



ROCHESTER AMERICANS

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Tonight's Game: Providence vs. Rochester

Sabres send Will Borgen to Amerks
Buffalo Hockey Beat
By: Bill Hoppe
Oct. 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres sent prospect Will Borgen, their extra defenseman the last two games, back to the Rochester Americans this afternoon.

The Sabres also assigned Borgen, 22, to the Amerks on Saturday. He played for the AHL club later that day before they recalled him again Sunday.

Borgen will likely play in Wednesday's home game against the Providence Bruins.

With Marco Scandella out with a lower-body injury, the Sabres have needed a seventh defenseman for depth.

The Sabres, who had today off, don't play again until Friday in Washington against the Capitals.

Sabres' top goaltending prospect Luukkonen getting closer to start for Amerks
Democrat & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
Oct. 29, 2019

John Gilmour had never waited so long to play a game. After appearing in the Sabres' preseason finale Sept. 27, the defenseman sat out 11 contests before making his season debut Friday.

So Gilmour, the Sabres' spare defender, patiently waited 28 days for his opportunity to materialize as the blue line remained healthy.

Gilmour, of course, acknowledged being a healthy scratch can be difficult. But he still reveled in the Sabres' early-season success.

"I embraced my role," Gilmour said prior to Monday's 3-2 shootout loss to the Arizona Coyotes. "The team was doing so well. It's fun for everybody, from A to Z in the organization, when things are going so well. So we were just riding the wave. "If he needed me to go in, I wanted to make that transition seamless."

Gilmour did that after defenseman Marco Scandella suffered a lower-body injury, skating 17 minutes, 28 seconds in the 2-0 road win over the Detroit Red Wings.

"He played a great game," said Sabres defenseman Colin Miller, Gilmour's partner. "It's tough, I mean, when you're waiting all summer to play some real hockey and then he hadn't played for that long."

The poise and confidence Gilmour showcased following the four-week layoff wowed Sabres coach Ralph Krueger.

"To be able to step in and put the pressure defensively on Detroit as he did and his hunger to play right within the boundaries that we want him to play (was impressive)," Krueger said. "And then with the puck, the confidence he showed in his playmaking ability and the way he uses his feet to get into open ice to make plays.

"A very, very strong performance."

The 6-foot, 188-pound Gilmour, 26, spent the opening weeks of the season preparing to play his first game with the Sabres.

Long after most of his teammates left the KeyBank Center ice each day, the Providence College product would stay on with assistant coaches Steve Smith and Chris Taylor for extra work. It paid off when Gilmour jumped into the lineup Friday.

"A lot of it had to do with his attitude, really, truly begging for more every day and working extremely hard at the sessions we had out there," Krueger said. "I think if you let your guard down 5% in those sessions for three weeks, you can't enter like that.

"But it's his experience and hunger to make the National Hockey League on a regular basis, I think, that drove him. Without that experience, he probably wouldn't have been able to bring such a calm game."

Gilmour said: "Just staying in shape, staying focused and dialed in and staying ready."

Fresh off a monster 20-goal, 54-point AHL season with the Hartford Wolf Pack, Gilmour signed a one-year, one-way contract worth \$700,000 with the Sabres on July 1.

Many expected Gilmour would be ticketed for the Rochester Americans this season, at least early on.

But Gilmour looked terrific throughout the preseason. The hand injury defenseman Brandon Montour suffered early in the exhibition schedule also helped him.

While Gilmour played 34 games with the New York Rangers, he had never cracked an NHL team out of training camp.

"It was everything," Gilmour said. "I think it was my best accomplishment in my hockey career and (in) my life is making an NHL team out of camp. It's not easy considering how many guys are trying out, the quality of player.

"It was a tremendous feeling, and I'm so happy to be a part of this organization."

—

The Sabres welcomed back former coach Phil Housley by showing a highlight package from his playing days with Buffalo and mentioning his Hall of Fame career. Housley acknowledged the warm ovation he received.

The Sabres fired Housley on April 7 after two losing seasons. He's in his first season as an assistant coach with the Coyotes.

—

General manager Jason Botterill told WGR on Monday top goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, 20, will start playing games with the Cincinnati Cyclones, the Sabres' ECHL affiliate, this week or next week.

The Sabres recently assigned Luukkonen, who underwent hip surgery in late April, to the Amerks to begin practicing.

The Finn hasn't played since April.

