



# AMERKS DAILY PRESS CLIPS

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## Sabres make moves, send five players to Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Amerks.com

Goalie Michael Houser, who started four games for the Buffalo Sabres last week, was among five players the team sent to the Rochester Americans this morning.

The Sabres also assigned defenseman Mattias Samuelsson and forwards Steven Fogarty, Brett Murray and C.J. Smith to their AHL affiliate.

The Amerks have four games left this season, starting with Wednesday's road contest against the Utica Comets.

Houser, 28, looked impressive in his first NHL action, compiling a 2-2-0 record with a 3.46 goals-against average and a .901 save percentage.

## Sabres Notebook: Victor Olofsson aiming to become a 'better goal-scorer'

By Lance Lysowski

Buffalo News

Victor Olofsson isn't a complete player yet.

The 25-year-old has routinely acknowledged that fact when speaking to reporters since he made his long-awaited National Hockey League debut on March 28, 2019, almost five years after he was drafted as an undersized winger in the seventh round by former General Manager Tim Murray's scouting staff.

A dynamo on the power play, Olofsson is still searching for ways to make an impact for the Sabres at 5-on-5. Of his 35 goals in 116 games since reaching the NHL, only 15 have occurred at even strength. An exit interview with GM Kevyn Adams on Tuesday provided some insight into how Olofsson can be more productive in the final year of a contract that will count \$3.05 million against the salary cap.

"I just had a great talk with Kevyn about that and I feel like, I probably, I've got to play a little bit more on the inside and be good around the net and find ways to score more goals around the net," said Olofsson, a restricted free agent in the summer of 2022. "I know I can score from the outside, I know I have a good shot and I'm going to get my opportunities and score goals from the outside. ... I think that's the biggest key for me to take the next step and become a better goal-scorer overall."

Olofsson finished second on the team in goals (13) and points (32) while playing in all 56 games during this shortened season. He was the top goal-scorer on a power play that ranked third in the NHL through Feb. 28.

Watch Now: It's a springtime winter wonderland in Wyoming

Since making his NHL debut, Olofsson ranks eighth in the NHL in power-play goals, only three fewer than Alex Ovechkin entering play Tuesday. As much as Olofsson has taken too many shots from the perimeter — particularly in the final weeks of the season when he shot just 7.6% under interim coach Don Granato — he is still generating chances when the Sabres don't have a man-advantage.

Though only six of his goals this season occurred at even strength, Olofsson's individual shot quality at 5-on-5 ranked fourth on the team, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

Only Jeff Skinner, Sam Reinhart and Tage Thompson had better opportunities to score in those situations. Now Olofsson wants to drive to the net more often, which will require improved awareness when the Sabres have the puck.

"I would say it's more look at video, look at the areas, what I can do differently, just the timing of it, maybe finding that open ice on the back door," Olofsson said when asked how he can improve. "Just got to be better and read the game a little bit better in the offensive zone and come to the inside a little bit more and find opportunities."

### Reinforcements

With their season over and exit interviews concluded, the Sabres assigned the following players to the Rochester Americans on Tuesday: goalie Michael Houser, defenseman Mattias Samuelsson and forwards Steven Fogarty, Brett Murray and C.J. Smith.

The Amerks have four games remaining, beginning Wednesday night at Utica.

The most significant addition is Houser, a 28-year-old who won his first two games in the NHL for the Sabres last week. He finished with a .901 save percentage in four games, capped by a 22-save performance during the season finale in Pittsburgh.

#### Hall backs Eichel

Former Sabres winger Taylor Hall threw his support behind his former teammate and captain, Jack Eichel, following the Boston Bruins' 3-2 win over the New York Islanders on Monday night.

"I know Jack is frustrated," Hall said after scoring two more goals. "Jack and I became really, really good friends during our time in Buffalo and I support him. I know he's gone through some stuff with the medical staff there and ultimately, Jack has to worry about himself. There's teams that they're going to worry, just like he said, about what's best for them. And Jack has to do what's best for him.

"And I know he's got an injury that he feels he can take care of with a surgery and there's a little bit of a disagreement. But I support Jack and he was nothing but a great teammate and a really good friend when I played with him."

