

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 01.23.18 – MOUNTAIN DIVISION



CASPER COYOTES (11-21-0, 22 pts)

www.caspercoyotes.com

@CasperCoyotes

The Casper Coyotes had a really great run for a few weeks there, but now are in the midst of the toughest stretch of their schedule. The Coyotes dropped the first three of a six-game series with Mountain Division rivals Colorado over the weekend by a combined score of 18-3.

Two of Casper's three goals were scored by defensemen (Tyler Rossi & Brody Surette) and only Bradley Green (1-1-2) managed two points.

Casper's played three different goalies against the Jr. Eagles, all three of whom were a bit overworked. Dylan Ossachuk and Nolan Kare each made 65 saves in Saturday and Sunday's games respectively, while Wesley Ellingsen faced 45 shots on Friday.

We're looking for Casper to steal a few points in the coming weeks and they'll have an opportunity for some revenge against Colorado this weekend when the 'Yotes travel to Fort Collins for the only time this season.

CHEYENNE STAMPEDE (2-38-0, 4 pts)

www.cheyennestampede.com

@StampsHockey

The Cheyenne Stampede faced off with their neighbors, the University of Wyoming, last weekend in a pair of games that counted in the league standings.

Friday's game was tight with the Cowboys scoring two goals in the first period to take an early lead. But, Cheyenne struck back with a goal in the last 30 seconds and then two back-to-back Logan Syrup goals in the second to take a 3-2 lead.

The Stamp's lead was short-lived as UW hit back, tying the game late in the second frame before taking the lead for good midway through the third.

Four of the game's seven goals were on the power-play, with both teams scoring two apiece with the man advantage.

Syrup now leads the team with 13 goals and 20 points in his 23 games with Cheyenne.

The Stamps scored first on Saturday, but the Cowboys fought their way to seven unanswered goals for the blowout victory.

Daniel Yockey made 38 saves on Friday and Robbie Hufnagel stopped 29 on Saturday for some solid efforts in the crease for Cheyenne.

The Stampede are the first team in the WSHL to reach the 40-game mark in games played and will be the first two wrap up their regular season slate.

They are currently scheduled for a three-week break before the playoffs, which will give them plenty of time to rest up before the postseason.

COLORADO EAGLES (25-5-4, 54 pts)

www.coloradojunioreagles.com

@COJrEagles

The Colorado Jr. Eagles swept Casper in the first three of their six-game series that will conclude this upcoming weekend.

Michael Petrotto continued his strong play recently going 4-2-6 in three games against Casper, and Anders Saarela went 4-1-5 including a hat trick in Sunday's 8-1 win. Saarela is now second on the team with 17 goals on the year.

We've long championed Colorado's depth and their ability to get consistent production from all four lines and from defense with guys like John Tower (6-23-29) chipping in from the blue line.

Another big contributor this season has been defenseman Cory Richardson who first played with Colorado and coach Steve Haddon during the 2013-14 season when he put up a 7-21-28 line. After three seasons playing in juniors, the Colorado native returned to the Jr. Eagles for ten games last season and for all of this year.

He now has 12-20-32 in 26 games this year and Coach Haddon says he's seen a lot of growth in Richardson over the years.

"Cory is a perfect example of a player who has been growing each season and working hard on his individual game, then setting the bar even higher for the next season and continuing the process," Haddon said. "He plays at a different level and makes other players better. He will have great success at the NCAA and Professional level."

The Jr. Eagles will look to continue their season-long dominance over the Coyotes this weekend at home.

OGDEN MUSTANGS (28-8-1, 57 pts)

www.ogdenmustangs.com

@OgdenMustangs

Usually when a team has a bye week, they use the time to relax and recharge. But, after their bye last weekend, the Ogden Mustangs must be sweating a bit.

Holding a firm lead on the first place within the Mountain Division all season, the Mustangs now find their hold a little less firm. Sure, Utah and Colorado have been breathing down Ogden's neck, but the 'Stangs always had an opportunity to pull away.