Notes: The Sabres have recorded three shutouts in the opening month of a season for the first time in franchise history. ... The Sabres scratched defenseman Will Borgen (healthy). ... Sabres captain Jack Eichel turned 23 on Monday. ... The Sabres have today off.

Sabres' top goaltending prospect Luukkonen getting closer to start for Amerks
Democrat & Chronicle
By: Leo Roth
Oct. 29, 2019

The Rochester Americans had finished practice for the day, but a few players and coaches stayed on the ice running shooting drills on goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

At 6-5, 220 pounds, Luukkonen is an NFL defensive end on skates, but 6-7 Tage Thompson, about the size of an NBA small forward, sure set a nice screen for him to work on tips and rebounds.

"It's real nice to be back on the ice, with this team and having normal practices," said Luukkonen, who finally left the ice 30 minutes after most of his teammates. "It's been a long time, but practices have started for me so I'm really excited and looking forward to a game."

So are hockey fans eager to get a look at one of the hottest goaltending prospects to join the parent Buffalo Sabres organization in years.

Luukkonen, just 20 years old from Espoo, Finland, was a 2017 second-round NHL draft pick, the 54th selection overall. That's the highest goaltender drafted by Buffalo since Sweden's Jhonas Enroth was selected in the second round, 46th overall, in 2006.

In their 50-year history, the Sabres have drafted just four goaltenders in the first round: Bob Sauve (1975), Tom Barrasso (1983), Marty Biron (1995) and Mika Noronen (1997). Biron and Noronen, another Finnish goalie, starred in Rochester before launching their NHL careers.

The buzz over Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen — "UPL" for short — is understandable.

As a teenager, he shined on the world's biggest stages, leading Team Finland to gold medals at the 2016 U18 and 2019 U20 World Junior Championships and a silver at the 2017 U18 event.

At the worlds last January in Vancouver, Luukkonen was 4-2-0 in six games with a 1.80-goals-against average and .932 save percentage, leading Finland past Team USA 3-2 in the final when he stopped 26 of 28 shots. One was a breakaway with 10 minutes to play on Jack Hughes, the No. 1 overall pick in last June's draft by New Jersey, one of the tournament's signature moments.

But beyond that, Luukkonen won Most Valuable Player honors in the Ontario Hockey League for leading Canada's top junior league in wins (38) and shutouts (six), taking the Sudbury Wolves to the playoffs. He actually made his pro debut with the Amerks last April, stopping 32 of 34 shots in a victory at Belleville, before undergoing surgery to correct a nagging hip issue.

Six months of rehabilitation has him back on the ice and working himself into playing shape. He's still a short time away from playing a game, but he's getting close.

"It's something that built up over time, a common injury with goalies," Luukkonen said. "We decided to take care of it now and I'm just excited to be back. It was a slow process, but now I'm getting the right conditioning. We did a really good job with that in Buffalo (during training camp) and it's helped to have the some of the same coaches here."

Luukkonen is under the watchful eyes of Sabres goaltending development coach Seamus Kotyk and Amerks interim head coach Gord Dineen.

"We're easing him back into it, giving him some game-situational drills or putting him out with the full team, and just being very patient with him," said Dineen, whose club, off to a 5-2-1-1 start, hosts Providence Wednesday and Binghamton Friday at Blue Cross Arena. "He's done his work on the other side of it, off the ice with his rehab. Getting his health back, that's priority No. 1."

At each stage of his career, UPL has delivered wins like UPS delivers packages.

Yes, he has great size. His butterfly extends from Exchange Street to the Genesee River. But Luukkonen is more than just a big man.

Thanks to Finland's highly respected development model, he has impeccable technique, reflexes quick enough to steal your watch and put it back on before you're missing it, and he controls rebounds like the Cookie Monster corralling a spilled package of Chips Ahoy.

As for the mental side of his position, one of the most challenging in sports, Luukkonen has proven time and again he can handle pressure with the best of them. Reminding scouts of the netminding heroes of his homeland, like Miikka Kiprusoff, Pekka Rinne and Tuukka Rask.

"I haven't seen a ton of him, but right away what stands out is that he's young, but he has come in here very confident," Amerks veteran defenseman Zach Redmond said. "He's obviously a huge body, takes up a lot of space and moves well. I haven't seen a ton, like I said, but I can see what all the hype's about."

Luukkonen has an older brother who played hockey and a twin brother whose preferred game was soccer.

"I was always a goalie," he said. "But I also played soccer and several other sports and I think that really helps you develop (athletically). I guess it just came natural for me to be a goaltender, I never think too much about it."

