



# AMERKS DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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## Amerks Top Five Takeaways From The Month Of February

By Suzie Cool  
Amerks.com

As the Rochester Americans' 2020-21 campaign has kicked off a little over a month ago, it's hard not to notice the excitement that surrounds the squad at The Blue Cross Arena.

Unlike any other year, Rochester started off the season coming off an extended training camp that lasted three whole weeks prior to opening night on Feb. 5. From that first game on, we have seen this team grow exponentially in terms of coming together during such an unprecedented season. That togetherness has seen the Amerks ride a four-game win streak, produce a power-play that sits among the top three in the entire league, has given young players the chance to make their NHL debuts and the list goes on.

It's time to take a look at the Amerks top five takeaways of their first month of play during an untraditional season.

### 1. AMERKS HEAD COACH, SETH APPERT

New to the city of Rochester this season, Amerks head coach Seth Appert made his pro coaching debut on Feb. 5 when the team hit the ice on opening night at The Blue Cross Arena.

As the 33rd head coach in the 65-year history of the franchise, Appert has a long history of developing players at all levels. Prior to coming to Rochester, he spent the last three years alternating the head coaching duties between the Under-18 and Under-17 teams at USA Hockey's National Team Development Program (NTDP).

Prior to joining USA Hockey, the Cottage Grove, Minn., native spent 20 years in the NCAA Division I collegiate coaching ranks, including 11 seasons as head coach of the men's program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) and nine seasons as an assistant coach at the University of Denver.

Over his 20 years at the collegiate level, Appert has aided in the development of 13 All-Americans, 37 all-league selections, four Players of the Year, four Hobey Baker Finalists and, prior to this season, at least 23 players who have graduated to the NHL, including former Amerks Jerry D'Amigo, Jason Kasdorf and Erik Burgdoerfer.

Looking at what Appert did in his first month behind the bench in Rochester, it seems he's fitting into his role quite nicely.

Through the first six games of the year, Rochester's record sat at 4-2-0-0, which included a four-game win streak between Feb. 10 and Feb. 20. Appert also helped produce a power-play that sat at third in the entire American Hockey League at a 32.0% conversion rate prior to February's end.

Appert also saw one of his Amerks defenseman make his NHL debut in Jacob Bryson, while fellow blueliner Casey Fitzgerald and forward Andrew Oglevie each earned their first career recalls to Buffalo's taxi squad. On top of the NHL newcomers, captain Steven Fogarty has made his Sabres debut and forward C.J. Smith and goaltender Dustin Tokarski are consistently back and forth between the Rochester roster and taxi squad.

The best part is, there's only more to come from the Amerks new bench boss and we're only a month into the 2020-21 campaign.

## 2. POWER-PLAY PRODUCTION

Rochester's power-play came in hot over the month of February as they were successful on eight of their 25 man-advantage opportunities.

Through first month of 2020-21 season, the Amerks saw at least three power-play chances in each of their first six games. By the end of the month, the Amerks power-play sat a 32.0% conversion rate, which was ranked third in the league.

## 3. LAAKSONEN LEADING THE WAY

Newcomer Oskari Laaksonen has quickly emerged as one of the top offensive defensemen in the AHL.

Averaging just under a point-per-game through February, the first-year defenseman led all Rochester blueliners with five points on five assists through his first six games of the season, including a season-high three assists in the 4-3 overtime win against Syracuse back on Feb. 10

Prior to February's end, Laaksonen was tied for the league lead in assists among all first-year defensemen while having the third-most points despite having registered only one shot on goal.

## 4. DEA PICKING UP WHERE HE LEFT OFF

After leading the Amerks in points (39) and holding a share of the team- lead in goals (15) during the 2019-20 season, his first in Rochester, forward Jean-Sebastien Dea picked up right where he left off this season with a team-high seven points on three goals and four assists through his five games in February.

Dea averaged nearly a point and a half per game and was among the AHL's top point-getters in scoring while also showing a team-best plus- four on-ice rating.

## 5. QUINN SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

Jack Quinn, Buffalo's eighth overall pick in the 2020 NHL Draft, rounds out Rochester's rookie class this season.

The highly touted 19-year-old is coming off an explosive 52-goal season for the Ottawa 67's in 2019-20, during which he became just the eighth player since 2000-01 to reach the 50-goal mark in his NHL Draft Year. He finished the season second in the Ontario Hockey League in goals and tied for fifth with 15 power-play tallies while also adding 37 assists.

He made his professional debut with Rochester back on Feb. 18 against Utica, recording an assist on the game-tying third-period goal before scoring the shootout-clinching goal on a dazzling effort in the second round.

Quinn is the third eighth overall pick of the Sabres in the last five years to spend time in Rochester, joining Alexander Nylander (2016) and Casey Mittelstadt (2017), and the second to make his pro debut with the Amerks following Nylander, who would spend parts of three seasons in Rochester.

Amerks Practice Report: Dea Continues Torrid Start, Upl Rolling  
By Staff Report  
Amerks.com

The Syracuse Crunch. The Utica Comets. The Syracuse Crunch. The Utica Comets. Yes, the Rochester Americans have already seen plenty of their North Division rivals through the first nine games of the 2020-21 season all while going 6-3-0-0 to begin their 65th season in the American Hockey League.

