, but what we do see is that there is a danger in their game, and in their ability to take advantage of teams if you give them that space. You need to play a really good defensive game, but we need to get back to our game above all. It's important to

understand that you have to respect every team that you play in this league. It doesn't matter where you are, [whether it's] at home or away. It doesn't matter where that team is in the standings on a given night, everybody can play to a certain level to earn themselves a win. We have to focus on ourselves. All of that other conversation right now doesn't help us get back to our game and what makes us stronger. That's what we're focusing on here today."

"They're a fast team," Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons said of Thursday's opponent. "As we saw when we played them in Detroit, they gave a heavy push in the second for us. Any team in this league you have to respect them. Any team can win on any given night. We just have to bring our A-game effort tonight."

"We have to play our game. We have our gameplan and it's up to the guys to execute it and to give it our best effort. If we do that, we'll be fine."

The Red Wings this season have been led by six players, all under the age of 25, who lead the team in scoring.

Starting at the top is by 23-year-old Dylan Larkin, who leads the team in scoring with 13 goals and 24 assists for 37 points in 54 games. Tyler Bertuzzi, 24, is just one point back of Larkin with 36 points, but he does lead the team with 17 goals. Filip Hronek (26 points), Robby Fabbri (26 points), Anthony Mantha (24 points) and Andreas Athanasiou (19 points) are also under the age of 25 and follow suit with the offensive production.

Some of Detroit's better players have been injured for a good portion of the season, including Mantha who has not played since Dec. 21 with an upper-body injury. Also out and on injured reserve for Detroit includes forwards Filip Zadina and Frans Nielsen, and defensemen Mike Green and Danny DeKeyser.

On Wednesday, the Red Wings called up defenseman Gustav Lindstrom, who will make his NHL debut against the Sabres on Thursday.

Where the Red Wings have gotten little contribution from this season is in their goaltending with Jimmy Howard and Jonathan Bernier.

Howard has been downright awful this year with a 2-20-2 record, a 4.12 goals-against average and a .884 save percentage. He has gone winless in 17 straight appearances, going 0-15-2 in that stretch.

Bernier has been the better of the two netminders as of late, posting a 1.98 goals-against average and a .939 save percentage in 11 starts since Dec. 12. Overall this season, he's posted a 10-14-2 record with a 2.89 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage.

It was Bernier who has gotten the last two starts in goal for the Red Wings, including a 28-save performance in Monday's 3-0 loss to the Flyers. He will likely get the start against the Sabres on Thursday.

As for the Sabres, they have beaten the Red Wings in three consecutive games, while also winning 10 of the last 14 matchups dating back to the start of the 2016-17 season. In that span, Buffalo is 10-1-3, while the Red Wings have gone 4-8-2.

Buffalo is 2-0-0 against the Red Wings this season with both games being played in Detroit. The first win came back on Oct. 25 with a 2-0 decision over the Red Wings, while the most recent victory came in a 5-1 game on Jan. 12.

Jack Eichel continues to score and put up points. He picked up an assist on Tuesday night to extend his latest point streak to four games, and upped his point total on the season to 66, which is tied for eighth place in league scoring. In 12 games against the Red Wings since the start of the 16-17 season, Eichel has 14 points (4+10), and has recorded a point in seven consecutive matchups with Detroit.

Reinhart was able to add on to his impressive run as of late with his goal on Tuesday. The 24-year-old now has 14 points (7+7) over his last 14 games, and is on pace to set career-high totals in goals (29) and points (68).

Outside of Eichel and Reinhart, Buffalo has gotten no other goal production throughout the lineup with the exception of Evan Rodrigues on Saturday against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Here are some notable goal droughts with the Sabres:

Jeff Skinner: 0 goals in 15 games

Jimmy Vesey: 1 goal in his last 11 games

Johan Larsson: 0 goals and 0 points in 18 games

Conor Sheary: 0 goals in 10 games, 2 goals in his last 22 games

Michael Frolik: 1 goal in his last 10 games with the Sabres

Marcus Johansson: 0 goals in 12 games, 2 goals in his last 23 games

Rasmus Asplund: 1 goal in 29 games this season

As for the power play that currently ranks 18th in the NHL, they have only scored twice on their last 14 attempts.

The Sabres will turn to Jonas Johansson on Thursday for his first career NHL start. The 24-year-old came in relief of Carter Hutton in the second period on Tuesday, giving up just one goal on 14 Avalanche shots.

Krueger has been very impressed with that he has seen from his rookie netminder in the short time he has been up from the Rochester Americans.

"He's come in to our space in a really good way," Krueger said. "He's worked hard through the practices, and also the off-ice sessions. He has a very good pro package that he brings with him. We're quite impressed with him."

"There's some excitement, for sure," Johansson said following Wednesday's practice about potentially starting at some point over the next two games. "It would be really awesome to play some more up here, but I feel prepared and I feel confident, so I'm just feeling ready and prepared if the opportunity comes."

In the earlier portion of the season with the Amerks, Johansson played very well, posting a 13-3-3 record with a 2.19 goals-against average, a .925 save percentage and two shutouts in 20 games played. At the time of his call up last week Wednesday, Johansson had ranked third in the American Hockey League in goals-against average, while his save percentage had him ranked fourth in the league.