Part of what's natural is a calm demeanor.

"Yes, I do stay calm," he said. "I think that's a good trait for a goalie, not to let too much get to you."

Especially when the pressure is at its greatest, like representing your country in the biggest international hockey events. He was teammates with Henri Jokiharju, who has been a terrific addition to the Sabres' defensive corps this season.

"Playing in front of big crowds, especially the world juniors, and knowing how much attention those tournaments get. The whole hockey world is watching," Luukkonen said. "It's a huge benefit for young players to learn to play in those tournaments."

Now he's in the American Hockey League learning the pro ropes.

Unlike skaters, the majority of goaltenders take a much slower path to the NHL, and the AHL has been an excellent training ground. Current Sabre Linus Ullmark of Sweden, a sixth-round pick in 2012, put in three seasons as the Amerks' workhorse. Ryan Miller, Buffalo's career wins leader, also put in three seasons in Rochester.

Dineen said Luukkonen has the work ethic to understand that like Rome, goaltenders aren't built in a day. He's also still adjusting to a new culture.

"It's our job to make sure we're exposing him properly and that he's developing as he should," Dineen said. "His size, you can't teach that, but he's really got a lot of athletic ability and just hockey smarts where he reads the game well. That's everything I've seen in the short window we've had him, and hearing last year, how he carried his team (in Sudbury) to another level."

When Luukkonen is ready to play, the Amerks and Sabres will have a decision to make regarding Sweden's Jonas Johansson, another top prospect who is 13-8-2 with a 2.84 goals against average in parts of four seasons for Rochester. A third-round pick in 2014, Johansson, 23, has played two full seasons for the Cincinnati Cyclones, Buffalo's ECHL affiliate. He'll be a free agent in 2020.

Andrew Hammond, 31, a seven-year pro with 56 NHL starts, is Rochester's veteran presence in net and the third goalie in the organizational pecking order behind Carter Hutton and Ullmark in Buffalo.

But having Johansson and Luukkonen in the system shows the care being given the goalie position by Sabres' GM Jason Botterill.

For his part, Luukkonen isn't looking too far ahead.

"Right now, it's just getting on the ice, playing in the games soon and seeing how that goes and build from there," he said. "It helped that I got to play one game here last year."

Like many before him, the first of many on the road to the NHL.

Amerks fall to Springfield in OT
C&C Worldwide
By: Staff Report/Amerks.com
Oct. 28, 2019

Despite a season-high of 50 shots on goal, including 26 in the first period, the Rochester Americans (5-2-1-1) suffered their first overtime loss of the season to the Springfield Thunderbirds (6-4-0-0) at the MassMutual Center on Sunday night.

By earning a point in the 2-1 overtime loss, the Amerks have earned 12 out of a possible 18 points throughout their first nine games of the season. Tonight was just the 10th all-time meeting between the two clubs, with Rochester claiming six of the last eight get-togethers.

Amerks forward Tage Thompson scored his fourth goal of the season at the start of the second period, while Rasmus Asplund and Sean Malone each tallied an assist. Goaltender Jonas Johansson (2-1-1) stopped 35 of the 37 shots he faced in his third straight appearance.

Springfield's Paul Thompson provided the marker that sent the tilt into overtime with his second of the campaign, before Henrik Borgstrom capitalized on a power-play goal in the extra frame to give the Thunderbirds their fourth straight victory. Netminder Chris Driedger (3-3-0) got the win while making a career-high 49 saves.

When the Amerks took a tripping infraction halfway through the third period, the Thunderbirds capitalized on the ensuing man-advantage, tying up the game at one apiece with 9:37 to play in regulation. Following a shot from the right point by Borgstrom that hit off the left pad of the Rochester netminder, Paul Thompson came in to tip in the equalizer, ultimately forcing overtime.

In the extra frame, both goaltenders made some grade-A saves, but a hooking penalty would force another man-advantage situation for the Amerks opponent late in overtime. Springfield won the ensuing face-off and Borgstrom notched his second point of the night, sending the game-winner over the right shoulder of Johansson from the left circle to seal the win for the Thunderbirds.

Things started out well for the Amerks as they outshot the Thunderbirds 26-7 in the first period before Tage Thompson backhanded Rochester's lone goal of the night just 55 seconds into the second period.

