# ROCHESTER AMERICANS

## DAILY PRESS CLIPS

*Wednesday, March 4, 2020*

*TONIGHT'S GAME: Utica vs. Rochester*

Meet the Amerks: Taylor Leier
Rochester First
By: Alex Ross
*Mar. 3, 2020*

Taylor Leier has one motto: control what you can control.

"I work my hardest, bring a consistent game to practice and games, and be a reliable player," said Taylor.

All of his hard work paid off in February, when Leier was signed to a two-way, one year deal for $700,000.

"All I want to do is contribute to this team."

A lot of his ability to battle adversity comes from his seven seasons spent in the Philadelphia Flyers organization.

"When you're getting booed at home it's challenging, but overall it's good," said Taylor. "They demand success in that city and it holds the players accountable."

Even after losing playing time this season due to injury, Taylor remains a leader in the locker room. His persistence and drive are all qualities he shares with his younger brother Keaton.

Keaton is a company member of the Atlanta Ballet, and made his Kennedy Center debut this December as the Prince in The Nutcracker.

"Where we grew up, it's rare to have a professional dancer come out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan," said Taylor. "The kid is so accomplished, I'm so proud of him."

Despite the obvious differences between ballet and hockey, the brothers share parallels in their career. Just like going from the AHL to the NHL, Keaton needed to work his way up from the bottom.

"He didn't get the luxury of starting in a first company," said Taylor. "He started in a second company in Houston and worked his way up to the first company in Atlanta."

Taylor and Keaton's work ethic is hugely influenced by their parents.

"I try to bring my lunch pail to work every day, same with him," said Taylor. "That's what our parents ingrained in us."

Amerks, Perinton Youth Hockey to launch Junior Amerks organization
Rochester First
By: Staff Report
*Mar. 4, 2020*

The Rochester Amerks announced Tuesday they will work with Perinton Youth Hockey to launch the Rochester Junior Americans youth hockey organization.

Officials say play is set to begin in the 2020-2021 season and that all youth hockey programming offered under the current PYH group will then be played under the Jr. Amerks brand.

According to a press release, the Jr. Amerks will offer an "enhanced level of competition" for local players ages 6 to 18. The organize will be housed at the Rochester Ice Center on Lyndon Road in Fairport.

"We're incredibly excited to partner with Perinton Youth Hockey and launch the new Jr. Amerks program next season," said Amerks vice president of business operations Rob Minter in a press release. "This is a tremendous opportunity not only for us to aid in the efforts of introducing the game of hockey to a wider audience but allows us as an organization to deepen our footprint in the local youth hockey community. We look forward to working together with Perinton Youth Hockey on growing the game under the Amerks brand.

"The Amerks have a rich and meaningful history here in Rochester, and we're proud to join the tradition," said Robyn MacBride, PYH president, in a press release. "Our organizations are like-minded, both dedicated to the development of our players while focused on making hockey a fun and memorable experience for everyone whether they're on the ice or in the stands. Next season is a great new beginning for our organization, and we can't wait for what's to come."

According to officials, PYH is the only local youth hockey organization recognized by the Amerks and allowed to use the trademarks.

Some youth teams have already been wearing the Amerks logo for 50 years, and will have to stop using it on their jerseys per the Amerks owners, Pagula Sports and Entertainment. Rochester Coalition Sports says 18 teams within the Empire Conference will be hit, estimated to be about 500 players.

In a letter to parents, Rochester Coalition sports says, "we have requested that the Rochester Americans be cognizant of the impact this adjustment will have on our hockey families by facilitating the transition, including with funding to defray any expenses this will cause our families to incur." Rochester Coalition Sports say each new jersey set will cost upwards of $100. They say their teams will now wear an "R" logo for "Rochester" and still use the colors of the American flag, something they say no one can take away.

Try-outs for the new Jr. Amerks will be on March 24-26 at the Rochester Ice Center.

West Seneca native Sean Malone slowly regaining Sabres' prospect status
Buffalo News
By: Bill Hoppe
*Mar. 2, 2020*

It took much longer than Americans center Sean Malone anticipated to reach this stage in his development.

Last year, fresh off a strong rookie season, injuries nearly derailed the West Seneca native's career. The physical toll and accompanying mental anguish sapped his confidence and left him searching for answers.

After appearing in only 38 games as a second-year pro, the Buffalo Sabres did not offer Malone a contract. Instead, the Amerks signed him to an American Hockey League deal.

But Malone, 24, has enjoyed a comeback campaign, morphing into one of coach Chris Taylor's most trusted forwards.

"I love the game again," Malone said.

While Malone said he never lost his love for hockey, missing so much action last season and rarely feeling like himself when he managed to play wore heavily on him.

"I know I had another gear, and I just wasn't able to turn it on," said Malone, who has stayed healthy all season. "I think stepping away and working on the issues I had this summer and coming back stronger is really paying off."

Malone has 11 goals, a career-high 28 points and a plus-14 rating in 54 games.

