

ROCHESTER AMERICANS HOCKEY CLUB

SIX-TIME CALDER CUP CHAMPIONS 1965 | 1966 | 1968 | 1983 | 1987 | 1996

Friday | **December 29, 2023** | 7:05 PM ET | Blue Cross Arena | AHL Game 445 | AHL TV, The Fan Rochester



GAME NOTES



TONIGHT'S GAME OVERVIEW

The oldest rivalry in the American Hockey League will be renewed tonight in Rochester when the Amerks (13-11-2-1) welcome the defending Calder Cup champion and league-leading Hershey Bears (25-6-0-0) back to The Blue Cross Arena for the only time this season. The puck drops on the 465th all-time meeting between the league's two oldest teams at 7:05 p.m. with all the action being carried live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM The Fan Rochester as well as AHLTV.

Tonight's highly anticipated reunion between the league's two cornerstone franchises is the first since meeting in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Finals this past spring. Hershey ended Rochester's longest playoff run in 20 years on its way to capturing its AHL-best 12th Calder Cup.

HEAD-TO-HEAD RESULTS AGAINST HERSHEY

Coming into tonight's matchup, the Amerks carry a three-game home win streak against Hershey dating back to the 2019-20 season, over which they have outscored the Bears 16-7 in that span.

The Amerks have collected at least one point in six of their last 13 games against Hershey overall, going 5-7-1-0 over that span dating back to the start of the 2016-17 campaign. Rochester has posted an even record or better against Hershey in each of last five seasons dating back to the 2018-19 season.

Brett Murray, who recently returned from a two-game stint with the Buffalo Sabres, led all Amerks skaters with two goals and three points in two games opposite the Bears last season.

LAST TIME OUT

The Amerks were unable to complete a two-game sweep over the Syracuse Crunch, dropping a 3-1 contest in a rematch with their intrastate rival Wednesday at The Blue Cross Arena.

Forward **Lukas Rousek** scored for the second time in as many games and pushed his point streak to four games as he has five points (3+2) dating back to Dec. 20. The Czech native has a goal in three of his last four outings over that same span for the Amerks, who remain winless on home ice in December.

Goaltender **Dustin Tokarski** (5-6-1) made his 12th appearance of the campaign and stopped 12 of 15 shots he faced.

THE BEST OFFENSE IS A GOOD DEFENSE

The Amerks own two of the league's top scoring defensemen in **Jeremy Davies** and **Kale Clague**, who have combined for five goals and 29 points this season. Davies' four goals are tied for 20th-most amongst all blueliners.

Davies, who scored a career-high 11 goals last season, including three game-winning tallies, is 12th amongst all defensemen with 64 shots. He's recorded at least one shot in all but three games this season. Davies, who closed out the month of October on a five-game point streak, has recorded one point in 12 of his first 26 games this season, never going more than three straight games without a point.

Clague, meanwhile, is tied for 16th among all blueliners with 13 assists in 25 games. Clague opened the campaign with three multi-point performances and enters the weekend with assists in five of his last 12 games.

2023-24 AMERKS OVERALL SCORING & GOALTENDING LEADERS

SKATER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM
Jiri Kulich [^]	23	16	6	22	0	8
Isak Rosen	23	8	14	22	0	6
Brandon Biro	18	9	9	18	2	12
Lukas Rousek	22	6	11	17	-1	10

GOALTENDER	GP	REC	SVS	SV%	GAA
Devon Levi*	2	1-1-0	70	.921	2.94
Devin Cooley	10	5-3-2	309	.890	3.78
Dustin Tokarski	12	5-6-1	333	.888	3.49

*=Currently on recall with Buffalo

[^]=Currently on reassignment at WJC

2023-24 BEARS OVERALL SCORING & GOALTENDING LEADERS

SKATER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM
Mike Sgarbossa	30	5	26	31	3	16
Ethen Frank	31	14	12	26	3	6
Alex Limoges	30	9	15	24	12	8
Joe Snively	28	8	16	24	7	10
Pierrick Dube	31	17	5	22	6	35

GOALTENDER	GP	REC	SVS	SV%	GAA
Clay Stevenson	14	10-4-0	337	.931	1.79
Hunter Shepard	16	14-2-0	367	.908	2.28

2023-24 HEAD-TO-HEAD BREAKDOWN

Hershey Bears	Rochester Americans
25-6-0-0	Record 13-11-2-1
15-3-0-0	Home Record 5-5-2-0
10-3-0-0	Road Record 8-6-0-1
8-2-0-0	Last 10 Games 3-6-0-1
4-0	Overtime Record 6-2
2-0	Shootout Record 2-1
19-1-0-0	Record When Scoring First 6-3-0-1
3.39 (6th)	Goals-For Per Game 3.26 (10th)
2.13 (1st)	Goals-Against Per Game 4.00 (31st)
23.3% (4th)	Power-Play 22.1% (7th)
87.0 (2nd)	Penalty Kill 74.7% (32nd)
Dec. 27 vs WBS (4-1 W)	Last Game Dec. 27 vs SYR (3-1 L)
Dec. 30 @ LV	Next Game Dec. 30 @ UTC
Todd Nelson (2nd)	Head Coach Seth Appert (4th)



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DYNAMIC DUO: THE SEQUEL

Jiri Kulich and **Isak Rosen** both return for their second seasons in Rochester after putting up one of the most impressive and productive seasons as teenagers in the history of the AHL during the 2022-23 campaign.