Krueger also confirmed on Thursday that forward Johan Larsson will return to the lineup after his one-game absence from a lower-body injury, while defenseman Rasmus Dahlin will miss his second consecutive game with an upper-body injury.



Meanwhile, Curtis Lazar, who missed Tuesday's game and Wednesday's practice due to an illness, is still being evaluated and his game-time status is to be determined.

Zach Bogosian will serve as the healthy scratch on Thursday as Krueger said that he will skate six defensemen on the blue line and 13 forwards for the pregame warmup.

Be sure to tune in for the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show starting at 6 p.m. with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog, where you will hear more from Krueger, Girgensons and Johansson.

A reminder that Thursday's game will be televised on NBCSN, so the only place to catch Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray on the call of all the action is on WGR.

Aquin returns to Amerks, gets pair of goals in win  
Buffalo News  
By: Staff Report  
Feb. 6, 2020

Pascal Aquin scored two goals including the game-winner for the Rochester Americans in a 4-2 American Hockey League victory Wednesday night over the Cleveland Monsters in Rocket Mortgage Field House in Cleveland. It was the Amerks' sixth straight win.

It was the first game back with Rochester for Aquin, a 22-year-old left wing, since his recall from the Cincinnati Cyclones of the ECHL.

Aquin had six goals and 11 assists in 30 games for the Cyclones. He played his only game last season with Rochester after spending most of the season with Cincinnati where he scored 27 goals among 59 points in 68 games.

A native of Le Gardeur, Quebec, Aquin had played 15 games for Rochester, the last on Dec. 28, with one goal and two assists before he was sent back to Cincinnati.

Goals by Nathan Paetsch and Aquin gave the Amerks a 2-0 lead. Calvin Thurkauf scored 1:02 into the second period for Cleveland but Aquin's second of the game at 4:53 made it 3-1. Eric Cornel scored his ninth of the season for Rochester in the third to make it 4-1 before Trey Fix-Wolansky finished the scoring with 7:42 left.

Cornel, who had two assists in addition to his goal, was the game's first star. Aquin was the second star.

Andrew Hammond made 23 saves for Rochester. Matiss Kivlenieks had 44 for Cleveland.

Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin suffers 'setback,' questionable to face Red Wings  
Buffalo News  
By: Lance Lysowski  
Feb. 5, 2020

Good news finally arrived for the Buffalo Sabres when Rasmus Dahlin stepped on to the LECOM Harborcenter ice for practice Wednesday afternoon.

Dahlin's return lasted only a few minutes. The 19-year-old defenseman left the ice before practice drills began and remains day to day with the upper-body injury that prevented him from playing in the Sabres' 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday night.

Though coach Ralph Krueger told the media Dahlin's injury is not thought to be "long term," the former first overall draft pick suffered a setback that makes him "questionable" to be in the lineup Thursday night against the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center.

"You can see he remains day to day for sure with this upper-body setback," Krueger said. "We'll keep monitoring it. He's questionable for tomorrow against Detroit, but it's definitely not a long-term injury."

In other injury news, center Johan Larsson (lower body) is on track to play Thursday night, while center Curtis Lazar (illness) missed practice Tuesday.

Krueger declined to reveal how Dahlin suffered the injury, though the latter was on the wrong end of a big hit last Saturday against the Columbus Blue Jackets. Dahlin had one assist with a plus-1 rating in 17:10 of the 2-1 overtime win, only to miss practice Monday for what Krueger called "maintenance."

Dahlin then skated Tuesday morning, only to be scratched against the Avalanche. He has three goals with 27 assists and a minus-2 rating in 44 games, and his .681 points per game are on pace for the best single-season mark by a Sabres defenseman since Brian Campbell (.683) in 2007-08. Dahlin is also on pace for the first 50-point season by a Sabres defenseman since Garry Galley in 1995-96.

With his assist Jan. 30 against Montreal, Dahlin passed Bobby Orr for the fourth-most points (74) recorded by a teenage NHL defenseman. He trails Phil Housley (132), Ray Bourque (79) and Rick Hampton (76).

Dahlin missed eight games after sustaining a concussion against Tampa Bay on Nov. 25.

Larsson had zero shots on goal in 14:07 on Saturday against Columbus. He has four goals and 12 assists with a plus-5 rating in 46 games this season. With Larsson and Lazar unavailable Tuesday, the Sabres recalled Rasmus Asplund, who had two shots on goal in 9:35 against Colorado.

Linus Ullmark (lower body), Victor Olofsson (lower body) and Kyle Okposo (upper body) were listed as week-to-week on the Sabres' injury report. Wingers Tage Thompson (shoulder) and Vladimir Sobotka (knee) remain out indefinitely.

Remi Elie (upper body), Casey Fitzgerald (upper body) and Kevin Porter (lower body) are day-to-day for Rochester.

## Roster move

Jean-Sebastien Dea was assigned to Rochester in time for the Amerks' game in Cleveland on Wednesday night. In a corresponding move, Scott Wilson was recalled by the Sabres.

Wilson, 27, had nine goals with nine assists in 27 games with the Amerks. He was pointless in two games during his previous stint with the Sabres this season. Dea, meanwhile, played only 10:07 in Buffalo's 6-1 loss to Colorado on Tuesday.  
Back to work

The Sabres focused on special teams Wednesday in preparation for their matchup against the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center.