"Maybe I'm developing a little later than I would've imagined," said Malone, who has the highest rating among Amerks forwards.

While Malone is in his mid-20s and doesn't have an NHL contract, he could be earning back his prospect status.

"He's really coming back to what we thought he was going to be as a player," Taylor said. "He's opening up not just his coaches' eyes, but his peers' eyes. Everybody that's around him understands (not only) how good of a player he is, but how much he's grown and how (dedicated he) has been this year. He's getting rewarded for it."

Taylor has rewarded Malone with an expanded role. In last Wednesday's 3-2 shootout loss to Utica, Taylor utilized him on the power play, to take a critical faceoff in the waning seconds of overtime and in the shootout.

"It's nice being relied on in important situations," Malone said. "Even today out there I went on the three-on-three to take an important faceoff with 15 seconds left. It's things like that, I think, that separate me from some guys. I want to keep doing that."

Taylor said Malone's confidence handling the puck has been his biggest area of growth.

"He's just not just throwing pucks in to get it in deep," he said. "He's making plays, he's making really good plays, sound plays. He's reliable on the defensive side of the puck, too. He's always underneath it supporting.

"He's one of those guys I can trust putting out in all different situations."

Malone, a sixth-round pick by the Sabres in 2013, 159th overall, seemed to develop quickly earlier in his career.

He earned a spot on the U.S. National Development Team as a teenager, played four years at Harvard and jumped directly to the NHL just days after his college career ended.

But other than one game he played with the Sabres just hours after signing his entry-level contract in 2017, he has stayed in Rochester.

Following a strong rookie campaign with the Amerks in 2017-18, Malone injured a knee in the Sabres' preseason opener last season before battling upper- and lower-body injuries.

"A couple of the injuries I had really set me back," said Malone, who said he underwent a "procedure" during the offseason. "I didn't feel like myself. To get those (injuries) out of the way, it feels good, it feels back to how I felt in college and before that."

A year ago at this time, Malone had just returned from a five-week absence and hadn't scored a goal in more than two months.

"He had a lot of injuries and he just couldn't find that groove," Taylor said. "And every time he kind of got back for two or three games he got injured again. I think just staying healthy this year gave him that consistency that he needed. But he worked hard all summer for it."

Malone said this season compared to last one is "like night and day."

"I went through a little mental battle, got in contact with the right people and sorted it out," said Malone, who wouldn't reveal with whom he spoke. "I'm just feeling good this year and grateful to have another opportunity with Rochester."

He added: "It was really tough for me mentally, and to able to get past that, I think that makes me a better person. I just feel like my character's a little bit better."

Despite 45 shots, Amerks fall at Syracuse
Buffalo News
By: Staff Report
*Mar. 1, 2020*

Boris Katchouk scored a third-period goal to break a 2-2 tie and the Syracuse Crunch celebrated Pride Night at the Upstate Medical University Arena with a 4-2 victory over the Rochester Americans on Saturday night in their American Hockey League game.

It was Katchouk's 13th of the season, and it was assisted by Tyler Bird and Otto Stomppi. Ross Colton scored into an empty net for Syracuse with 26 seconds left after Rochester pulled goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

Andrew Oglevie gave Rochester the first lead with his 14th goal of the season at 4:20 of the opening period. Brett Murray and Andrew MacWilliam assisted.

Syracuse tied it on Gemel Smith's 21st goal just 33 seconds later.

Alexander Volkov scored the only goal of the second on the power play at 8:03. Rasmus Asplund got the Amerks even again when he scored a power-play goal 23 seconds into the third period. Casey Mittelstadt had his 14th assist and Taylor Leier his fifth on the goal. It stayed tied until Katchouk's goal.

Luukkonen had 16 saves for Rochester. Former Amerk Scott Wedgewood made 43 saves for Syracuse but was only the second star of the game. Volkov, who had a goal and an assist, was the first star. Rochester's Asplund was the third star.

Rochester (31-18-4-5, 71 points) is eight behind first-place Belleville (37-17-4-1, 79 points) in the North Division of the AHL. Utica (31-21-3-2, 67 points) is four points in back of the Amerks. It's a big week ahead for the Amerks. They host Utica on Wednesday and go to Belleville in two games, Friday and Saturday.

The Syracuse Crunch (28-23-5-3) scored twice in the third period, including an empty-netter with 26 seconds remaining, to end the Rochester Americans' (31-18-4-5) seven-game point streak with a 4-2 win Saturday night at Upstate Medical University Arena.

Despite the regulation loss, their first since Feb. 12, the Amerks remain in second place and eight points back of the Belleville Senators for the North Division lead with a game in hand and hold a four-point lead over the third-place Utica Comets ahead of Wednesday's rematch in Rochester.