While seeing each of the aforementioned teams four times already, this coming Friday's matchup with the Cleveland Monsters on Mar. 12 will provide a welcome reprieve from Utica and Syracuse, especially considering the Amerks face-off against the Comets twice this week as the team prepares for another busy stretch of three games in four nights.

#### Stand and Dea-liver

With a season-high three points (1+2) in Saturday's 4-2 victory against the Crunch, forward Jean-Sebastien Dea became the first Amerk skater this season to reach double digits in points with 12 (4+8). Dea, who has notched at least one point in seven of his first eight games this season, has already recorded four multi-point games after posting six in 57 contests last season.

"I am 10 pounds heavier than I was a season ago," explained Dea of the difference this year compared to the 2019-20 campaign. "Despite being heavier, I feel 20 pounds lighter and every day I am just having fun when I come to the rink. I am not worrying about things I cannot control."

"Every night I sleep well on my pillow and when I wake up, I am happy and excited to come to the rink. Everyday is a new day and it is a fresh start to work hard and bring my energy for the young guys on the team. It has been a lot of fun this season so far."

While the Laval, Quebec, native is tied for fourth in the AHL in points and eighth in assists (8), Amerks head coach Seth Appert said it's Dea's play away from the offense that is contributing to his success. He also paces all Rochester skaters with an on-ice rating of plus-seven, which ranks 16th among league leaders in that category.

J-S is playing so committed," said Appert. "We always talk about his skill, creativeness and offensive ability, but I think Saturday night, he and Remi Elie were dominate on the penalty kill and J-S's work in the face-off was impressive as he was 18-for-24."

After pacing the Amerks in points and tying for the team in goals last season, Dea has picked up right where he left off last March while also being looked upon as a leader. He's a veteran presence that the Amerks are benefitting from in all aspects.

"He is playing such a committed 200-foot style," Appert continued. "With the commit, it is helping him getting the puck a lot, and when a player with his talent has the puck a lot, good things happen."

#### UPL rolling

After suffering back-to-back losses to see a four-game win streak come to an end, goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen responded to last Monday's 4-3 loss with a pair of victories to push his season-record to 5-2-0.

The Finnish netminder is tied for fourth in the AHL in wins and has made 30 or more saves in four of his last six appearances dating back to a career-best 43-save performance at Cleveland on Feb. 12.

"He had a real strong bounce-back effort," said Appert of his young 21-year-old goaltender. "That is the beauty of this season with the strangeness of playing the same few teams over and over, the taxi squad and things like that. Without Tokarski and Jonas Johansson who are both with Buffalo, it is good for Ukko-Pekka to be a number one goaltender on a night-to-night basis."

"There is no hiding or handing the baton to someone else while you go find your game. He must go back into the net and answer the bell. The healthy pressure that comes with that, extremely important for a young goaltender's development to gain the confidence."

With a record of 5-1-3 in nine appearances inside the Flower City, Luukkonen will look to push his home win streak to four games should he earn the nod Friday night against Cleveland.

### Powering Up

Saturday night in Syracuse, the Amerks tallied two power-play goals. With the two markers, Rochester has scored a power-play goal in eight of their last 12 games against the Crunch dating back to last season, going 13-for-48 (27.0%) with the man-advantage over that span.

"Everyone has their own role to do on the power-play," said Dea. "Even in the event when someone makes a mistake, we have each other's back and can cover up for the error. We have been working hard in practice and the success there is carrying over in the games, too. Our hard work has been paying off."

Four games into the 12 scheduled meetings between the two clubs this season, the Amerks have scored six of their 14 goals with on the power-play while posting a 6-for-17 (35.3%) success rate.

"We have scored a lot of our power-play goals this year on what you'd classify as 'work goals', which are second and third puck retrievals, winning puck battles, and scoring from the blue paint," said Appert.

Nine games into the campaign, Rochester's power-play has gone 12-for-38 with a 31.6% conversion rate that is currently third-best in the AHL. The Amerks' 12 goals on the man-advantage are the most in the league coming into this week. The Amerks have scored at least one power-play goal in seven of their first nine games this season and have registered multiple power-play tallies in five of their last eight outings overall.

### Looking ahead

The Amerks look to take a 3-2 series lead and extend their win streak to three games on Wednesday, Mar. 10 when they face-off against Utica again for the fifth time of the 14 scheduled meetings this season at Adirondack Bank Center. Game time is slated for a 7:00 p.m. and will be carried live on The Sports Leader AM 950/95.7 FM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.

## AROUND THE PROS: Londoner Jacob Bryson offers rare Buffalo bright spot

By Ryan Pyette

Ottawa Citizen

Four years ago, Jacob Bryson wasn't sure if he was going to be drafted by an NHL team.

On Saturday against the New York Islanders, the former London Jr. Knights defenceman scored his first NHL goal — 33 seconds in on a shot that handcuffed Semyon Varlamov — and led the Buffalo Sabres with 20 minutes, 48 seconds of ice time.

There isn't a lot of joy around the Buffalo club these days and any hint of swagger is practically non-existent, but when Will Borgen fractured his forearm blocking a shot last month, they called up Bryson from the Rochester Americans.