Entering Tuesday, Hall had eight goals with six assists for 14 points in 16 games since his trade from Buffalo to Boston last month. He had only two goals and 19 points in 37 games with the Sabres.

Amerks Auctioning Off 65th Anniversary Jerseys On Dash  
By Staff Report  
Amerks.com

The Rochester Americans announced today that the team will auction off the special-edition red sweaters worn on select game-nights throughout the 2020-21 season as part of its 65th anniversary celebration. All proceeds raised will benefit Golisano Children's Hospital in Rochester.

Fans will have the opportunity to purchase the set of autographed game-worn and game-issued jerseys through an online auction on DASH, a sports-focused online auction platform and partner of the Rochester Americans.

To access the auction, visit <https://amerks.co/3f078Jr> or text "DASH" to 66866, click on the download link and install DASH on your mobile device. Fans can then create their own personal profile and select the Amerks as their favorite team to start bidding.

Bidding is open now through 8:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 16. Winners will be contacted directly.

The sweater was inspired by one worn during the team's first Calder Cup championship season of 1964-65. The timeless red jerseys pay tribute to the early years of the franchise and feature the classic stars and stripes shield on the front outlined in black, with a thicker black border enveloping the right side of the crest to create a shadow effect.

Six white stars adorn the shoulders, with three on each side, symbolic of Rochester's six Calder Cup championships. Each arm features a thick royal blue stripe with a thinner white band at the top and bottom, and a white lace-up also accentuates the neckline.

Amerks auctioning off special edition sweaters  
By Staff Report  
WHEC-TV

The Rochester Americans Monday announced they will be auctioning off the special-edition red sweaters worn on select game nights throughout the 2020-21 season as part of its 65th-anniversary celebration.

All proceeds will go to Golisano Children's Hospital.

The auction will be on DASH, a sports-focused online auction platform.

Those interested in bidding can visit the website or text "DASH" to 66866. Bidding will last through 8 p.m. Sunday, May 16.

Winners will be contacted directly.

## Dea Lifts Amerks To 4-3 Shootout Win Over Monsters

By Staff Report

Amerks.com

Jean-Sebastien Dea scored twice in regulation, including the game-tying tally midway through the third period, and netted the only goal in the shootout to lift the Rochester Americans (10-12-2-1) to a 4-3 win over the Cleveland Monsters (15-8-8-2) in the final meeting of the season between the two teams Saturday at the Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

Tonight's matchup was the sixth and final meeting between the two teams this season with Rochester showing a 2-4-0-0 record against the Monsters, including a 2-1-0-0 mark in Cleveland. Rochester holds a record of 31-11-4-4 over Cleveland since the start of the 2011-12 campaign and has earned a point in nine of the last 12 games, which includes all seven meetings last season.

In his first game back with Rochester since April 9, Dea (2+0) notched his fifth and sixth goals of the season for his fourth multi-point effort of the year before adding the shootout-clinching goal. Rookie forward Patrick Polino (1+0) notched his second professional marker, while defenseman Oskari Laaksonen (0+2) collected his third multi-point game of the season. Additionally, forwards Brandon Hawkins (0+1), Brendan Warren (0+1) and Matej Pekar (0+1) all added assists as Rochester picked up its second straight win on the road.

In his third start of the season, rookie goaltender Billy Christopoulos (1-1-0) earned his first American Hockey League win as he stopped 38 saves on 41 shots he faced through regulation and overtime. Additionally, Christopoulos was clean through three shots faced in the shootout.

Cleveland forwards Cliff Pu and (1+0) and Josh Dunne (1+0) and defenseman Jake Christiansen (1+0) all contributed to the scoreline during Saturday's contest with a goal apiece. Both notching multi-point efforts, forward Tyler Angle (0+2) and defenseman Thomas Schemitsch (0+2) combined for four assists on the night.

In his 12th game of the season, veteran goaltender Brad Thiessen (4-5-3) suffered the loss on the night while making 16 saves in the crease.

Just shy of the six-and-a-half-minute mark in the second period, Cleveland squared up the contest at one apiece before taking its first lead of the game not even three minutes later.

The first of two Cleveland goals came at the 6:24 mark when Pu knocked in his second goal of the season with a shot that went right through the legs of Christopoulos.

