

WSHL DIVISION SEMIFINAL WRAP-UP; March 22 - March 25, 2018



Utah Outliers photo

Five of eight series went to a third and deciding game in the division semifinal round of the 2018 Thorne Cup playoffs over the weekend. When the dust settled, the favorites were still standing. The only "upset" was Fresno recovering from a Game One loss in Ontario to topple the Avalanche on the road, but both teams won the same number of games in the regular season, so it was an upset in name only.

At the end of the day, the top two seeds advanced in the Mountain Division, but both series went right down to the wire with the higher-seeded team losing Game One on home ice, staying alive with a Game Two win, then holding on to win Game Three at the buzzer or in overtime.

Regular season division champions Long Beach (Western) and Utah (Mountain) faced challenges from #4 seeds in their respective series but persevered - by a single goal in overtime in Utah's case.

Overall, these eight series served as a testament to the depth that exists around the Western States Hockey League this season.

WESTERN DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#5 Phoenix Knights (23-26-2) at

#1 Long Beach Bombers (36-11-4)

GAME 1 Thursday, March 22 Long Beach 7, Phoenix 2

GAME 2 Friday, March 23 Phoenix 3, Long Beach 2 (OT)

GAME 3 Saturday, March 24 Long Beach 5, Phoenix 2

Long Beach wins series, 2 games to 1; advances to play Fresno

Anthony Masanotti and the Phoenix Knights made the top-seeded Long Beach Bombers work for their berth in the 2018 Western Division Final, forcing a third and deciding game with an overtime win in Game Two. But the Bombers rose to the challenge and will play in their third straight division final.

Masanotti scored twice early in the second period for Phoenix to tie Game One on Thursday, but the Bombers scored late in the frame to restore their lead, then added four unanswered goals in the third period for a 7-2 win.

Long Beach goaltender Spencer Kozlowski (36 saves) stopped all 11 shots he faced in the third period to secure the win for the Bombers, who seemingly regained control of the series they were favored to win.

But Phoenix was not going to go quietly. The Knights, who lost their first 15 games of the season only to fall just short of a .500 record and a top-four finish in the division, were a much different team in the second half of the season and posted impressive wins against top opponents.

Game Two was playoff hockey for sure. The game was tied, 2-2, throughout a scoreless third period with the shots even, 13-13. The game went to overtime with Phoenix playing for their lives and Long Beach hoping to finish things and avoid an elimination game on Saturday.

7:36 into sudden death, Phoenix sniper Masanotti skated across the Long Beach blue line at the middle of the ice and, using a Bombers defenseman as a screen, put a slap shot just under the bar over Domenic Bosetti's glove. It was one of the biggest goals -

if not *the* biggest - in Knights franchise history, and it gave the team an opportunity to play in an even bigger game the next day.

Bosetti made 40 saves in the game for the Bombers while Owen Petten stopped 34 of 36 shots for Phoenix.

Andrius Bermejo scored with 41 seconds left in the first period to give Phoenix a 2-1 lead. With the Bombers on the power play, two Long Beach players mis-handled a pass in the neutral zone and Michael Caravella snagged the puck, skated down the left wing, and made a 180-degree spin, tossing a backhand pass to Bermejo as he cut to the net. Bermejo finished to give the Knights their first lead of the series.

Tomas Urbanec, who scored both Bombers goals, scored the lone goal of the second period to tie the game back up, 2-2, and set the stage for Masanotti's OT winner.

The regular season division champs found themselves with their backs to the wall on Saturday and showed the type of resilience you need to be a champion.

The Knights scored 22 seconds after the puck drop, and another goal by Masanotti gave them a 2-1 lead early in the second period, but the Bombers came back to tie both times. Three goals in a span of 5:19 late in the second period gave them a two-goal lead going into the third.

Phoenix out-shot Long Beach, 14-6, in the third period, but Morgan Soderstrom added an insurance tally late and the Bombers are on their way back to the division final after a 5-2 win.

Kozlowski was back in the crease and turned aside 34 of 36 shots - including all 14 sent his way by the Knights in the third period - to quell any chance Phoenix had of making a comeback.

Petten made 31 of his 36 saves through the first two periods for Phoenix.

