



AMERKS DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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Amerks Stumble In 5-1 Loss To Monsters
By Staff Report
Amerks.com

The Cleveland Monsters scored twice in the opening eight minutes and rode a near-perfect performance from veteran goaltender Brad Thiessen on their way to a 5-1 win over the Rochester Americans Wednesday at The Blue Cross Arena.

The loss snaps Rochester's home point streak at four games (3-0-1-0) and drops the Amerks to 6-4-1-1 on the season.

Veteran forward Michael Mersch provided the lone tally for the Amerks, spoiling Thiessen's bid for his first shutout since April 3, 2019 with a power-play goal late in the third period. Brandon Biro, coming off a three-point effort Friday against Syracuse, notched an assist as did fellow rookie forward Patrick Polino, who registered his first pro point on Mersch's third of the season. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 24 saves while making his ninth start in 12 games for Rochester.

Jake Christiansen (1+2) and Adam Helewka (0+2) each turned in multi-point efforts while Gavin Bayreuther, Tyler Sikura, Josh Dunne and Zach Jordan rounded out the scoring for the Monsters, who improved to 5-2-0 in their last seven games. Thiessen stopped all but one of the 23 shots he faced to collect his second straight win and third in his last four appearances.

Cleveland needed just 3:47 into the contest to take a 1-0 lead on Christiansen's first of the season. As former AHL Rookie of the Year Nathan Gerbe carried the puck into the Rochester zone along the right-wing wall, the former Buffalo Sabre sent a cross-ice pass to Christiansen, who was trailing the play. The Monsters defenseman caught the pass in stride just inside the Amerks blueline before picking the upper corner from the left face-off dot to give Cleveland the early advantage.

It was the 12th time in 13 games this season the Monsters scored the first goal of the game.

The Monsters doubled their lead just over four minutes later on a play that began and ended with Bayreuther scoring his first pro goal. Bayreuther, who came into the matchup coming off a franchise-record four-assist performance against Texas on Sunday, led the rush out of the Cleveland zone and advanced the puck to Evan Polei at center ice. As the Monsters gained the offensive zone, the team exchanged a series of slick passes before Bayreuther tapped home a centering feed from Carson Meyer atop the crease at the 8:00 mark.

Shortly after, Rochester had its best chance of the night to get on the board with 1:12 worth of a two-man advantage following consecutive penalties to Cleveland, but Thiessen managed to keep everything in front of him.

The visitors appeared to increase their lead to 3-0 early in the middle frame, but the apparent goal from Helewka was waved off for what was later determined as goaltender interference by the Monsters forward. Cleveland, however, would eventually get its third of the night after Sikura swatted in a bouncing puck off an initial offering from Christiansen.

With time starting to dwindle, the teams exchanged power-play goals in the latter half of the third period, beginning with Dunne notching his first of the season at 9:59 before Mersch answered at 16:09, effectively ruining Thiessen's shutout bid to make it a 4-1 game.

Rochester pulled Luukkonen in the waning minutes in favor of the extra attacker, but Jordan added an empty-netter with 1:36 to play to seal the 5-1 for Cleveland.

The Amerks close out their three-game homestand on Friday, April 2 when they host the Syracuse Crunch in the first leg of a home-and-home series at The Blue Cross Arena. Game time is slated for a 7:05 p.m. start and will be carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM ESPN Rochester and AHLTV. The North Division matchup will also be tape-delayed on CW Rochester beginning at 10 p.m.

Wrong approach dooms Amerks in loss to Cleveland

By Kevin Oklobzija

Pickin' Splinters

If Wednesday night was the audition for the auditions, Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams couldn't have liked too much of what he saw.

With Adams sitting high atop Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial to evaluate prospects, the Rochester Americans didn't give him much to appreciate in a 5-1 loss to the Cleveland Monsters.

The Sabres intend to use their remaining 21 inconsequential games to see what younger players such as goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, defenseman Mattias Samuelsson and first-year forwards Jack Quinn and Arttu Ruotsalainen can do at the NHL level.

None were all that great on Wednesday, although Luukkonen and Ruotsalainen were playing for the first time in three weeks. Luukkonen allowed four goals on 28 shots and Ruotsalainen had just one shot on goal and was a minus-two in plus/minus.

