



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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TONIGHT'S GAME: Utica vs. Rochester

Amerks lose at home to Cleveland
Buffalo News
By: Staff Report
Feb. 23, 2020

Sam Vigneault, a 6-foot-5 center, scored at 1:35 of overtime to give the Cleveland Monsters a 3-2 American Hockey League victory over the Rochester Americans on Saturday night at Blue Cross Arena in Rochester.

Dillon Simon and Trey Fix-Wolansky assisted on the winner.

Wolansky, a feisty 5-foot-6, 20-year-old winger, had a goal and two assists for Cleveland, his first three-point game of the season for the Monsters.

Cleveland took a 2-0 lead in the first period on a goal by Fix-Wolansky at 5:59 and another by Markus Hannikainen, with Fix-Wolansky assisting, at 7:35.

Rochester fought back, however.

Taylor Leier scored with an assist from Rasmus Asplund with 4:06 left in the first.

Rochester tied it when Brett Murray scored at 9:15 with defensemen Lawrence Pilut and William Borgen getting the assists.

The third period was scoreless, though Rochester outshot the Monsters, 13-4. Overall the Amerks had a 34-13 advantage in shots on goal.

Joonas Korpisalo made 32 saves for Cleveland, but did not receive one of the three-star awards which went to Vigneault, Fix-Wolansky and Leier in that order.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, Rochester's rookie goalie, had to come up with only 10 saves.

The lost point would have helped the second-place Amerks (30-17-4-4 for 68 points) keep pace with the first place Belleville Senators (35-16-4-1, 75 points) in the North Division of the AHL.

Cleveland, last in the division, is 24-26-3-2 for 53 points. Rochester has four regulation wins over the Monsters, but has two shootout losses and Saturday's OTL to Cleveland.

Next for Rochester is a Wednesday night home game against the Utica Comets.

Disappointing week ends for Luukkonen and the Amerks
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija
Feb. 23, 2020

Throughout the season, Rochester Americans general manager Randy Sexton had said the development process for a young goaltender is a marathon, not a sprint.

You can't rush them through any phase. You can't be fooled by a stretch of strong play and think they're farther along than they really are.

We saw this week how very true that is for Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen. He allowed goals from essentially the same spot in overtime Wednesday and Saturday as the Amerks went just 1-0-2 in three games on home ice.

The week ended with a 3-2 loss to the Cleveland Monsters on Saturday night in front of 7,003 on First Responders' Night at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

Cleveland center Sam Vigneault fired a shot from deep in the left circle past Luukkonen's left leg, capping a aggravating night for the Amerks.

They outshot the Monsters 34-13 and overcame an early 2-0 deficit yet lost.

"Right now I'm frustrated," said Amerks winger Taylor Leier, who scored his eighth goal. "This is a week when we should have had six points."

On Wednesday they squandered a 2-0 third-period lead and lost 72 seconds into overtime when Josh Norris drove a shot from the left circle under Luukkonen.

On Saturday, while, Vigneault was closer to the net, it's still a shot teams want to see made. Especially when Monsters goalie Joonas Korpisalo was making clutch stops for Cleveland.

Then again, Korpisalo was supposed to play in the NHL All-Star Game last month but instead has been on injured reserve because of a knee ailment. Saturday's start was his first game of a rehabilitation assignment from the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The Buffalo Sabres have high hopes for Luukkonen's future, especially after his dynamic MVP season a year ago in the Ontario Hockey League.

But he been just OK in his nine games with the Amerks. He has a 3-3-3 record, 3.16 goals-against average and .876 save percentage.

Of the 72 goalies who have played at least 500 minutes in the American Hockey League this season, only two have stopped a lower percentage of shots.

He has, however, shown what he's capable of doing. On Sunday he made two terrific point-blank stops to preserve a 3-2 win over Utica.

On Wednesday, however, the Norris OT shot needed to be stopped. On Saturday, he misread a carom of a shot wide of the net and the Monsters turned it into their second goal.

Then the overtime goal wasn't necessarily the toughest shot a goalie will face.

"I'm sure he'd like to have it back," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said, "just like our shooters would like to have some of those back, then we would even be talking about it."

Indeed, the Amerks have difficulty scoring. They've produced just 20 goals in the past nine games. Of the 16 teams currently in playoff position, just three average fewer goals than the Amerks (2.93).

Leier said it's not necessarily what they're doing when they shoot, either.

"It's the five seconds before the play happens," he said. "It's being sync with your linemates. It's puck management. It's plays at the blue line. If we want to win now and win in the playoffs, we have to start making a lot more of those plays."

Amerks drop 2nd of 3 straight OT games
C&C Worldwide
By: Craig Potter
Feb. 23, 2020

It's getting to be a broken record for the Rochester Americans the past 3 games, outshoot your opponent but lose 2 of the 3 contests in overtime.