WESTERN DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#3 Fresno Monsters (33-17-1) at

#2 Ontario Avalanche (33-15-3)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 Ontario 8, Fresno 7 (OT)

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 Fresno 5, Ontario 0

GAME 3 Sunday, March 25 Fresno 5, Ontario 1

Fresno wins series, 2 games to 1; advances to play Long Beach

The Western Division semifinal between the Ontario Avalanche and Fresno Monsters was destined to be a close one, with both teams winning the same number of games during the regular season. And close it was. The Avalanche won Game One in overtime, but the Monsters rallied to win twice on the road while facing elimination.

The opener was a wild one with the home team coughing up a three-goal lead only to recover and win in overtime.

The Avalanche took a 6-3 lead into the third period of Game One on Friday only to see the Monsters score four unanswered goals to take a 7-6 lead.

David Sovik's third goal of the game for the Avalanche, with 6:32 left in regulation, completed a hat trick and tied the game back up, 7-7, and forced overtime.

3:51 into sudden-death, Ontario's William Ma swept the puck out of the Av's zone and Sovik beat a Fresno defender to the puck on the left wing boards. He poked it ahead to Jeremy Van Dyke who skated in on his off-wing and beat Monsters goalie Kyle Franceschini with a shot up over his glove to end the game.

Van Dyke also had three assists in the game and Ma (1-4-5) picked up his fourth assist of the game on the winning goal.

Filip Subrt's 46th save of the game was his biggest. Just under three and a half minutes into sudden-death, a horrible turnover in the Ontario end sent Deivids Tempelmanis in alone right up the middle, but Subrt snagged his slapper with his glove to buy the Avalanche some more time.

Daylon Mannon (2-2-4), Nikita Anistratenko (2-1-3) and Tempelmanis (2-1-3) all scored twice in the game for Fresno and Franceschini made 39 saves for the Monsters.

Max Karlenzig was between the pipes for the Monsters in Saturday's Game Two. He faced 25 shots - 11 of them in the first period - and stopped them all to backstop Fresno to a 5-0 win that squared the series.

Tempelmanis found the net in each period for a hat trick and Anistratenko picked up a pair of assists.

Connor Duffy was between the pipes for the Avalanche and faced 50 shots. He made 35 of his 45 saves in the first two periods and kicked out 18 of 19 shots in the first period alone.

Fresno again led 3-0 after one period in Game Three and that strong start was enough to propel them to a 5-1 series-clinching win.

Monsters head coach Kevin Kaminski went right back to Karlenzig in net and he stopped 29 of 30, meaning he allowed just one goal on 55 shots over the course of two elimination games.

WSHL scoring champ Daylon Mannon scored twice in the game for Fresno, as did Anistratenko.

Sovik scored the Ontario goal early in the second period to get the Avs within two goals at 3-1, but Ontario was unable to build any momentum from there.

NORTHWEST DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#4 West Sound Warriors (21-29-1) at

#1 Idaho IceCats (44-4-3)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 Idaho 13, West Sound 2

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 Idaho 11, West Sound 0

Idaho wins series, 2 games to 0; advances to play Tahoe

There was a great deal of intrigue around the league over the weekend, but not so much in Idaho. The IceCats took care of business with a convincing two-game sweep of the West Sound Warriors.

Idaho opened their post-season with a 13-2 win on Friday.

Lance Herning (3-2-5), Matthew Kindred (1-5-6), and Alexander Piliya (2-3-5) lead the scoring parade for Idaho. Jackson York and Jacob Hedencrona each had a goal and three assists.

The Icemen closed out the series with an 11-0 win on Saturday. Herning (2-3-5), Piliya (2-2-4) and Andreas Otto (2 goals) led the way and provided more than enough offense for Victor Ojdal, who recorded the shutout in his WSHL post-season debut.

Robbie Brennan made 45 saves for the Warriors before being lifted in the third period.

NORTHWEST DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#3 Bellingham Blazers (28-20-3) at

#2 Tahoe Icemen (28-20-3)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 Tahoe 5, Bellingham 1

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 Tahoe 9, Bellingham 6

Tahoe wins series, 2 games to 0; advances to play Idaho

The Tahoe Icemen and Bellingham Blazers finished with identical records during the regular season, so there was some anticipation around this series. Tahoe won in two games, out-scoring Bellingham 14-7 in the process, but both games were closer than the final score may indicate.