Andrew Oglevie opened the scoring for Rochester with his 14th goal of the campaign while Rasmus Asplund registered his third. Casey Mittelstadt finished the month of February with 12 points (3+9) in 14 games as he set up Asplund's third-period power-play goal. The former first round selection has totaled 21 points (9+12) since the turn of the New Year and eight points on one goal and seven assists over his last nine appearances. First-year netminder Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (3-4-3) suffered the loss while making 16 saves.

Ross Colton (1+1) turned in his second consecutive two-point outing for Syracuse, which has earned at least one point in 11 of its last 12 games dating back to Feb. 5. Alexander Volkov also had a goal and an assist while Gemel Smith and Boris Katchouk rounded out the scoring with their 21st and 13th goals of the slate, respectively. Former Amerk goaltender Scott Wedgewood made a season-high 43 saves in the crease to improve to 13-7-2. His 43 saves were his most since Apr. 7, 2018 as a member of the Ontario Regin.

The Amerks drew an interference infraction during the final minute of the second period while trailing by a goal. Following the intermission break, Rochester evened the game at two just 23 seconds into the frame.

As Mittelstadt carried the puck through the neutral zone, he left a pass for Taylor Leier atop the Crunch blueline. The duo exchanged a series of give-and-go passes before Mittelstadt slid the puck across the goal-mouth to Asplund to even the game.

The Amerks have scored a power-play goal in 17 of the last 31 games against Syracuse, going 23-for-128 (18.0%) over that span.

Syracuse responded nearly five minutes later to regain its one-goal lead as Katchouk snapped in the eventual game-winner from the right circle past Luukkonen. Tyler Bird, who was recalled from the ECHL earlier in the week, earned his first AHL point with the primary assist while Otto Somppi notched the secondary helper with 14:53 left in regulation.

Rochester attempted to force overtime and drew a pair of penalties in the final six minutes of the third, but Wedgewood turned aside each shot to preserve the win. Colton capped off the scoring as he added his 11th of the slate with Luukkonen on the bench for the extra skater at the 19:34 mark.

The North Division rivals traded goals just 33 seconds apart early in the first period, but Syracuse grabbed its first lead of the contest midway through the middle frame. The Crunch added a pair markers during the third to come away with the 4-2 victory.

The Amerks open the month of March on Wednesday, Mar. 4 against the Utica Comets at The Blue Cross Arena. It will be the second game in seven days and third between the two clubs since Sunday, Feb. 16. Game time is slated for a 7:05 pm.

*NOTES — With Friday night's victory, the Amerks stretched their point streak to seven straight games, including a 3-0-2-1 record during the homestand, and remain just 6 points back of the Belleville Senators for the North Division lead with a game in hand…On the strength of a 16-5-3-5 home record, Rochester is tied with Milwaukee for the second-fewest regulation losses in the AHL and have the fifth-most points on home ice (40) coming into Saturday night…Casey Mittelstadt quickly has evolved into one of Rochester's most consistent point-getters with 22 points (9+13) in 31 games for Rochester since being reassigned to the Amerks in December from the Buffalo Sabres…Jean-Sebastien Dea, who remains the only Amerk forward this season to reach the 30-point plateau, continues to pace the team in goals (15) and points (37) through 52 games. Dea, who also is second among all Amerks forwards with 103 shots on goal, has 16 points (5+11) in his last 22 games since the turn of the New Year, including 5 points (1+4) over his last 6 games. He's now reached the 15-goal mark in each of the last 5 seasons dating back to the 2015-16 campaign when he scored a career-high 20 for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

Wedgewood again shows why Syracuse Crunch's playoff push starts in goal
Syracuse.com
By: Lindsay Kramer
*Feb. 29, 2020*

The Syracuse Crunch looked like a playoff contender where it counted on Saturday night: in goal.

That's where Scott Wedgewood again offered proof that the Crunch's turnaround might not be a mirage.

The veteran turned in one of the Crunch's best nights in net this season, stopping 43 shots and lugging Syracuse to a 4-2 win over Rochester in the Upstate Medical University Arena.

The saves total was the highest by a Crunch goalie this season.

"I think Scott Wedgewood was phenomenal tonight, and we needed that from him," said Syracuse coach Ben Groulx. "I don't think tonight was our best game, but we had the best player on the ice (Wedgewood). This race, to make the make the playoffs among the four, five teams (in the North), will probably be decided by the goaltending. They're the ones who can make the difference, and we had a great example here tonight."

Wedgewood was supported by a third-period game-winner from Boris Katchouk, followed by an empty netter from Ross Colton. Gemel Smith and Alexander Volkov also scored for the Crunch.

The win capped a 2-0 weekend for Syracuse and gave the team points in 11 of its last 12 contests. With 17 games left the Crunch sits in the fourth and final playoff spot in the North Division, three points ahead of fifth-place Binghamton and two behind third place Utica.

"We're doing well," Wedgewood said. "You can't look too far ahead and you can't get too high on what we're doing right now. I think, as a group, we understand what works right now, the process that we got throughout the whole year to get to this point."