"Right now I'm frustrated," said Amerks winger Taylor Leier, who scored his eighth goal. "This is a week when we should have had six points."

"It was not the result in the end that we wanted," said assistant captain and veteran defenseman Andrew MacWilliam. "If I said I was not frustrated I'd be lying, but that's what being a professional is all about. We just need to learn from it and come back on Monday ready to get back to work."

The Amerks latest shortcoming was Saturday night before 7,003 fans at the Blue Cross Arena as the Cleveland Monsters scored on their first 2 shots of the game, then wound up winning on the only shot in overtime for a 3-2 victory.

Sam Vigneault netted the game-winner 1:35 into the extra session for the Monsters.

"He would have liked to have that one back," Amerks head coach Chris Taylor said of Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen after allowing the overtime-winning goal. "Just like our shooters would like to have some of those back, then we would even be talking about it."

The Monsters capitalized on a couple of Rochester defensive mistakes to grab a 2-0 lead in the first period against rookie goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

However, the Amerks kept plugging away with shots on Cleveland goalie Joonas Korpisalo, who was on a rehab assignment from the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Taylor Leier got the Amerks on the scoreboard as he took a pass from Rasmus Asplund, then roared down the right wing and closed to put the puck through the 5-hole for the goal.

Rochester held a 16-3 shot advantage but trailed 2-1 at the end of the period.

Brett Murray evened the count in the second stanza as Lawrence Pilut picked up his 100th pro assist on the play. Will Borgen also received an assist on the goal.

"I liked how we were able to get back into the game after trailing," said Taylor. "We are frustrated with the result, but the positive is we got back into the game. We could have let the game get away from us, but we didn't. We got close to 35 shots on net and made a game out of it."

"We showed mental toughness and did not give up," Leier added. "When you're down, guys need to step up and make plays. You also have to put the puck in the net. It starts inside your own zone, from your own blueline then continues further up the ice."

The Amerks had numerous opportunities in their 34 shots as they hit the post 3 times and miss several open nets.

"It's the five seconds before the play happens," Leier said. "It's being sync with your linemates. It's puck management. It's plays at the blue line. If we want to win now and win in the playoffs, we have to start making a lot more of those plays."

Korpisalo finished with 32 saves as he came up with several key stops.

*NOTES — By way of last night's 3-2 overtime win, the Amerks reached the 30-win mark for the fourth consecutive season and third straight under head coach Chris Taylor. Taylor became the first Amerks head coach since Randy Cunneynworth, the all-time winningest coach in franchise history, to lead his team to 30 or more wins in each of his first three seasons behind the bench...Rochester's homestand continues on Wednesday, Feb. 26 when they host the Utica Comets at the Blue Cross Arena at 7:05 pm...Jacob Bryson is tied for sixth among all first-year players with a plus-10 rating. Bryson, who scored his first pro goal on Wednesday and had the game-winner Friday night, also is tied for eighth among all rookie blueliners with 21 points (2+19) in 53 games...Amerks assistant coach Toby Petersen was behind the bench when Cleveland won the Calder Cup in 2016...Rochester holds a record of 29-7-4-4 over Cleveland since the start of the 2011-12 campaign and has earned a point in all 7 games so far this season.

Officer Denny Wright honored at hometown heroes hockey game
Rochester First
By: Atyia Collins
Feb. 23, 2020

Two hockey games on Saturday, with one goal; to celebrate the work of our area's first responders including one Rochester police officer.

First, The Rochester Americans honoring first responders at their 'Hometown Heroes Night' game against the Belleville Senators.

Before that game, another match up at the Blue Cross Arena, this one between two local law enforcement agencies, with one local hero, officer Denny Wright, being recognized.

The Rochester Police Department" and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office going head to head on the ice, all for charity during this year's hometown heroes exhibition game.

"it's been a four-year rivalry we beat them the last three. I think today might be a pretty competitive game," said Lt. Ralph Montinarelli of the Rochester Police Department.

This year's gaming carrying an even greater meaning, as officer Denny Wright, a Rochester Police Officer who lost his eyesight while responding to call, was recognized for his dedication to the community, receiving a jersey.

"It's got his IBM number on it. Just want to say thanks for his service to the community," said Capt. James McGowan of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office.

"It's difficult this job, it's pretty rough. You got people out there serving the community. It's not always seen that way by the community. Then you got somebody like Denny Wright who pretty much made almost the ultimate sacrifice and he's in a difficult spot right now. We want to let him know that we care about that. We appreciate what he did. We just want to say thanks in whatever way we can do that," said McGowan.

Funds raised went towards the Monroe County Sheriff's Office Association of Retirees (SOAR).

