

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.22.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (23-18-3, 49 pts)
www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com
@Bhamblazers

Another strong week has pushed the Bellingham Blazers into a second-place tie and stretched their winning streak to nine games.

The Blazers, who have spent most of the season near the bottom of the division, seem to have figured things out as the postseason draws near. They swept Southern Oregon last weekend and are one of the league's hottest teams.

Despite his team's recent success, Bellingham Head Coach Mark Collins knows there's still plenty of time left in the regular season.

"I still feel like it will be difficult to catch Tahoe and finish in second place," Collins said. "Much will be riding on what happens between Tahoe and Southern Oregon this weekend."

Collins may be wise to temper his expectations, as his team is slated to take on powerhouse Idaho in a three-game set at home next weekend. Idaho is a club against which the Blazers have yet to log a competitive game.

"As far as Idaho, they were able to add even more players and will most likely be more difficult," Collins continued. "We will need to be very diligent with our preparation in order to steal a couple games from them."

The Idaho series will be preceded by this Friday night's matchup against West Sound at Bellingham Sportsplex. It's a game the Blazers will almost certainly need to win to have any shot at the first-round bye that comes with finishing in second place.

"It is certainly nice to be at home over the next few games," Collins said. "We have found a way to win on the road, and hopefully we can carry that momentum into these home series."

IDAHO ICECATS (39-4-2, 80 pts)

www.IdahoIceCats.com

After beating Ogden in the first two games of a three-game set last weekend, the Idaho IceCats suffered a rare loss via a shootout in the final contest.

The loss put a halt to the IceCats' winning streak, which ended at 17 games. It was their first defeat of the second half, and only their sixth of the season.

For the second week in a row, Idaho took on the Mountain Division leader. It swept Utah to knock the Outliers out of first place in the division a couple of weeks ago before holding Ogden to just two points last weekend, creating a tie between the two teams at the top of the division.

The two-week stretch against Utah and Ogden was considered the IceCats' biggest test of the second half, and they passed with flying colors. With victories in five of six games and 11 of 12 possible points earned, Idaho proved that it can match up well with the best the Mountain Division has to offer.

Over the next couple of weeks, the IceCats will close out their regular season. After taking on Seattle at home this weekend, they will travel to Bellingham for a three-game set against the surging Blazers.

The remaining games will give Idaho plenty of time to work in some new faces on its roster as it vies for its sixth Thorne Cup title.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (11-26-6, 28 pts)

www.SeattleJrTotems.com

[@SeattleJrTotems](#)

The Seattle Totems fought hard against a tough Ontario squad on the road last weekend but could not keep up with the Avalanche, who are fighting for a potential Western Division crown.

All three contests were close, and Seattle led 3-1 midway through the second period on Sunday before Ontario took control in the third for a 7-5 win.

Over the final few weeks of the regular season, Seattle will be tasked with what is arguably the toughest schedule in the league.

After taking on Idaho on the road this weekend, the Totems will close out their regular season with a five-game homestand that will feature series against Southern Oregon and Fresno.

Southern Oregon will be hungry, as the two-game set could potentially represent its last chance to leapfrog Seattle and avoid a last-place finish.

Heading into this weekend, Fresno is just five points out of first in the Western Division and is in the midst of a dogfight with Long Beach and Ontario, meaning it will need all the points it can get.

All in all, it's clear there will be no easy wins for the Totems from here on out. They'll need to earn it if they hope to hang onto fifth place and likely play a first-round series against West Sound.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (11-34-1, 23 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

[@wshlspartans](#)

The Southern Oregon Spartans ran into a Bellingham team playing its best hockey of the season and suffered a three-game sweep, failing to pick up any points and staying in sixth place with five games left on their schedule.

Southern Oregon has lost some heartbreakers over the past couple of weeks, leading to its current six-game losing streak, including last week's 2-0 setback against the Blazers.

If the Spartans can't pull off a win or two in this weekend's three-game tilt against Tahoe, they will have one more chance to right the ship before the playoffs: a two-game series in Seattle next weekend that marks the end of their regular season.

Forward Joel Holmberg has proven to be a reliable go-to option this season with 53 points (26-27-53) over 35 contests, making him the club's leading scorer by a wide margin.

Other than Holmberg, the only player scoring at a point-per-game pace is Yanneck Kumli, who has posted a 14-24-38 line over 34 appearances while racking up 100 penalty minutes.

Axel Low (8-24-32) is also having a nice season, but after that there is a drop-off in production. Holmberg and Kumli are the only two Spartans with double-digit goals.

Offensive depth has been a problem all season for Southern Oregon, and the club will need some of its under-the-radar scorers to step up over the next few weeks.

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

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

The Tahoe Icemen have a legitimate challenger for the second seed in the division, as Bellingham took advantage of the multiple games in hand it had on the Icemen to tie Tahoe at 49 points apiece.

The Icemen, who were off last weekend, are set to kick off their final road trip of the season this weekend with a three-game set in Southern Oregon.

The six-game trip will conclude next weekend with three contests in West Sound against the struggling Warriors to mark the end of the regular season for Tahoe.

This weekend's series will give the Icemen an opportunity to suit up their new additions for the first time. Tahoe acquired Eric Easterson, Locke Wischman, and Kevyn McElligot prior to last week's trade deadline.

But that's not only thing Icemen fans can look forward to this week. Star forward Paul Frys (38-57-95) is on the verge of hitting the 100-point mark for the first time in his career.

Frys, who was chosen as Tahoe's captain in his first season with the club, is having his best season by a landslide. He has posted 19 points (7-12-19) through six games against Southern Oregon, so there's a good chance the veteran will have another productive series.

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

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors have struggled to the finish line after an impressive start to the second half of the season.

The Warriors have lost five of their last six games and each of their last four. They have seven games left to right the ship, which will need to happen if they hope to make a run in the playoffs.

A good start would be winning their only game this week when they host Bellingham on Friday night. A win over the streaking Blazers would allow West Sound to regain its confidence and build some momentum as it heads into March.

Depending on what happens over the next few weeks, the Warriors will take on Seattle or Southern Oregon in the first round of the Northwest Division playoffs.

No matter which club West Sound faces, it will have the luxury of home-ice advantage. Even though the Warriors' home and away records are quite similar this season, playing in front of their home fans in a playoff atmosphere should provide a big advantage.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media