With Dahlin out, Jeff Skinner remained on the top power-play unit, which also featured Rasmus Ristolainen, Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Marcus Johansson. The Sabres' power play went 0-for-2 against Colorado, while they did not have to kill a penalty.

Detroit (12-38-4) has a negative-96 goal differential and has lost nine games in a row. The Sabres are 10-2-2 against the Red Wings since the start of the 2016-17 season. The game will be televised by NBC Sports Network.

Sabres recall Scott Wilson from Amerks, send Jean-Sebastien Dea back  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Feb. 5, 2020

The Sabres recalled winger Scott Wilson from the Rochester Americans this afternoon and sent forward Jean-Sebastien Dea back to the AHL club.

Dea, 25, went pointless in two appearances during his recall.

Wilson, 27, has spent most of the season with the Amerks, scoring nine goals and 18 points in 27 games. He recorded three goals and four points in five contests after the Sabres sent him Rochester following a two-game recall last month.

Dea has scored 13 goals and 30 points, both team highs, in 41 appearances with the Amerks this season.

Sabres centers Johan Larsson (lower body) and Curtis Lazar (illness) missed Tuesday's 6-1 loss the Colorado Avalanche, a game the Sabres used seven defensemen.

Larsson practiced today and could return Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings, coach Ralph Krueger said. Lazar, meanwhile, missed the session.

Jonas Johansson soaking in his first NHL experience

WGR 550

By: Brayton Wilson

Feb. 5, 2020

When Linus Ullmark went down with a lower-body injury back on Jan. 28 in a 5-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators, the Buffalo Sabres called up 24-year-old netminder Jonas Johansson from the Rochester Americans to back up goalie Carter Hutton in Buffalo.

It has been a long road for Johansson to get to this point, starting out as the Sabres' third round pick (61st overall) in the 2014 NHL Draft out of Sweden's SuperElit Junior League with Brynäs IF. From there, he went from playing in the Swedish second-tier league Allsvenskan to signing his entry-level contract and starting his North American career in the ECHL to getting some work in the American Hockey League with the Amerks to finally earning his first call up in the National Hockey League.

"It's been like a roller coaster for me, even ever since I got drafted," Johansson said following Wednesday's practice at Harborcenter. "This has always been the goal, so it's nice to get rewarded and to be here. I'm just taking it in and enjoying every moment."

In his third full season in North America, Johansson has really started to set himself up as a legitimate goaltending option for the Sabres organization in the coming couple of years.

Last season was when he first started to show his potential with a strong start with the Cincinnati Cyclones, going 18-5-3 with a 2.60 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage. In some limited action with the Amerks that year, he went 4-1-0 with a 2.26 goals-against average and a .926 save percentage. However, a mid-season injury halted his progress after it was determined that he needed season-ending surgery in February.

However, he bounced back nicely in training camp and went to work on focusing in on a full-time spot with the Amerks in 2019-20.

"I don't know if I put pressure on myself more than usual. You always want to prepare, you always want to play well, but I think I just felt better and better the longer the year went starting from camp," Johansson said. "Up until now, I feel more comfortable in the net so that's a good thing."

This season has been the breakout year for Johansson with the Amerks as he posted a 13-3-3 record in Rochester with a 2.19 goals-against average and a .925 save percentage in 20 games played at the time of his call up last week Wednesday. At the time of his call up, Johansson had ranked third in the AHL in goals-against average, while his save percentage had him ranked fourth in the league.

Now that the rookie netminder has had some time to get acclimated to the NHL level of hockey, he's starting to notice the differences.

"Everything around is [up another] level. Even though it's really good in Rochester, you can definitely tell this is another level [of hockey], even in practice and how things work around the game," Johansson said.

The Sabres have played three games since Johansson was called up from Rochester, and he was able to make his NHL debut on Tuesday night in a 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche. He entered the game at the 10:58 mark of the second period after Hutton had given up five goals-against on 13 shots on goal.

It may not have been the debut that he was expecting to make, but Johansson says he has to be ready for anything on a nightly basis.

"You always try to stay prepared," Johansson said. "I prepare myself before the game exactly as I would if I were to play, so you really can't do much about it when you go in there or you stay on the bench. You just got to have to deal with it as it comes, I guess.

"I try not to focus on what the score is or who we're playing against. I just try to help the team as much as I can and do my part. That's what I try to focus on even if it's a 1-1 game or a 5-1 game."

Despite giving up a goal on his first shot faced in the NHL, a decent shot from forward Mikko Rantanen off the post and in the top part of the net, he was able to turn away the remaining 13 shots he faced on the night.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger was certainly pleased with the effort from his young netminder coming in cold off the bench.

"We really liked the way he came in," Krueger said with Howard Simon and Jeremy White on Wednesday morning on WGR. "He ended up eating [a goal-against] off a 2-on-1 early. It was an unbelievable shot that he really didn't have a chance on the short side, and we thought he settled in nicely and showed a very calm first performance and made some nice plays with the puck... There weren't a lot of holes in his game and there were some scoring chances in the third as we were trying to force some opportunities at the other end to give our fans something to cheer about going home. We thought overall it was a really good performance from him, and probably that's one positive that we all need to take out of last night was his performance."

"He made some really big saves," Sabres forward Conor Sheary said of his young goaltender on Wednesday. "In the third, he probably had three or four Grade-A chances that he turned away. It's good for him to get that opportunity, obviously in some unfortunate circumstances, but maybe better that way [because] he wasn't thinking about it all day and he just got to jump in there and know he can play at this level. I think we're going to need him moving forward with Linus out, so hopefully that will grow his confidence."