The Amerks close out the first month of the season on Wednesday, Oct. 30 when they welcome the Providence Bruins to the Blue Cross Arena at 7:05 pm for the only time this season. Rochester fell in the first matchup between the two teams earlier this month by a 3-2 score during the team's annual trek through New England.

**NOTES* — Tonight's game is just the 10th all-time meeting between the two teams. Rochester swept the season series during the 2017-18 season by a combined score of 6-3 and have won six of the last seven get-togethers. . . In the nine previous meetings between the Amerks and Thunderbirds, Rochester's shorthanded unit has killed off 34 of the last 38 man-down situations, good for a 89.5 % success rate. . . Springfield assistant coach Doug Janik has ties to Rochester having spent time in the Flower City as a player and was inducted into the Amerks Hall of Fame in 2019. Janik, a Springfield native, appeared in 376 career games in Rochester, the third-most among any blueliner in franchise history, and his 91 points (18+73) still rank 30th among all-time defensemen in franchise history. . . Thunderbirds forward Daniel Audette is the son of former Amerk Donald Audette.

Amerks rally in 3rd, stun Syracuse in OT, 7-6

C&C Worldwide

By: Staff Report/Amerks.com

Oct. 27, 2019

After scoring twice in the final 6:35 of regulation to erase a two-goal third-period deficit, the Rochester Americans (5-2-0-1) completed the 7-6 come-from-behind win in the final minute of overtime to stun the Syracuse Crunch (2-2-2-0) Saturday at the War Memorial Arena.

With the win in the extra session, their second of the campaign against the Crunch, the Amerks have earned 11 out of a possible 16 points overall through the first eight games of the season. Dating back to the 2018-19 slate between the two teams, Rochester is 8-4-1-1 in the previous 14 get-togethers against Syracuse.

Amerks forwards J.S. Dea and Curtis Lazar both posted a pair of goals and two assists in the comeback, with Dea's second of the night coming with only 13 seconds remaining to force overtime. Casey Fitzgerald (1+1), Lawrence Pilut (1+2) and C.J. Smith (0+2) all recorded multi-point efforts on the night as well. Sean Malone netted his second marker of the campaign in the second period to close out the scoring. Goaltender Andrew Hammond (3-1-1), who made his sixth appearance of the year in the crease, notched 15 saves before Jonas Johansson (2-1-0) came in and finished the final 12:38 of regulation and the overtime period with three saves on all three shots he faced to earn his second straight win.

Gemel Smith (2+1) recorded his second multi-point performance of the season while Luke Schenn and Cameron Gaunce both tallied a pair of helpers. Cory Conacher and Alex Barre-Boulet each found the back of the net for the Crunch, while Boris Katchouk and Ben Thomas both scored their first goals of the season. Former Amerk Scott Wedgewood (1-1-1) made 21 saves in the overtime loss.

Trailing 6-4 with less than seven minutes to play in regulation, Lazar capitalized on Rochester's fourth man-advantage of the contest, making it a one-goal game from Smith and Scott Wilson.

Rochester pushed for the equalizer and would eventually find it as they pulled Johansson in favor of the extra attacker inside the final minute. Dea converted a loose rebound to the left of Wedgewood with just 13 seconds to force overtime off the initial offering from Pilut from just inside the Syracuse blueline.

With the game tied at 6-6 after 60 minutes of play in a back-and-forth affair, Lazar and Dea exchanged passes inside the Crunch zone before Dea handed Pilut the puck atop the right face-off dot. Taking a few strides towards Wedgewood, the second-year blueliner rung a shot off the inside of the right post to give the Amerks 7-6 victory with 41 seconds left in overtime.

The two teams traded power-play goals in the opening 20 minutes to go into the locker rooms knotted up at one-goal apiece.

Syracuse grabbed a 2-1 lead less than five minutes into the middle stanza before Fitzgerald and Malone turned a one-goal deficit into a 3-2 lead just 21 seconds apart at the 11:43 mark. The Crunch, however, countered as they scored two twice in a span of 1:25 to take a 4-3 lead going into the final period.

Following the opening face-off of the frame, and despite the Crunch grabbing the puck inside their own zone, Wilson forced a turnover and Dea tied the game yet again just 10 seconds in.

The scoring frenzy continued as Syracuse took a two-goal advantage midway through the period before Rochester stormed back with two goals, including the game-tying goal from Dea with 13 seconds left.

As a shootout was looming late in the overtime period, Pilut completed the comeback for Rochester with his first of the season to seal the 7-6 victory.

