

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 01.02.18 – MOUNTAIN DIVISION



CASPER COYOTES (11-15-0, 22 pts)

www.caspercoyotes.com

@CasperCoyotes

Lindros Beard scored a hat trick in the first half of Casper's first game in Vegas, leading the way to a 6-1 Coyotes victory in their first game of the Shootout. Casper ended the showcase 2-1 after also beating the CPJHL team but losing to Dallas.

Aside from the six games against Cheyenne before Vegas, the schedule has not been very friendly to the Coyotes and it won't get much better entering 2018.

Before the two series with Cheyenne, Casper had to face – in succession – Utah, Idaho, Utah again, and Ogden; all teams atop their respective divisions.

To open 2018, the Coyotes will be facing off with Ogden and Colorado for six games apiece. While their record is a respectable – four games below .500 now – it's likely going to get much worse come mid-February.

But, tough competition breeds tough teams, and Casper could be tougher come March heading into the playoffs after consistently playing against the WSHL's best teams.

Bradley Green (16-12-28) and Dallen Neese (9-11-20) are leading the Coyotes and they'll have their hands full as Casper looks to take their Vegas success to the second half of the season.

CHEYENNE STAMPEDE (2-30-0, 4 pts)

www.cheyennestampepe.com

@StampsHockey

The Stampede dropped all three games in Vegas and now head to 2018 with the worst record in the WSHL. It's been a trying season for Cheyenne, but they continue to fight and make their opponents work.

The Stampede scored quick after Southern Oregon scored the first goal in Cheyenne's first game, but the Spartans fought back and ran away with the 8-2 victory. The Stamps scored first in their second game, but San Diego proved too much for Cheyenne.

Cheyenne scored first again in their third game against Wichita, but ultimately fell short after a late Jr. Thunder goal dropped the Stamps to 0-3-0 in the showcase.

The Stampede will open 2018 with Ogden and Utah in the next two weeks with Logan Syrup leading the team with 10 goals and 14 points in his 15 games with Cheyenne.

COLORADO EAGLES (20-5-3, 43 pts)

www.coloradojunioreagles.com

@COJrEagles

The Jr. Eagles showed their muscle in Vegas, going 3-0 against some stiff competition in the Western States Shootout.

Colorado's first game came against the Western Division's best team, the Long Beach Bombers, with the Jr. Eagles pulling out the 3-2 OT victory after falling behind 2-0. Their next victory came over Valencia, a 4-1 win which saw the Jr. Eagles score four straight goals, including two from Carter Dahl.

The Northwest Division's best team – the Idaho IceCats – weren't enough for Colorado as the Jr. Eagles skated to a 3-0 win, finishing the Shootout undefeated.

Colorado now takes a six-game winning streak to 2018 when they'll play Superior and Casper all month before facing off with El Paso the second week of February.

Carter Dahl is leading the team with a 17-16-33 line, but Vincent Mastrandrea, Sean McMahon and David Mitchell are close behind with 29 points each.

Goalie Braden Lajoie won all three games in Vegas and now sports 14 wins to go along with his 2.59 goals-against average and .911 save percentage.

OGDEN MUSTANGS (22-6-1, 45 pts)

www.ogdenmustangs.com

@OgdenMustangs

The Ogden Mustangs, one of the league's top teams on an annual basis, went into the Western States Shootout with a rare two-game losing streak having lost two straight to in-state rivals Utah. Like many teams in the WSHL, the Mustangs were going to the Shootout with hopes of making a statement within the league, and getting back on track for 2018.

Things got out of hand for Ogden in Vegas, as the Mustangs continued their losing streak, dropping their first two games of the Shootout to Oklahoma City and El Paso – the top teams of the Mid-Western Division.

Ogden righted the ship and got back to their winning ways with a victory over Valencia to finish 1-2-0 in the desert showcase and avoid their first five-game losing streak since the 2011-12 season.

Each game was a nail-biter, with their first game against OKC going back and forth before the Blazers pulled out the 3-2 victory. The Mustangs fell down 3-0 to El Paso, the league's best team, but fought back only to fall 4-2 on a Rhinos' empty-netter.