Cleveland Monsters take down the Rochester Americans in overtime
SB Nation The Cannon
By: Elaine Shircliff
Feb. 23, 2020

The Cleveland Monsters took down the Rochester Americans in a thrilling overtime battle on Saturday night. Joonas Korpisalo was in net for the first time since going down with an injury on December 29th, 2019. He put on a show stopping 31 of the 33 shots the Amerks put on goal.

In Friday night's loss to the Syracuse Crunch, the Monsters started the game jumpy and flustered. Tonight, the Monsters came out cool, calm, and confident. This change in attitude gave the Monsters the upper hand in the first period.

Trey Fix-Wolansky put the Monsters on the board with a breakaway wrister four minutes into the game. This also happened to be the Monsters first registered shot of the evening.

On the Monsters' second shot of the night, they extended their lead over the Amerks to 2-0. Fix-Wolansky grabbed an errant puck towards the top of the right faceoff circle. He swatted it towards the net but it sailed a bit wide. Markus Hannikainen chased it down before banging it off the post from below the goal line to make it 2-0 7:35 into the game.

With 4:06 left in the first period, Taylor Leier cut the Monsters lead in half. Michael Prapavessis was knocked over while trying to close up the hole left by Korpisalo's right skate which allowed the puck to fly into the net. If Prapavessis hadn't been knocked out of position, the puck likely would have been stopped by his blade. It was a smart defensive move by Prapavessis that, unfortunately, did not work out the way he planned.

At the end of the first period, the Monsters led the Amerks 2-1. However, they trailed the Amerks in shots 16-3. The good thing about the lack of shots is the fact 2/3 of the registered shots found the back of the net.

The Amerks were able to tie the game at two with 10:45 left in the second period. Brett Murray picked up a rebounded puck and quickly fired it into the net.

For the remainder of the second and the entirety of the third, the Monsters did their best to keep the Amerks out of scoring position. Especially Hannikainen who dug multiple pucks off the board and had a nice breakaway. Branden Troock and Doyle Somerby spent a great deal of the final stanza of play trying to put pucks on net. While, Trey Fix-Wolansky continued to break up plays and pick off passes.

Regulation wasn't enough time to settle the battle between the Monsters and Amerks. In the first minute of overtime fans were treated to Ryan MacInnis' ability to not let the opposition get the best of him. Twice he was double teamed while making a move for the net but didn't let the extra pressure prevent him from moving up the ice with the puck. Fix-Wolansky did a great job of keeping the Amerks from leaving the neutral zone during overtime as well.

The first registered shot from either team in overtime turned into the game winning goal. Sam Vigneault skated along the boards with the puck before gliding into the left faceoff circle. Once he hit the faceoff dot, Vigneault launched the puck into the net for the Monsters 3-2 win over the Amerks.

The Monsters look to keep the winning going in Toronto against the Marlies at 11am on Wednesday.

Bryson's overtime goal lifts Amerks to win
Buffalo News
By: Staff Report
Feb. 21, 2020

Jacob Bryson notched the game-winning goal with 4:29 left in overtime to lift Rochester to a 3-2 victory over the Lehigh Valley Phantoms on Friday night at the Blue Cross Arena.

Bryson was set up by Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Asplund. He finished off a rebound from the crease.

After being held scoreless in his first 51 games with Rochester, Bryson has two goals in two games.

C.J. Smith opened the scoring for the Americans in the first period with a shot just inside the left post.

Neither team found paydirt in the second period. Kurtis Gabriel tied it for the Phantoms three minutes into the final stanza.

Sean Malone netted his 11th goal of the season with less than a minute to spare, but 20 seconds later Lehigh Valley tied the game again, this time on a shot from Mikhail Vorobyev.

Vorobyev nearly won the game in overtime for the Phantoms but his shot was turned away by the Amerks' Andrew Hammond, who logged 29 saves in net.

The Americans are 30-17-3-4 and are six points behind Belleville in the North Division.

Rochester will be back at the Blue Cross Arena on Saturday night to host the Cleveland Monsters at 7:05 p.m.

Taylor Leier's new contract provides Sabres organization with forward depth
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
Feb. 21, 2020

The Sabres signed Amerks winger Taylor Leier to a one-year, two-way contract worth \$700,000.

Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton said Leier, who inked a one-year AHL deal after tearing his labrum last May, would have received an NHL contract last offseason if he had remained healthy.

Shortly after his season debut Dec. 11, Leier, 26, scored five goals over a four-game stretch. Then a frightening injury — teammate Kevin Porter's shot hit him in the neck, causing him to be stretchered off the ice — sidelined Leier for 12 games.

"I've had a chip on my shoulder since the surgery happened and then my neck injury," Leier said. "I think I've become stronger because of it. You learn a lot about yourself when there's adversity in front of you.

"It hasn't been the easiest year. Just without a training camp, no exhibition games. But at the same time, I obviously knew I wasn't going to start in Buffalo.

"I had one job to do, and it was come play for the Amerks, which I was very grateful for and the contract they gave me."