Then again, not many Amerks were good, or even OK.

"The fact we scored seven against them last time (a 7-3 win at Cleveland on Feb. 12) had guys thinking offense instead of just playing the game the right way and offense will come," Amerks coach Seth Appert said. "That's being immature. I thought some of the younger guys had immaturity in that approach, it felt like."

Combine that wrong approach with a Monsters team that played exceptionally well and you end up with a lopsided 5-1 loss.

"Cleveland was really good tonight," Appert said. "Their forechecking pressure, we struggled with it. And then we just didn't establish enough O-zone time so they kept coming at us."

As a result, the Monsters led 2-0 after just eight minutes and buried the Amerks with a two more goals in the first 10 minutes of the third period.

"I thought we were too cute tonight, we didn't have a shooting mentality," Appert said. "We're a team that wins the hard way. We're not blessed with a lot of easy offense. The last time we scored seven against them and it seemed like we wanted it more easy tonight."

"I thought Cleveland was fantastic tonight and made the game hard on us and then we made it hard on ourselves."

Nathan Gerbe, now in his 12th pro season and eight years removed from his last game with the Sabres, set up rookie defenseman Jake Christiansen for the game's first goal just 3:47 into the first period.

Gerbe moved deep into the right winger circle, then threaded a pass between the legs of Remi Elie to Christiansen at the left point. With space and time to move toward the top of the left circle, Christiansen snapped a wrist shot into the very open top right corner of the net for his first pro goal.

Fourth-year veteran Gavin Bayreuther, a St. Lawrence University alum, pushed the lead to 2-0 at 8:00, leading, and then putting the finishing touches on, a four-on-two fast break with the Elie-Jack Quinn-Brandon Biro line stuck in the Cleveland zone.

"They play a heavy game and when you get down on them and they're wearing you down and you're not able to come up the ice as a five-man group, it becomes hard," said Amerks center Michael Mersch, who ended Brad Thiessen's shutout bid with a power-play goal with 3:51 remaining.

Adam Helewka — as well as everyone on both teams — thought he had given Cleveland a 3-0 lead at 4:07 of the second period when, with position at the top of the crease, he steered a Gerbe pass between Luukkonen's legs and into the back of the net.

Since the AHL has opted against the use of goal judges this season (as well as video review), the goal light did not come on and referee Brandon Schrader somehow never saw the puck enter the net. He instead blew the whistle to signal a faceoff, which elicited a very loud "You've got to be kidding me" — edited for use on this site — from one of the Monsters.

The four officials huddled to discuss what they saw and stuck with Schrader's ruling, even as the video board was showing the puck hit the back of the net.

The Monsters scored a third goal again, 4:18 into the third period, and this one counted. Christiansen's shot from the left-wing half wall caromed up in the air, dropped behind Luukkonen in the crease and Tyler Sikura tapped it in.

Josh Dunne pushed the lead to 4-0 with a power-play goal at 9:59, establishing inside position at the top of the crease on defenseman Griffin Luce before steering home Tyler Angle's centering pass.

The goal came after Luukkonen's best sequence of saves. After blocking a Gerbe slap shot from the slot, he jumped back into position to stop Sikura's rebound try at 7:53. Ninety seconds later, he leaped across his crease to rob Helewka's one-timer toward an empty net.

Mersch scored on a Brandon Biro rebound during a power play, then Zach Jordan's empty-net goal with 1:36 remaining inflated the score.

Sabres plan to give prospects an NHL audition in season's final weeks

By Lance Lysowski

Buffalo News

Amid all the phone calls ahead of the April 12 trade deadline, General Manager Kevyn Adams drove across Interstate 90 on Wednesday to take a closer look at possible reinforcements for the Buffalo Sabres.

During a livestream at the morning skate in KeyBank Center, Adams told Sabres television analysts Brian Duff and Martin Biron that he planned to step away from the NHL team in order to watch the Rochester Americans' game Wednesday night in Blue Cross Arena against the Cleveland Monsters.

In addition to evaluating top prospects, Adams wanted to have extensive conversations with players. A trip to Rochester was not possible during the first three months of the Sabres' season because there was little time with the truncated schedule.