With the Sabres set to close out their five-game homestand on Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings, followed by a Friday night road matchup with the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden, it is likely that Johansson will get the opportunity to make his first career NHL start. What Krueger did not confirm on Wednesday is which of the two games that he would have the chance to start.

In spite of that, Johansson is already looking forward to getting the opportunity to get his first start under his belt in the NHL.

"There's some excitement, for sure," Johansson said. "It would be really awesome to play some more up here, but I feel prepared and I feel confident, so I'm just feeling ready and prepared if the opportunity comes."

Before Tuesday's game against Colorado, the team announced that forwards Johan Larsson (lower-body injury) and Curtis Lazar (illness), as well as defenseman Rasmus Dahlin (upper-body injury) were all day-to-day. On Wednesday, Lazar and Dahlin both were still not back to action, while Larsson was back skating with his teammates.

Dahlin had taken the ice just before practice began to test his upper-body injury, but did not take part in the team skate that followed. Krueger said that Dahlin is questionable to Thursday's game against Detroit and that he remains day-to-day and it's not a long-term injury.

Krueger also said that he feels like Larsson will be good to go for Thursday against the Red Wings, but they would confirm that in the morning.



Tough night at the office for the Cleveland Monsters  
The Cannon  
By: Elaine Shircliff  
Feb. 6, 2020

Before the game, the Monsters received reinforcements in the form of Jakob Lilja, Andrew Peeke, and Matiss Kivlenieks. "They got here this afternoon. They didn't get a chance to skate," Head Coach Mike Eaves explained of the guys who came into the game. "Some of the challenge we had tonight is we had three guys come in who didn't have a skate with us and tried to jump in there midstream."

After a lengthy injury, Bryan Moore slotted into the lineup for the first time this season last night. "I've never seen Bryan in a game. I noticed he kept his shifts really short and tried to do the simple things. I think that helped a lot," Coach Eaves said on Moore's first game in the lineup.

The Americans were first on the board 9:20 into the game. Kivlenieks skated around back to rim the puck and broke his stick in the process. He was able to prevent a shot from below the goal line from going into the net. Unfortunately, Kivlenieks couldn't get back to the crease in time to stop Nathan Paetsch's shot from flying into the open net. "I think the first goal was an indication of how the whole night went," Coach Eaves said of the ice cold start to the game, "You go to rim the puck and the stick breaks. Next thing you know, the puck is in the net."

With 8:30 to play in the first period, the Americans extended their lead over the Monsters to 2-0. Kivlenieks stopped Erric Cornel's initial shot but Sean Malone batted it out of the air for Pascal Aquin to pop into the net. "We put ourselves in the hole 2-0 and we couldn't get ourselves out of it,"

The Monsters showed some sign of life when Calvin Thurkauf put the Monsters on the board 1:02 into the second period. After receiving a pass from Lilja, Thurkauf glided down the ice before launching the puck into the net from the top of the faceoff circle.

The Americans fired back and extended their lead to 3-1 4:53 into the second period. Yet again, Aquin was the culprit. He muscled around Simpson before popping the puck into the net.

The first penalty of the night came courtesy of the Monsters with 11:43 left in the second period. Despite being hemmed into their defensive zone for the entirety of the penalty, the Monsters were able to prevent the Americans from scoring.

With 5:31 left in the second period, the Monsters head to their first power play of the night. Now it was the Americans turn to be hemmed into their own defensive zone. During the Monsters power play, both Peeke and Lilja fired off multiple heavy handed slappers from the top of the faceoff circle.

A little over two minutes into the third period, the Americans extended their lead over the Monsters to 4-1. Cornel launched a shot that banged off of Peeke's shine. He then picked up the blocked shot and lofted it through Kivlenieks' five-hole. After this goal, Kivlenieks began to play a much tighter game. He didn't leave the crease much and tried to use his body to fill the net from post to post. When he had to leave the crease or move to one side of the net, Gabriel Carlsson and Anton Carlsson filled the gap in the net. This took away many scoring opportunities for the Americans in the final period of play.

Trey Fix-Wolansky fired a laserbeam from below the point to put the Monsters within two of the Americans with 7:43 to play in the game. The late period goal wasn't enough to light a fire under the Monsters. In the end, they ended up falling to the Americans 4-2.

Last night was an anomaly for the Monsters. "It was surprising to see us play this way as a group because that's not who we've been for a great part of this season," Coach Eaves said of last night's play, "It's disappointing and I know the boys are disappointed. It does happen. It's about us responding now"

The question is how will the Monsters respond and prepare for Friday's game against the Binghamton Devils. "We play a lot of hockey coming up," Coach Eaves said, "So, do we even practice tomorrow or do we come back on Friday have a good skate in the morning and get ready for our next opponent?"

Monsters slow and sloppy in 4-2 loss to Rochester

The News-Herald

By: Jeff Schudel

Feb. 6, 2020

If a minor league hockey team is going to play a dunker, it is always best to play it in the middle of the week when most of their loyal fans aren't watching.

The Monsters were slow and sloppy Feb. 5 in a, 4-2, loss to the Rochester Americans before an announced crowd of 4,876 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

The Monsters managed only five shots on goal – weak ones at that – in the first period while the Americans were building a 2-0 lead.