Ogden even fell behind, 2-0, to Valencia, but righted the ship and came out with the much-needed victory.

The Mountain Division – home to three of the league's top teams – is crowded at top with Utah and Colorado sitting within one win of overtaking first place.

The 'Stangs will have their chance to build some space between the Outliers and Jr. Eagles when they take on Cheyenne and Casper in their next two series before facing off with rivals Utah at the end of the month.

Forward Matus Spodniak's scoring exploits have earned him an offer from American International College, making him the first player to secure an NCAA Division I commitment while playing in the WSHL. He has scored 111 goals in two and a half seasons with the Mustangs and is 18 goals away from breaking the WSHL's all-time record.

SUPERIOR ROUGHRIDERS (16-14-0, 32 pts)

www.SuperiorRoughRiders.com

@SPR_RoughRiders

Superior's up-and-down season continued in the desert as the RoughRiders went 1-2-0 in Vegas with a pair of one-goal losses. The RoughRiders couldn't seem to make much headway in 2017, hovering around the .500 mark all season.

Thore Weyrauch scored two goals and an assist when Superior faced off with another .500 team, Tahoe, in their first game of the showcase – a 5-2 RoughRider victory. Marshall Murphy got the win after making 22 saves.

A late goal against one of the CPJHL rep teams downed Superior 3-2 in their second game, and a stellar showing from goalie Murphy against the second-best team in the Western Division, Ontario, wasn't enough in a 1-0 loss to the Avalanche. Murphy ended the Shootout with 66 saves in two games.

Things aren't looking good for the teams below the three-headed Mountain monster that is Ogden, Utah, and Colorado atop the division standings. It's a Mountain-heavy schedule for everyone moving forward, giving teams like Cheyenne and Casper – sitting at the bottom of the division – very little chance to make a dent in their records.

Superior's schedule is no different and they're going to have to work hard to jump high in the "above .500" territory. They'll open 2018 with Colorado and Utah, and sneaking a few wins against those two teams will help the RoughRiders as they approach the playoffs.

We like the RoughRiders and their roster of young guns, and this season can work as the framework for a team looking to make the jump into the elite.

UTAH OUTLIERS (22-6-0, 44pts)

www.UtahOutliers.com

@UtahOutliers

The Outliers keep rolling, now only one point back of first-place Ogden, after going 2-1-0 in Vegas. Their first game, against the Western Division's Valencia Flyers, saw nine total goals scored and four lead changes with Utah falling 5-4.

But the talk of the town was Utah's second game when they played the Western Division's top team, the Long Beach Bombers. The Outliers opened the scoring with two straight goals in another nine-goal game and, after pulling ahead by two goals in the second frame, Long Beach pulled their goalie for the extra attacker.

Let's digress a bit and remember what we've pointed out about Utah at this point in the season: they have the best goalie tandem in the league with Dawson Rodin (12-4-0, 1.72/.943) and Otto Saxin (8-1-0, 1.68/.907) among the league leaders for goalie stats, and their offense has carried the team the last few weeks that saw Utah get closer and closer to first place within the Mountain Division.

"We have been playing well and finding the net the past few weekends," head coach Paul Taylor said before the Vegas showcase.

So, with over a minute to go against Long Beach, an empty net on the opposing side of the ice and with Rodin in net for Utah, a Bombers dump-in landed in the Outlier goalie's glove which he quickly dropped to his stick, and then this happens:

<http://www.bobsblitz.com/2017/12/goalie-goal-utah-outliers-g-dawson.html>

That highlight was #2 on ESPN's *SportsCenter* play of the week.

Everyone on the Outlier roster is putting pucks in the net and the team moves on to 2018 being led by defenseman Zack Hoffman (12-30-42) and forward Gianni Vitali (14-26-40) – both of whom are rookies. Another rookie, Kane Toriumi, leads the team in goals with 17 through 25 games.

It's all Mountain Division opponents from here on out for Utah save for one series with Idaho next month.

2018 looks to be a game of "King-of-the-Mountain" with three teams vying for that lofty first-place finish, or one of two byes, and Utah looks poised to make their move.

--- *Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media*