

Weekend Preview

FRESNO MONSTERS VS. SAN DIEGO SABERS

It will be the final time these two clubs meet in the regular season as the San Diego Sabers travel north for three games against the Fresno Monsters at Gateway Ice Center. San Diego and Fresno split their previous two games at Selland Arena, with the SoCal side stealing a 4-3 win, and then losing 2-1.

Only three points, or one regulation win, separates the two clubs in the standings therefore this particular series can be a big indication as to who ends up in first. Particularly, for the Sabers who must close out the regular season with a trip to El Paso.

While the Monsters are coming off a sweep of the Valencia Flyers, as are the Sabers who finished off Northwest Division rival, Seattle Totems, in Washington.

Fresno's Zackory Turpin and Narek Aleksanyan have been proving day-in and day-out why they are among the Top-10 scorers in the league. The Saber's Calijah Hunter has been a workhorse for the team, also being among the league's Top-10 goalies in SVP with at least 900 minutes of action.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER VS. PUEBLO BULLS

Wichita Jr. Thunder will be looking to play spoiler, returning to Pueblo Ice Arena after kicking off the Bulls' current 12-game home stand on Jan. 17. Jr. Thunder put up two near-wins as they really did run with the Bulls all the way to overtime in two of three games.

The Bulls started the home stand with the three wins over Wichita, then suffered two consecutive setbacks against Dallas Snipers, before getting back on the win column going into this weekend. But it hasn't been easy going for the Jr. Thunder who still haven't seen a win in 12 games.

Pueblo's Ondrej Blaha is among the Top-10 scorers in the league as is their starting goaltender, Henry Dennee, among the Top-10 goalies. It won't be the last time the two sides meet as Pueblo will close the regular season in Wichita. They currently have a commanding 6-0 lead in the season series.

VALENCIA FLYERS VS. LAS VEGAS THUNDERBIRDS

Third in the Western Division, Las Vegas Thunderbirds, will host the bottom-seed Valencia Flyers at Sobe Arena for three games. The Thunderbirds are searching for vindicating wins to prove they are still in the race for higher seeding this late in the season.

This marks only the second time Valencia makes the trip to Sobe Arena, other than their single appearance on the eve of Showcase. The Thunderbirds dealt a serious 9-0 blow to the Flyers, although, their memory of Las Vegas can also be positive. They were able to secure their first win in the month of December, and first win since the month of October—at Showcase.

Las Vegas will be looking to improve its 2-1 start to the six game home stint, and the Flyers will attempt to snap a 12-game skid. The Vegas net will be less permeable with Rhett Bruckner, as he is among the Top-10 goalies in the league in SVP with at least 900 minutes of ice time.

NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES VS. EL PASO RHINOS

The 2020 Thorne Cup hosts, Northern Colorado Eagles, will have another crack at the two-year defending champs, El Paso Rhinos. It will be a statement series for the Eagles who are only one of four teams to defeat the Rhinos this season. They can become only the second team to defeat them twice, or, the second team to defeat them at home.

Though the Eagles won't catch up to the Rhinos points-wise, their six-game win streak has put 11-points between them and the Pueblo Bulls. The Rhinos enjoyed a bye week and will be well-rested going into the tilt versus Northern Colorado. Their recent acquisitions of talent have been quite fruitful extending their win streak to 16-games.

El Paso is 16-1-0 at home while the Eagles boast a decent 10-4-2 road record. Northern Colorado suffered a sweep the last time they paid a visit to the County Events Center in El Paso. They lost 6-2, 4-1, and 2-1(OT) in 2018-2019. But defeated them one time this season in Greeley.

BARRHEAD BOMBERS VS. EDSON AEROS/HINTON TIMBERWOLVES/COLD LAKE HORNETS

Barrhead Bombers will face the entirety of the Provincial Division spread as they open in Cold Lake and close out at home against the Edson Aeros and Hinton Timberwolves. Barrhead must look for success early this weekend starting with the Hornets who are ahead of them in the standings by three points. The Bombers took a 5-3 victory in their last appearance at the Energy Centre.

Hinton has vastly out-skated the Bombers this season winning all eight meetings leading up to the weekend. Barrhead manages to score two goals per game when facing Hinton, but the goaltending facet has suffered when against the division's second place team. Hinton secured two wins at Barrhead Agrena earlier this season, and a third victory in Mayerthorpe, with Barrhead as the designated home team.