With a sellout crowd of 6,239 enjoying the drama, the game had the tension of a postseason contest. These were exactly the moments for which Tampa Bay signed Wedgewood as a free agent in the off-season, and after a string of injuries Wedgewood has responded as the type of stopper needed for a team with deep postseason hopes.

"Yeah, they we're shooting. The nice thing was I saw a lot of them cleanly," said Wedgewood, who played with the Amerks last season. "I've done well as of late, but I think that was one of the games that as an individual and kind of evaluating myself I was really happy with what I did and it's something I need to build on and bring that effort every night."

Wedgewood bailed the Crunch out all game, most noticeably when Syracuse put its 3-2 lead in peril with a pair of late-game penalties. Alex Barre-Boulet was called for high-sticking at the 14:08 mark and Katchouk was called for tripping at the 17:30 mark.

"We've got to learn, when you take a penalty with your stick, it's rarely a good one," Groulx said.

But Wedgewood was a wall for most of the night, and he put a bearhug around the two points and wouldn't let go. He stopped 17 of Rochester's 18 shots in the final 20 minutes.

"Unbelievable. He stood on his head back there tonight for us," Katchouk said.

Wedgewood didn't have much of a chance on either of Rochester's two goals, a deflection by Andrew Oglevie in the first that gave the Amerks a 1-0 lead and a power-play marker from Rasmus Asplund at the 23-second mark of the third that knotted the game at 2-2.

But the Crunch showed more of its recently developed poise to push back. Katchouk hammered home the game-winner at the 5:07 mark of the third, a laser from the left circle off a pass from Tyler Bird.

"It felt like a playoff game tonight. Our team showed a lot of character out there," Katchouk said.

Monday is the AHL trade deadline, the last chance for teams to add players on AHL pacts via trade or loan and have them eligible to play the rest of the season.

After Monday, teams can add players only from lower leagues like the ECHL or college and junior players once their seasons are over.

Cornel scores twice as Amerks top Rocket
Buffalo News
By: Staff Report
*Feb. 29, 2020*

Eric Cornel scored twice and Casey Mittelstadt had a goal and an assist as Rochester took care of Laval, 4-2, in front of 5,425 at the Blue Cross Arena.

Mittelstadt now has 15 points in his last 17 games with the Americans.

The win stopped a two-game slide for Rochester and kept the team in second place in the AHL North Division at 31-17-4-5 overall. Laval remains in fourth place in the division at 26-24-5-3 overall.

Andrew Hammond earned the win between the pipes for the Amerks. He made 36 saves throughout the night.

Rochester got out to an early 2-0 lead in the first period. First, Remi Elie notched his seventh goal of the season after finishing a pass from Mittelstadt off the faceoff.

Mittelstadt himself made the game 2-0 Rochester with 45 seconds left in the first when he scored on a power play.

While everything seemed to be going Rochester's way, things started to unravel as the second period progressed.

Laval was awarded a goal despite Hammond appearing to play the puck off the top of the net. At the same time, Kevin Porter was assessed a five-minute major penalty for a check to the head of Jake Luccini.

Porter was later ejected for the hit.

The Rocket missed the ensuing penalty shot but Laurent Dauphin found the back of the net minutes later to tie the game at two apiece.

Hammond opened the third period with a huge save on a Laval breakaway and Cornel was able to tip the pick into the Rocket net to put the Amerks back up by one goal.

With 6.2 seconds left, Cornel fired into an empty Laval net to seal the win. He is up to 12 goals this season, a career high.

Rochester is back in action on Saturday on the road at Syracuse.

Puck drop is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Amerks hold off Laval
C&C Worldwide
By: Staff Report/Amerks.com
*Feb. 29, 2020*

Thanks to a pair of goals by Eric Cornel late in regulation, the Rochester Americans (31-17-4-5) concluded their season-long six-game homestand with a 4-2 win over the Laval Rocket (26-24-5-3) Friday at The Blue Cross Arena.

With the victory, the Amerks stretched their point streak to seven straight games, including a 3-0-2-1 record during the homestand, and remain just six points back of the Belleville Senators for the North Division lead with a game in hand. Rochester also completed the four-game season-sweep versus the Rocket this season, outscoring Laval 17-6 while improving to 13-3-0 all-time against Montreal's affiliate.

Cornel pushed his career-high in goals to 11 and 12 as he struck twice in the third period, first providing the go-ahead goal at the 14:44 mark before sealing the win with an empty-netter with seven seconds to spare in regulation. Casey Mittelstadt (1+1) and Taylor Leier (0+2) each produced a pair of points in the win while Remi Elie opened the scoring 2:10 into the contest as he added his seventh goal of the season. Goaltender Andrew Hammond improved to 15-11-3 on the slate as he made 34 saves in-between the pipes.

Forwards Nikita Jevpalovs and Laurent Dauphin both found the back of net for Laval, which saw its four-game point streak halted. First-year netminder Cayden Primeau (15-11-3) stopped 26 of the 29 shots he faced but was dealt the loss.