Kulich continued his torrid start to the season with three more goals over the team's recent three-game road trip earlier this month, temporarily taking over the league's goal-scoring lead with 16 goals in just 23 games. Kulich, who also leads the AHL with four overtime game-winning tallies, remains on pace to become the first AHL player to reach the 20-goal mark in the fewest number of games to begin the season since Frank Vatrano scored 20 goals in just 18 games to begin the 2015-16 campaign.

Kulich, whose 24 goals last season were the second-most ever by an 18-year-old in league history, was named team captain of Czechia's national junior team for the 2024 World Junior Championship. On Wednesday Kulich had a hat trick and has five points (3+2) through his first two games.

With nine points over his last 10 games, which includes a career-best four point (2+2) effort in Cleveland on Nov. 18, Rosen shares the team-lead with Kulich in scoring with 22 points having recently returned from his first recall with the Sabres earlier this month. The Swedish forward is third amongst all Amerks in goals (8) and has matched his totaled from last season in game-winning tallies through just 20 games.

Back on Nov. 25, Kulich and Rosen both made their NHL debuts with the Buffalo Sabres against New Jersey Devils at Prudential Center

The duo has combined for 127 points (62+65) in 172 regular season games. Rochester boasts an impressive 21-3-2-1 record when they each record at least one point in the same game as well as a near-perfect 8-1-0-0 mark when they both score in the same game.

BRYSON BACK IN ROCHESTER

Rochester's blueline received another significant boost last week following the reassignment of defenseman **Jacob Bryson** to the Amerks. Bryson, a former fourth-round selection (99th overall) of the Sabres in the 2017 NHL Draft, began his professional career with Rochester.

Bryson appeared in three games with the Sabres this season as one of eight defensemen on Buffalo's roster.

The London, Ontario, native made his Amerks season debut last Wednesday against Cleveland, and has totaled 31 points (4+27) in 70 career American Hockey League games with the Amerks over parts of three seasons. He's also recorded 28 points (3+25) over 173 career NHL games for Buffalo.

In 121 collegiate games during a three-year career at Providence College, he totaled 73 points on 11 goals and 62 assists. In his final season with the Friars, he earned Hockey East Second Team All-Star honors after recording 28 points (4+24) in 42 games and serving as a team captain.

As a senior, Bryson set career-highs in both assists (24) and points (28), both of which topped the club's defensemen, and ranked second and third overall, respectively. He also recorded an assist in all three NCAA Tournament games to help lead his team to a Frozen Four appearance and was the recipient of Hockey East's Len Ceglarski Sportsmanship Award for the second straight year in 2019.



APPERT CLOSING IN ON CENTURY MARK

Amerks head coach **Seth Appert** is a mere three wins away from 100 as Rochester's bench boss. He will become just the seventh head coach all-time to reach 100 career wins, an impressive list that includes the likes of Amerks Hall of Famers Randy Cunneynworth, John Van Boxmeer, Joe Crozier, Mike Keenan, Chris Taylor and Brian McCutcheon.

On Dec. 16 against Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Appert also became the seventh head coach in the 68-year history of the franchise to be behind Rochester's bench for 200 games.

Since the 2020-21 season, Appert has guided the Amerks to a 97-82-17-8 record as well as two straight playoff appearances, which included a trip to the Eastern Conference Finals in 2023. It was the team's deepest playoff run in nearly 20 years and their first to the Conference Finals since the 2004 Calder Cup Playoffs.

WORKING OVERTIME

The 3-2 overtime win in Syracuse on Dec. 23 was the fifth game over the last 13 for Rochester that went beyond regulation, which includes two shootout decisions this month. Overall, the Amerks have gone to extra time on 11 different occasions this season, including each of the first three games of the campaign.

Never before in the near 68-year history of the franchise have the Amerks opened a season with three consecutive overtime contests.

Rochester is the only team in the league with 11 games decided beyond regulation this season. Dating back to last season, 19 of Rochester's previous 20 regular-season games have required overtime to determine a winner.



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TOKARSKI AMONG ELITE COMPANY

Veteran goaltender **Dustin Tokarski**, who missed the first eight games of the season due to an injury he sustained in training camp, made his season debut back on Nov. 3 against Utica.

In doing so, the two-time Calder Cup winner and AHL All-Star became just the 18th goaltender in league history to play in 400 career games, a list that also includes former Amerks Bobby Perreault (512), Michael Leighton (507), Drew MacIntyre (440) and Ed Chadwick (417).