Leier, who played 55 games with the Philadelphia Flyers earlier in his career, said he tried not to think about earning an NHL contract.

"I just tried to feel like my old self, which I have, and things just kind of took care of itself," he said.

Leier, of course, boosts the Sabres' forward depth in Rochester.

"We don't have a ton of guys here on NHL contracts, particularly up front, so we wanted to make sure we have some depth just in case things go a different way come trade deadline," Sexton said.

Leier has scored seven goals and nine points in 18 games this season.

Sabres prospect Will Borgen enjoys being 'hard guy to play against'
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
Feb. 21, 2020

When an opportunity materializes to join the rush and showcase his offensive skills, Buffalo Sabres defense prospect Will Borgen tries to pounce on it.

"The majority of the time I just like to play safe, play my role," Borgen said. "But if I see an opportunity, I'm going, yeah."

On Wednesday, Borgen spotted a chance in the Americans' 3-2 overtime loss to the Belleville Senators, zoomed to the net and nearly scored his first goal this season.

Amerks coach Chris Taylor said Borgen, 23, possesses the talent to generate more offense.

"He's not here just to play defense," Taylor said after the Amerks blew a late two-goal lead in Blue Cross Arena. "If there's opportunities to jump in plays, we want everybody to be included in the offense. He's the type of player that he skates well, he's got a good shot. We need to see more of it."

Still, Borgen, who believes he can reach another level offensively, doesn't want to veer too far out of his comfort zone.

"My job is defense — that's my position — so that's what I take priority in first," said Borgen, who has compiled eight assists in 52 game this season.

The 6-foot-3, 198-pound Borgen takes pride in stymieing the opposition.

"Will embraces the physical ... hard guy to play against," Amerks General Manager Randy Sexton said. "He wants that role, he's embraced it, we've encouraged him to do it. I mean, that in his mind is his identity."

One scout who has watched Borgen regularly throughout his pro career called him a "big, strong, physical, stay-at-home defenseman."

He "is a good skater and is hard to play against but does not bring a lot of offense or creativity from the back end," the scout said. "He will keep other teams' players honest and on their toes."

Considering Borgen rarely displays much flash, other Sabres defense prospects and even an Amerks veteran often overshadow him.

Lawrence Pilut, who has been shuttling between Buffalo and Rochester, quickly developed into one of the American Hockey League's top offensive defensemen following his arrival from Sweden in 2018. The diminutive Jacob Bryson has quietly established himself as one of the Sabres' best prospects as an AHL rookie.

Zach Redmond, a 10-year pro, has followed up a dynamic career season in which he was named the league's top defenseman by recording 30 points in his first 50 games.

The Sabres recalled Borgen, who played his first four NHL games late last season, in October but did not dress him for any game.

Since then, the Sabres have summoned Pilot and defenseman John Gilmour ahead of Borgen.

"We have a lot good defensemen, we have a lot of depth in this organization, which is really good," Borgen said. "It just brings everyone's game up a level in practice and in games, so, yeah, you're always fighting for a spot. ...

"If somebody else gets called up, you got to be just happy for them."

Former Sabres General Manager Tim Murray drafted Borgen in the fourth round in 2015, 92nd overall. Organizationally, defense is their deepest position.

The Sabres could use Borgen as an asset to help them find more forward depth before Monday's deadline.

Notes: Bryson scored his first AHL goal Wednesday in his 52nd appearance. "It took a long time to get there," he said. ... Taylor said Amerks defenseman Casey Nelson is week-to-week with an upper-body injury. Nelson has missed the last five games. ... Goaltender Michael Houser has been reassigned to the Cincinnati Cyclones (ECHL). ... The Amerks host the Lehigh Valley Phantoms on Friday and the Cleveland Monsters on Saturday.

Bryson lifts Amerks in overtime
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija
Feb. 22, 2020

Way back on opening night, Rochester Americans assistant coach Gord Dineen talked about how impressed he was with the skating abilities of rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson.

But only over the past few weeks has Bryson really begun to show what he's capable of producing.

It's amazing what a shot of confidence can do.

Bryson continued his emergence on Friday night, setting up one goal before scoring the winner 35 seconds into overtime as the Amerks defeated the Lehigh Valley Phantoms 3-2.

It took Bryson until his 52nd game to score his first professional goal, converting a Rasmus Asplund pass off a two-on-one fast break on Wednesday night.

Now he has goals in back-to-back games. This time, as Casey Mittelstadt was angling through the right circle toward the net, Bryson charged toward the deep slot.

Mittelstadt's pass hit traffic but dropped right at the top of the crease and Bryson swatted it into an open net.

"Mittsy made a great play and I was in the right spot at the right time," Bryson said.

The goal saved the Amerks from another possible crushing loss. On Wednesday they squandered a 2-0 third-period lead and lost 3-2 in overtime to Belleville.