Game One was tied 1-1 in the second period, but three Icemen scored three unanswered goals in the middle frame to take a 4-1 lead. That would be all of the scoring until Mitch Hunt added a goal for Tahoe in garbage time.

Paul Frys scored the tying goal for the Icemen in the first period and the game-winner 6:21 into the second. About 30 seconds after play resumed following an extended delay (timekeeper), Frys out-skated two Bellingham defenders with the puck and cut to his backhand to score the go-ahead goal.

Frys scored again at 17:21 of the second period to complete his hat trick and give the Icemen a three-goal lead.

Maximilian Haselbacher gave up the first goal of the game, as Bellingham's Ilya Abubakirov scored 1:12 after the opening faceoff, then shut the door the rest of the way, finishing with 24 saves.

Tahoe led, 2-0, after the first period on Saturday, but the Blazers came storming back with five goals in the second period as the game was tied, 3-3, then 4-4, then 5-5 heading into the final period. Each time Bellingham tied the game up, Tahoe would come up with another go-ahead goal.

But the Icemen came out on home ice and scored three times in a span of 3:57 early in the third period to take control of the game and the series.

Justin Poirier scored twice in the third period for Tahoe and Frys scored twice and collected assists on five of the other seven goals for a seven-point game (2-5-7).

Both teams stuck with their starting goaltenders throughout the high-scoring affair. Maximilian Haselbacher (32 saves) stopped all 12 shots he faced in the first period as the Blazers carried play early on, and made the saves when he needed to later in the game.

Bellingham netminder Kolter Pawlick made 21 of his 40 saves in the third period.

Ryuslan Novruzov scored twice and Robbie Eichelberger picked up three assists for the Blazers.

MOUNTAIN DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#4 Superior RoughRiders (25-25-1) at

#1 Utah Outliers (39-11-1)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 Superior 2, Utah 1

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 Utah 4, Superior 2

GAME 3 Sunday, March 25 Utah 2, Superior 1 (OT)

Utah wins series, 2 games to 1; advances to play Ogden

As we pointed out in the preview for this series, the Superior RoughRiders were essentially looked upon as the fourth team in a three-team race and, as a result, were overlooked quite a bit in the Mountain Division discussion this season. They made a statement in this series, pushing the division champion Utah Outliers to the limit and coming with a single goal of pulling off what would have been a huge upset.

The RoughRiders, backstopped by Marshall Murphy's stellar goaltending, stayed with Utah all night on Friday. As the game wore on, the chances of an upset started to creep in.

Playing four-on-four late in regulation, Superior's Nikita Sheberov raced down the ice to beat the Utah defensemen to the puck and negate an icing call. He headed behind the Utah cage, but slid a backhand pass to David Waterman in front at the last instant. Waterman tucked the puck between the pads of Dawson Rodin to give the RoughRiders their first lead of the game with 4:15 left.

Murphy had to be sharp for Superior, making 35 saves, including all 16 shots the Outliers put on him in the third period.

Utah out-shot Superior in all three periods, and 36-16 for the game, but Murphy gave the 'Riders a chance and they made good on it.

Superior found itself down 4-0 in the third period of Game Two but, knowing there was going to be a Game Three on Sunday for all the marbles, they kept playing and scored a pair to make it a 4-2 final.

Utah's Brandon Krumpschmid scored the only goal of the first period. He tallied three of the four goals in the game for the Outliers.

Sheberov ruined Rodin's shutout bid 37 seconds into the third period and Chase Taleghani added one later for the RoughRiders. Rodin made 16 saves in the game.

Murphy made 21 saves before giving way to Bronson Sudberry for the third period as Superior head coach Paul DePuydt tried to keep his #1 goaltender fresh for Sunday's third and deciding game. Sudberry faced 22 shots in the final period, allowing just two goals.

There was a quick turnaround for Game Three as the two teams returned to the ice for a 12:15 p.m. puck drop, and Murphy stood on his head again, but was the tough-luck loser in a game where he stopped 41 of 43 shots.