This fact-finding mission will be used to determine which prospects can help the Sabres following the deadline. Interim coach Don Granato confirmed to the media following the morning skate that the organization plans to give Amerks players an NHL opportunity in the final weeks of the season.

"We know that we want to do that," said Granato. "And that's part of the plan moving forward. The timeline has not been set. But the motor is moving for me, certainly. And I'm excited for that. I think it's a valuable time for players to gain some experience, internalize that experience. It's what we're about right now."

Winger Taylor Hall and defenseman Brandon Montour are among the pending unrestricted free agents likely to be traded before the deadline. Each will be among the most highly coveted players at his respective position, providing Adams with an opportunity to acquire draft picks and/or prospects rather than receiving nothing in return when they likely sign elsewhere in July.

Those trades, though, will leave significant holes in the Sabres' lineup. Rather than plugging in players from the taxi squad, Adams can use this as an opportunity to evaluate and develop prospects who are currently in Rochester.

Center Arttu Ruotsalainen, winger Jack Quinn, defenseman Mattias Samuelsson, goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and defenseman Oskari Laaksonen could be candidates for an NHL audition. The Sabres might also want to see if winger Brett Murray, a power forward with skill, can add a physical element to their bottom six.

Evaluation and development will be primary focuses for the Sabres over the final five weeks. Casey Mittelstadt is receiving an opportunity to play center. Granato plans to give Tage Thompson a consistent spot in the lineup. Henri Jokiharju, a 21-year-old defenseman, is again a fixture after he was scratched 10 times by former coach Ralph Krueger this season.

The Amerks' game Wednesday night was only their second since three positive Covid-19 cases on the team resulted in a two-week pause. Rochester had additional games postponed because the Utica Comets endured a similar outbreak.

"Obviously, we're in a position where we need our young players to be learning and growing and getting better, but we just have to figure out a way to balance all that," said Adams. "The veterans know when you're in a situation like we are there may be guys on the move, and we'll see where it goes the next couple weeks."

The Sabres will face a difficult decision with Quinn, a 19-year-old selected eighth overall in the NHL draft in October. Entering Wednesday, Quinn had one goal and three assists for four points in eight games since joining the Amerks. He isn't physically ready for professional hockey, but a spot in Rochester made the most sense because his junior team, the Ottawa 67's, are awaiting word on when or if the Ontario Hockey League will launch its season. The Sabres can leave Quinn with the Amerks or see how he responds to facing bigger, stronger competition in the NHL.

Luukkonen, 22, isn't ready for a full-time job with the Sabres, but introducing the former second-round draft pick to the NHL would make more sense than giving starts to pending unrestricted free agent Carter Hutton or Dustin Tokarski, who is currently the backup behind Linus Ullmark.

Entering Wednesday, Luukkonen had appeared in 55 professional games between Finland and North America, including 19 with the Amerks. NHL teams typically want goaltending prospects to play 100 pro games before a permanent promotion.

Cozens update

The Sabres are hopeful rookie forward Dylan Cozens will only miss one week with an upper-body injury, Granato said.

Cozens, 20, missed a second consecutive game Wednesday after he exited in the first period Monday because of a hit from Philadelphia Flyers defenseman Philippe Myers. Cozens, one of the few bright spots in the Sabres' dismal season, has yet to resume skating with the Sabres.

"He was really angry," Granato said of Cozens. "He was upset at himself and the fact that he was injured. You guys sense the competitive nature of Dylan Cozens. It is there. He's an intense, intense hockey player. And he was mad that he has to sit out games.

"So, he's a player who's going to push it and be back as soon as he possibly can. We're hopeful that it's next week at some point. And he's just going to keep pushing ahead."

Cozens has totaled four goals with two assists for six points in 25 games during his rookie season. He began the year at right wing in a move to lessen the growing pains during his introduction in the NHL. However, Jack Eichel's upper-body injury caused Krueger to move Cozens to a top-line center role last month. This is the second time in less than three weeks that the former seventh overall draft pick suffered an injury.

Cozens missed four games after he crashed into the boards because of a blindside hit from Pittsburgh Penguins winger Zach Aston-Reese in KeyBank Center on March 11.