"His confidence level is extremely high, which this league asks for," Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger told Sabres.com recently. "We're extremely pleased with his puck management."

Bryson was passed over in the Ontario Hockey League draft, but he went on to play for Providence College where he co-captained the Friars to the NCAA Frozen Four championship tournament in Buffalo.

He was a fourth-round selection by then-new Sabres general manager Jason Botterill in the 2017 NHL draft following his freshman season.

Midway through his first American Hockey League season, his Rochester coach Chris Taylor, a former London Knight, made him a healthy scratch and that proved to be a turning point.

"I watched from up top and I kind of gained a lot of confidence that I could be one of the best players out here every game," he told Bill Hoppe of Buffalo Hockey Beat. "I kind of went into every game with that attitude and I think things started to work out for me. I was playing my best hockey in that second half."

AROUND THE PROS: Memorial Cup champ Marc Methot has jumped on the podcast train, putting together The Wally and Methot Show with ex-TSN reporter Brent Wallace. The former Knight will have some stories to share from playing days to retirement and being a dad. He is remembered in London for his overtime winner in the 2005 Cup opener against Rimouski . . . Two-time Stanley Cup winner Patrick Maroon scored his 100th NHL goal over the weekend . . . Nobody who knows the O'Reilly family should be surprised Ryan and Cal's mother Bonnie donated a kidney to Graham Nesbitt, the longtime arena manager at the Seaforth Community Complex. On visiting Bonnie and Brian in Bayfield right before Ryan's Stanley Cup parade two years ago, they told how Nesbitt would allow their boys into the rink when no one else was there for a little extra skating time.

## Rochester skates past Syracuse Crunch, 4-2

By Staff Report

Syracuse.com

A second-period surge and a three-point night from leading point-getter Jean-Sebastien Dea would solidify the Rochester Americans' (6-3-0-0) sixth win of the year and third over the Syracuse Crunch (2-5-1-0) in a 4-2 victory over their North Division rivals Saturday at Upstate University Medical Arena.

The contest was the first of two consecutive road games as well as the fourth of 12 scheduled meetings against the Crunch this season. With the win tonight, the Amerks push their record to 15-8-1-1 in their last 25 games against their North Division foe.

Captain Steven Fogarty (1+0) notched his fifth goal of the year — and fourth on the power-play — in just nine games, a mark that just last season took him 20 games to reach. The veteran forward is now tied for the league lead in power-play goals this season with Cleveland's Trey Fix-Wolansky and Utica's Kole Lind.

Dea (1+2) tallied his fourth multi-point effort of the campaign with a pair of assists and a late goal, making him the first Amerk to reach double digits points in 2020-21 and moving him into five-way tie for second in the league in scoring with 12 points through his first eight games. More impressively, Dea has recorded at least one point in all but one game so far this season, including opening the campaign with three straight multi-point effort for this first time in his seven-year pro career.

Forwards Andrew Oglevie (1+0) and Arttu Ruotsalainen (1+0) both notched their third goals of the season, respectively, while Jack Quinn (0+1) and defensemen Casey Fitzgerald (0+1) and Mattias Samuelsson (0+2) each added assists on the night.

For the second consecutive game, goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (5-2-0) recorded a win for his fifth of the season while stopping 27 of the 29 shots he faced. The Finnish netminder is now tied for third in the AHL in wins and has made 30 or more saves in four of his last six appearances dating back to a career-best 43-save performance at Cleveland on Feb. 12.

The two Crunch tallies were recorded by Serron Noel (1+0) and Taylor Raddysh (1+0), both of which were on the man-advantage. Forwards Peter Abbandonato (0+1), Jimmy Huntington, former Amerk Scott Wilson (0+1) and defenseman John Ludvig (0+1) all added the helpers throughout the course of the contest.

In his fourth game of the year, and third against Rochester, Spencer Martin (2-2-0) took the loss despite making 23 saves.

Heading into the second period, the score was all tied up at one apiece before the Amerks pulled away with their first two-goal lead of the night.

From the neutral zone, Remi Elie drove the puck down the right wing, where he would send a backhanded pass to Dea, who was positioned in-between the dots. Dea's initial offer was denied by Martin, but Ruotsalainen made good on the second opportunity to shovel the puck over the Crunch netminder for his third of the year.

With 4:05 left to go in the middle frame, the Amerks would get on the board once again to push the score to 3-1 in their favor.

Catching the Crunch on a change, the Amerks would find themselves in a three-on-one situation within their offensive zone. From the right face-off dot, Samuelsson sent a pass to Quinn, who quickly one-touched it back to the slot for a wide-open Oglevie to redirect it past Martin for Rochester's third goal of the night.

As the Amerks headed into the final frame with a two-goal cushion, Syracuse pulled within one before the final buzzer.

On the Crunch's seventh power-play opportunity of the contest, Raddysh was the recipient of a perfect pass from Wilson and sent a wrist shot past Luukkonen to make it a one-goal game.

The Amerks then went on to seal the win with a late power-play marker with only 39 seconds to go.