Next, Angle would force a turnover in the neutral zone before skating up the right wing and finding a wide-open Dunne making his way to the Amerks crease. As Angle took the initial shot, the rebound caromed off an Amerks defenseman and ricochet off the shoulder of Dunne, who was stationed atop the crease.

Rochester wouldn't leave the middle frame without a goal, though, as they tied up the tilt at two apiece with 9:25 to go.

Pekar picked up his fifth assist of the season as he shifted the puck to Laaksonen in the Amerks offensive zone. Laaksonen centered himself between the face-off dots before slipping a pass to Polino above the right face-off circle. Polino then zipped a shot from out high and lit the lamp for the second time in his professional career.

Another six-and-a-half-minutes later, a wrist shot from the high slot by Christiansen would sail over the glove side of Christopoulos to pull the Monsters ahead 3-2 heading into the second intermission.

As Rochester headed into the final stanza behind by one, they found a way to tie up the game once more to send it into an extra frame of hockey for the sixth time this season.

Exchanging passes, Dea flipped the puck to Warren in the right face-off circle as he attacked the Cleveland net. As Warren made his way right to the right of Thiessen, he would send a pass to Dea, who was positioned on the opposite side of the crease ready to ring one in for his second marker of the game at the 9:32 mark and send the contest into overtime.

As overtime ensued, both teams were held silent before heading into the Amerks third shootout effort of the 2020-21 campaign.

Being the home team, Cleveland had the chance to go first in the shootout but was unable to succeed on its first two chances. As Hawkins came up short on the first shot for Rochester, it was up to Dea to make his mark for the final time of the night.

Dea beat Thiessen high stick-side of Thiessen for the game-winning shot as Cleveland was not able to get past Christopoulos in its third and final effort.

When the Amerks embarked on their first man-advantage opportunity just 90 seconds into the night's contest, they'd immediately controlled the face-off to the right of the Cleveland crease.

As Laaksonen danced above the right face-off circle, he found Hawkins waiting alongside the boards. Hawkins connected with Laaksonen's pass and went driving up the wing where he found Dea ready to take action. Faking out a Monsters defenseman upon retrieving the puck, Dea made his way around the back of the net before stuffing a wraparound inside the near post for the first shot and goal of the night for Rochester.

Now 25 games into the season, Rochester's power-play has gone 26-for-94 with a 27.7% conversion rate that is again first in the AHL. The Amerks' 26 goals on the man-advantage are most among all North Division teams and seven off the AHL lead behind the San Diego Gulls. Not to forget, the Amerks have scored at least one power-play goal in 17 of their 25 games this season.

For the first time this season, Rochester held Cleveland silent through the first 20 minutes of play despite their 10 chances on net.

The Amerks close out their final road trip of the year on Wednesday, May 12 at the Adirondack Bank Center when they take on the Utica Comets for the 11th meeting between the clubs this season. All of the action from the 7:00 p.m. puck drop will be carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM ESPN Rochester as well as AHLTV.



## 5 takeaways | Sabres' season ends with loss to Penguins

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

Don Granato remained proud of his players even after a shutout loss.

Granato took over as interim coach of the Sabres on March 17 and challenged the team to learn a possession-based, up-tempo game on the fly. He set his sights toward the future, putting more and more on the plates of young players who figure to be a part of the organization's core. He increased practice time at the expense of rest.

The players responded all the way to the end of a 1-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins in their season finale at PPG Paints Arena on Saturday.

"As a coach, you have nothing if you can't push guys," Granato said afterward. "And I really felt the best thing was to be able to push guys. Guys wanted to be pushed. They wanted more. They felt they could give more, and they had more within themselves.

"That was something very nice and very special to have as a coach."

Here are five takeaways from the final game of the season.

### 1. Sabres adjust from Thursday

Granato said after an 8-4 loss on Thursday that he felt his players got caught up in trying to trade chances with the more experienced Penguins. He liked their mindset during practice on Friday and felt they adjusted well in the rematch.

The Sabres outshot the Penguins 11-3 during the first period and 29-23 overall. The two teams finished even with eight high-danger scoring chances apiece at 5-on-5, according to Natural Stat Trick.