The Amerks saw the Rocket erase their 2-0 goal lead during the second period and saw the visitors register eight of the first 10 shots in the final 20 minutes. After successfully killing off its fourth penalty of the night, Rochester pushed back and was rewarded as Cornel redirected in his 11th of the season and first of the night at the 14:44 mark.

The line trio of Cornel, Sean Malone and Scott Wilson and defensemen Will Borgen and Brandon Hickey kept the Rocket trapped inside their own zone for an extended shift. Hickey pinched down the from left point to prevent the puck from escaping across the blueline and Malone gathered a pass from Wilson behind the net. Malone continued to cycle the puck around the zone as he banked a pass to Borgen at the blueline. The second-year defenseman rifled a shot towards Primeau and appeared to net his first goal of the season only to have Cornel provide a last-second redirection to give Rochester a 3-2 lead.

"I tried to do what I always do," said Cornel of what led to his first goal of the night. "I always want to work hard, get on the forecheck and make it hard on their defensemen."

Laval attempted to force overtime and pulled its goaltender for the extra attacker in the final minute of regulation. The Rocket tried to dump the puck into the offensive zone, but Asplund and Leier both held the line before Cornel sealed the 4-2 victory as he scored into the vacant net.

"He has confidence and is making plays," said Amerks head coach Chris Taylor of Cornel. "He is not just throwing pucks away and his wall play has been really good. Both he and Malone have been on a line together for much of the year and they have been really thriving and feeding off one another."

"It's nice to see them both get rewarded for their efforts," Taylor continued.

In the opening period, after Elie gave Rochester an early one-goal lead, Mittelstadt notched his ninth of the campaign in the final minute of the frame from Jean-Sebastien Dea and Leier.

With his goal and assist tonight, Mittelstadt has 11 points (3+8) in 13 games during the month of February and shows eight points (2+6) over his last nine appearances. The former-first round selection and second-year pro has 20 points (9+11) since the turn of the New Year.

"At this point of the season, it always feels good when you can take the points as you can get them," said Mittelstadt. "Leiersy kind of just threw the puck at the net and J-S made a great play knocking it out of midair. The rebound came right to me and I had nearly the whole net."

The Rocket erased Rochester's two-goal advantage during the second period on goals from Jevpalovs and Dauphin, but Cornel's two goals in the final six minutes of regulation gave the Amerks the victory.

"I thought we had a good start," said Taylor. "After their (first) goal and penalty it was a little tough, but we battled back on the penalty kill. We just hung in there, and while we made some mistakes, I thought Hammond played really well."

"We fought back in the third period, which is nice, and found a way to capitalize on our opportunities," Taylor added.

The Amerks conclude the month of February on Saturday, Feb. 29 against the Syracuse Crunch at Upstate Medical University Arena. Game time is slated for a 7:05 p.m. start and will be carried live on The Sports Leader AM 950/95.7 FM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.

Amerks double up Laval to close out homestand
Pickin' Splinters
By: Staff Report/Amerks.com
*Feb. 28, 2020*

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As Sabres' postseason hopes dwindle, Casey Mittelstadt eyes playoff run in Rochester
The Athletic
By: Joe Yerdon
*Feb. 29, 2020*

While the postseason hopes for the Buffalo Sabres dwindle, the Rochester Americans are very much alive in their quest for the Calder Cup playoffs.

Rochester's lineup is balanced up front, deep with defensemen, and steady in goal, but the player who has helped make a big difference since the start of the New Year is Casey Mittelstadt.

When we last caught up with Mittelstadt in mid-January, he was emerging from the transition from the NHL to the AHL. His start in Rochester was not good, as he posted one point in his first five games. But since the start of the year, things have gone much better with nine goals and 11 assists in 25 games.

"He wants to be a guy that's on the ice and in every situation, not just offensively. He wants to be on the ice in defensive situations," Americans head coach Chris Taylor said. "He's becoming a guy that we can count on for penalty killing (and the) last minute of a game for a face off.

"He's not just waiting to be told, 'Hey, you're going out there.' He's standing up ready to take charge and that's what you want."

It's always the cumulative stats that we'll all look at to judge how a player is doing in the minors. Mittelstadt's 22 points in 31 games won't grab anyone's immediate attention, but he wasn't sent to Rochester to be a savior. He was sent to get his game into gear and that's what's happened of late.

"I think the biggest thing for me has always been (if) the chances stop coming then you get worried," Mittelstadt said. "But they've been coming. Even last game I thought my line played really well. We had a ton of chances, probably should have had more than one (goal). But I think once those stop coming then it's time to get worried. But as long as you're getting those, eventually you seem to break out and they go in."

