

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.02.18 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (20-15-1, 41 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

Last weekend saw the Fresno Monsters post back-to-back wins over Ontario and Valencia, two teams directly ahead of them in the division standings.

The Monsters poured in nine goals in a dramatic one-goal victory over Ontario on Thursday before putting up another huge offensive game in an 8-3 win over Valencia last Saturday.

Forward Daylon Mannon (50-51-101) has finally reached 100 points on the season, and he still has 14 games left to play. Fellow star Cody Key (46-50-96) is not far behind and could reach the milestone for the first time in his career this weekend.

While Mannon is getting his first taste of WSHL dominance, Key has been doing this for years. The 20-year-old is in his fourth season, three of which have been spent with Fresno.

"Cody is very gifted offensively," said Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "He has a very hard and accurate shot, but also has great vision and hockey sense and is an excellent passer."

With 276 career points (114-162-276) over 178 games, Key could soon make history. He ranks fifth all-time in the league in points and needs just 28 more over Fresno's final stretch of the regular season to enter the top three (where he would join Valencia forward Jacob Kranabetter).

"I'm sure that's on his mind, and it's pretty cool to have a chance to be in the top three," Kaminski said. "To me, he thrives on the offense, he's hungry, and he loves to score or go make a nice play."

"He just has great instincts and has fun using them, and he has become a really good 200-foot hockey player. He's learned to play solid defense and is big on faceoffs."

Key and the Monsters began a three-game set with Phoenix on Thursday night, dropping the series opener by an 8-3 final. They will look to exact revenge over the next two days as they continue an eight-game homestand.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (27-7-4, 58 pts)
@LBBombersHockey
www.JrBombers.org

The Long Beach Bombers had an up-and-down series against Tahoe, with each team recording blowout wins before the Bombers dropped the final contest in overtime.

The Bombers maintained an eight-point lead atop the division after the weekend, adding two more points Thursday night when they defeated Ontario.

The Ontario game was the first of two contests on Long Beach's schedule this week. The Bombers will take on Valencia on the road this Saturday.

Long Beach is in full control of its own destiny, but it has plenty of pivotal games coming up. Its two-game set against Ontario next weekend will either increase its division lead or trim it down, and its three-game set against Fresno at Sellaand Arena from February 15-17 will be one of the biggest series of the year for both clubs.

The Bombers' goaltending corps was bolstered this week with the acquisition of veteran Spencer Kozlowski from Valencia. Kozlowski, who made 33 saves

in his Bombers debut – a 5-3 win over Ontario Thursday night – will provide another reliable veteran between the pipes to take some of the workload from Domenic Bosetti.

Bosetti, who's in the midst of his third WSHL campaign, is once again thriving as a number one goalie. Long Beach Head Coach Chris White spoke of the importance of his experienced goaltender.

"He has been our rock," White said. "I would imagine he has played the most minutes in the WSHL over the past two seasons.

"His best trait is his competitiveness. He never quits on a play, and his quickness is at an elite level. He still has one year of junior eligibility, so we'll see which options he chooses to pursue."

First and foremost, Bosetti's primary focus is bringing the Thorne Cup back to Long Beach. The Bombers' success in the playoffs could potentially be one of the deciding factors in whether Bosetti returns for his final season.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (24-11-2, 50 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

Last week, the Ontario Avalanche shook off a Thursday night loss to Fresno to defeat San Diego and Valencia on consecutive days. The win over Valencia gave Ontario a five-point edge over the Flyers in the division standings.

The Avalanche were unable to keep the momentum going in their only game this week, a 5-3 loss to Long Beach that gave the Bombers some breathing room at the top of the division.

At this point, Ontario is six points back of Long Beach and both clubs have played 37 games. With only two games remaining against the Bombers, the Avs have to hope Long Beach suffers a few setbacks over the next few weeks if they want to have a shot at the division crown.

There was some good that came from the loss. Blueliner Alex Bouchard dished out a pair of assists to push his scoring line 21-30-51, making him the highest-scoring d-man in the league.

Bouchard has hit a new level of play this year after registering 17 points (7-10-17) over 32 games last season. He has points in six of his last seven games, with three multi-point efforts during that stretch.

One of the biggest reasons for Ontario's success this season is its ability to win away from home. It has won 15 of 21 contests in enemy territory, and that record was even better before the Avs suffered losses in Fresno and Long Beach over the past week.

The Avalanche are back in action next weekend with a home-and-home series against Long Beach that could have massive implications on playoff seeding.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (17-21-2, 36 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

Because of their slow start, the Phoenix Knights are stuck in fifth place in the division. But you can bet that no one wants to see Phoenix in the first-round of the postseason.

The Knights, who were off last weekend, started the weekend strong with an 8-3 win over Fresno on Thursday in a potential playoff preview. The series will continue with games on Friday and Saturday evenings.

After netting a pair of goals in the win over Fresno, forward Anthony Massanotti has tied the Knights' single-season record with 33 goals.

It has been a great rookie season for Massanotti, who has posted a line of 33-14-47 and could hit 50 points in the next couple of days.

Phoenix has just 11 games left on its schedule, all against division rivals. After finishing up the series with Fresno this weekend, the Knights will play series against Valencia, San Diego, and Long Beach to finish out the regular season.

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

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers continued their rough second half with a pair of losses to Valencia and Ontario, pushing their losing streak to 12 games, but they have been competitive for most of the streak.

Things won't get much easier, however, as every remaining contest on the Sabers' schedule is against a Western Division opponent. The depth and talent of the division has made for a long, tough season for first-year head coach Petr Kankovsky and his players.

Defenseman Karel Kankovsky (9-31-40) continues to stand out. The rookie is coming off a stretch of 19 points over 20 games in which he logged 34 points (6-28-34).

Kankovsky has posted the seventh-most points in the league among d-men. The 20-year-old Czech played for St. John Bosco High School in Bellflower, California, the previous two seasons, so this is his first taste of North American junior hockey.

The Sabers will get some rest this weekend but are back next week with three games on the road against Fresno.

VALENCIA FLYERS (21-11-3, 45 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers put up a lopsided win over San Diego last weekend before falling to Fresno by five goals the following day.

Similar to the Flyers' season as a whole, the weekend showed off their potential, but also saw them lack consistency.

Despite being in third place and 11 points out of first, Valencia is not out of the race for the division title. It still has four games left against Long Beach, including a one-game matchup at home this weekend.

The Flyers will close out the regular season with a three-game series in Long Beach that, if things go well for Valencia during the month of February, could determine the division winner.

All season long, it has been anticipated that forward Jacob Kranabetter (28-66-94) would become the league's all-time leading scorer sometime toward the end of the regular season. With 15 games left, Kranabetter needs only seven more points to tie Tomas Nemeth's 325-point career.

While it might be too much to ask for the veteran to put up seven points in the Flyers' only game this week, next weekend's two-game set against Phoenix is a realistic target for Kranabetter to set the record.

Another record will also be broken soon, as Kranabetter and forward Dawson Keay (26-33-59) currently sit at 184 and 183 games played with Valencia, respectively. The Flyers' record for games played belongs to Evan Johnson, who appeared in 187 games with the club from 2013 to 2017. Keay is also in

second place on the Flyers' franchise scoring list with 182 points (81-101-182).

Both players have been staples on Valencia's roster over the past few seasons, but that will soon come to an end as both are in their final season with the Flyers.

--- *Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*