"I thought our guys did an incredible job with adjustments," Granato said. "We were too loose the other day. We talked about playing ... too much like pond hockey the other day, and we tightened things up. We made a lot of improvements and I was very proud of that."

### 2. Lagace comes up big for Pittsburgh

Maxime Lagace made his Penguins debut and stopped all 29 shots, including a breakaway attempt from Drake Caggiula during the second period and a point-blank one-timer from Victor Olofsson in the third. Sam Reinhart nearly had the tying goal during the final minute, but his attempt at a bouncing puck sailed wide of the net.

Jeff Carter scored the lone goal of the game for Pittsburgh early in the second period when a rebound deflected into the net off his body.

### 3. Houser's memorable week

Michael Houser made his fourth straight start and stopped every shot but one, including a highlight-reel save to rob Jake Guentzel during the first period. It was the final chapter in an unforgettable week that began with back-to-back wins for the ninth-year pro in his first NHL games.

That story had taken a turn Thursday, when Houser took the brunt of an all-around sloppy performance by the Sabres and allowed eight goals. He had family and friends in attendance once again Saturday and felt good about the performance in spite of the result.

"Yeah, that was satisfying," Houser said. "Especially it being our last game, just the effort that I thought we showed for all 60 minutes, that was really fun to play behind. We were getting out of our zone extremely well, I thought, the entire game and that made it pretty easy on me."

Prior to Monday, Houser had not played a game above the ECHL level since the 2017-18 season. He had not played a game of any kind in nearly 14 months. His chance in the NHL simply reinforced what he had suspected throughout his long journey.

"I think showing myself was what I wanted to do," he said. "I've always thought that I could play at this level, I've always thought that I could win games here. . . . I can play here and play well and give our team a chance to win. I think that's all you can ask from a goalie."

#### 4. Houser's impressions

The Sabres finished last in the NHL at 15-34-7. They went 8-11-2 since the beginning of April despite leaning on inexperienced players after trading a quartet of veterans and playing 14 games against playoff teams in Boston, Pittsburgh, Washington, and the New York Islanders.

Houser had watched most of the Sabres games on TV when he was with the Amerks earlier in the season and had an up-close look since signing his NHL deal in March. He answered without hesitation when asked if he feels the team is better than its record suggests.

"I think we're quite a bit better than what the record indicated," he said. "I think we've gotten a lot better, at least since I've joined the team and I could see it from the stands and then on the bench a few games and then behind it the last four.

". . . There's so much talent in that room and most of the talent is fairly young. They're only gonna get better. It was a great opportunity for a lot of guys this year to really showcase themselves, especially late in the season. And we started winning some games, too."

#### 5. What's ahead

Sabres players will meet with the media on Monday and Tuesday, followed by season-ending press conferences with Granato and general manager Kevyn Adams on Wednesday.

Stay tuned to Sabres.com for coverage throughout the week.

## Thriving in a 'contract year,' Rasmus Asplund wants to be part of Sabres' future

By Lance Lysowski

Buffalo News

A chorus of stick taps echoed throughout UPMC Lemieux Complex when Rasmus Asplund darted past a defending Colin Miller and one-timed a shot over Michael Houser's glove during the Buffalo Sabres' final practice of the season Friday.

It wasn't the only impressive feat by Asplund during the rigorous, fast-faced, 40-minute session ahead of the season finale Saturday against the Penguins in PPG Paints Arena. Asplund, a 23-year-old forward, used his speed to execute interim coach Don Granato's neutral-zone transition drills to perfection.

Once considered an unlikely source for offense, Asplund has become a top-six fixture with six goals and 10 points in 22 games since Granato took over on March 17. While much of the praise heaped on Granato has revolved around Casey Mittelstadt's breakthrough or Rasmus Dahlin's rejuvenation, and rightfully so, the ascent of Asplund is another silver lining to a 10th consecutive season without playoff hockey in Buffalo.

"Myself, I'm just trying to enjoy this as much as I can," beamed Asplund. "It's the NHL, it's the best league in the world, and to have this chance and opportunity that I have is just a blessing."

