

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.15.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (20-18-3, 43 pts)
www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com
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The Bellingham Blazers seem to have turned a corner, winning six games in a row and pulling themselves into a third-place tie with West Sound.

Last weekend, the Blazers posted back-to-back wins over Seattle and West Sound, further cementing themselves as one of the better teams in the division.

"We certainly have played better as of late, even with all of the injuries we've had," said Blazers Head Coach Mark Collins. "We are starting to play a full 60 minutes the way that I want and have increased our tempo at practice."

One of the most important aspects of the turnaround is Bellingham's improved offense. A team that struggled to score goals for much of the first half is averaging nearly six goals per contest during the winning streak.

The Blazers are still six points out of the second seed, but they do have four games in hand on second-place Tahoe. A strong finish could allow them to surpass the Icemen in the final weeks of the regular season.

"I'm not sure that we can get to second, but it would be nice," Collins said. "Tahoe might be tough to catch at this point."

This week, the Blazers are working to prepare for a three-game set on the road against Southern Oregon, a squad that has gone through plenty of growing pains but has looked rejuvenated in recent games.

"It will be tough," Collins continued. "It seems that Southern Oregon is a lot stronger than at the start of the year and they have a solid number one goalie. We will just have to continue to play like we have been as of late and find ways to score."

Bellingham added to its depth at the trade deadline, bringing in defenseman Raymond Beaudry and forward Forrest Chaffee from Ontario. Beaudry, 20, appeared in 19 games with the Avalanche, registering an assist with two PIMs. Chaffee, 18, scored three goals and picked up a pair of assists in 14 games.

IDAHO ICECATS (37-4-1, 75 pts)

www.IdahoIceCats.com

It seems that every year under general manager and head coach John Olver, the Idaho IceCats give it their all each and every game, no matter the circumstances.

Even though Idaho wrapped up the division title a couple of weeks ago, it played a fantastic series over the weekend as it swept Utah in three games, knocking the Outliers out of first place in the Mountain Division.

Before the series, Utah had suffered only six regulation losses all season. That number shot up to nine after the IceCats came to town.

Idaho has now built a 15-game winning streak, the longest of any club in the WSHL. It trails only El Paso, which has won 40 of 42 games.

The IceCats' goaltenders continue to dominate, even against tough competition. Tyler Matthews (1.57, .941) leads the league in save percentage while Jacob Hough (1.66/.931) is third.

Matthews hails from West Chester, Ohio, while Hough is a native of Cheat Lake, West Virginia. Olver's ability to identify and recruit talent from all over the country has been one of the main reasons for his club's success.

The IceCats could potentially follow up their strong showing in Utah by taking down the new Mountain Division leader, Ogden. They will take on the Mustangs this weekend at home, with the final game taking place at CenturyLink Arena.

Idaho head coach and general manager John Olver did not stay on the sidelines at the deadline, bringing in four players from Sweden to bolster the roster.

Forwards Casper Sjodin and Marcus Jernberg, and goaltender Victor Ojdal join the IceCats from SK Lejon while defenseman Mauro Lorenz comes over from Helsingborgs HC.

The IceCats also sent goaltender Shaun Brown to Ogden.

The new players are not expected to join the lineup in time for this weekend's games.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (11-23-6, 28 pts)

www.SeattleJrTotems.com

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

After a six-goal loss to Bellingham last weekend, the Seattle Totems were able to regroup well enough to post a 6-4 triumph at home over sliding West Sound.

At this point in the year, every point is critical. Even though Seattle is a longshot to finish outside of one of the bottom two spots in the division, the Totems were able to increase the gap between themselves and last-place Southern Oregon to five points.

For whatever reason, Seattle has been markedly better on the road than it has in front of its home fans. The Totems have posted a respectable 8-10-2 record in opposing arenas while winning just three of their 20 home games.

One factor in that discrepancy is probably the difficulty of the Totems' home schedule to this point. They have played several home games against Idaho, Tahoe, and West Sound. West Sound, in particular, was red-hot when it visited Olympicview Arena a few times toward the end of the first half.