The Monsters did get a spark early in the second period when Calvin Thurkauf launched a shot from the left circle over the left shoulder of Rochester goalie Andrew Hammond, but it was like lighting a match in a thunderstorm; the spark was doused quickly.

"It was surprising to see us play that way as a group, because that's not who we've been for a greater part of the season," Monsters coach Mike Eaves said. "It's disappointing. I know the boys are disappointed. But it does happen, and it's about us responding.

"We need to get back on the ice and prepare for Binghamton (games Feb. 7 and 8 at the FieldHouse). Our disappointment is in the way we started. We got in a hole and couldn't get ourselves out."

Monsters goalie Matiss Kivlenieks went behind net midway through the first period to get the puck with the score 0-0, but his stick broke in the process. The Americans scored before he could get back to the front of the cage.

The Monsters defense was slow to react when Americans' Pascal Aquin lifted the puck over Kivlenieks' right pad two minutes later for a 2-0 lead.

The Monsters, seventh in the AHL North, slipped to 21-22-2-2. Rochester, second in the North, improved to 26-13-2-4.

Aquin scored his second goal of the game to give Rochester a 3-1 lead in the second period. Any chance the Monsters had of a comeback was squelched when Eric Cornel snapped the puck past Kivlenieks' blocker for a 4-1 lead.

Trey Fix-Wolansky scored on a slapshot for the Monsters with 7:42 left, but that was it for the home team.

"It was a tough night at the office," Eaves said. "We all have tough days. It seemed like we were biking into the wind tonight. We need to have a reset button and get ready for our next opponent."

Eaves isn't certain whether he will have Kivlenieks for the game with Binghamton Feb. 7. The Blue Jackets sent Kivlenieks to Cleveland in mid-afternoon Feb. 5. The Jackets might recall him for their game against the Detroit Red Wings on Feb. 7 in Columbus.

## Sabres struggle in 6-1 loss to Avalanche

W KBW

By: Jenna Callari

Feb. 4, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres are back in the loss column, falling to the Colorado Avalanche 6-1 Tuesday night. Sam Reinhart scored the lone goal for the Sabres, his 19th of the season, while Carter Hutton and Jonas Johansson combined to stop 21-of-27 shots. The Sabres will be back at home Thursday when they host Detroit.

### 4 observations from tonight's game

#### W oof

Honestly, this observation doesn't need much explaining because I'm pretty sure it's how every fan feels right now. The Sabres started things off out-shooting the Avalanche 7-1. With 8:53 left in the second period, each team had 13 shots yet the difference was that the Avs had five goals and the Sabres had just one. Yes, I know the roster is a little thin right now but there's not much production at all on any given night and I think the only thing that kept fans around was to see the debut of Jonas Johansson (more on that below).

#### Hutton's Struggles

The first goal of the game was one of the oddest scores I've seen because quite frankly, I'm not sure what was going on down on the ice. Following an initial shot, a scrum started to form to the first of Carter Hutton. I'm not sure if Hutton, Lawrence Pilut, and Zemgus Girgensons were watching the scrum or looking for the puck but it looked like Samuel Girard was the only one with his eyes on it as he grabbed it and easily put one past Hutton. The Sabres goalie has had some odd goals go in while in net and this one is right up there. It obviously didn't get any better. Hutton finished the night allowing five goals on 13 shots before being pulled. After a nice victory the other night, this one was probably hard for him to swallow.

#### Johansson's debut

When your starting goalie is having a bad night, the backup usually gets the call. In this case Jonas Johansson was ready, making his NHL debut just days after being called up from the Rochester Americans. Johansson was expected to see some action at some point during this stretch but I don't think the team anticipated him going in goal so early. He didn't walk into the greatest scenario and wound up allowing his first goal on the Avalanche's first shot since the change in net. Johansson stopped the rest of his shots, including a nice save to end the 2nd period, and while it wasn't a perfect outing it gave him some good experience as the team continues to play without their starting goaltender.

#### Depleted roster

If you would've told me that Jean-Sebastian Dea, Rasmus Asplund, Evan Rodrigues, Zach Bogosian, and Jonas Johansson would all see time on the ice for a February game I would've thought you were crazy. Alas, here we are. Victor Olofsson, Linus Ullmark, and Kyle Okposo have been out of the lineup with injuries and before today's game we learned three more players would be out for various reasons: Curtis Lazar with an illness, Johan Larsson with a lower-body injury, and Rasmus Dahlin with an upper-

body injury (all are considered day-to-day). A depleted roster is just the latest hit this team is taking and with 29 regular season games left, hopes of fighting for a postseason spot continues to dwindle.

Sabres dealing with sickness, recall could be coming from Amerks  
Buffalo Hockey Beat  
By: Bill Hoppe  
Feb. 4, 2020

In addition to what coach Ralph Krueger has termed some "light injuries," the Sabres are dealing with some sickness going around the locker room.

So tonight's lineup against the Colorado Avalanche isn't set yet.

"I would love to be able to tell you the roster, but I have to be honest, we're still assessing," Krueger said this morning inside KeyBank Center.

Krueger said two defensemen are being assessed. Rasmus Dahlin, who had a maintenance day Monday, and Brandon Montour, a late scratch because of a lower-body injury for Saturday's 2-1 overtime win, both skated this morning.