Samuelsson's shot from the left face-off circle pinballed to the right of the Syracuse net, Dea swooped in to backhand the puck past Martin for his third point of the night and 11th of the season to secure the 4-2 win for Rochester.

With a combined 24 shots on goal from both teams in the first period, it would be the Amerks that got the scoring started with the first of two power-play goals of the night.

To the right of the Crunch crease, Fogarty rimmed the puck around the boards and Dea picked up the pass at the edge of the right face-off dot. As Dea lasered a shot in at the Syracuse netminder, Martin would make a pad save, kicking the rebound out to where the original shot took place. Fogarty was ready to pounce on the loose puck, sending his shot over Martin's blocker despite fighting off two Crunch skaters to give the Amerks a 1-0 lead at the 7:20 mark.

The Amerks have scored a power-play goal in eight of their last 12 games against Syracuse dating back to last season, going 13-for-48 (27.0%) with the man-advantage over that span.

In similar fashion, the Crunch came back within the first stanza with a power-play of their own.

As Amerks defenseman Griffin Luce took a hooking penalty at the 12:43 mark, Noel would notch his first as a pro to get the Crunch on the board during their first of eight man-advantage opportunities of the night.

The Amerks continue their two-game road trip on Wednesday, Mar. 10 as they take on the Utica Comets at the Adirondack Bank Center for the fifth of 14 scheduled matchups this season. Game time is slated for a 7:00 p.m. start and will be carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.

Syracuse Crunch suffers home loss to Rochester  
By Staff Report  
Syr.com

The Syracuse Crunch were defeated by the Rochester Americans, 4-2, tonight at the Upstate Medical University Arena.

Serron Noel netted his first professional goal as the Crunch dropped their third game of the year to the Amerks. Syracuse is now 3-5-1-0 on the season and 1-2-1-0 in the 12-game season series with Rochester.



Crunch netminder Spencer Martin stopped 23-of-27 between the pipes for the Crunch. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen earned the win turning aside 27-of-29 in net for the Amerks. Syracuse went 2-for-8 on power play, while Rochester went 2-for-5.

The Amerks opened scoring with a power-play goal 7:20 into the game. Jean-Sebastien Dea's right circle shot was blocked, but the rebound came back out to Steven Fogarty who stickhandled towards the net and scored.

The Crunch tied it up with a power-play goal of their own at 13:44 when Noel redirected Peter Abbandonato's left wing shot.

Rochester went back on top 2:23 into the second period. Martin made the initial save, but left the puck out for Arttu Ruotsalainen to backhand in. The Amerks made it a two-goal lead with 4:04 remaining in the frame. After a tic-tac-toe passing sequence from Mattias Samuelsson to Jack Quinn, Andrew Oglevie finished it off with a quick stick as he cut towards the slot.

Syracuse came back within one halfway through the final frame with another power-play tally. Scott Wilson came in down the left side and sent a perfect cross-zone feed for Taylor Raddysh to sneak in past Luukkonen's left skate.

The Amerks regained their two-goal lead with 39 seconds remaining in the game when Dea chipped in a rebound while on the man-advantage.

The Crunch are back in action on Friday when they travel to face the Utica Comets.

'Calm and cool': Jacob Bryson's confidence has shown to start NHL career

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

Jacob Bryson said prior to making his NHL debut in New Jersey last month that he would not shy away from playing his game, which for him involves plenty of skating with the puck on his stick.

He wasn't kidding. Bryson put his playmaking tendencies on display during his very first NHL period, jumping in on a rush and earning a scoring chance at the back door.

"His confidence level is extremely high, which this league asks for," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said.

Bryson skated a season-high 24:10 against the New York Islanders on Tuesday, his fifth NHL game. The 23-year-old defenseman has continued to exude confidence not only with his willingness to join the rush, but with his poise under pressure in his own end.

"Whether it's on retrievals on our end, when he's trying to solve pressure or when he's at the blue line and he's getting a winger closing on him extremely quickly, he's so calm and cool," Krueger said. "He's got his head up all the time and makes the right decision.

"We're extremely pleased with his puck management. The same thing is going on without the puck. Whenever there is a transition of any sort, we lose possession, he is able to read his gaps and take those gaps really quickly and also in the D zone he always falls back to the good ice and works from there without really any sort of panic."

Poise, mobility, and an ability to move the puck were the traits coaches and teammates used to describe Bryson during his NCAA career at Providence College. In three collegiate seasons, Bryson developed into an all-situations player who co-captained the Friars to the Frozen Four in Buffalo.

He admits to having felt nervousness at the start of last season, his first as a pro in Rochester. He played 44 consecutive games for the Amerks before being scratched for a January contest in Cleveland. He tallied 16 points in 21 games from that point on, including all four of his goals. Any nervousness was gone by the time he made his NHL debut in New Jersey.

"When I watched that game up top I got better and better," he said. "I just tried to carry that into this year and keep my feet running. I think I've done a good job. . . . I'm just trying to keep that confidence, gain more every day."

With his ice time increasing and now including minutes on the penalty kill, Bryson may be working himself into a consistent role for a defense corps playing without a key left-handed piece in Jake McCabe. His 5-foot-9 stature has not prevented him from ably battling against larger players, in part a testament to his NCAA upbringing.