Tokarski, who's in his second stint with the Amerks and 10th different AHL franchise, went 1-1-0 during a brief two-game stint with Rochester as part of the COVID-shortened 2020-21 campaign. He went 12-20-7 in 42 appearances with the Buffalo Sabres from 2021-23.

Currently in his 15th season, he joins Marcel Paille and Michael Leighton as the only goaltenders all-time to play at least 15 seasons in the AHL.

Tokarski, who's 5-6-1 in his first 12 starts, surpassed the 10,000-save mark for his AHL career following a 31-save effort against Utica on Nov. 10. He also reached the 12,000-save mark for his pro career the week prior when he made his season debut against the Comets.

Entering this weekend, the 34-year-old Tokarski is one win away from tying Nick Damore for 12th all-time in career wins (211). He also ranks 18th all-time in games played (411) and will tie Yann Danis for eighth all-time with his next shutout.

SCOUTING THE BEARS

Hershey's title defense couldn't have started any better as the Bears make their return to Rochester as arguably the hottest team in the AHL.

The Bears became the first team to reach the 50-point mark this season following their AHL-best 15th home win over W-B/Scranton Wednesday.

Hershey, which comes into the matchup having won 16 of its last 18 games dating back to Nov. 15, including a season-long nine-game win streak over that span, leads the AHL in wins (25) and have only six regulation losses through 31 games this season.

The Bears, who haven't suffered a loss in back-to-back games all year, join the Texas Stars as the only two teams across the AHL to score more than 100 goals on the season. More impressively, Hershey has outscored the opposition 105-66 through its first 31 games this season, which includes 60-31 on home ice.

Hershey owns the top goaltending tandem in the AHL in rookie netminder Clay Stevenson and reigning AHL Playoff MVP Hunter Shepard, who have combined for 24 of the team's 25 wins and anchor a stingy Hershey defense that has allowed the second-fewest goals-against in the league (66). Shepard is currently tied for the league lead with 14 wins while Stevenson's four shutouts are the most amongst all AHL rookie netminders.

Pierrick Dube paces the AHL with 17 goals, including four in each of his last four games, while veteran forward Mike Sgarbossa, who's in his sixth season with the Bears, ranks third in scoring with 31 points in 30 games.

Second-year pro Ethen Frank is on pace to replicate his 30-goal season from 2022-23, a performance that earned him AHL All-Rookie Team honors.

AMERKS-HERSHEY 2022-23 SEASON SERIES BREAKDOWN

ROCHESTER

SKATER	GP	G	A	PTS	PIM	+/-
Brett Murray	2	2	1	3	0	1
Mason Jobst	2	0	3	3	0	1
Joseph Cecconi	2	1	0	1	0	0
Michael Mersch	2	1	0	1	0	0

GOALTENDER

	GP	REC	GA	SV%	GAA
Michael Houser	1	0-1-0	2	.938	2.03
Malcolm Subban	1	1-0-0	3	.889	2.78

HERSHEY

SKATER	GP	G	A	PTS	PIM	+/-
Connor McMichael	2	2	0	2	0	2
Ethen Frank	2	1	1	2	2	1
Mike Sgarbossa	2	0	2	2	0	1
Joe Snively	2	0	2	2	0	2

GOALTENDER

	GP	REC	GA	SV%	GAA
Hunter Shepard	1	1-0-0	1	.957	1.00
Zach Fucale	1	0-0-1	3	.906	2.77

2022-23 SERIES BREAKDOWN VS. HERSHEY

Date	Result	Score	SF-SA	PP	PK
Mar. 18	L	2-1	23-32	0-4	2-2
Mar. 24	SOW	4-3	33-27	1-3	2-2

SERIES NOTABLES

Currently in his second season as Hershey's head coach, Todd Nelson spent the 2000-01 season with the Amerks as a defenseman, recording 26 points (6+20) in 74 games before adding two assists in four playoff appearances. A three-time Calder Cup winner, Nelson owns the distinction of being just the third person in AHL history to win a Calder Cup as a player (1994, Portland), assistant coach (2008, Chicago) and head coach (2017, Grand Rapids & 2023, Hershey).

Bears defenseman Chase Priskie, a former sixth-round pick (177th overall) of the Washington Capitals in 2016, appeared in 42 games with Rochester last season before closing out the campaign in San Diego following a midseason trade to Anaheim. During his senior year at Quinnipiac University in 2018-19, Priskie was a teammate with Amerks rookie blueliner **Zach Metsa**.

Amerks assistant coach **Vinny Prospal** played the bulk of his AHL career in Hershey, spending three seasons with the Bears from 1993-94 to 1995-96. Prospal totaled 131 points in 192 games while leading Hershey to three straight playoff appearances. The following year, Prospal would be named a 1997 First Team AHL All-Star after finishing third in the league in scoring.

In 13 of the previous 14 matchups between Rochester and Hershey, the winning club has posted three or more goals.



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