Each team managed just one goal in regulation. Almost 16 minutes into sudden death, Zach Dornseifer moved from behind the Superior net and tried to center the puck to Jacob Wanstrom as he close in on the front of the net. The puck was knocked away to the side of the net, but Wanstrom fired it off Murphy from a severe angle - behind the goal line - and it ricocheted in off his rib cage and across the line to give the Outliers a dramatic win in the game and in the series.

Utah out-shot Superior, 15-5, in a scoreless first period, then both teams scored in the second. Oskars Ancitis broke the ice 1:06 into the period, carrying the puck out from behind the Superior net, maneuvering himself into the slot, and burying a wrist shot.

Superior's David Waterman evened the score midway through the period with the RoughRiders on a five-minute power play.

The third period also went by without any scoring, as Murphy and Rodin both made big saves with the season on the line. Murphy stopped 37 of 38 shots through regulation. Rodin kicked out 27 of 28 shots for Utah.

MOUNTAIN DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#3 Colorado Jr. Eagles (32-12-7) at

#2 Ogden Mustangs (38-12-1)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 Colorado 3, Ogden 1

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 Ogden 5, Colorado 4

GAME 3 Sunday, March 25 Ogden 6, Colorado 5

Ogden wins series, 2 games to 1; advances to play Utah

One of the more highly-anticipated series of the division semifinal round certainly did not disappoint. The Ogden Mustangs dropped Game One to Colorado, then pulled off a pair of one-goal wins to take back the series in front of their fans.

Colorado, the lower seed, set the tone for the series by keeping Ogden's lethal top line off the board and winning Game One, 3-1.

The Jr. Eagles scored two quick goals early in the second period to go up, 3-0. Vincent Mastrandrea scored in the first minute of the frame and Tom Ignatovich added one at 3:03.

Kerry Kruzel put Ogden on the board late in the period to give the Mustangs some life.

The Mustangs out-shot the Jr. Eagles, 16-7, in a scoreless third period but Braden Lajoie was sharp in the Colorado net. He allowed just one of 44 shots to elude him in the game. Ogden's Tymen Edelkoort made 25 saves at the other end.

Ian Currie's third goal of the game came with 1:08 left in regulation and gave the Mustangs a 5-4 win in Game Two, keeping Ogden alive.

Harry Gulliver centered the puck to Currie who was unable to corral the pass on his backhand. The puck bounced off a skate, however, and back to Currie who was able to spin and fire the puck past Lajoie (31 saves) to his stick side and the Mustangs lived to fight another day.

The Jr. Eagles came back from 2-0 and 3-2 deficits and led midway through the third period. Dawson Keay scored with just two seconds left in the second period to tie the game, 3-3, then Trent Hines scored an unassisted goal 8:40 into the third to give Colorado their first lead of the game.

The Mustangs found themselves with their backs against the wall, but came up big when they needed to. Currie scored just 1:36 after Hines to tie the game, 4-4, then went on to provide the game-winner.

Edelkoort made 40 saves, stopping 21 of 22 shots in the second period alone.

With a 1:30 p.m. puck drop for Game Three, Colorado head coach Steve Haddon turned to a fresh Will McEwen to start in goal. Ogden out-shot Colorado, 19-6, in the first period, but McEwen kept the Mustangs off the board.

Matus Spodniak broke the ice 3:27 into the second period and finally broke out with a four-point game (2-2-4).

After a scoreless first period, the two teams combined for nine goals in the middle frame. The Jr. Eagles scored on five of their eight shots, scoring four times in a span of 5:14 to turn a three-goal deficit into a 4-3 lead. McEwen gave way to Lajoie midway through the period.

Jacob Laurin scored 3:35 into the third period to give Ogden a 6-4 lead and that turned out to be the game-winner as Colorado scored three minutes later to get back within a goal, but Edelkoort and the Mustangs shut the door for the final 13:46 to hold on for a 6-5 win and a spot in the Mountain Division Final.

MID-WESTERN DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#4 Dallas Snipers (13-38-0) at

#1 El Paso Rhinos (49-1-1)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 El Paso 11, Dallas 0

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 El Paso 10, Dallas 0

El Paso wins series, 2 games to 0; advances to play Oklahoma City

As expected, the division semifinal series between the WSHL's most dominant team of the regular season, the El Paso Rhinos, and the #4 seed Dallas Snipers was a one-sided affair.

