

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 01.26.17 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (18-15-1, 37 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters have been involved in some of the league's most entertaining games this season, and that trend continued last weekend in a three-game set at Valencia.

The Monsters earned four points against the Flyers after logging a pair of overtime victories and a regulation loss. Rudolfs Bulis (8-1-9), who has been a goal-scoring machine since joining Fresno at the Western States Shootout, scored one of the game-winners, while Cody Key (41-45-86) netted the other on a rebound from Daylon Mannon's (43-49-92) shot.

"Last week was a playoff atmosphere, it was a war," said Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "Both teams played extremely hard. It was a battle to get those points and the boys showed a lot of character, especially late in the games."

Kaminski, who is in his second season with Fresno, expects more high-intensity series throughout the remainder of the season.

"It's going to be like this the rest of the way," Kaminski said. "We did a lot of good things this weekend, but we feel we can tighten up defensively and have to relax and finish, as we had a lot of chances and needed to capitalize.

"We need everyone to keep playing this hard and sacrificing their bodies. When we do that, we get results, and that should give us a big boost in confidence down the stretch."

The Monsters are set to begin an 11-game homestand this weekend with matchups against Ontario and Valencia. The nearly month-long stretch will be capped off with the Monsters' final series of the season against Long Beach at Selland Arena in Downtown Fresno.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (25-6-3, 53 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

It has been a difficult stretch of hockey for the Long Beach Bombers, but they seem to be getting back on track. The Bombers posted a three-game sweep of San Diego last weekend and have won five of six so far in 2018.

Though the three games were closer than the final scores would indicate, it was another step in the right direction for Long Beach.

The Bombers have built a seven-point cushion at the top of the Western Division. They have one game left against Ontario, the team directly behind them in the standings, on February 1 at home.

Over the next month, productive forwards Miroslav Rohlik (31-29-60) and Artem Korolev (20-40-60) will battle it out in a friendly competition to try to finish the regular season as the Bombers' leading scorer. Parker Moskal (24-30-54) is also a candidate for the honor.

Veteran netminder Domenic Bosetti is once again thriving in a workhorse role. Although he has taken a slight step back statistically, he still has a 3.33 goals-against average to go along with his .900 save percentage.

For Bosetti, the regular season is like a warmup. The Long Beach native has plenty of experience in the postseason and knows the most important games

come in the spring. Bosetti is looking to win the first Thorne Cup of his three-year WSHL career, which has been spent entirely with the Bombers.

The Bombers will see an unfamiliar group this weekend as they travel to Tahoe to take on the Icemen for the first time this season. The three-game series will begin Friday evening and conclude Sunday afternoon.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (22-10-2, 46 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

The Ontario Avalanche collected five of six points against Phoenix last weekend, pulling themselves within seven points of first place in the division.

The Avalanche took the first two games of the series, but the Knights gave them a run for their money in both contests. Phoenix got over the hump in the third game and beat Ontario in overtime.

With plenty of divisional games coming up this month, the Avs have a chance to pull away from the pack in February. But head coach Rob O'Rourke doesn't focus on sending messages to individual opponents.

"Every point on the table is important. It's not about making a statement, it's more about being consistent," O'Rourke said.

Ontario has improved its consistency as the year has gone on, but it still has work to do if it wants to beat top Western Division rivals on a regular basis. It lost to Fresno by an 11-4 final back on January 7, and it was defeated by the Monsters yet again on Thursday night, this time by a score of 9-8.

The Avs won't have any opportunities for revenge on Fresno until March, when they battle the Monsters in one of their last series of the regular season.

For now, Ontario will continue its weekend schedule with home matchups against San Diego and Valencia on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (16-21-2, 34 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

The Phoenix Knights continue to log wins over opponents that seemed to be too much for them early in the season. Phoenix lost its first two game to Ontario before recording an overtime victory over the Avalanche.

The win was the Knights' first of the season over Ontario, and they will finish the regular season with a 1-5-0 record against the Avs after their early-season struggles.

Eric Cotton netted the game-winner for Phoenix with his fourth goal of the season. Cotton (4-14-18) notched his first multi-goal game of the campaign in the win and has collected at least one point in six of his last eight outings.

Star rookie forward Anthony Massanotti (31-14-45) is having an historic season. His 31 goals are the second-most ever by a Knight, and he needs just two more to tie the franchise record.

Backstop Rhett Bruckner has stepped up his game in the second half of the season. Since the start of the Western States Shootout, the two-year veteran has posted a 5-0-0 record to go along with a sparkling slash line of 1.64/.946.

Dominant goaltending is a must in the WSHL, where offense tends to prevail. With the playoffs a little more than a month away, Bruckner's improved form is a great sign for the Knights.

Phoenix will have a chance to breathe this weekend with no games scheduled. It has four series left in the season, including tough matchups against Fresno, Valencia, and Long Beach.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (3-30-3, 9 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers continue to fight under first-year head coach Petr Kankovsky, but the losses also continue to pile up. The Sabers were swept by Long Beach last weekend despite competing with the division-leading Bombers for the majority of each contest.

With 10 consecutive defeats, the Sabers now own the second-longest losing streak in the league. Only Cheyenne has a longer streak of futility, as it is winless over its last 33 games.

The Long Beach series closed what ended up being a winless homestand for the Sabers. They probably deserved to win more than one of those games, but all they can do at this point is keep fighting for an elusive victory.

The talent of the Western Division makes the remainder of San Diego's schedule unforgiving. With games remaining against every division rival except Long Beach, the Sabers will have to earn it if they hope to break the losing streak.

This weekend, San Diego will travel to Valencia for a Friday night contest before visiting Ontario Center Ice Arena for a matchup against the Avalanche on Saturday evening.

VALENCIA FLYERS (20-10-2, 42 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers picked up three points in the standings last weekend after a three-game battle with Fresno that brought high levels of intensity and a playoff-like atmosphere.

The Flyers lost the opening matchup in regulation before earning points through a win and an overtime loss over the next two days.

After setting the all-time WSHL assist record and Valencia's franchise record for career goals, forward Jacob Kranabetter (25-60-85) can now turn his attention to Tomas Nemeth's all-time points record.

Nemeth finished his career with a 115-210-325 scoring line, while Kranabetter currently sits at 94-214-308. Kranabetter needs to score 18 points over the Flyers' last 18 regular season games to set the mark.

Considering the five-year veteran is averaging nearly three points per outing, there's a great chance that Kranabetter becomes the league's all-time leading scorer sometime next month.

Valencia will play San Diego, Fresno, and Ontario this weekend. After that, 10 of the Flyers' final 15 contests will be on the road. It gives them a chance to improve upon their mediocre 9-6-0 record away from home before the postseason.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media