Timberwolves's Jamahl Eakett recently surpassed Matus Spodniak and Vitali Mikhailov for the WSHL's 2nd All-Time Goals Leader distinction, and will be on the prowl this weekend—currently the league's leading goal scorer this season.

The Aeros also boast an 8-0 lead in its season series against the Bombers. They are rather fresh off a pair of wins against Barrhead, including a 4-1 win at the Barrhead Agrena. Edson's fire power comes from all angles, though they have been counting on Top-10 scorer, Niklas Froden, who is backed by top goaltender in Gregory Smith.

Bombers have lost four in a row with their last win coming against the Hornets.

SEATTLE TOTEMS VS. SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS

After kicking off the Spartans' 13-game home stand, Seattle Totems will return to Medford for two games. The clubs last met in Klamath Falls, Ore. for a regular-season outdoor game, in which the Totems won 5-2. Southern Oregon has only collected a single win in eight games at home. The victory came last weekend defeating the Bellingham Blazers 7-6 in the shootout.

Southern Oregon will count on the goaltending of Aidan Harding who had a pleasant performance last weekend, more so, in blanking Bellingham in their shootout victory. On the other hand, Seattle has been stymied and are experiencing a five-game losing streak since being swept by the San Diego Sabers last weekend, and losing twice to the Utah Outliers before that.

The Totems recently surpassed the one-year mark since last losing to the Spartans on Feb. 2, 2019, in a 7-2 decision at 'The RRRink' in Medford.

OGDEN MUSTANGS VS. BELLINGHAM BLAZERS

It wasn't the brightest showing for Bellingham the last time they faced Ogden. They let in nearly 30 goals in three games and scored seven goals. Now, they must ramify those results in a setting where the Mustangs have only lost twice all season long—The Ice Sheet.

The Blazers away record stands at 11-7-1.

It's a venue that comes with a degree of difficulty since it is an Olympic Sheet. Fatigue sets in, but the Mustangs have made a living off the extra space. Ogden is well rested as they were in a bye week, and return to action with an eight game win streak, and memories of their last opponent in the Bellingham Blazers.

Bellingham went 2-1 since playing against Ogden, but the competition level will be taking a steep hike this weekend facing a Top-3 team in the league. The last time Bellingham made an appearance at the Ice Sheet, they lost three consecutive games in the Thorne Cup Finals Round-Robin, but never faced the Mustangs.

Ogden will cap off the season-series against Bellingham after the weekend.

DALLAS SNIPERS VS. OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS

It's always a physical series with these two Midwest-Mountain Division foes. Dallas Snipers have improved to 3-2 against the Oklahoma City Blazers after defeating them back-to-back in their last affair. OKC possesses the only shutout victory of the season-series.

Dallas is only in the loss column by one game as they nearly swept the Pueblo Bulls two weeks ago, while the Blazers have seen better days trying to recover from their first home sweep of the campaign.

The Snipers can draw more blood as the wounded Blazers haven't seen a victory in their last six outings. The weight of a season-slump is presenting itself far too deep into the regular season, however, their strong start still has them in playoff contention.

As insinuated earlier, the Snipers found two wins at the Arctic Edge Ice Arena when they last made the trip to Oklahoma City. They pushed to a pair of overtime victories, including one in the shootout. At the time, it was only the second instance where a team defeated the Blazers on back-to-back nights, at home.

Dallas has been to overtime a total of 13 times. Not being able to close out in regulation, or, having to force a rally in order to push it to overtime is starting to become costly. They sacrificed seven points in their seven OTWs, and lost 12-points in their six OTLs. That's 19 total points.

Three regulation wins this weekend will have the Snipers tied for fourth with the OKC Blazers.

HINTON TIMBERWOLVES VS. EDSON AEROS

Edson will put its 15-0-0 home record to the test when they play host to the visiting Hinton Timberwolves for a single match. Timberwolves are the only Provincial Division team to defeat the Edson Aeros, though they did it at the Murray Rec. Center in Hinton early in the season.

The Aeros now hold a 3-1 series lead over the Timberwolves having beat them last week. After having their 21-game win streak end, the Aeros right back in the win column with eight straight victories since the Showcase.

The Timberwolves are nowhere near losing their second place position in the division, but a win over the Aeros is certainly one for the mindset going into playoffs.