The total package has the Sabres believing they have a key piece for the future.

"We all have to be excited about it, because the need for a defenseman in the modern game to be able to solve pressure and maintain control of the puck through that pressure is one of the most important attributes to be a long-term NHL defenseman in the future," Krueger said. "The days of rim off the glass or indirect out of the zone and just defend are over. Everybody needs to be able to play with the puck now."

Friday's practice

Dylan Cozens skated on a line with Taylor Hall and Jack Eichel, offering a glimpse of what we could see when the Sabres continue their three-game series with the Islanders on Saturday.

"He quite clearly is becoming very quickly an important centerpiece of what we want to build on here as we move forward," Krueger said of Cozens. "He has completely taken on the culture on and off the ice that we are striving to embed in everybody as a habit. You will see him up the lineup again tomorrow."

Coverage on Saturday begins at 12:30 p.m. on MSG. The puck drops at 1.

Jacob Bryson has shown coaches he can handle the NHL

By Staff Report

WGR 550

Jacob Bryson is not your typical rookie in the NHL. The 23-year-old defenseman spent three years at Providence College before playing one full year with the Rochester Americans.

With injuries to Jake McCabe and Will Borgen, Bryson got called up and has been given a chance to play. In his first four NHL games, Bryson has averaged almost 18 minutes of ice-time. Thursday night against the New York Islanders on Long Island, he played a whopping 24:10.

Despite being small, Bryson is not afraid to go to battle against players much bigger than him and win that battle.

"I am a smaller guy, so I've worked around that, but I know being a smaller guy I have to be able to compete with those guys if I want to play in the NHL, so I've had that mindset," Bryson said following Friday's practice in Uniondale. "I can knock guys off the puck because it's a low center of gravity, and I've been working on my strength for four or five years. That's what I do every summer, try to get stronger."

Ralph Krueger has been very impressed with Bryson. He said he plays a very calm game.

"His poise when pressure is coming at him, when he has the puck; whether it's on retrievals, when he's trying to solve pressure or when he's at the blue line and he's getting closed in on extremely quickly, he's so calm and cool," Krueger said after Friday's practice. "He has his head up all the time and makes the right decision."

"We're extremely pleased with his puck management, but the same thing is going on without the puck. He's able to read his gaps and take those gaps really quickly, and he always falls back to the good ice and works from there without any sort of panic."

Krueger said despite feeling the effects of COVID-19 on Thursday, Rasmus Ristolainen felt much better at practice on Friday. Krueger is optimistic Ristolainen will play on Saturday in Long Island.

Krueger confirmed that Dylan Cozens was on Jack Eichel's right wing on Friday. Cozens spent a little time on Eichel's wing during the third period Thursday night. Krueger said Cozens earned the chance to play with Eichel.

"Dylan is just so smart. It's amazing how he's embraced the habits that we have to have going up our lineup. He's so responsible when we don't have possession, because how strong he plays defensively we get the puck back quicker."

"He's also able to read off linemates and make them better. [It's] quite exciting to see, and he quite quickly is becoming an important centerpiece of what we want to build on."

The Sabres play the Islanders on Saturday at 1 p.m. EST. Join Brian Koziol for pregame coverage on WGR at noon, when he'll be joined by Krueger, Bryson and Rasmus Dahlin.

## Fitzgerald Lifts Amerks To 4-2 W in Over Comets

By Staff Report

Amerks.com

On the strength of a pair of goals from defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and two assists by Steven Fogarty, the Rochester Americans (5-3-0-0) avenged last Friday's setback by doubling up the first-place Utica Comets (5-1-0-1) with a 4-2 win in a North Division matchup Wednesday at The Blue Cross Arena.

With the victory, Rochester has collected at least one point in 21 of the last 30 games against Utica dating back to the start of the 2017-18 campaign, going 16-9-2-3 over that span. Additionally, the Amerks earned their third straight win on home ice after dropping a 3-2 decision to the Comets on opening night.

With his first-career two-goal outing, including his first shorthanded marker, Fitzgerald is the first Amerks blueliner to score twice in a game since former defenseman Casey Nelson netted a pair as part of a three-point game back on Nov. 1, 2019 against Binghamton.

Fogarty recorded his second two-point game of the season while Brett Murray and Arttu Ruotsalainen scored their third and second goals of the slate, respectively. Murray has collected five points (2+3) in the last five games. Michael Mersch, who was held without a point in his first three outings with the club, picked up an assist to push his point streak to four games.

Goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (4-2-0) earned his third straight win in the Flower City while making 31 saves. The Finnish netminder has made 30-plus saves in four of his first six games of the season, which included a career-high 43 stops back on Feb. 12 in a 7-3 triumph at Cleveland.

The Comets offense was powered by forward Jonah Gadjovich's team-leading seventh goal of the campaign while rookie defenseman Jack Rathbone added his first pro goal in the loss. Goaltender Jon Gillies (3-1-1) suffered his first regulation defeat of the season while stopping 19 shots he faced.