On Friday night, they carried a 1-0 lead into the third, gave up the tying goal, went ahead with 51.1 seconds remaining on a Sean Malone goal, then watched the Phantoms tie it 20 seconds later.

Goalie Andrew Hammond, who played especially well, blocked an attempted centering pass but the puck caromed across the deep slot and Mikhail Vorobyev slammed it in.

"I thought we were doing all the right things and I go to block a pass and it goes to the backdoor," Hammond said.

Said Malone: "It was an emotional roller coaster. I was very amped up (after scoring) and 10 seconds later it's in our net."

They didn't collapse, however, with Bryson scoring before there was ever a line change in overtime.

The goal gave him 10 points in his past 13 games (2 goals, 8 assists). He has 2-19-21 in his 53 games this season.

"There's newfound confidence," Amerks coach Chris Taylor said. "He's getting more points lately and any time you get rewarded you start to gain confidence. Some guys get an empty net goal and it gives them liftoff."

That was very evident when he set up Malone's goal in the final minute. He held the puck in near the Phantoms blue line and, without hesitation, bolted down the right wing boards.

That forced defenders to chase while trying to recover. Bryson's pass for Andrew Oglevie deflected away from the Amerks winger but Malone was following the play in the high slot and fired high into the net for his 11th goal.

"I grabbed that puck and I felt I could beat those guys wide," Bryson said. "I'm trying to use my speed to the best of my ability."

Considering that skating ability — not just his speed but his all-directions mobility — is his biggest asset, the new mindset is making him much more dangerous.

"He's jumping in plays because he can recover," Taylor said. "It's making him tough to control for other teams."

The Amerks (30-17-3-4, 67 points) also gained on first-place Belleville as the Senators lost at home 6-3 to Utica. The six-game homestand continues Saturday night against Cleveland.

Bryson's OT goal lifts Amerks to victory
C&C Worldw ide
By: Craig Potter
Feb. 22, 2020

Jacob Bryson was in the right place at the right time to score on a backhand shot to lift the Rochester Americans to a 3-2 victory over the Lehigh Valley Phantoms on Friday night before 6,196 fans at the Blue Cross Arena.

"It was all about getting to the net tonight," said Bryson. "Mittsy (Casey Mittelstadt) made a great play getting there and I was kind of in the right spot at the right time for the goal. I just drove to the net and was able to find the puck."

The goal was the rookie's second career pro goal in 2 games, and it turned out to be the game-winner. He also assisted on the go-ahead tally by Sean Malone in the final minute of regulation, but the Phantoms netted the equalizer just 20 seconds later to send the game into overtime.

"I grabbed that puck and I felt I could beat those guys wide," Bryson said. "I'm trying to use my speed to the best of my ability."

"He is getting more and more confidence," added Amerks head coach Chris Taylor of Bryson. "Any time you get rewarded with goals it can sort of give you the lift off. You see that with Jacob and now you can see him jumping up into the play. He is quick enough and smart enough that he can recover and get back into the play, if needed."

The Amerks grabbed the lead in the first period on a power play goal by CJ Smith. Jean-Sebastien Dea and Rasmus Asplund assisted on the play.

The Phantoms knotted the count early in the third when former Amerk Kyle Criscuolo found Kurtis Gabriel open in the slot as he beat Andrew Hammond to tie the game.

Hammond was brilliant between the pipes as he finished with 29 saves, including several key stops while the Amerks killed off a 5-on-3 by the Phantoms.

"It's one of those things where you could feel them gaining some energy," said Hammond. "As a goaltender, you feel if you can help bail your team out then maybe we could go the other way. It's my job to make the saves, and sometimes it's maybe harder than others, but you just try to do what you can do to bail the team out.

Malone ripped home a shot in the final minute of regulation, off a mishit by Andrew Oglevie, after Bryson set up the play with his speed to get around the Lehigh Valley defense.

"I saw the puck go through our defenseman and forward's legs and decided to step up," said Malone. "I knew I had an opportunity to shoot the puck and fortunately it went into the net."

However, just as in Wednesday's game against Belleville, the visitors score again in the final minute to send the contest into overtime.

"It was an emotional roller coaster. I was very amped up (after scoring) and (20) seconds later it's in our net," said Malone.

"I thought we were doing all the right things and I go to block a pass and it goes to the backdoor," Hammond said.

Taylor added, "Hammond made some big saves for us. I thought our 'D' played really well tonight and they contained Lehigh Valley. It was a strange play as Hammond tried to slide across the crease, but the puck bounced off the stick and right to their guy."

But unlike Wednesday, the Amerks netted the game-winner as Bryson followed the play to the net and put home a backhander in the slot after Mittelstadt made a pass. Asplund received his second assist of the night on the play as well.

The Amerks continue their homestand Saturday night at 7 pm against the Cleveland Monsters on First Responders Appreciation Night.

