

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 1.5.18 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (14-13-0, 28 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters begin the second half this weekend at just one game above .500, putting them in fourth place in the deep Western Division.

The Monsters had a solid trip to Las Vegas the week before Christmas, winning two of three games at the Western States Shootout.

In their first contest, a 4-3 triumph over Springfield, leading scorer Daylon Mannon netted the game-winner with just under 10 minutes remaining in the game. After a 6-3 loss to West Sound the next day, Fresno closed out the Showcase with a 12-5 blowout victory over Tahoe.

Fresno Head Coach Kevin Kaminski was impressed by his team's play, but knows there's always room for improvement.

"I thought we played some very good hockey, but there's always things to work on," said Kaminski. "Besides the minute-and-a-half versus West Sound, we played very well."

The minute-and-a-half Kaminski was referring to was a flurry of three West Sound goals within the first two minutes of the Monsters' matchup against the Warriors. From that point on, the two clubs played to a 3-3 tie, but that brief stretch was what ultimately doomed Fresno, as the hole was too deep to recover from.

Fresno's record is nothing special, but it has logged plenty of impressive wins that seem to indicate that it has the talent to compete with the top teams in the division.

"Our second-half expectations have to be high," said Kaminski. "We need everyone to pull on the rope to try to get the second spot."

The second seed, of course, comes with the coveted first-round bye as well as home-ice advantage in the second round. It's a tall task, but it's not an unrealistic goal for the Monsters.

Leading scorers Daylon Mannon (38-9-39-77) and captain Cody Key (29-39-68) will have an enormous load to carry if they hope to propel the Monsters towards the top of the division. Both players are top-five scorers in the league and have shown dynamic offensive abilities throughout the first half.

"Key and Mannon are quite the duo," Kaminski continued. "They're a perfect match and complement each other well and know where the other is on the ice at all times. They both have very strong offensive instincts and love to score or set each other up."

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (20-5-3, 43 pts)
@LBBombersHockey
www.JrBombers.org

As the Long Beach Bombers begin the second half, their position atop the division, but they will need another strong half to capture their third straight Western Division title.

Valencia has been on their tail all season long, and Ontario has had a mid-season resurgence that has vaulted it into second place, eight points behind Long Beach.

"Our primary team goal is to win the division, simple as that," said Bombers Head Coach Chris White. "We feel very confident on home ice, and in our ability to matchup against our local rivals."

The statistics strongly support White's statement. Long Beach's 7-4-1 record in opposing arenas pales in comparison to its staggering 13-1-2 mark at home.

But not everything has been going well for the Bombers, who failed to win a game at the WSHL Showcase with losses to Colorado, Utah, and El Paso.

"Obviously, we would have liked to earn more than one point at the Showcase, however, we got what we deserved," White added.

"We could not close out the game against Colorado. We started poorly against Utah, and we executed poorly in several areas against El Paso."

White did not hold much back in his assessment of his team as it begins a new year of hockey.

"We are not an elite team at this point. We're playing .500 hockey and we need to be better," he said. "Our team defense has been horrendous. You're not going to win a championship in this league when your wingers are consistently your best defenders. We are going to need several guys to step it up in the second half."

The Bombers will have to settle for improvement through practice time this week. They will look to right the ship next weekend when they host Fresno for a three-game set.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (17-9-1, 35 pts)
@TmOntAvs
www.OntarioAvalanche.com

Over the past month, the Ontario Avalanche have been the class of the division. With a league-best 11-game winning streak, the Avs have officially established themselves as contenders.

The theme of Ontario's season has been close, intense games. That trend continued in Las Vegas as the Avalanche won three straight one-goal contests over the CPJHL Red Team, Springfield, and Superior.

For whatever reason, Ontario has shown a knack for playing up or down to the competition throughout the season. It has logged wins over both Long Beach and Valencia and gave league-leading El Paso one of its best series of the year, but barely squeaked out wins over Springfield and Superior at the Showcase.

Springfield has lost 11 games in a row and is in the midst of a downward spiral. Superior, on the other hand, is not necessarily a bad or struggling team, but it has been hovering around .500 for much of the year and should not pose too much of a threat to this improved Ontario squad.

The Avalanche are one of the WSHL contenders that truly resembles a team. Although Jesse Zaharichuk (18-26-44) leads the club and points while William Ma (22-15-37) and Alex Bouchard (16-21-37) have both stood out, the whole roster has contributed on both ends.

Ontario features 12 players with double-digit points, but the backbone of this team is its defense, which is in the top ten in the league in goals allowed.

Within the division, only Long Beach has allowed less goals to the opposition than Ontario. The Bombers have given up 87 goals compared to 88 for the Avs.