As we've seen with the Sabres all season long, the distinct lack of an offensively creative center behind Jack Eichel has been a glaring issue. A lot of the hopes for next season are being preemptively tossed on Dylan Cozens's shoulders, but Mittelstadt's development in Rochester will have a big say in both how Cozens is brought along and how the Sabres approach the position in the offseason. Whether it's on Jason Botterill for not sending Mittelstadt down sooner or Mittelstadt for not being NHL-ready right out of college, the 21-year-old is trending in a good direction with the Americans. Part of that growth is being part of a winning team with a lot of veteran voices and being involved in a playoff race.

The signal to culture building is something the entire organization has worked on. With Taylor in charge in Rochester, that's been a huge focus. But nothing teaches a player how to improve more than reps and being put into situations where they're being counted on most in high-pressure circumstances. The Americans are second in the North Division, Thejust ahead of Utica but behind Belleville. That situation doesn't have the same attention as a race for the Stanley Cup playoffs, but the need to win is the same.

"Teams want winners," Americans defenseman Zach Redmond said. "I remember it was my first or second year (with St. John's), we had a really good team went to the finals the one year and ended up losing, but just the amount of success guys had just going into the fire in the playoffs… it is a different game. It's more intense. I guess your true colors can really shine or go the opposite way on you.

"What (scouts) can see from you stands out and who rises to the challenge are the guys that you want on your team and in the organization. So yeah, this is big for any young guy looking to make that next step."

Laval @ Rochester recap & highlights: Depleted Rocket fall late to the Americans
SB Nation Eyes On The Prize
By: Scott Matla
*Feb. 29, 2020*

After struggling through one of their worst stretches of the season less than a month ago, one that saw the Rocket fall well back of the playoff race, the team battled its way back into that chase. Three straight wins, including back-to-back victories over the Toronto Marlies and Belleville Senators, left them just one point out of the final playoff spot in the North Division. Standing in their way on Friday night was yet another season-long bogeyman, the Rochester Americans.

The last time the two teams clashed it was marred by Keith Kinkaid scoring on himself, and Charles Hudon being ejected for a late hit at centre ice. Since then the Rocket were entirely remade under Joël Bouchard's direction, shipping out a trio of underperforming veterans and bringing in some new faces to rebuild the lineup.

Unfortunately for Bouchard, he came into this critical game minus Hudon, Jake Evans, Karl Alzner, and Xavier Ouellet, who were with the NHL club, and also missing Jesperi Kotkaniemi, out due to illness. The return of the hard-working Joe Cox and offensive-minded Otto Leskinen helped to lessen the blow, while a resurgent Cayden Primeau started between the pipes.

Laval jumped into it right off the opening draw, with Ryan Poehling collecting an aerial pass and breaking in alone on Andrew Hammond. As Poehling went to get his shot off his stick failed, harmlessly dribbling the puck into Hammond's pads.

The Americans quickly countered, forcing Primeau into a desperation save with his glove and pad. Unfortunately for Primeau, the next shot he faced after the faceoff trickled in under his pad, putting the Rocket down just over two minutes into the game.

Laval gained a chance to tie the game up with the first power play of the night as Sean Malone sat for a cross-check. The Rocket power play, minus its main attacking pieces, created a handful of chances, but Hammond stood tall to send the Laval shots out of play and away from his net to keep Rochester in the lead.

As the teams traded hits and scoring chances, the Americans still kept their one-goal advantage, but a sloppy line change sent Laval back to the man advantage on a too many men call. In the opening seconds Laval nearly tied the game, but an unchecked Poehlng sent his shot just wide from the back-post position.

Leskinen put Rochester on its first power play of the night, taking a high-sticking penalty with under two minutes left in the period. After killing a chunk of Leskinen's minor, a shot from the point was launched sky-high, bouncing around in front of Primeau and his penalty-killers, it eventually landed on Casey Mittelstadt's stick, and the Rochester forward had no issue making it a 2-0 game.

Ryan Culkin nearly halved that deficit, but his blast was saved by Hammond's mask as the horn sounded, leaving Laval with a two-goal hole to work their way out of in the second period.

Laval opened the second with a massive chance, as Kevin Porter was ejected for a check to the head of Jake Lucchini. As the officials waited to whistle play dead, Nikita Jevpalovs fired a shot on Hammond that went straight up in the air, and just trickled off Hammond's back and in to cut the Rochester lead in half.

The Rocket then had a five-minute advantage to work with, and in that time they managed two decent chances as the Rochester penalty-killers kept them contained to the outside. The major penalty came to an end, and the Rocket failed to take any sort of advantage from it, leaving them still trailing a goal approaching the midpoint of the game.

Laval followed up its lacking power play by taking a tripping penalty of their own, forcing their penalty-killers into a massive spot. They came through with flying colours, with Alexandre Alain and Poehling nearly converting short-handed to end the kill in style.

The Americans refused to go away, with Rasmus Asplund drawing a penalty shot as he split through the Rocket defence. The Swede took his shot, coming in slow, then cutting wide as Primeau kicked out his pad, but fired it high and wide, keeping Laval well in the game.