On the second shift of the contest, Utica's Kole Lind handed Will Lockwood the puck just outside the blueline prior to the duo entering the Amerks zone. As Lockwood went down the boards, he fired a shot off the shoulder of Luukkonen. With bodies crashing towards the goal-mouth in search of a rebound, Gadjovich spotted the loose puck and poked it behind the Rochester netminder, giving the visitors an early 1-0 lead just 59 seconds after the opening face-off.

Despite being hemmed inside their own zone much of the first 20 minutes of play and trailing 1-0, Rochester capitalized on an icing infraction to tie the contest at one prior to the break.

Following a face-off to the left of Gillies, Dea won the draw back to Fitzgerald at the point and the blueliner wristed a shot that glanced off the crossbar and in behind the screened netminder. The marker was Fitzgerald's first of the slate while Dea picked up his team-leading sixth assist and ninth point.

After tying the contest at one late in the first period, Fitzgerald doubled his goal total and put the Amerks on top with his second of the night just nine seconds into the second stanza. With a tie-up between the centers to start the frame, Fitzgerald scooped up a loose puck in the neutral zone and carried it into the offensive zone. While warding off a defender, he slipped the puck between Gillies' pads to give Rochester a 2-1 lead.

Later in the frame, the Amerks doubled their lead thanks to Murray's third of the slate at the 15:07 mark, giving the second-year pro five points in as many games.

The third period was cruising along, and it seemed Rochester was going to take the 3-1 victory. However, the Comets pulled within a goal as Rathbone blasted his first goal while on a two-man advantage at the 12:37 mark.

The Amerks successfully killed off the rest of the power-play, and despite being whistled for its seventh infraction of the contest late in the game, Remi Elie centered a pass to Ruotsalainen to seal the 4-2 win into an empty Utica net. The assist was Elie's 100th point of his pro career.

The Amerks make a return trip back to Syracuse on Saturday, March 6 to face-off with the Crunch for the second time this week at Upstate Medical University Arena. The North Division showdown is slated for a 7:00 p.m. start and will be carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.

Mersch Grateful For Opportunity With Amerks

By Warren Kosel

[Amerks.com](http://Amerks.com)

For the first time in his seven-year pro career, forward Michael Mersch was at a crossroads with what direction his career was heading. The uncertainty of not knowing if he would have a job, especially in a season amid a global pandemic, and what the future had in store for him.

Then his phone rang. The Rochester Americans, who just opened their 65th season in the American Hockey League with only 10 forwards in the lineup, were in need of players and Mersch was in need of a new opportunity. Suddenly, the angst and worry were soon replaced by excitement and an appreciation for the opportunity that would lie ahead.

So, the trek to Rochester began, paving way for a fresh start with a new organization that is still in the process of forming a new identity and looking to build off the success from a year ago prior to the cancellation of the season.

At first, Mersch, admittedly, was a little apprehensive having not played a game in close to a year since March 11, 2020, when he earned an assist in what turned out to be his final appearance with the Texas Stars.

"Coming in and not having played a game in almost a year, I was just trying to get my feet under me and get acclimated. The systems are pretty straightforward here, and once you get those, you can just go out and play and think about the game. Everything we do has a lot of detail in it and I feel like that helps my game out because I feel like I'm a pretty detailed player."

Fast forward a few weeks later and Mersch has recorded four points (1+3) through his first six games with the Amerks while playing among Rochester's top six forwards and seeing steady time on the power-play. He also recently appeared in his 400th professional game.

According to Amerks head coach Seth Appert, the addition of Mersch has paid dividends and provided the team with another reliable veteran presence.

"I can't say enough positive things about 'Mersch'," said Appert. "We're obviously a younger team this year, so having guys like Mersch has been so massively important. When our scouting staff called me about him, I knew his background and I knew the character we were getting, the quality of human and leader that we were getting.

"He's so competitive and so detail-oriented," continued Appert. "His systematic execution is nearly perfect, and his competitiveness is elite. Everything about his game is world class and he cares about puck battles more than most people care about scoring goals. The identity that we want to create here, and we want to keep building here in Rochester and within our organization is that we want to be hard to play against, we want to be demanding to play against with a lot more toughness and grit. A guy like Mersch can deliver that in spades and infuse that down through the lineup and the younger guys see that and it's easier for our younger guys to buy in to playing that way."

When looking back on his journey that led him to Rochester, it is perplexing to see how Mersch was still available, especially when you consider the contents of his resume.

Originally a fourth-round selection (110th overall of the Los Angeles Kings in 2011, Mersch led the Manchester Monarchs to a Calder Cup championship in 2015 following four years at the University of Wisconsin, where he was a Second-Team All-American and a First-Team All-Big Ten selection as a senior.

It's at the American Hockey League level, however, where Mersch made a name for himself. He surpassed the 20-goal mark four times in five years while also topping the 40-point mark in each of those seasons.

So, again, it begs the question, how did Mersch go unnoticed for almost a full year?

"It was really tough," said Merch when asked what the process was like that ultimately led him to Western New York. "A lot of guys had gone overseas, and the job market was totally out of whack. It took a lot of patience. You think something is going to work out and then it falls through and the same thing happens again.

"I just kept telling myself that everything happens for a reason. My wife was really supportive, and my family has been very supportive. I'm not going to lie, there's been some tough days. You see guys in training camp in the NHL and AHL you're still at home training."