Montour said he told the Sabres he feels well enough to play.

The Sabres did not skate as a team.

Krueger said the Sabres could recall a player from the Rochester Americans.

Center Johan Larsson, who also had a maintenance day Monday, did not skate this morning.

Update: The Sabres have announced Dahlin (upper body), Larsson (lower body) and center Curtis Lazar (illness) are out tonight. They're considered day-to-day.

Forward Rasmus Asplund has been recalled from the AHL.

The Sabres have utilized all sorts of lineups this season, mixing up lines and combos while often dressing 11 forwards and seven defensemen.

"The good thing about our roster is the guys are used to playing with different bodies," Krueger said. "Since the injuries began, even back to (Vladimir) Sobotka leaving, we've had a lot of changes in our lineup from game to game and the guys have done really well with that. We're going to adapt.

Krueger said "there's a high chance" the Sabres could dress 11 forwards and seven defensemen tonight.

In other lineup news, Krueger said goalie Carter Hutton will start tonight, his third straight nod since Linus Ullmark suffered a lower-body injury Tuesday.

Sabres look to continue winning ways against the Avalanche  
ESPN Rochester  
By: Staff Report  
Feb. 4, 2020

Following a much-needed win over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday afternoon, the Buffalo Sabres will continue on with their homestand on Tuesday against the Colorado Avalanche at KeyBank Center.

It was Jack Eichel's heroics in overtime on Saturday that helped the Sabres snap a three-game losing streak, and possibly reinvigorate some life into Buffalo's playoff hopes, despite the fact that the team still sits 10 points behind the Florida Panthers for the third spot in the Atlantic Division and 11 points behind the New York Islanders for the final Wild Card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Tuesday night's matchup will be Buffalo's toughest test in this five-game homestand, and will likely be the toughest test during this stretch of six home games in the next seven games. The Avalanche enter the game as the highest-scoring team in the Western Conference with 182 goals-for this season, and combined with their 149 goals-against has a plus-33 goal differential, which ranks first in the West and fifth in the National Hockey League.

"They have a lot of speed, they are extremely aggressive in their defense, but offensively they're attacking with four-plus [players] all the time," Krueger said of Tuesday's opponent. "[They play a] very, very dynamic game. They like to play on their toes, we like to play on our toes. It's going to be a really good game tonight."

The Sabres have lost three straight matchups with the Avalanche, being outscored 14-5 along the way.

Buffalo's last win against the Avalanche came back on Dec. 5, 2017 when the team went to Colorado and beat the Avalanche 4-2. That night saw four Sabres come up with two-point nights, including a goal and an assist from both Jack Eichel and Jake McCabe.

The last win for the Sabres in Buffalo came back on Feb. 16, 2017 when Sam Reinhart and Evander Kane scored, while Robin Lehner stopped all 23 shots faced in a 2-0 shutout win at KeyBank Center.

Overall, the Sabres' history against the Avalanche has not been good since the franchise moved to Denver, going 12-15-2-3 in 32 games.

Eichel continues to ignite the Buffalo offense with his career-year for the Sabres. The 23-year-old picked up his 31st goal of the season, which currently has him ranked fourth in the league. His 65 points is tied for eighth in the league in scoring, even with Chicago Blackhawks forward and Buffalo native Patrick Kane.

The Sabres captain is currently riding a three-game goal streak, starting from the first game of the five-game homestand against the Ottawa Senators. With a goal on Tuesday, Eichel would have his second four-game goal streak of his career, with the first one coming earlier this season from Dec. 10 to 17.

He is currently on pace for 49 goals and 103 points this season, while his 70 even strength points this season are the most by a Sabres since Pat LaFontaine (83) and Alexander Mogilny (73) set back in the 1992-93 season.

One player who is trying to break out of his current slump is Jeff Skinner, who has not scored a goal in 14 consecutive games. In that time frame, Skinner has only picked up two assists, but he is also still coming off an upper-body injury suffered just after the Christmas break.

Overall this season, Skinner is still sitting with 11 goals and 19 points through 42 games.

Despite his scoring woes, Skinner is trying to stick to his game and generate more scoring chances that will, hopefully, lead to a breakthrough.

"There's little things you work on in practice. Obviously in-game there's situations I think from game-to-game where you look at things to try and adjust and create more and work with your linemates on being on the same page," Skinner said following the team's morning meetings. "I think all of those things come together when you're having success, things [start to] really click. So you just have to work at getting those things back in order."

"I think he definitely had a setback with the injury," Krueger said of his winger. "Just in the games leading up to the injury, he was really finding his groove, lots of scoring chances, lots of shots, and the goals were just going to come. Then he had that setback, and I think right now just getting back to where we were there, it's normal coming off a long injury after a couple of games you might have a little bit of a dip, and we're also working hard together with Jeff to just get him back into that space. The pressure of scoring is so big on him, and he needs to park that and just create chances and get involved in our game at 5-on-5 and the chances will follow. He wants to add, and he feels that pressure because we aren't scoring as a team right now. We need to just get him back and focused on all the other things and have that be a byproduct of his game."

At practice on Monday, the 27-year-old was skating as part of a rotation of players on the bottom two lines with Johan Larsson being unavailable at practice with a maintenance day. Some of his best success this season has come while playing on a line with Larsson at center, with Conor Sheary playing the right wing.

