

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 01.03.18 – MID-WESTERN DIVISION



DALLAS SNIPERS (7-17-0, 14 pts)
WSHLDallasSnipers.pointstreaksites.com
[@DallasSnipers](https://twitter.com/DallasSnipers)

The Dallas Snipers were looking to jumpstart their season in Vegas, and turned in a decent performance, going 1-2-0 including a nice 5-2 victory over Casper in their final game. Each of the teams Dallas faced in the desert had more wins than them, but the Snipers managed to put on a strong showing nonetheless.

Eric Eaton scored a 3-1-4 line in three games and Trevor Borlace went 2-2-4 at the Shootout.

The team leaders were quiet in Vegas with Alex Hladonik (14-26-40), Sterling Cooper (14-22-36), Jaroslav Vasicek (12-20-32) combined for one goal and one assist in three games.

Dallas is going to need their snipers to get locked in for 2018 as they open the new year with six straight games against Springfield before facing off with the likes of OKC and El Paso.

All four Dallas goalies saw at least a half in Vegas and did their best against some teams shooting the puck well. Evan Williams continued his strong season, making 46 saves in two halves, and Ragael Goncalves added 42 in his two chances to play.

With six games against the Express coming out, Dallas now has a chance to take the momentum from their game 3 Vegas showcase victory and earn some points and catch up to Springfield in the standings.

EL PASO RHINOS (29-1-0, 58 pts)

www.EIPasoRhinos.com

@El_Paso_Rhinos

The El Paso Rhinos opened the season having won their first 27 games and went to Vegas ready to cement their place atop the WSHL. Unfortunately, they were shocked in a heartbreaker in their first game in the desert, losing to Idaho 3-2 on a last-second IceCat goal.

The Rhinos started a new winning streak in their next game, beating the Mountain Division's best team, the Ogden Mustangs, 4-2 behind four different skaters scoring. Ogden fought back to within one with under two minutes before Justin-Cole Dubecky buried an empty netter just 40 seconds later to put the icing on that game.

El Paso found themselves in yet another tight game for their final matchup when they beat the Long Beach Bombers 3-2 on an Adam Stalzer snipe just 90 seconds after the Bombers tied it.

It was a strong showing in the desert for El Paso which is continuing its strongest season yet. And, while their offense gets all the hype, their goalies continue to be the key when the Rhinos find themselves in defensive games like those in the showcase.

Filip Krasanovsky continued his MVP-type season making 23 saves in the loss and 21 saves against Ogden. Krasanovsky's 24 wins are seven better than the next highest in the league and his 1.50 GAA is tops in the league and his .928 SV% is good for second in the entire WSHL.

Kayden Pickles showed strong in the third game of the showcase, making 22 saves against Long Beach.

After going 17-1-0 against teams outside of the Mid-Western Division, it's all intra-division games from here on out for El Paso beginning with Wichita and OKC.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (25-4-0, 50 pts)

www.OKCityHockey.com

@OKCBlazersWSHL

We were positing that part of Oklahoma's early success this season – including scoring a league-high 224 goals – were due in part to their schedule which had them playing sub-.500 teams save for one series against Superior early in the season, and one with El Paso in which they were swept.

So, the Blazers went into the desert looking to prove themselves against worthy opponents, and play well they did, going 2-1-0 with both wins coming against first-place teams.

OKC shocked the Mountain Division's Ogden Mustangs with a late-game Victor Ekk goal to win the game 3-2. Bobby Cloutier's 18 saves proved to be enough against one of the league's top offensive teams.

The Blazers scored first and last in their 2-1 win over the Northwest Division's top team, the Idaho IceCats. Cloutier added 30 saves in the victory.

Unfortunately, the Blazers took their hot play against the upstart Utah Outliers who have been hiding in the shadows of Ogden all season. Losing 3-0 to Utah ended the showcase on a sour note for OKC, but Utah is proving to be among the top one or two teams in the league.

It was a strong showing for a team hungry for decent competition and it can't be understated how talented this team is. Yes, their schedule hasn't done them any favors, but beating two really great teams in Ogden and Idaho shows that this team can hang when they have to. And, when the playoffs come and it's a matter of winning a series, the team that will either hang with you or beat you is the most dangerous team.

The Blazers will have a week off before trying their hand against El Paso in what will be the series of the week for two teams looking to prove themselves.

SPRINGFIELD EXPRESS (11-12-6, 28 pts)

www.SpringfieldExpress.com

@_ExpressHockey

Springfield has been hovering around .500 all season, but continue to be a tough out for their opponents. The Express headed into the Vegas showcase on an eight-game losing streak, but that was eight games against El Paso and OKC, the top two teams in the Mid-Western Division.

So, the Express rolled into Vegas looking to turn things around, but Springfield fell just short in their attempts, losing all three games by one goal in heartbreak fashion.

Their first game to the Western Division's Fresno Monsters saw the Express take a 2-0 lead into the second half before the Monsters scored four straight to hand Springfield their ninth straight loss.

The second game, against the Western Division's second-best team in Ontario, was the opposite opening with the Avalanche scoring two straight to begin the game. Vegard Faret scored two goals in two and a half minutes to tie the game before Ontario scored with a minute left to break Springfield's heart for their tenth straight loss.

Kyle Cagnoni scored his 13th goal of the year to open the scoring in Game Three, but the West Sound Warriors – the Northwest Division's second-best team – scored two goals in 30 seconds in the second half to take the lead. Things started to look up for Springfield when Stephane Doering scored with just 16 seconds left in regulation to tie the game.

But, as with most things this season with Springfield, they fell just short after the Warriors won the game in the second (three-on-three) overtime.

So, the Express head into 2018 with an 11-game losing streak which includes six one-goal games. They'll try to turn it around and get the lucky bounces when they travel to Dallas for the first of two straight series against the Snipers.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (3-24-0, 6 pts)

www.WichitaJuniorThunder.com

@JrThunderHockey

Wichita went into the Western States Shootout hoping to turn their season around. After losing the first two games, the Jr. Thunder finally came out on top, beating the Cheyenne Stampedo, 3-2, in their third game in the desert.

The Jr. Thunder have now won two of their last four games.

Wichita opens 2018 with some stiff competition in El Paso and Springfield coming up next, then they play a home-and-home series with Dallas, the team they beat just before the Vegas showcase.

Coach Rob Weingartner stresses the importance of teaching the team to win and the strong showing in Vegas, going 1-2 against teams with more wins than them, could be the learning opportunity this team needs as they head into the new year.

--- Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media