*NOTES — Rochester Americans General Manager Randy Sexton announced today that goaltender Michael Houser has been reassigned to the Cincinnati Cyclones. . . The Buffalo Sabres announced that the 16th Annual Scotty Bowman Showcase will take place on Wednesday, March 18 at KeyBank Center. The 2020 Scotty Bowman Showcase consists of three all-star hockey games between players from Buffalo and their rivals from Rochester. Each game will consist of two 22-minute halves. Admission for the games is \$5. . . Rochester's homestand closes out the weekend on Saturday, Feb. 22 when they welcome the North Division rival Cleveland Monsters back to the Blue Cross Arena. Game time is slated for a 7:05 pm. . . The Amerks need just one more win to reach the 30-win mark for the fourth consecutive season and third straight under head coach Chris Taylor. With the team's next win, Taylor will become the first Amerks head coach since Randy Cunneyworth, the all-time winningest coach in franchise history, to lead his team to 30 or more wins in each of his first three seasons behind the bench. . . Lehigh Valley's roster includes 4 former Amerks in forwards Kyle Criscuolo and Cal O'Reilly and defensemen T.J. Brennan and Eric Knodel. . . Last season, the Buffalo Sabres acquired Taylor Leier from the Philadelphia Flyers organization. The Saskatchewan native made his Amerks debut against his former team in the first meeting last season after posting 136 points (56+80) in 226 games with the Phantoms to begin his professional career.

Buffalo Sabres make move to terminate Zach Bogosian's contract

WGRZ

By: Kim DeGeorge

Feb. 21, 2020

Zach Bogosian's time with the Sabres has officially come to an end as the team has him on unconditional waivers with the intention of terminating his contract.

The team suspended Bogosian February 17 for failing to report to the Rochester Americans in the AHL.

Bogosian was placed on waivers February 14. The Sabres assigned him to Rochester when he cleared waivers.

Injuries have been an issue for Bogosian during his career, especially with the Sabres. Most recently he had hip surgery this past offseason that caused him to miss the first 22 games of the season.

He reportedly requested a trade and was a healthy scratch for 17 of his past 26 games with the Sabres.

Once he clears waivers, Bogosian's cap hit will be at zero with this move. At first, he was costing the team just over \$5 million but sending him to Rochester reduced that to \$3.9 million.

Gostisbehere returns but Phantoms lose in OT at Rochester
The Morning Call
By: Staff Report
Feb. 22, 2020

Defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere was on the ice in a Lehigh Valley Phantoms uniform for the first time in four years on Friday night.

Gostisbehere, on a conditioning loan from the Philadelphia Flyers, wasn't involved in any scoring plays as the Phantoms fell to the host Rochester Americans 3-2 in overtime.

Lehigh Valley forced the extra period on Misha Vorobyev's goal with only 32 seconds left in the third period.

Kurtis Gabriel's third-period tally accounted for the Phantoms' other goal.

Alex Lyon made 32 saves for Lehigh Valley.

Jacob Bryson got the game-winner for Rochester.

The Phantoms visit Syracuse Saturday night and then return home next Friday and Saturday for a pair of games against the Charlotte Checkers.

Overcoming Adversity Paying Off For Leier

Amerks.com

By: Suzie Cool

Feb. 19, 2020

Earlier this week, the Buffalo Sabres announced that the team signed forward Taylor Leier to a one-year, two-way contract for the remainder of the 2019-20 season.

"I knew I had to put the work in and that it just wasn't going to be given to me. I'm just really excited and happy that Buffalo has the belief in me, and I hope to prove them right," commented Leier after clearing waivers Tuesday afternoon, keeping him in Rochester.

Well, for now at least. The new two-way deal for Leier, who began the season on American Hockey League contract, now means the Sabres can bring him up whenever they need. He becomes the second Amerks forward this season to be elevated to an NHL contract, joining Dalton Smith.

Leier has spent parts of the last two seasons with the Rochester Americans after being acquired by the Buffalo Sabres in a midseason trade from the Philadelphia Flyers just last year. The Amerks forward has recorded 31 points (19+12) in 52 games with the Amerks, including eight points (7+1) in just 17 appearances due to an injury-filled season.

His last stint in the NHL came in 2017-18 when he spent the duration of the campaign with the Flyers, who drafted him in the fourth round (117th overall) in the 2012 NHL Draft, recording five points (1+4) in a career-high 39 games. In all, he's appeared in 55 NHL games, all with Philadelphia, totaling seven points (2+5).

Despite only being with the Buffalo organization for a little over a year now, Leier has taken the time to attribute much of his relaxed mindset on seeing time in different organizations and how no matter what he needs to just go and play his game.