The Rocket then took advantage of a lazy play by the Amerks, with Cox snagging an errant pass creating an odd-man situation. Cox dished to Alain, who paused for a moment then slid a pass to Laurent Dauphin to roof his 12th goal of the year.

With momentum on their side, the Rocket headed into the intermission having battled out of an early deficit, and with a big chance to keep their winning streak alive.

They came out swinging to start the final period, and Cox's hard work drew a hooking call, putting Laval on a massive power play early in the period. The man advantage threw everything at Hammond, testing the veteran netminder, but he refused to budge on anything, swallowing up every shot.

Laval nearly took the lead as Yannick Veilleux took advantage of a John Gilmour turnover, playing give-and-go with Antoine Waked. As the duo worked in on net they caught Hammond out of position with a yawning cage, but Veilleux pushed his chance just wide.

The Americans took control afterward, hemming in the Rocket and breaking the deadlock with Eric Cornel tipping a Will Borgen shot by Primeau to restore Rochester's lead.

The Rocket struggled to get Primeau to the bench due to the Amerks' defensive pressure, and once they did Rochester immediately added an empty-net goal.

Final Score: Rochester 4, Laval 2

The Rocket road trip wears on tomorrow as the team heads to Utica for a showdown with the Comets.

Only goal in the shootout beats Rochester, gives Utica win
Buffalo News
By: Staff Report
*Feb. 26, 2020*

Sven Baertschi scored in the fifth round of the shootout to give the Utica Comets a 3-2 win over the Rochester Americans on Wednesday night at Blue Cross Arena in Rochester.

Baertschi beat Rochester goalie Andrew Hammond after four of his teammates had failed.

Taylor Leier, Andrew Oglevie, Casey Mittelstadt, Sean Malone and Lawrence Pilut were the five unsuccessful shooters for Rochester.

Baertschi had given the Comets a 2-1 lead at 5:20 of the second period with his 11th goal of the season but Scott Wilson scored his 10th for Rochester with 28 seconds left in regulation to tie it.

Brogan Rafferty scored for Utica in the first, but Mittelstadt's goal with 1:02 to go in the period tied it. It was Mittelstadt's eighth of the season for Rochester. C.J. Smith and Oglevie had the assists. It was the 14th assist of the season for Oglevie, the former Notre Dame star.

Michael DiPietro made 34 saves for Utica. Hammond had 19 for Rochester. He also picked up an assist on Mittelstadt's goal as did C.J. Smith, who now has 13.

With the win Utica (30-20-3-2, 65 points) moved within four points of second place Rochester (30-17-4-5, 69 points) in the North Division of the American Hockey League.

The Amerks will be home against the Laval Rocket on Friday before traveling to Syracuse to meet the Crunch on Saturday.

Wednesday's game was the fourth in a row that went into overtime or beyond for Rochester.

Rochester has 30 wins for the fourth consecutive season and third in a row under coach Chris Taylor. He is the first since Randy Cunneyworth, the all-time winningest coach in franchise history, to accomplish that.

**Controversial SO goal beats the Amerks**
C&C Worldwide
By: Craig Potter
*Feb. 26, 2020*

The Rochester Americans continue to struggle getting goals as they once again outshot the opposition only to lose the third of four straight overtime games.

The Amerks were victimized by the Utica Comets, 3-2, in a shootout on Wednesday night before 3,137 fans at the Blue Cross Arena.

Rochester forced overtime by scoring in the final minute of play, but neither team could score in the 5-minute sudden death period. The Amerks dominated in shots with 36 as the Comets managed 21 shots on Rochester netminder Andrew Hammond.

"We played pretty well," said Amerks captain Kevin Porter. "We just needed one of those lucky bounces and we got one to send the game into overtime. We did not give up, and while we would have liked to get two points, we were still able to get that one."

The controversy arose on the only goal of the shootout. Sven Beartschi was Utica's fifth shooter. He came in, got Hammond down and out as he skated to his left, stick-handled the puck and lifted it over the sprawled Hammond for the game-winner.

"In my interpretation, you can't bring the puck back. You've got to bring the puck forward at all times," said Amerks coach Chris Taylor. "Just at the end, he (Beartschi) stopped it from going forward and brought it back a little bit and then put it in so it should be no goal."

The Amerks argued the call with the officials, but the referees allowed the goal to stand.

Rochester (30-17-4-5) dominated the opening period but it took the 15th shot to even the count 1-1 in the last minute of the stanza.

The Comets (30-20-3-2) had taken a 1-0 lead when Hammond was penalized for delay of game. Utica scored on the ensuing power play, but Hammond complete the statistical oddity when he assisted on the tying goal. He passed the puck to CJ Smith, who skated into the offensive zone and found Casey Mittelstadt open at the bottom of the left circle. Mittelstadt's shot beat Utica goalie Michael DiPietro on the short side as the teams skated off 1-1 at intermission.

Utica regained the advantage about 5 minutes into the second period when Sven Beartschi's shot trickled through Hammond and across the goal line for the 2-1 lead.