Over the course of 27 games, those 88 goals amount to just over three goals per game for Ontario opponents. In a goal-happy league like the WSHL, that's above average.

Veteran netminder Filip Subrt can take much of the credit. The 20-year-old Slovakian has shown elite consistency over his three seasons with the Avs. This year, he's putting up another solid campaign with a 2.81/.915 slash line through 25 appearances.

Ontario will be back in action this Sunday with a home game against Fresno, which will be followed by a series against San Diego next weekend.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (11-17-2, 24 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

Slowly but surely, the Phoenix Knights are closer and closer to .500. The Knights' turnaround from a 15-game winless skid to open the season has been remarkable, but a tough second-half schedule will make things even more difficult from here on out.

The Knights were one of the teams that stood out at in Las Vegas, with a trio of wins over Dallas, Seattle, and Bellingham at the Showcase.

Phoenix outscored its opponents by a 15-6 margin at the event, and four of those goals were scored by Seattle.

The Knights ended the first half on an 11-4-0 run that has seen several players step up. Rookie Anthony Masanotti has proven to be a stud, with 24 goals and eight assists through the first 30 games of his career.

Additionally, forwards Michael Caravella (6-18-24), Andrius Bermejo (5-14-19), and Nolan Twerdoelib (7-10-17) have contributed offensively while Kohl Hedquist (9-3-12) is second on the team in goals.

Phoenix opens the second half on the road this weekend with a three-game set against struggling San Diego. With no disrespect towards the Sabers intended, it will be one of the Knights' easiest series for some time.

Phoenix will play series against Valencia, Ontario, Fresno, and Valencia again over the month or so following its matchup with San Diego.

That will take the Knights all the way to the last two weeks of the season, when they will play series against San Diego and Long Beach to finish out the regular season.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (3-22-2, 8 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

Some new competition proved to be a good thing for the San Diego Sabers, who won games against defending Thorne Cup champion Wichita and Cheyenne before running out of steam in a non-competitive loss to Southern Oregon in their Western States Shootout finale.

In their first game, the Sabers scored first, but Wichita tied things up about three minutes later. Forward Karel Kankovsky tallied his second goal of the game to break the tie with six minutes left in the first frame, and Michal Kolarik scored what would turn out to be the game-winner less than a minute into the final period as San Diego cruised to a 5-2 victory.

The Sabers' second win at the Showcase did not look good early on, as Cheyenne scored first less than 10 minutes into the game.

San Diego rebounded with four unanswered goals to win their second straight game by a score of 4-1. Kolarik, Kankovsky, and Ondrej Imrich all enjoyed multi-point outings.

Kankovsky is riding a 10-game point streak that dates all the way back to November 12. He has five multi-point contests during that stretch, including a pair of four-point performances.

Kolarik has also impressed lately, as his 12-game point streak recently concluded. He has a pair of hat tricks this season and has been productive since posting just three points (1-2-3) over his first 12 games.

Kankovsky and Kolarik the Sabers' top scorers this year, with lines of 8-19-27 and 15-10-25, respectively. If San Diego wants to win, they need those two to carry the load.

The Sabers have taken a step back this year, so it was good to see them win a couple of games in Las Vegas. But, San Diego will now go back to the weekly grind of playing in one of the league's most talented divisions.

The Sabers will take on Phoenix this weekend at home. It marks the beginning of a season-long nine-game homestand that will last until the end of January.

VALENCIA FLYERS (17-9-0, 34 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers had mixed results at the Western States Shootout. The Flyers dropped two of three games, but their lone win came over a Utah team that won 22 of its 28 games in the first half.

In the win, which came on the first day of the tournament, former Las Vegas Storm Nikita Pintusov scored his second goal of the game with 5:48 remaining to break a 4-4 tie and give his team one of its best wins of the season.

The next two days did not go well for the Flyers, who lost back-to-back games against Colorado and Ogden to complete their tour of the Mountain Division.

Valencia dropped five of six games to end the first half. It has had plenty of time to rest and get back to being the team that represented Long Beach's only competition within the division during the first couple of months of the season.

Forward Jacob Kranabetter is closing in on the all-time WSHL points record, which is currently held by Tomas Nemeth, who played for three different teams over his four-year tenure in the league.

Kranabetter, who has accumulated a 17-52-69 scoring line this season, is fourth in the league in points on the year. Overall, he has 292 points (86-206-292) during his four-year career with the Flyers.

The 20-year-old native of Mission, British Columbia also needs just four more assists to tie Nemeth's record of 210. He could very well tie or break that mark next weekend when Valencia returns to host Phoenix for a three-game set.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media