Mersch considered all of his options, including going overseas, but the opportunity to join the Amerks came at the right time and was one he couldn't pass up.

"I considered everything and looked at all my options. There weren't many opportunities in the job market with it being all over the place and things needed to really settle down before teams could look at players like myself and my situation.

"I just feel really fortunate to be here, to get the opportunity, because I know there's a lot of guys still trying to figure out what I was trying to figure out a few weeks ago."

Fitzgerald, Amerks defeat Utica  
By Kevin Oklobzija  
Pickin' Splinters



He has gone from part-time player without a full-time position to a mid-season look-see at what the NHL is all about.

Not a bad one-year progression for Casey Fitzgerald.

And while Fitzgerald wasn't added to the Buffalo Sabres active roster during his six-day stint on the taxi squad in late February, he did at least end up with a stronger sense that he belongs.

"It's a step in the right direction," the second-year defenseman said. "All I can really control is to take it one step at a time."

He showed more signs of his progression on Wednesday night, when he scored two goals and provided snarl in the defensive zone as the Rochester Americans defeated the Utica Comets 4-2 at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

The goals were his first of the season, and matched his total from 2019-2020, when he scored twice in 39 games as a sometimes defenseman, sometimes forward.

This year he knows he'll be playing on the blue line, and that he'll play as long as he's performing well.

"I think every player, you're going to go through that adversity, unless you're a superstar," the 24-year-old Fitzgerald said. "I was never doubting myself. We had a great roster last year; it was a tough roster to crack."

Amerks first-year coach Seth Appert said it was evident that trying rookie season provided motivation for workouts in the summer and fall.

"You have to remember where Casey was last year," said Appert, whose club improved to 5-3 while Utica dropped to 5-2-0-1. "He was a healthy scratch of injured or, when he did play, they played him at forward."

"He's got so much pride and competitive spirit that I can only imagine how hard he worked this offseason to prove to this organization that he's an NHL prospect."

There was actually a lot of hard work by the Amerks on Wednesday, especially in the defensive zone. As a team they blocked 21 shots.

"When you have a collection of players, especially this year when there's not a Calder Cup to play for," Appert said, "it's an incredible message these guys are sending to each other, how much they care for each other."

The Comets did have at least eight great scoring chances on their 33 shots on goal, but goalie Ukka-Pekka Luukkonen was terrific.

Fitzgerald's first goal of the night tied the score at 17:47 of the first period, then he scored a short-handed goal just nine seconds into the second period to give the Amerks the lead.

Brett Murray's rebound goal at 15:07 of the second period extended the lead to 3-1. With Fitzgerald in the penalty box for high sticking, the Comets pulled within a goal with 7:23 to play on a power-play goal by Jack Rathbone but Arttu Ruotsalainen's empty-net goal with 40 seconds to play secured victory.

Amerks score victory over 1st place Comets 4-2 at Blue Cross Arena  
By Staff Report  
RochesterFirst

The Rochester Americans (5-3-0-0) took down the first-place Utica Comets (5-1-0-1) Wednesday with a 4-2 victory at the Blue Cross Arena.

Casey Fitzgerald scored two goal and Steven Fogarty had two assists to fuel the Amerks.

Goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (4-2-0) earned his third straight win in the Flower City while making 31 saves.

With the victory, Rochester has collected at least one point in 21 of the last 30 games against Utica dating back to the start of the 2017-18 campaign, going 16-9-2-3 over that span. Additionally, the Amerks earned their third straight win on home ice after dropping a 3-2 decision to the Comets on opening night.

The Amerks make a return trip back to Syracuse on Saturday, March 6 to face-off with the Crunch for the second time this week at Upstate Medical University Arena.

Fitzgerald leads Amerks win over Utica  
By Staff Report/Courtesy of Amerks.com  
RochesterFirst

On the strength of a pair of goals from defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and two assists by Steven Fogarty, the Rochester Americans (5-3-0-0) avenged last Friday's setback by doubling up the first-place Utica Comets (5-1-0-1) with a 4-2 win in a North Division matchup Wednesday at The Blue Cross Arena.

With the victory, Rochester has collected at least one point in 21 of the last 30 games against Utica dating back to the start of the 2017-18 campaign, going 16-9-2-3 over that span. Additionally, the Amerks earned their third straight win on home ice after dropping a 3-2 decision to the Comets on opening night.

With his first-career two-goal outing, including his first shorthanded marker, Fitzgerald is the first Amerks blueliner to score twice in a game since former defenseman Casey Nelson netted a pair as part of a three-point game back on Nov. 1, 2019 against Binghamton.

Fogarty recorded his second two-point game of the season while Brett Murray and Arttu Ruotsalainen scored their third and second goals of the slate, respectively. Murray has collected five points (2+3) in the last five games. Michael Mersch, who was held without a point in his first three outings with the club, picked up an assist to push his point streak to four games.

Goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (4-2-0) earned his third straight win in the Flower City while making 31 saves. The Finnish netminder has made 30-plus saves in four of his first six games of the season, which included a career-high 43 stops back on Feb. 12 in a 7-3 triumph at Cleveland.