When training camp began in January, Asplund was somewhat of an afterthought. He wasn't among the NHLers skating with the Sabres' top practice group on day one, and he began the season on the taxi squad, relegated to on-ice workouts with a handful of players who would be in Rochester during a normal season.

Uncertain about Asplund's ability to contribute in 2020-21, General Manager Kevyn Adams and former coach Ralph Krueger added veteran center Cody Eakin as a free agent in October. Eakin has failed to contribute offensively, while Asplund has positioned himself to possibly earn a raise as a restricted free agent this summer. His seven goals are tied for fifth on the team this season.

"It's a contract year for me, too. Hopefully I've been playing good enough to be able to be a part of next year's team, but you never know," said Asplund. "But the minutes I got, that gives me an opportunity to really show what type of player I am, what I can do out there, what situations I'm good at. Hopefully I've been doing good enough to be a part of this for a long time because that's what I want."

This is the latest step in a long development plan that began with his selection 33rd overall in the 2016 draft, a pick acquired by former General Manager Tim Murray in a trade that sent defenseman Mark Pysyk to the Florida Panthers.

Asplund spent the next two seasons in the Swedish Hockey League, totaling only 14 goals in 89 games. Murray's replacement, Jason Botterill, signed Asplund to a three-year, entry-level contract in May 2018. The plan was that Asplund would develop for two seasons in Rochester before competing for a full-time spot in Buffalo.

The adjustment to pro hockey in North America was not seamless. Asplund, like his linemate in 2018-19, Victor Olofsson, needed time to become responsible defensively. The two paired with Danny O'Regan to form a potent top line, but Asplund finished with only 10 goals in 75 games for the Amerks.

Olofsson, meanwhile, had immediate success upon joining the Sabres in March 2019.

Botterill's assistant general manager, Randy Sexton, continued to express confidence that Asplund's offense would come. Sabres brass lauded his work ethic and skill. When most players retreated to the dressing room to shower and head home after practice in Rochester, Asplund and Olofsson were on the ice so long that a staff member had to ask them to stop skating so the Zamboni driver could do his job.

"Back in Roch, I think we had really good chemistry and the first thing you notice about him is how hard he works," said Sabres winger Tage Thompson. "He's really reliable on both ends of the ice and he obviously has great skill and great touch around the net. I enjoy playing with him. I think the biggest thing for him is similar to me: opportunity and confidence. He knows he's capable of performing and putting up numbers. He's getting an opportunity to do that now and running with it."

Asplund's first NHL opportunity in 2019-20 came with some challenges. Though Asplund was reliable on the penalty kill, he had only one goal in 29 games. The mental part of the game was difficult for Asplund. He had trouble sleeping, always reflecting on the previous game. Equipped with lessons from his first season, Asplund set out last offseason to make more of an impact with the puck.

Still, Asplund had trouble when elevated to the lineup this January. He was unsure about how to defend properly, which isn't surprising given the struggles many young players had under Krueger. Asplund started to make a significant impact after the coaching change — he had only two goals in 34 games for Krueger — and when he was united on a line with two of his former Rochester teammates: Thompson and Mittelstadt.

They have been on the ice together for five goals at 5-on-5. When the Sabres were trailing by a goal midway through the third period Monday against the New York Islanders in KeyBank Center, it was Asplund who buried a loose puck to tie the score in a game that ended with a 4-2 Buffalo win.

"When players jump up levels, their identity was at the previous level and then you have to kind of find ways you're going to impact — we're talking about the score sheet," said Granato. "You can score goals, you just got to score them in a different way than another player. He's figured out, progressively figured out, and gained experience playing the game at this level and how to maybe create scoring chances, put the opposition in a tougher spot to create turnovers."

It's unclear where Asplund fits in the Sabres' long-term plans. The upside he's shown offensively would be valuable for the bottom six, an area where Buffalo hasn't received enough production in recent years. He can also play center and has the skill to excel alongside talented forwards.

But the roster picture is unclear because of pending unrestricted free agents and the Seattle expansion draft. Regardless, Asplund isn't taking this opportunity for granted. It wasn't long ago that he was watching from a suite with the rest of the taxi squad. Now he wants to ensure that he sticks around to help the Sabres next season.

"I'm here right now and still trying to make my way here to become a regular," said Asplund.