

WSHL NORTHWEST DIVISION SEMIFINAL PREVIEW



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

#4 WEST SOUND WARRIORS @ #1 IDAHO ICECATS

Best-of-three series/all games at Manchester Ice Centre - McCall, ID

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 7:00 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 7:00 p.m.

GAME 3* Sunday, March 25 4:00 p.m.

**if necessary*

SEASON SERIES

Idaho 6-0-0, 12 points

West Sound 0-6-0, 0 points

October 20 Idaho 7 @ West Sound 1

October 21 Idaho 4 @ West Sound 1

October 22 Idaho 8 @ West Sound 2

January 12 West Sound 4 @ Idaho 9

January 13 West Sound 0 @ Idaho 4

January 14 West Sound 0 @ Idaho 7

PLAYOFF HISTORY

Idaho - The IceCats have a long history of excellence in the WSHL postseason. Idaho has qualified for the Thorne Cup finals in each of the last seven seasons, earning five championships over that span. Idaho has also won eight consecutive division titles, including six in the Northwest Division. For head coach and general manager John Olver, anything less than a championship is below expectations.

West Sound - West Sound is getting its first taste of the WSHL playoffs but has plenty of experience in the Northern Pacific Hockey League's postseason. Although they missed out on a playoff berth in each of the last two seasons, the Warriors won two division titles in three years, culminating in a Cascade Cup championship in the 2014-15 season.

IDAHO ICECATS

Head coach: John Olver

44-4-3, 1st place - Northwest Division

306 GF / 103 GA

IDAHO SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 68/234 (29.1%, 3rd in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 210/240 (87.5%, 3rd in WSHL - 5 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Lance Herning (44-36-80), F Matthew Kindred (21-33-54), F Jacob Hedencrona (21-32-53), F Alexander Piliya (14-35-49), F Kevin Fellows (16-32-48), D Terry Ryder (11-44-55), G Jacob Hough (19-1-1/1.83/.921), G Tyler Matthews (12-2-1/1.58/.944; highest save percentage in WSHL)

WEST SOUND WARRIORS

Head coach: Ty Smith

21-29-1, 4th place - Northwest Division

210 GF / 254 GA

WEST SOUND SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 41/237 (17.3%, 17th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 170/220 (77.3%, 15th in WSHL - 11 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Harri Koll (34-38-72), F Alec Johnson (19-28-47), F Connor Wherrett (25-20-45), F Samuel Pelech (15-26-41), D Bryce Ebert (14-19-33), D Ethan Cooney (5-10-15), G Brian Eisele (15-18-1/4.42/.865)

ANALYSIS

While the Idaho IceCats begin their quest for a sixth Thorne Cup championship and eighth straight Thorne Cup finals appearance, the West Sound Warriors just wrapped

up a series win over Seattle in their first WSHL postseason action. While the Warriors were impressive in a two-game sweep of the Totems, they take on a whole different animal this weekend.

After what was a rocky first half by their lofty standards, the IceCats cruised to the Northwest Division title with an astounding 22-0-2 record after the holiday break. Yes, Idaho is coming into this series riding a 24-game streak that propelled it to second place in the overall WSHL standings. The IceCats' home-ice advantage in the series will make things even more difficult on the Warriors. Idaho has dropped just one game all year at Manchester Ice Centre, a 7-6 setback in a shootout against Ogden, a club that narrowly missed out on the top seed in the Mountain Division.

For several years, Idaho has successfully utilized the formula of balanced scoring with an overwhelming defense and dominant goaltender. It has carried Idaho to a level of success that has not otherwise been seen in the WSHL, and the end of the IceCats' dynasty is nowhere in sight. Year after year, Idaho general manager and head coach John Olver recruits top-tier talent that fits perfectly into his system.

This season has differed from previous campaigns, though, as sickness and injury have resulted in the loss of several players throughout the year. Luckily, the IceCats are coming off a two-week period of rest and should be ready to go when the puck drops Friday evening.

"We have used the time off to get players healthy," Olver said. "We had a large number of players injured and sick for an extended period of time with the flu. So this break was a real blessing for us.

"We also used the break to focus on working on our special teams," Olver continued. "We had some new players join our team in February, so it was an opportunity to walk through with them all of our systems and to have a refresher course for our veteran players."

West Sound will need to kickstart its offense to have any real shot at an upset. In six regular-season games against Idaho, the Warriors managed just eight goals, and half of those came in one game. They were shut out twice and netted just one goal on two separate occasions.

The Warriors had a nice surge toward the end of the first half, but their performance in 2018 has been defined by inconsistency, resulting in a final record that is eight games below .500. To pull off the historic upset, West Sound will need goaltender

Brian Eisele to be on top of his game every night. The three-year veteran has shown steady improvement each season, and West Sound Head Coach Ty Smith rewarded him this year with the opportunity to be the Warriors' number one goalie.

It's clear that Idaho is the runaway favorite in this series. No Northwest Division opponent has shown it can consistently keep up with the powerhouse IceCats. In order for West Sound to flip the script and take down the five-time champs, it will need to play its best hockey of the season and stifle the IceCats' impressive collection of scorers while taking advantage of every offensive opportunity.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media