So now the Mustangs have a mere one-point lead on the Utah Outliers. And, to make matters worse, Utah has three games in hand on Ogden, meaning they'll have last serve to surpass their in-state rivals.

This weekend, Ogden and Utah will play the Series of the Week when they compete in a home-and-home beginning in West Valley City on Saturday. This will work as an opportunity for the Mustangs to pad their lead a bit and continue to do so as their next bye week comes only as the season is winding down.

While players like Matus Spodniak (53-57-110) and Jacob Laurin (37-57-94) have been getting all the press with their remarkable seasons, the Mustang squad is littered with players who are competing and succeeding for Ogden.

Defenseman Austin Dittenhafer is one such player, having his best season in the WSHL. The Pennsylvania-native has an 11-29-40 line to lead the team's defensemen in points.

Head Coach Jake Laime credits Dittenhafer's 64-game experience prior to this season with helping him make the leap.

"Outside of his natural ability, he is coming into the season with prior knowledge to how our team operates," Laime said. "He is familiar with systems and we have a good understanding of each other and expectations. He is also in his last year ... wanting to produce and win is a motivating priority of his."

Dittenhafer and the Mustangs will get back on the ice against Utah on Saturday in West Valley City.

SUPERIOR ROUGHRIDERS (17-19-0, 34 pts)

www.SuperiorRoughRiders.com

@SPR_RoughRiders

Superior may actually be the true barometer of how the Mountain Division stacks up. We've been big fans of how this team has played all season, considering they're being led by teenage rookies with veterans like Austin Tautfest (23-26-49 in 84 career WSHL games) and defenseman Avery Albert (11-30-41 in 114 career games) chipping in.

But when we look at the Mountain Division standings we see three teams vying for first place. The RoughRiders, stuck at .500 all season, have now

played all three of these teams and have managed close games with all three even if they have only managed wins against two.

To be fair, this past weekend's series with Utah was the first time these two teams met all year, but the RoughRiders did manage to beat Ogden (7-6 on Oct. 6) and Colorado (2-1 on Jan. 12) and also played the Jr. Eagles to a pair of two-goal losses.

But when Superior had to play the Outliers, they were unable to skate away with a win. Yet.

Superior managed to tie the first game at two goals apiece midway through the first period. But, Utah scored just 20 seconds after the RoughRider's second goal, beginning a string of eight unanswered goals for the win.

Superior fought hard again on Saturday, but came up short with L. J. Newell making 36 saves. Sunday's game was another characteristic Superior game – scoring first, finding themselves down, only to tie the game, and then prove to be just unable to compete with a better team till the end.

The RoughRiders will have a home-and-home with Cheyenne this weekend to try and get themselves back up to .500 on the year before they play another series with Colorado.

UTAH OUTLIERS (28-6-0, 56 pts)

www.UtahOutliers.com

@UtahOutliers

Utah Head Coach Paul Taylor likes where his team is at this point in the season as the Outliers find themselves just one point back of first-place Ogden with three games in hand.

"I believe our team is excited about the opportunity to chase first place in our division and pursue a run for the Thorne Cup," Taylor said.

But, Taylor knows his team needs to stay focused on the next game rather than the end product of their work.

"We are trying to stay focused and have a one game at a time and one series at a time mentality," Taylor added. "Looking too far ahead won't help us achieve our goal."

Goalies Dawson Rodin and Otto Saxin make up the best tandem in the WSHL and showed that level again as they kept an upstart Superior team to just two goals a game in this past weekend's sweep of the RoughRiders. Rodin made 27 saves between Friday and Sunday's wins, and Saxin stopped 15 on Saturday.

Utah will have a chance to jump Ogden this weekend – maybe for good when the two in-state rivals play a home-and-home for the WSHL Series of the Week.

On the season, Utah has outscored Ogden 23-20 in seven games in what has been the league's best rivalry, while posting four victories including the last two.

This will be the final meeting between these two rivals and is sure to be a doozy.

--- Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media