The Comets offense was powered by forward Jonah Gadjovich's team-leading seventh goal of the campaign while rookie defenseman Jack Rathbone added his first pro goal in the loss. Goaltender Jon Gillies (3-1-1) suffered his first regulation defeat of the season while stopping 19 shots he faced.

On the second shift of the contest, Utica's Kole Lind handed Will Lockwood the puck just outside the blueline prior to the duo entering the Amerks zone. As Lockwood went down the boards, he fired a shot off the shoulder of Luukkonen. With bodies crashing towards the goal-mouth in search of a rebound, Gadjovich spotted the loose puck and poked it behind the Rochester netminder, giving the visitors an early 1-0 lead just 59 seconds after the opening face-off.

Despite being hemmed inside their own zone much of the first 20 minutes of play and trailing 1-0, Rochester capitalized on an icing infraction to tie the contest at one prior to the break.

Following a face-off to the left of Gillies, Dea won the draw back to Fitzgerald at the point and the blueliner wristed a shot that glanced off the crossbar and in behind the screened netminder. The marker was Fitzgerald's first of the slate while Dea picked up his team-leading sixth assist and ninth point.

After tying the contest at one late in the first period, Fitzgerald doubled his goal total and put the Amerks on top with his second of the night just nine seconds into the second stanza. With a tie-up between the centers to start the frame, Fitzgerald scooped up a loose puck in the neutral zone and carried it into the offensive zone. While warding off a defender, he slipped the puck between Gillies' pads to give Rochester a 2-1 lead.

Later in the frame, the Amerks doubled their lead thanks to Murray's third of the slate at the 15:07 mark, giving the second-year pro five points in as many games.

The third period was cruising along, and it seemed Rochester was going to take the 3-1 victory. However, the Comets pulled within a goal as Rathbone blasted his first goal while on a two-man advantage at the 12:37 mark.

The Amerks successfully killed off the rest of the power-play, and despite being whistled for its seventh infraction of the contest late in the game, Remi Elie centered a pass to Ruotsalainen to seal the 4-2 win into an empty Utica net. The assist was Elie's 100th point of his pro career.

The Amerks make a return trip back to Syracuse on Saturday, March 6 to face-off with the Crunch for the second time this week at Upstate Medical University Arena. The North Division showdown is slated for a 7:00 p.m. start.

Comets suffer AHL road loss at Rochester  
By Staff Report  
WKTV

The Utica Comets suffered a 4-2 road loss to American Hockey League rival Rochester Americans on Wednesday night.

The teams skated to a 1-1 tie in the first period. Jonah Gadjovich lit the lamp first for the Comets and it was his seventh of the season. Will Lockwood and Kole Lind assisted on the first goal of the game.

Later in the first, Rochester tied the game after Casey Fitzgerald snuck one past Utica goalie Jon Gillies. Jean-Sebastian Dea assisted on Fitzgerald's goal.

The Comets began the second period on the power play, but Fitzgerald gave the Americans the lead after he scored a short-handed goal. Steven Fogarty assisted on Fitzgerald's second goal of the game.

Rochester added another goal to give them a 3-1 lead later in the period, this goal coming off of the stick of Brett Murray. Assisting on the third goal were Michael Mersch and Fogarty.

Heading into the third period, Rochester still held a two-goal advantage, but midway through, Jack Rathbone scored his first professional goal on a power play to cut the Americans lead to 3-2. Assisting on Rathbone's goal were Mitch Reinke and Sven Baertschi.

Arttu Ruotsalainen gave the Amerks an insurance goal late in the third after the Comets pulled Gillies for the extra skater.

Utica scored once on eight power play chances while Rochester went 0-for-2 on the power play. The Comets outshot the Amerks 33-23.

Rochester goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 31 saves and picked up the win. Gillies took the loss and made 19 saves for the 5-2-1 Comets.

Utica is off until on Wednesday, March 10 when it hosts Rochester again.

Comets fall to Amerks in Rochester as Rathbone scores first professional goal

By Spencer Davidson

WKTV

Highly-touted defensive prospect Jack Rathbone scored his first professional goal, but it was not enough to bring the Comets back even as the team fell 4-2 to the Rochester Americans at BlueCross Arena, Wednesday.

The Comets, coming in on a five-game point streak, took the lead just 59 seconds into the game with Jonah Gadjovich crashing the net to put in a rebound. Will Lockwood and Kole Lind had assists on the goal.

The Amerks evened it up with a Casey Fitzgerald goal late in the frame and then opened the second period with another goal by Fitzgerald just nine seconds in to take a 2-1 lead.

Brett Murray added to it 15:07 into the middle stanza and the Comets would be down 3-1 heading into the third period.

Rathbone's goal came on a one-time blast from the point on a 5-on-3 power play with assists from Mitch Reinke and Sven Baertschi.

After pulling the goalie for an extra attacker late, Arttu Ruotsalainen scored an empty-netter to ice it.

Utica outshot Rochester 33-22 with Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen making 31 for the Amerks and Jon Gillies stopping 19 for the Comets.

With the loss, the Comets drop to 5-2-0-1.

These teams go back at it next Wednesday, March 10, at the Adirondack Bank Center in Utica. Puck drop at 7 p.m.