

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.08.17 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (18-18-3, 39 pts)

www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com

@Bhamblazers

The Bellingham Blazers were victorious in their only game last week, a Saturday night matchup on the road against struggling West Sound.

The Blazers scored four unanswered goals, and netminder Avery Heath entered the final period with a shutout. But the Warriors tallied a pair of goals in the third frame, including forward Illya Abubakirov's 26th of the season – pushing his line to 26-33-59 – with under a minute to go that made the final score 5-2.

The win pushed Bellingham back to .500 and just four points back of Tahoe and West Sound, which are tied for second place.

At the beginning of the second half, it seemed like the race for the second seed in the Northwest Division would be a two-team battle between Tahoe and West Sound. The Blazers have forced their way into the conversation with improved second-half form.

Bellingham has a three-game series against Idaho looming, and it will be a great chance for it to see how far it has come in the last few weeks. The Blazers were dominated by the IceCats in a series in mid-January.

This weekend, Bellingham will play a pair of home games against Seattle and West Sound. It will take on the Warriors four more times in the regular season, meaning every game will have an impact on the division standings.

IDAHO ICECATS (34-4-1, 69 pts)

www.IdahoIceCats.com

The Idaho IceCats were given all they could handle against Tahoe last weekend, but they pulled through for another sweep to stretch their winning streak to 12 games.

Idaho was able to clinch its eighth consecutive division title over the weekend, increasing its lead atop the division to a staggering 26 points.

While they haven't lost a game in the second half, the IceCats have faced exclusively Northwest Division opponents in 2018. They will begin what is perhaps their toughest two-week stretch of the season this weekend with a three-game set on the road against Utah.

After the Utah series, Idaho will be tasked with three home games against Ogden the following weekend. Idaho dropped two of three to Ogden earlier in the year, while it has yet to take on Utah.

Forward Lance Herning continues to pile up points. Herning has collected a team-leading 64 points (35-29-64) and has already set a new career high in goals.

Herning needs 14 more points to equal his output of 80 in last year's regular season. The IceCats have 12 games left, so the 20-year-old will accomplish the feat later in the month if he continues to score at his current pace.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (10-22-6, 26 pts)

www.SeattleJrTotems.com

[@SeattleJrTotems](https://twitter.com/SeattleJrTotems)

A pair of narrow losses to Southern Oregon last weekend has pushed the Seattle Totems dangerously close to last place in the division.

After falling by two goals in the first contest, the Totems secured a much-needed point in the second game by virtue of an overtime loss.

While most clubs in the Northwest Division have chosen to stand pat as the trade deadline approaches, Seattle made a splash this week as they sent forwards Tom Ignatovich and Tyler Glovan to Colorado in exchange for forward Christopher Calabrese and goaltender Anthony Carlier.

Ignatovich (25-25-50) and Glovan (9-16-25) were both having strong seasons and should help Colorado as it vies for a division crown in the competitive Mountain Division.

Calabrese (3-3-6) and Carlier, who joined Colorado at the outset of the second half, are both young players with multiple seasons of eligibility remaining.

Carlier has appeared in only three games this season. His best start came on January 19 when he stopped 27 of 28 shots in 6-1 win over Casper. Hopefully, the Michigan native will have similar performances for the Totems down the stretch.

This weekend, Seattle will battle Bellingham on the road Friday night before coming back home to Olympicview Arena for a Sunday afternoon matchup against West Sound.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (11-28-1, 23 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

@wshlspartans

The Southern Oregon Spartans continue to fight their way out of the basement. The improved Spartans' strong second half gained even more momentum last weekend as the club took down Seattle on consecutive days at home.

The two-game set concluded a nine-game homestand. The Spartans used the stretch to show their fans they are a much better team than their first-half results would indicate.

"We have been making small improvements throughout the whole season," said Southern Oregon Head Coach Denis Creighton. "With some of our veteran players getting healthy now, we are starting to come together nicely at the right time."

The Spartans' first-round playoff series will be played against Tahoe, West Sound, or Bellingham. It's doubtful that any of those clubs are excited by the idea of a first-round series against Southern Oregon.

Veteran backstop Austin Toussaint is one of the most important pieces on the Spartans' roster. The third-year North Dakota product has singlehandedly willed Southern Oregon to victory multiple times this season, and he's carrying a heavier workload than ever before.

Even with the offseason addition of rookie netminder Krystof Holub, Toussaint has logged nearly 1,500 minutes of ice time and is on pace for the most playing time of any season in his career.

"Austin in a big part of our success," added Creighton. "He gives us a chance to win every night, and that's all you can ask of your goalie. He has also been a great leader for this team on and off the ice."

Southern Oregon will take on Tahoe on the road this weekend in a three-game set. The two teams have not met since the first week of the regular season.

TAHOE ICEMEN (20-19-3, 43 pts)

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

The Tahoe Icemen had a chance to take over second place in the division last weekend, but the stifling defense and overall talent of Idaho proved to be too much as the Icemen were swept by the IceCats in three games.

It didn't help that Idaho was fighting to clinch the division title. Luckily for Tahoe, West Sound lost its only game of the week and remains tied with the Icemen at 43 points apiece.

Tahoe will begin a stretch of six games against Southern Oregon beginning this week at South Lake Tahoe Arena.

Captain Paul Frys' (35-50-85) career year continued last weekend with a seven-point series (4-3-7) against Tahoe. The 21-year-old can essentially be counted on for production every game.

Frys is riding a 21-game point streak that dates back to mid-November. He has registered at least one point in all but four of his 42 appearances.

Heading into this weekend, Frys is eighth in the league scoring race and just nine points out of the top five. He leads the entire Northwest Division in scoring and has also provided a reliable veteran presence in the Icemen locker room.

WEST SOUND WARRIORS (21-20-1, 43 pts)

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors could not shake off their recent struggles last week as they fell to Bellingham at home.

The Blazers have been the Warriors Achilles' heel for most of the season. West Sound has dropped eight of 10 games against Bellingham, including two in the last week.

The Warriors still have five games left against the Blazers this season, including Saturday in Bellingham. It gives them plenty of time to right the ship and prepare for a potential playoff series against their intrastate rivals.

Despite being in second place in the Northwest, West Sound owns a goal differential of minus-13. Even though Idaho is the only team in the division with a positive differential, it represents an issue if the Warriors want to make a run in the postseason.

All of West Sound's remaining games are against Tahoe, Bellingham, and Seattle, so they are in full control of their own destiny in terms of playoff seeding.

After this weekend's games against Bellingham and Seattle, the Warriors' only other contest in the month of February will be played against the Blazers on the 23rd. The additional time off gives head coach Ty Smith's squad plenty of time to prepare for a packed March schedule.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media