"I try to just take it day-by-day and game-by-game. I try not to really think about the things that I can't control and the outside noise, like what management thinks of me or other teams think of me. I think those are things that players can't really think of. You just have to play your game"

Diving deeper into Leier's play this season with the Amerks, he started out watching 23 games from the stands before getting the go-ahead to join his teammates back out on the ice. After missing the first part of the season due to an upper-body injury that occurred over the offseason, Leier came out on fire. Through his first 10 games of the season, the versatile forward collected six points on four goals and two assists, including two multi-goal efforts.

He was starting to find a rhythm while rediscovering his scoring touch.

Then, adversity struck again.

Unfortunately, after that 10-game span, Leier found himself sidelined once more. During the first game of the new year against the Belleville Senators on Jan. 3, the Amerks forward would leave the game with an upper-body injury and no timeframe of when he could return to the ice.

"It was just a freak accident that I don't even think a lot of the guys on the team or coaching staff have really ever seen before. It was unfortunate but there's nothing much you can do with a situation like that. In the end, I think all these things can only make a guy stronger," recalled Leier.

Since then, Leier has made it back in the lineup for the second time after missing 12 more games. Making his comeback earlier this month against the Cleveland Monsters, Leier has appeared in seven games, notching two goals, including the game winner this past Sunday against the Utica Comets.

Even with his second return from injury, he still wasn't sure if the path he was on would lead him back to the NHL. That all changed on Monday.

"I'm super excited," said Leier. "It's been a long eight or nine months for me. I kind of took it step by step and tried to really work my way back after a significant injury."

There's no doubt that when the Amerks forward is in the game, he's giving his all in order to be a key factor behind his team's success – no matter who he's playing for. For now, Leier is just excited to be healthy, again, and focused on staying that way so he can make his return to the NHL.

"Just feeling like you're a piece of the puzzle and a part of the solution is a great feeling for a player, and that's what I strive to be for any organization and any team I play for. That's my goal. I want to be on a winning team, and I want to be a key factor on that winning team wherever I am."

Amerks can't hold lead, lose to Belleville at home

Buffalo News

By: Staff Report

Feb. 20, 2020

With a chance to close the gap between them and the first-place Belleville Senators on Wednesday night, the Rochester Americans could not hold a two-goal lead and lost to their American Hockey League North Division rivals, 3-2, in overtime.

Josh Norris, who tied the game with 4:49 left for the Senators, scored his 30th of the season at 1:12 of overtime to win it for Belleville.

The Amerks had taken a 2-0 lead on a first period goal by Jean-Sebastien Dea at 4:34 of the first period and defenseman Jacob Bryson's score at 10:56 of the second.

Halfway through the third period, Belleville got on the board with Vitaly Abramov's 18th goal with Norris and Rudolfs Balcers assisting. Then Jordan Murray and Balcers assisted on the tying goal by Norris.

Balcers also had the assist on the winning goal in overtime.

Dea's goal was his team-leading 15th for the Amerks. He assisted on Bryson's goal as well, giving him a team-best 35 points through 48 games. Zach Redmond and Taylor Leier had the assists on Dea's goal.

Rochester outshot the Senators, 29-18, in a game in which only two minor penalties were called. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 15 saves for Rochester. Joey Daccord had 27 for Belleville.

Instead of gaining two points on the Senators (34-15-4-1, 73 points), Rochester (29-17-3-4, 65 points) dropped one point more behind the division leaders.

It was the first of five home games in a row for Rochester. The Amerks will face the Lehigh Valley Phantoms on Friday at Blue Cross Arena, and the Cleveland Monsters come in for a 7:05 p.m. game on Saturday.

Amerks learn why Belleville is the team to beat
Pickin' Splinters
By: Kevin Oklobzija
Feb. 20, 2020

If the Rochester Americans were realistically going to take a run at first place in the American Hockey League's North Division, then victory on Wednesday night was paramount.

The Belleville Senators came to Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial with a seven-point lead over the second-place Amerks.

They left with an eight-point lead — and left behind a perplexed Amerks team and a dismayed Amerks coach.

Ahead 2-0 and in total control through two periods, the Amerks allowed Josh Norris and the Senators to tie the score in the final 10 minutes before winning the game 72 seconds into overtime.

Norris set up the first Belleville goal by Vitaly Abramov 10:23, tied the score with a slick mid-slot deflection with 4:49 to play, then ended the game by driving a shot from the left circle past goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

"Tonight was a big game," said rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson, who scored his first goal as a pro at 10:56 of the second period. "They have a lot of young talented forwards. That's the team to beat right now."

The Senators (35-15-4-1, 73 points) joyously celebrated the comeback victory, and rightfully so. They erased a late-game deficit on the road against a team that entered Wednesday with a 20-1-2-2 record when leading after two periods.

Then again, the Amerks (29-17-3-4, 65 points) have hardly mastered the great-from-start-to-finish playbook, and they know it.