The Amerks kept applying pressure and it finally paid off in the final minute of the third period with Hammond on the bench for the extra attacker. Scott Wilson found the back of the net from the bottom of the right circle as Smith picked up his second assist of the contest.

"It was a good sign being able to score in the last 30 seconds," Smith said. "It was a way to show some grit. It was a bounce in our direction and now we just have to keep finishing games and earning points."

Neither team could score in the 5-minute overtime period, and no one scored through the first 4 rounds of the shootout. Lawrence Pilut was Rochester's fifth shooter but he could not beat DiPietro.

"I thought we had a really solid game," said Taylor. "I really liked our start as we generated a lot of chances. In the second period, I thought it was better than our last game as we continued to execute and stick to our game plan. In the third, we fought back for a goal to send the game into overtime.

"I really liked our game but we just could not find a way to put the puck behind their goaltender."

*NOTES — Rochester's home stand concludes on Friday, Feb. 28 when they host the North Division rival Laval Rocket at the Blue Cross Arena at 7:05 pm…Casey Nelson is tied for ninth among all blueliners with a team-best plus-19 on-ice rating through 44 games this season…Jacob Bryson is sixth among all first-year defensemen with a plus-11 on-ice rating. Bryson, who scored his first pro goal on Wednesday and had the overtime game-winner Saturday night, is also tied for ninth among all rookie blueliners with 21 points (2+19) in 55 games while his 19 assists are eighth-most…Rochester has collected at least one point in 18 of the last 24 games against Utica dating back to the start of the 2017-18 campaign, going 13-6-2-3 over that span…Former Amerk Justin Bailey remains at a close second behind teammate Reid Boucher with a career-high 26 goals in 46 games for the Comets. Bailey, who recently returned from a two-game stint with Vancouver, has five points in his last three games, including four goals. He's been one of Utica's most dominant goal-scorers since the turn of the New Year, scoring 14 goals in his last 12 games. The Buffalo native also scored three hat tricks in a four-game span in that stretch, including in back-to-back games against Hartford. He's now reached the 20-goal mark three times in his pro career having previously reached the mark in consecutive seasons with Rochester in 2015-16 and 2016-17…The game was the 500th professional game that Zach Redmond played in.

**Comets down Amerks in shootout**
Utica Observer-Dispatch
By: Ben Birnell
*Feb. 26, 2020*

Goaltender Mike DiPietro is playing a confident game and it is helping the Utica Comets.

DiPietro capped another standout performance Wednesday with five stops in a shootout and Sven Baertschi scored the lone goal in extras as the Comets grabbed a 3-2 victory over the Rochester Americans in the second of three meetings over a span of about two weeks at Blue Cross Arena.

The 20-year-old DiPietro — described as the "hot hand" this week by Comets coach Trent Cull in seizing the team's goaltending duties — finished with 34 saves to help Utica earn back-to-back wins. DiPietro is 4-2-1-0 while starting the last seven games for the Comets.

DiPietro — who said he's improved many aspects of his game including the mental side — earned his 18th win of the season after the Comets were outshot 36-22 in Wednesday's affair. He turned in a huge sprawling save on Remi Elie's chance in tight late in the second period to help keep it a one-goal game.

It was a key victory for the Comets (30-20-3-2, 65 points), who remain in third place in a tight North Division. The Comets — who have won four of the last six games — are four points back of Rochester (30-17-4-5) and four ahead of rival Syracuse, which was idle.

The shootout ended with some disagreement. After going scoreless through four rounds, DiPietro stopped Lawrence Pilut's fakeout attempt before Baertschi's try. On his attempt, the veteran forward made a hesitation move in front to draw out Andrew Hammond and scored in the top corner of the net.

The Amerks disputed the goal with the officials, but it stood.

Baertschi also scored in regulation to give the Comets a 2-1 lead in the second period on a shot that dribbled off Hammond and in.

Rookie Brogan Rafferty's first-period power play goal pushed him to 41 points, which is a single-season record for points by a defenseman. He surpasses Bobby Sanguinetti's 40 points from 2014-15.

The Comets looked to be headed to a regulation win despite a so-so game. Baertschi nearly put in a empty-netter but appeared to be tripped and didn't get a call late.

However, Scott Wilson tied the game with 28 seconds to go on a follow-up finish with Hammond on the bench for the extra attacker for Rochester, which controlled much of the game.

Utica jumped out to a short-lived quick start in the first period with help from the power play.

About a minute into the advantage, Nikolay Goldobin sent a short pass to Rafferty, whose shot from the point got through traffic and past Hammond. Reid Boucher added an assist on the goal less than two minutes into the game.

Rochester grabbed control the rest of the period, keeping DiPietro busy. Rochester outshot Utica 15-2 in the frame.

Rochester caught Utica on a long shift with 1:02 remaining and Casey Mittelstadt scored from the left circle on an odd-man rush.