The Amerks close out the weekend on Sunday, Oct. 27 with a return trip back to Springfield to take on the Thunderbirds at 5:05 p.m. at the MassMutual Center. Rochester claimed the first matchup between the two teams earlier this month by a 2-1 score during the team's annual trek through New England.

**NOTES* — The Amerks have scored a power-play goal in 11 of the last 23 games against Syracuse, going 15-for-99 (15.1%) with the man-advantage over that span...After going 4-5-1-0 against the Crunch during the 2017-18 campaign, the Amerks have posted a 7-4-1-1 against Syracuse over the last 13 contests...The Amerks are facing a familiar name in goaltender Scott Wedgewood tonight. Wedgewood went 28-16-1 with 5 shutouts in 48 games last season for Rochester, ranking second in the AHL in wins...The Buffalo Sabres assigned defenseman Will Borgen to the Amerks on Saturday.

Amerks rally, beat Crunch in overtime
Pickin' Splinters
By: Staff Report/Amerks.com
Oct. 26, 2019

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Henrik Borgstrom, Chris Driedger lead Springfield Thunderbirds to 2-1 OT victory over the Rochester Americans

MassLive

By: Jason Kates

Oct. 27, 2019

With the Springfield Thunderbirds tied at one heading into overtime against the Rochester Americans, center Henrik Borgstrom admitted he was exhausted.

The 22-year-old dug deep however, scoring nine seconds into a Thunderbirds power play to lift Springfield (6-4-0-0) to a 2-1 OT victory, solidifying the second three-game weekend sweep in team history.

Borgstrom, who drew the hooking penalty that gave the Thunderbirds their fourth man advantage of the night with 1:12 remaining in the extra period, took a pass from defenseman Tommy Cross and unleashed a wrist shot that beat Americans (5-2-1-1) goaltender Jonas Johansson.

"I was so tired and just trying to make something happen," said Borgstrom, who also tallied an assist. "In 3-on-3 there's more space so it's easier to go 1-v-1 against guys, then the goal I just had a lot of time and space so I decided to rip it."

Springfield head coach Geordie Kinnear credited Borgstrom for his contributions since being sent down by the Florida Panthers on Oct. 20.

"He was ultra-competitive, he wanted to be the difference," Kinnear said. "As I said, it's not easy coming down from the National Hockey League then you have to play three in three, but that's what the kid has. He's a winner, he wants to win and I think you saw that tonight."

It was a historic night in between the pipes for Thunderbirds goaltender Chris Driedger, who set team-records for most saves in a game (49) and most saves in a period after stopping all 26 shots he faced in the opening 20 minutes.

The netminder's lone blemish came 55 seconds into the second period when a Rochester shot fell to Tage Thompson, who corralled the puck and backhanded one into the net to put the Americans ahead 1-0.

Kinnear hailed Driedger's effort in net as "a great performance" just two days after the goaltender allowed four goals in a 7-4 win over the Bridgeport Sound Tigers.

"I think if you talk to him he wasn't happy with how he played his last outing so it's a sign of great character that he came out tonight and stood on his head," Kinnear said. "We knew they were gonna have a push and that's what you want from your goaltender. He allowed us to build our game and have a good third period. He definitely stole that for us."

Borgstrom added: "Without him, we would not have won that game."

In a night that consisted of many key saves, the highlight of the night for Driedger occurred inside the final five minutes of the third period when he stuck out his right leg to deny a breakaway opportunity by Rochester's Curtis Lazar and keep the game tied at one.

The breakthrough for Springfield came with 8:37 left in regulation, with captain Paul Thompson deflecting a Borgstrom shot that snuck past Johansson for a power play tally.

Just under six minutes into the third period, the Thunderbirds found their backs against the wall following a four-minute double minor assessed to Cross for holding and unsportsmanlike conduct. However, the Springfield penalty kill rose to the occasion, killing the penalty and providing the bench with a much-needed momentum boost.

Kinnear acknowledged the intensity his team showed out of the second intermission, with the penalty kill supplying an added confidence builder.

"if you look at the start of the third period, the first shift guys were skating on top of people and there was a determined group coming out of the locker room after the second period," Kinnear said. "That was just a byproduct afterwards that got us going even more but I think the guys came with a laser focus ready to win the third period and find a way to win the hockey game."

Winners of four straight games, the Thunderbirds return to action next weekend for a pair of home contests versus the Hershey Bears and Wilkes-Barre Scranton Penguins.