With the departure of Tom Ignatovich, forward Michael Shippee is now the unquestioned go-to option of offense. With a scoring line of 26-43-69 that ranks third in the division and among the top 20 in the WSHL, Shippee is enjoying a career year in his second season with his hometown Totems.

The 19-year-old still has multiple years of eligibility left, and if he keeps improving at this rate, he could be one of the league's premier scorers in the near future should he choose to remain with Seattle.

Ignatovich was dealt to the Colorado Jr. Eagles along with Tyler Goclan for forward Christopher Calabrese and goaltender Anthony Carlier.

This weekend, the Totems begin the brutal end to their regular season with a three-game series on the road against Ontario.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (11-31-1, 23 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

@wshlspartans

Another commendable effort from the Southern Oregon Spartans bore no results as the club was swept in a three-game series in Tahoe.

The Spartans came closest to winning in the second game, when they built a 2-0 lead heading into the third period before allowing three unanswered goals while putting only two shots on goal.

The late collapse proved to be too much to come back from in the series finale on Sunday afternoon, when Tahoe cruised to an 8-3 victory.

There was one positive that came from the series, however, as leading scorer Joel Holmberg hit 50 points (24-26-50) on the season with a goal and a helper in Sunday's loss.

Holmberg, who appeared in two games with El Paso early in the season, has been the focal point of the Spartans' offense. The 20-year-old rookie from Sweden has scored or assisted on about 40 percent of Southern Oregon's 123 goals.

The Spartans have three series remaining. After taking on streaking Bellingham this weekend, they will look for revenge as they welcome Tahoe to Medford, Oregon, before closing out the regular season with a two-game set against Seattle during the first weekend of March.

TAHOE ICEMEN (23-19-3, 49 pts)

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

The Tahoe Icemen had a great week, sweeping Southern Oregon as they finished a nine-game homestand and completed the home portion of their regular-season schedule.

The Icemen should be considered the favorite to land the second seed in the division. They have built a six-point gap between themselves and Bellingham and West Sound, two clubs that are tied for third.

Tahoe recently added blueliner Eric Easterson, the 16-year-old brother of Icemen forward Easton Easterson (14-10-24). He will be one of the youngest players in the league.

But the Icemen didn't stop there, as they acquired two other players from Utah: defenseman Kevyn McElligot and right wing Locke Wischmann.

McElligot, 18, is Montreal product who is playing his second season of junior hockey. The 6-foot, 190-pounder has previously played for the O-Town Rebels and the Muskoka Wild of the Canadian Premier Junior Hockey League.

Wishmann is slightly undersized with a 5-foot-8, 165-pound frame but has a good offensive skillset with 18 points (9-9-18) on the year. The New York native has appeared in multiple prep leagues over the past couple of seasons, including nine games last season with St. Francis High (NY) in the Midwest Prep Hockey League.

Tahoe's regular season is starting to wind down. It is off this week, but it will be back in action next weekend to kick off a six-game road trip with three games in Southern Oregon.

WEST SOUND WARRIORS (21-22-1, 43 pts)

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

With less than a month left until the playoffs, the West Sound Warriors seem to have hit a bump in the road. The Warriors have dropped five of their last six games, including each of their last four.

Prior to that stretch, the Warriors looked like one of Idaho's strongest challengers within the division. Now, the club needs to improve its play if it wants to get a shot at the IceCats, who will very likely qualify for the division finals.

Last weekend saw West Sound drop consecutive games to division rivals Bellingham and Seattle. While both games were close and the Blazers are hotter than they have been all season, it's the time of year when divisional losses become more and more damaging.

Nevertheless, the Warriors have proven they can compete with anyone in the Northwest, meaning West Sound fans shouldn't have too much to worry about.

The Warriors are off this weekend and will play their final game in the month of February next Friday night in Bellingham with an opportunity to exact revenge on the Blazers.

After that, West Sound will be tasked with six games over the course of 10 days when the calendar flips to March. That includes a three-game set at home against Tahoe that could be the Warriors' last chance to creep closer to the Icemen in the standings and steal a first-round bye.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media