Sheary was consistently working on a line with Marcus Johansson and Michael Frolik on Monday, but if Larsson is back for Tuesday's game, we could see him and Skinner reunited on a line.

In Skinner's career against the Avalanche, he has played in 12 games while picking up four goals and registering three assists.

Reinhart continues to play some very good hockey for the Sabres on a line with Eichel, picking up 13 points (6+7) in his last 13 games. The 24-year-old has put up 18 goals and 25 assists for 43 points in 52 games this season, and is currently on pace for career-high totals in goals (28) and points (68).

The Sabres will face an Avalanche team that is chock full of talent, especially up front with dangerous playmakers like Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen, Gabriel Landeskog, Andre Burakovsky and Nazem Kadri.

MacKinnon is one goal shy of Eichel's 31 this season, but he currently ranks fourth in the NHL for scoring with 72 points in 50 games played. The 24-year-old is on pace this season to set career-high totals in goals (49), assists (69) and points (118) in his seventh season in Colorado.



Rantanen has seen himself missing some time this season due to injury, but has still produced at over a point per-game pace with 16 goals and 19 assists for 35 points in 34 games. However, he has become a dangerous scorer and playmaker himself during his four full seasons in the NHL.

Injuries have been a bit of a story for the Avalanche this season, however, they still currently sit third in the Central Division with a 28-16-6 record and 62 points. On the road this season, Colorado has been very potent with a 14-9-2 record.

Shutting down the Avalanche and their playmakers will be a top priority for the Sabres if they want to come away with another win before facing the NHL's worst team in the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday night at KeyBank Center.

"Obviously they have top-end guys. We just want to make sure that everyone's got their legs in the game, that we start skating right away, and just play our own game. I think that's the key for tonight," Sabres defenseman Henri Jokiharju said on Tuesday morning.

The young Sabres defenseman has had a very solid first season in Buffalo after being acquired from the Chicago Blackhawks in the offseason for forward Alexander Nylander. The 20-year-old has not missed a game all season, and has put up four goals and nine assists for 13 points.

Before the season started, many had Jokiharju pegged to find himself back in the American Hockey League and with the Rochester Americans at some point during the early part of the season once some healthy bodies returned to the lineup. However, Jokiharju had exceeded many people's expectations and has firmly set himself in the every day lineup for the Sabres. His play at both ends of the rink is very controlled, and his vision allows him to be a very relied upon player in all types of situations for this group.

When asked about his game and how he fits in the make up of this team moving forward, Krueger said that his young blue liner has showed the confidence in his game going all the way back to the 2019 IIHF World Championship in Slovakia back in May.

"Winning the World Championship as a European player, especially with a country like Finland, is an unbelievable experience as being one of the top-six defensemen. The World Championships kind of go under [the radar] because of the Stanley Cup [Playoffs] being on here in North America, but in Europe they mean a lot, especially to those countries that are chasing the big boys like Sweden, Russia, the Czech. For the Finns, that was a big win. I thought from there, when we communicated and everything that happened in his mind through the summer, his confidence was really high coming in here, and then he just worked so hard at everything he does. He's a very coachable player. He embraced the way we want to play here when we speak about gapping and we speak about solving pressure in our end. Both of those components he's outstanding at, and that's why he's an excellent fit to where we're going with this hockey team here in Buffalo and the Sabres hockey of the future. He's going to be an important piece."

Carter Hutton will get the start in goal for the Sabres after having his 12-game losing streak snapped on Saturday against the Blue Jackets. The 32-year-old has looked very good over the course of his last three games, going 1-1-0 with a 1.42 goals-against average and a .946 save percentage. He did not start last Tuesday night coming out of the break against the Senators, but he was forced to come into the game in the third period after Linus Ullmark suffered a lower-body injury.

Philipp Grubauer will likely start in goal for the Avalanche against the Sabres, who has gone 14-11-4 this season with a 2.90 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage. Over the course of his last 10 games played, Grubauer has been up-and-down in goal with a 4-4-2 record with a 3.11 goals-against average and a .915 save percentage.

If the Sabres are to have any chance of sticking close with the Avalanche throughout the night, especially with their high-octane offense, they will need to get out on the attack fast and try to get the game's first goal.

Only a handful of player decided to take the ice on Tuesday for a morning skate, which included Rasmus Dahlin and Brandon Montour, who are dealing with, what Krueger determined as, "minimal management of bodies." However, Krueger said on Tuesday that injuries are not the only thing that could have a determining factor on the lineup against Colorado.

"I would love to be able to tell you the roster, but I have to be honest that we're still assessing," Krueger said on Tuesday. "We're also dealing with not only with some light injuries, but we're also dealing with some sickness in the room right now. We are evaluating as I stand here, so the way the roster is going to finally play out, we will let you know as soon as we have it."

Be sure to tune in at 6 p.m. for the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog from (716) Food and Sport, where you will hear more from Krueger, Skinner, and Jokiharju. In addition, Sabres general manager Jason Botterill is expected to speak with Schopp and the Bulldog on Tuesday at 5:30 p.m.

After a midseason OHL trade, Sabres prospect Matej Pekar is once again the new guy in a new place  
The Athletic  
By: Joe Yerdon  
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Being the new guy in a new place is something Sabres prospect Matej Pekar has gotten accustomed to the past few years.

