

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 1.18.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (14-15-3, 31 pts)
www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com
@Bhamblazers

After a couple of big wins against Seattle last week, the Bellingham Blazers stumbled to a 7-5 loss in the series finale, preventing them from securing a winning record.

The Blazers won the first two games of the series by scores of 3-1 and 12-2 before falling by a 7-5 final, so the series was unpredictable, to say the least.

After the letdown in the third contest, Blazers Head Coach Mark Collins spoke about his team's performance.

"I think we played well overall the first couple of games," Collins said. "After the big win in the second game, I think that got into the players' heads a bit, and we played very poorly on Saturday night."

While there's not much to complain about regarding the five goals scored by the Blazers' offense, the defensive effort was not good. Seattle is just outside the bottom five in the league in terms of goals scored.

"Because of poor play, it was a very costly loss," Collins continued. "It hurt in the standings, player injuries, and suspensions. I feel it also hurt from a confidence point of view, as well, traveling to Idaho this week."

Bellingham will need a short memory if it wants to take down the IceCats this week in Idaho. The Blazers are playing the IceCats for the first time, so they have yet to experience the elite play of the division leaders.

One thing the Blazers have on their side is their ability to stay disciplined. They have earned the second-fewest penalty minutes in the division, and, according to Collins, they need to stay out of the penalty box in order to be successful.

"We try to be a very disciplined team and not take penalties. We take pride in that. When we stay away from taking penalties, we win games."

IDAHO ICECATS (25-4-1, 51 pts)

www.IdahoIceCats.com

The Idaho IceCats picked up six points last week in dominating fashion, sweeping the West Sound Warriors and once again establishing themselves as the class of the Northwest Division.

Netminder Jacob Hough put up one of his best series of the season in the sweep, shutting out West Sound in a 25-save effort on Saturday before sharing a shutout with Shaun Brown the next day after making 11 saves.

Forward Lance Herning appeared in just one game in the series, but he made it count as he notched his third hat trick of the season and reached 50 points (30-20-50) on the campaign in Idaho's 9-4 victory on Friday evening.

Other than Herning, the IceCats don't really have any other elite scorers, but it's worked out perfectly. Idaho uses a balanced team effort to rack up goals. Twelve Idaho skaters have logged 20 points or more, and all but three members of its roster have double-digit points.

Even with their disappointing results at the Western States Shootout, the IceCats still have yet to encounter any legitimate challenger within the Northwest as they vie for their eighth consecutive division crown.

Idaho still has six games in hand on the second-place Warriors in addition to its 14-point lead. It has played fewer games than every team in the division except Seattle, which, like the IceCats, has played 30.

Idaho continues its six-game homestand this weekend as it welcomes Bellingham to Manchester Ice Centre for a three-game set.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (10-17-3, 23 pts)

www.SeattleJrTotems.com

@SeattleJrTotems

Things weren't looking good for the Seattle Totems after they dropped their first two games to Bellingham last week, but the Totems managed to bounce back and salvage two points with a 7-5 win in the series finale.

Forward Bogdan Klotchkov has rejuvenated the Seattle offense. He found the back of the net four times in the win and has a 5-2-7 line since joining Totems during the WSHL Showcase.

Klotchkov's four goals were more than he scored over 32 games with Tahoe during the first half of the year. Perhaps the change of scenery will nudge him back to his form from last season, when he scored at a point-per-game pace with Utah and Tahoe.

At fifth place in the division and eight points behind the next closest team, Seattle is still on the outside looking in on the race for home ice in the postseason. The third and fourth seeds in the division will enjoy home-ice advantage, while the top two clubs will receive a first-round bye.

Seattle will need a second-half revival if it wants to open its playoff schedule in front of its hometown fans at Olympicview Arena.

The Totems have a great opportunity in front of them over the next few weeks. They will begin a six-game homestand this weekend with a three-game set against Tahoe, which will be followed by a single-game matchup with Bellingham and a brief two-game series against West Sound.

That stretch will take them into the first week of February, when they will battle Southern Oregon on the road for a pair of games. With the plethora of division rivals coming up on its schedule, Seattle can potentially get back into the thick of things in the Northwest over the next few weeks.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (8-24-0, 16 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

@wshlspartans

After a long wait, the Southern Oregon Spartans will finally get back to work this weekend at home against West Sound.

The Spartans have not played a game since they blew out San Diego on December 21 in their final game in Las Vegas. The month-long break has provided plenty of rest, but likely made them a little anxious to play another game.

If a second-half turnaround is going to happen, it will need to start soon. With just 19 games left in the regular season, Southern Oregon does not have much time to right the ship.

Fourteen of those 19 contests are at home, giving the Spartans a chance to improve upon their 5-10-0 record at Southern Oregon Ice.

This season has not been the norm for Southern Oregon. It has finished in the top three of the Northwest Division in each of the last three seasons, and has secured a top-three seed in four of its five seasons in the WSHL.

Ultimately, aside from player development, what really matters is the postseason. No matter what happens over the final months of the regular season, the Spartans will qualify for the playoffs. If they can manage a quality second half and build some momentum, making some noise in the tournament is not out of the question.

TAHOE ICEMEN (15-15-3, 33 pts)

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

Like Southern Oregon, the Tahoe Icemen have yet to open the second half. They will kick things off this weekend on the road with three games against Seattle.

As head coach Mickey Lang said last week, the Icemen have big plans for the rest of the season. Most of their first half was used to develop players and give them opportunities to earn roles. From here on out, it's all about winning.

After this weekend's series, Tahoe will begin a tough homestand that will see them take on Western Division-leading Long Beach as well as Idaho and Southern Oregon.

In his fourth WSHL campaign, veteran forward Paul Frys is on pace for his best season yet. With a 25-36-61 line through 33 games, he needs just 11 more points to surpass his career high of 71, set last year with the Vancouver Rangers.

Back in 2014-15, Frys appeared in the 39 games for the West Sound Warriors, who were members of the North Pacific Hockey League at the time. Now, the Warriors are one of Frys' division rivals and the biggest threat to Tahoe's bid for a first-round bye.

This weekend, Frys will likely reach 200 career points. The Portland, Oregon, native is currently 18th on the WSHL's all-time scoring list with 199 points (79-120-199). He needs 36 points to move into the top 10 on the list.

WEST SOUND WARRIORS (18-17-1, 37 pts)

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors are coming off a forgettable series. They were thoroughly dominated for most of the weekend against Idaho last week.

"The biggest thing is we have nine games left until March 1, so we must fine-tune everything," said Warriors Head Coach Ty Smith. "Last weekend was very needed to show our guys where they need to be.

"We must improve in all three phases of the ice, the d-zone to the neutral zone to the o-zone."

West Sound is still clinging to second place, four points ahead of Tahoe. Outside of first-place Idaho, the Northwest Division is one of the league's most competitive. The rest of the division will be gunning for the Warriors' spot for the rest of the regular season.

With 36 games down, West Sound is tied with Phoenix for the third-most games played in the WSHL and has played more contests than anyone else in the Northwest Division. That creates a sense of urgency to pick up points over the team's final 15 games, especially if other Northwest teams have a successful second half.

West Sound's top three scorers – Erik Safstrom (22-37-59), Harrik Koll (28-27-55), and Mattias Wikstrom (13-37-50) – have arguably been the Warriors' three best players. Smith mentioned the impact that the trio has had on the club.

"It's huge to have guys like them," he said. "They have been the backbone of goal scorers, and we will need them going forward. We also need other guys to step up as well from here on out."

--- *Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*