

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 01.09.18 – MOUNTAIN DIVISION



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

www.caspercoyotes.com

@CasperCoyotes

Coyote Nation had an additional week off coming out of the holidays and are gearing up for the second half of the season. The Coyotes are now heading into one of the most difficult stretches in the league as every team they play from here on out is near the top of their respective divisions including six games against Mountain Division rivals Ogden and Colorado.

Bradley Green (16-12-28) is leading Casper in his rookie season with veterans like Dallen Neese (9-11-20) and Lindros Beard (9-8-17, 85 PIMs) chipping in to keep the Coyotes in it, though they may need more than that given the difficulty of their schedule.

Aside from a successful 2-1-0 showing at the Western States Shootout, the Coyotes stayed busy in Casper over the holiday season.

One of the team activities was participating in Wreaths Across America at the Wyoming State Veterans Cemetery in Evansville. Here, the players read aloud the names of a veteran and laid a wreath on the gravesites as a way of paying respect. This all on the heels of former Coyote defenseman Gabriel Romero (3-7-10 in 2016) announcing he was joining the US Navy.

You can visit the Coyote's Facebook page for more information and photos.

CHEYENNE STAMPEDE (2-33-0, 4pts)
www.cheyennestampede.com
@StampsHockey

Cheyenne was only able to score two goals in three games against the high-flying Ogden Mustangs over the weekend.

Logan Syrup continues to be a spark for the Stamps. His assist on Friday gives him 15 points in just 18 games with Cheyenne, leading the team in points and goals (10).

Hakan Salt, the only Turkish-born player in the WSHL, continues to chip in with nine points (2-7-9) this season to go along with 16 PIMs.

The schedule does not get any easier for the Stampede with Utah paying them a visit this weekend. The Outliers right in the thick of the race for the Mountain Division title and will be coming to town on a business trip. This will mark the first meeting between the Mountain Division rivals.

COLORADO EAGLES (21-5-3, 45pts)
www.coloradojunioreagles.com
@COJrEagles

The Colorado Jr. Eagles continue to impress, beating the Superior RoughRiders to extend their winning streak to seven games since being swept by El Paso.

The 5-3 victory over Superior also gave Colorado a 4-0-0 record against their in-state rivals. The two teams will meet five more times this year including two games this upcoming weekend.

Five different Jr. Eagles skaters scored against Superior with Cory Richardson adding two assists for his 11th goal of the year. Richardson's points came on three straight Colorado goals with the Jr. Eagles down 3-2 in the second period. Richardson now has a 11-19-30 line in 21 games on the season.

Goalie Braden LaJoie made 27 saves for his 15th win of the year. That is good for third in the league.

We've said it before, so we'll keep saying it, but the Jr. Eagles are a deep team who don't rely on just one or two players to get points. Right now, eight Colorado skaters have more than 24 points on the year with Carter Dahl (18-16-34) leading the way. But, the team isn't top-heavy and that bodes well as they move into the second half of the season.

The schedule is in Colorado's favor with Superior this weekend followed by six games against Casper and another two against the RoughRiders. While the 'Riders have played hard against the Jr. Eagles, the next few weeks will be a chance for Colorado to catch up to Ogden in the standings and position themselves for a battle to the end for the Mountain Division championship.

OGDEN MUSTANGS (25-8-1, 51pts)
www.ogdenmustangs.com
@OgdenMustangs

The Ogden Mustangs added to their Mountain Division lead by sweeping the Stampede in Cheyenne.

Newcomer Matthew Thielemann scored a 3-5-8 line against Cheyenne, bringing his totals up to 3-7-10 in just eight games with Ogden.

Ross Bartlett scored a 2-9-11 line over the weekend and is now up to 28-47-75 for the year, good for third on the team in all three categories. Which is ridiculous to even type. Bartlett has 75 points in just 34 games and is *third* on the team in points.

Of course, being on the same team as dynamo Matus Spodniak means you'll be getting a lot of assists. Recently signed to an NCAA D1 offer at American International College, Spodniak leads the world with a 45-49-94 line in just 28 games this season.

Head Coach Jake Laime credits Spodniak's approach to the game for his success this year.

"Matus is our heartbeat on and off the ice," Laime said. "He has such high character and work ethic that his presence alone can elevate our play. I always say that his biggest strength is that he doesn't really have a weakness ... his work ethic and attitude is second to none."

As the team moves forward to the second half of the season, they'll have plenty of opportunities to put some space between them and the rest of the Mountain Division – the league's strongest. All but one of the Mustangs' series are against Mountain rivals, so while they've had a giant bull's-eye on their backs all season, Ogden will still have the chance to knock Colorado and Utah down in the coming weeks.

Laime says there are still areas he would like to see his team improve upon, even as they sit in first place.

"We would like to improve our consistency and physicality," Laime said. "We want to be a fast skilled team, but we don't want to be taken lightly. We want to be tough to play against in the dirty areas."

Casper is next up for Ogden before a huge two-game weekend with Utah who have proven to be the bee in the Mustangs' bonnet all season.

SUPERIOR ROUGHRIDERS (16-15-0, 32)

www.SuperiorRoughRiders.com

@SPR_RoughRiders

The Superior RoughRiders fell just short against in-state rivals Colorado, taking a three-goal lead, but losing 5-3 over the weekend.

Nikita Sheberov scored a natural hat trick in the first period to put the RoughRiders ahead of the Jr. Eagles 3-0 after the first frame. Colorado answered with five unanswered, winning their fourth game of the season against their in-state rivals.

We like the makeup of this Superior squad, with rookies leading the team all season, earning the experience they'll need to carry them for the next few seasons in the league's toughest division. Russian sniper Sheberov's 40-29-69 line is good for 6th in the league in his first season in North America.

Superior has been playing real tough lately, and have even taken Colorado to the brink the last few times they've played.

It'll be the Jr. Eagles again this weekend, and the RoughRiders will have a real opportunity to get some sweet revenge against Colorado. Superior will have three other opportunities to finally take down the Jr. Eagles after this weekend. Chances are, it'll happen.

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

www.UtahOutliers.com

@UtahOutliers

Utah was off this weekend after a nice run in Vegas and look towards a Mountain-Division heavy schedule and an opportunity to close in on first place.

Head Coach Paul Taylor was happy with his team's play in the desert, but now looks to make the necessary changes heading to the second half of the season.

"I want to see us committed to improving our team game during the second half of the season," Taylor said. "We still have areas to improve and I would like to see the group continue to push each other to get better in our systems."

The Outliers have played fewer games (28) than Colorado (29) and Ogden (34) – two teams ahead of them in the standings. They've been neck-and-neck with the Jr. Eagles and Mustangs all year, and their 54 goals against is the fewest in the division. So, it's their defense that has been the key to their success, buoyed by the play of goaltending duo Otto Saxin (1.68/.907, 8 wins) and Dawson Rodin (1.72/.943, 12 wins).

"There really has been no secret to handling our goalies," Taylor said of his dynamic duo. "Both Rodin and Saxin have been solid when called upon. They work hard in practice and they push each other on a daily basis. I think their competitive nature to make a difference when they take the net has been key."

Utah won't have any breaks from here on out and begin their packed schedule at Cheyenne this weekend.

--- *Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media*