His hockey life began at home in the Czech Republic, where he played until he headed to Michigan when he was 14. There he played for three different junior teams before graduating up to the Muskegon Lumberjacks in the USHL in 2017-18 before being selected by the Sabres in the fourth round of the 2018 NHL draft.

In Muskegon, he won the league's rookie of the year award and was at the time committed to play college hockey — first for Nebraska-Omaha and then Miami University (Ohio) — before he ultimately decided to play in the OHL for Barrie. After his second straight appearance with the Czech Republic in the World Junior Championships last month, he's now playing for Sudbury after a midseason trade.

That's a lot of turnover over the span of seven years for a teenager (Pekar turns 20 on Feb. 10), but if anything it's helped him adjust to the life that awaits him in pro hockey. Being traded was a new experience though.

"I don't worry about where I'm going, where I'm driving, whatever, where I end up," Pekar said. "I just worry about me playing hockey and getting better in the gym and off the ice and on the ice. It's hockey and it's kind of a pro way to get traded. So like, yeah, you know, it's good to learn it."

Pekar has always had a bit of an "aw shucks" demeanor that seems to contrast his fierce competitive style. During the past two summers at Sabres development camp, he's shown an ability to drive the biggest names crazy with his brand of hockey. After all, he's cited Brad Marchand as one of his favorite players to model himself after and loves playing the part of a pest. When he's at his best, he's able to make the likes of Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Dahlin seek revenge in what's supposed to be a friendly yet competitive, intrasquad situation.

"He is that guy that when he's moving his feet and he's on the puck, he's on people and he works hard," Sudbury Wolves coach Cory Stillman said. "He's tenacious and he's going to dig and battle and do whatever to come up with the puck. You can see why people would like the way he plays."

Since joining Sudbury, Pekar has posted solid numbers with three goals and 11 assists in 14 games. He had more success scoring goals with Barrie, with 16 tallies and 13 assists in 26 games there before he was dealt. With trades come system changes and the differences for him between the two teams were clear.

"Coach Stillman is a little bit more system guy and Dale (Hawerchuk) was more of a run-and-gun guy, a little more offensively I'd say," Pekar said. "But everything else you know, they're pretty much the same. They both had great careers so they had a lot of experience to give us."

"The style we play (we) demand a lot for him to be around the puck. We try not to take any shifts off and I want him to be engaged and then sometimes he's away from the puck," Stillman said. "But I've been very happy with how he's been performing."

Playing in the OHL with one of the players expected to be taken in the top-five of the upcoming NHL Draft, Quinton Byfield, gives Pekar one of the biggest offensive threats to work off of. Pekar's first few games with the Wolves saw him on Byfield's wing, although recently he's been on the wing on a line with undrafted 20 year-olds Bradley Chenier and MacAuley Carson.

Playing in the OHL is one thing compared to playing against the best junior players in the world at the World Junior Championships. It was on that stage Pekar was expected to play a big part with the tournament taking place in his home country, but things didn't play out that way. He began the tournament on the top line and helped the Czechs upset Russia to open the tournament, but penalty problems against Germany caused him to lose ice time and opportunity.

"It's not something I wanted to do and it's sometimes because of too much effort, I'd say," Pekar said of the penalties. "I can't control where I'm playing. I was still trying to provide the team (what) I can provide them, you know, but the production was not the best at all. I just tried to accept the role and just play the right way and I know I can run better, but I don't think it was as bad as people will say."

Sabres assistant general manager and Rochester Americans GM Randy Sexton was in the Czech Republic for World Juniors and his assessment matched Pekar's.

"You know that he's going to take penalties. You'll see it here that we don't like the fact he takes a lot of penalties, but we love the zest and the grit and the high level of compete that he brings," Sexton said. "It's part of his learning process. I guess the coaches were clear with him. That's why he didn't play quite as much. But again, it's part of the process. And in order for him to learn and grow as a professional, he'll have some rough nights here. You know, you take some penalties you might miss a few shifts. It's just all part of the learning process."

The process is something the Sabres are very invested in. During Sudbury's 10-3 loss in Mississauga, Sabres player development coach Adam Mair was there to speak with him afterward. The drive from Buffalo to Mississauga, just outside Toronto, isn't too far, but the OHL covers a lot of ground and the Sabres' development coaches have been motivated to watch Pekar in person often.

"Last week, we played against North Bay for example, the game wasn't the best for me," Pekar said. "(Sabres development coach) Krys Barch was there. He told me exactly what I have to do next game. I feel like I bounced back really good against Sault Ste. Marie. He told me everything like what I do right. Let's say the game before against North Bay I had three assists. And then against the Soo I had only one goal but he said that game I was 30 times better because that game will translate into the pros rather than those kind of 'junior points.' It's great that they that they want me to perform (as opposed to) point production."

Pekar's value as a pro when he gets there will be as a player who will drive opponents nuts with his brand of hockey. Piling up points in the OHL would look nice, but it doesn't always translate into NHL success. For him, doing the little things and doing them all the time and consistently will allow him to ascend the organizational depth chart. As his season progresses with the Wolves, the goal will be for him to help them go far in the OHL playoffs and potentially to the Memorial Cup, but after that Rochester is waiting.

"We know the people in Sudbury well with UPL (Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen) there last year," Sexton said. "And you know they have a good team — they should have a good playoff push — and then our plan is whenever his season's done, assuming we're still playing here, he'll come here at the end to continue his development process."