"I think that's what we have to work on, playing a full 60 minutes," said winger Jean-Sebastien Dea, who scored his team-leading 15th goal. "We either don't start strong or don't finish strong."

The winning goal was scored after defenseman Lawrence Pilut attempted to dangle down the slot and between two defenders. It ended up being a rather nothing scoring chance that the speedy, look-to-attack Senators exploited.

Rudolfs Balcers passed to Norris, who sped away down the left wing before unloading from the left circle for his 30th goal, second-most in the AHL.

"He's a game-changer for sure," Taylor said.

Taylor is very familiar with Norris. He was a teammate of Norris' father, Dwayne, in Germany a dozen years ago.

"Josh is the same age as Sami (his daughter, Samantha)," Taylor said. "I used to drive them to school."

On Thursday he'll try to again drive home the point to his team about finding a killer instinct.

While the overtime play by Pilut didn't resemble anything you'd draw up, and consequently Dea and Taylor Leier weren't in position to defend.

"I'm not even looking at the overtime, there shouldn't have even been an overtime," Taylor said. "It's hard to win games, it's hard to finish teams off. We weren't willing to finish that team off."

He was especially perturbed at the overall play in the third period.

"We play four lines, there's no excuse not to have fresh legs," Taylor said. "You have a power play . . . you have no shots on it."

Thus, the Amerks learned again why the Senators are in first place.

"We have to give them credit," Dea said. "They're talented, they're young, they're hungry."

Taylor is hoping the Amerks find a little more late-game hunger soon.

Amerks squander lead, fall in OT
C&C Worldwide
By: Craig Potter
Feb. 20, 2020

The Belleville Senators demonstrated why they not only lead the North Division, but also have the most points in the Eastern Conference of the American Hockey League with an overtime, come-from-behind 3-2 victory over the Rochester Americans Wednesday night before 3,783 fans at the Blue Cross Arena.

"I'm not even looking at the overtime, they're shouldn't have even been an overtime," said Amerks coach Chris Taylor. "It's hard to win games, it's hard to finish teams off. We weren't willing to finish that team off.

"We play four lines, there's no excuse not to have fresh legs. You have a power play (early in the third period)... you have no shots on it."

The Amerks dominated the first period as they outshot the Senators, 13-1, through 19 minutes but only led 1-0.

"We have to be willing to finish teams off," Taylor said. "As hard as it is to win games, it is even harder to finish them off. We did not finish off plays and we let them back into the game."

"I thought we came out strong," said Jean-Sebastien Dea. "We seemed to think it was maybe going to be an easy game, but we have to play a full 60-minute game. At times lately we have not been able to play a full 60 whether it be a slow start or finishing the game. It's something that we need to regroup and get better moving forward."

Dea scored his team-high 15th goal, off assists from Zach Redmond and Taylor Leier, to give Rochester the 1-0 lead.

Belleville registered just one shot, by Erik Brannstrom at 7:35, in the first 19 minutes of the opening stanza. The Senators posted 2 shots in the final minute of the period.

"I think that's what we have to work on, playing a full 60 minutes," Dea said. "We either don't start strong or don't finish strong."

Rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson recorded his first professional goal midway through the second period for a 2-0 Rochester advantage.

"It took nearly 50 games but it does feel good," said Bryson. "It was a set play off the face-off. 'Aspie' (Rasmus Asplund) made a great pass and all I really had to do was put the puck on net. It was a great feeling."

"It's nice to see him get rewarded finally," said Taylor. "Jacob is one of those guys who is very good defensively, but over the last 10 games or so he has had a lot of really good offensive chances. I am very happy for him."

The Amerks, however, were unable to close out the game as the Senators took just 4 shots on rookie goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, and scored on 2 of them to tie the game and send it into overtime.

"We did not play a 60-minute game," said Amerks team captain Kevin Porter. "We let up a little bit and they picked it up and took it to us in the third period. To get two points out of this game would have been huge."

Josh Norris ended the game in 1:12 of the extra session with his second tally of the contest for the victory.

"He's a game-changer for sure," Taylor said of Norris.

"Tonight was a big game," Bryson added. "They have a lot of young talented forwards. That's the team to beat right now."

*NOTES — The Amerks need just one more win to reach the 30-win mark for the fourth consecutive season and third straight under head coach Chris Taylor. With the team's next win, Taylor will become the first Amerks head coach since Randy Cunneynworth, the all-time winningest coach in franchise history, to lead his team to 30 or more wins in each of his first three seasons behind the bench...Jean-Sebastien Dea, who remains the only Amerk this season to reach the 30-point plateau, continues to pace the team in goals (14) and points (33) through 47 games... Rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson is tied for 11th among all first-year defensemen with a plus-6 rating. Bryson is also eighth among all rookies with 18 assists in 51 games...The Senators lineup features two former Amerk defensemen in Jack Dougherty and Stuart Percy.