Sabres notes: Don Granato overworks players; Buffalo plans to add prospects

By Bill Hoppe

Buffalo Hockey Beat

Instead of letting the Sabres rest and recover in the midst of their grueling schedule, interim coach Don Granato said he has “overworked” his players.

“We’re trying to push them harder to develop harder,” Granato said on a Zoom call prior to Wednesday’s 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center. “We know we have to get better. The focus has to be on that. And we have to trust that wins will follow and be a by-product of that.”

So Granato has tried to use what little practice time the Sabres have available — they played a whopping 16 games in March — to his team’s advantage.

“We moved the thought of, ‘OK, let’s just rest and maximize maybe our work-to-rest ratio on the rest side so we can maybe get the next win,’” Granato said.

Granato, who replaced Ralph Krueger on March 17, has embraced a long-term approach. He did not want the Sabres to end what had ballooned to an 18-game winless skid and quickly revert to their old ways.

He said focusing on the marathon streak “drains you.”

“We had to turn our focus to improving even if it costs us in the short term with a little bit longer practices, a lot harder practices, maybe a couple more minutes in meetings or videos or one-on-ones,” Granato said.

He added: “We want to try to get to a point where we can feel we can win any night out, and win with consistency.”

So, for example, prior to Monday’s 4-3 overtime loss to the Flyers, the Sabres’ morning skate was really a full practice.

Sessions under Granato feature plenty of teaching. He, of course, has different ideas than Krueger. His new system has forced the Sabres to play faster.

“We’ve had some pretty in-depth meetings and some really good conversation about the things that we want to do and how we want to play,” Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. “It’s about getting everybody on the same page that way, because you don’t have (a lot) of practice time in a year like this.”

Granato said he and his staff have introduced things to the team “incrementally.”

“We didn’t want to give them too much,” he said. “To tie it in, we made sure that whatever we spoke of in a meeting or video and showed them, we actually ran drills in practice where they could get the reps to it and get some confidence that way. And that’s still a process. We can only move in increments within that process.”

The Sabres have slowly started performing better for long stretches of games. Having taken leads into the third period in each of other their last two outings, they appear close to winning for the first time since Feb. 23.

In Monday's game, they led 3-0 before imploding late.

"We're trying to push them harder to develop harder," Granato said. "We know we have to get better. The focus has to be on that. And we have to trust that wins will follow and be a by-product of that."

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Granato said the Sabres plan to recall some of their prospects from the Rochester Americans before the season ends May 8.

"The timeline has not been set," he said. "But the motor is moving for me, certainly. And I'm excited for that. I think it's a valuable time for players to gain some experience, internalize that experience. It's what we're about right now."

Goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, forward Arttu Ruotsalainen and defenseman Mattias Samuelsson would probably be the top candidates to play their first NHL games.

Amerks defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and forwards Brett Murray and Andrew Oglevie have also spent time on the Sabres' taxi squad this season.

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With rookie center Dylan Cozens sidelined by an upper-body injury, the Sabres recalled Steven Fogarty from the taxi squad prior to the game and played him at right wing on the fourth line beside center Cody Eakin and Tobias Rieder.

Fogarty scored the first goal of his 22-game NHL career 9:42 into the second period. He also assisted on center Casey Mittelstadt's goal later in the period.

The Notre Dame product had recorded one NHL point entering the night.

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Sabres rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson played Wednesday after an upper-body injury sidelined him Monday.

Amerks lose to Monsters 5-1
By Staff Report
WHEC

The Rochester Americans were home against the Cleveland Monsters Wednesday night.

The Amerks were down by 2 in the second but firing as best they could. Brad Thiessen made 23 saves for Cleveland.

Rochester had its own power play in the third, Michael Mersch was strong in front of the net but it was too little too late.

It was a tough day at the office for the Amerks. They lost 5-1.

Amerks lose to Monsters 5-1
News10NBC

"You know, they were really good tonight, their forechecking pressure, we struggled with it, we really did," Head Coach Seth Appert said. "We struggled breaking the puck out cleanly and then we just didn't establish enough o-zone time because they won too many puck battles in the defensive zone."

The Amerks' next game is scheduled for Friday at 7:05 p.m. at home against the Syracuse Crunch.