Phillip Pugliese (4-2-6) and Leeam Tivers (3 goals) led the charge for the Rhinos in an 11-0 win in Game One. Filip Krasanovsky, who recorded 11 shutouts during the regular season, posted a clean sheet in his Thorne Cup playoff debut.

Manny Legace (30 saves) and Brady Weiss (29 saves) split the goaltending duties for Dallas.

Game Two went by on Saturday without any drama. El Paso went up 3-0 in the first period and extended the lead with five unanswered goals in the second on their way to a 10-0 win.

Three goals in the first 3:31 of the second period did away with any intrigue.

Logan Orem (2-2-4) and Donald Alchin, Jr. (2-1-3) each scored two goals.

Evan Williams handled the goaltending duties for Dallas, making 39 of his 50 saves through the first two periods.

MID-WESTERN DIVISION SEMIFINAL - SERIES A

#3 Springfield Express (29-16-6) at

#2 Oklahoma City Blazers (42-7-2)

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 Oklahoma City 7, Springfield 4

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 Springfield 2, Oklahoma City 1 (OT)

GAME 3 Sunday, March 25 Oklahoma City 11, Springfield 2

Oklahoma City wins series, 2 games to 1; advances to play El Paso

The best-of-three Mid-Western Division Semifinal series between the Oklahoma City Blazers and the Springfield Express was expected to be a dandy and it was for the first two games. The Blazers won the opener, Springfield staved off elimination with an OT win Saturday, then OKC dominated in the rubber match to advance.

Oklahoma City opened the series with a 7-4 win, but had to come from behind in a back-and-forth affair in Game One. Two goals in the first 3:42 of the second period broke a 2-2 tie and put the visiting Express ahead, 4-2. Then the Blazers scored twice in 16 seconds to tie the game back up, 4-4, at the end of two.

Oklahoma City scored three unanswered goals in a span of 4:52 early in the third period to go ahead, 7-4, and clamped down the rest of the way to make that the final. Patrick Tondl scored the last two goals of the game for the Blazers.

Filimon Ledenkov and Nikita Sokov each scored in the first and second periods for Springfield.

Kayne Pasquet made 46 saves for Springfield before being relieved in the third period. He made 20 saves on the first period and helped the Express take the lead early in the second, but couldn't keep the OKC shooters at bay all night.

Pasquet backstopped Springfield to a season-saving overtime win on Saturday, stopping all 38 shots he faced through the first two periods and making 52 saves total in a 2-1 Express win.

Filimon Ledenkov scored the deciding goal 7:25 into sudden-death.

Neither team was able to get on the board until Drake Johnson broke the ice 8:44 into the third period as Pasquet and Oklahoma City's Bobby Cloutier (33 saves) matched each other save for save.

Griffin Weincek won a draw cleanly back to Johnson and he wired a wrister through a screen and past Pasquet.

Sokov scored another big goal for the Express, tying the game up, 1-1, with 7:41 left in regulation. Sokov had the puck in front of Cloutier but the play was broken up. Arkhip Ledenkov got to the puck first and swept it back to the front of the net where Sokov was able to knock it in to tie the game.

Twelve seconds after Springfield killed off an OKC power play in overtime, Arkhip Ledenkov carried the puck into the Blazers zone, cut to the right wing board and fired a pass to Sokov in the slot. The pass was behind him, but he managed to collect the puck, then spun and fired the puck on net.

Cloutier made the save with his left pad, but Filimon Ledenkov was crashing the net and was able to shovel it in for the game-winning goal.

The third game turned out to be anti-climatic after the first two. Springfield broke the ice 3:06 into the game, but OKC led 4-1 by the end of the first period, and never looked back in an 11-2 series-clinching win.

Patrick Tondl scored four times in the game for Oklahoma City and Ivan Bondarenko popped in three more. Cloutier stopped 24 of 26 shots to earn his second win of the series.

Sokov and Akos Szigeti were the goal-scorers for the Express. Pasquet made 33 saves for Springfield - 16 of them in the first period.

--- compiled by Scott Harrington/Harrington Sports Media