

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 03.01.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (24-18-3, 51 pts)
www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com
@Bhamblazers

The Bellingham Blazers continued their push for the second seed in the Northwest last weekend with their 10th consecutive victory, a dominant 5-0 shutout of West Sound.

Bellingham has had West Sound's number this year, and that trend continued in the win as Kolter Pawlick (3.82, .873) posted his third shutout. Pawlick, 18, is responsible for every Blazers shutout this season.

Of the 12 meetings between Bellingham and West Sound, the Blazers have come out victorious 10 times. The two clubs will face off for the final time next weekend.

Prior to its game against West Sound, Bellingham swept Southern Oregon in a three-game set. Blazers Head Coach Mark Collins had some comments on the series.

"Southern Oregon played really hard against us," Collins said. "There wasn't any letdown in their game through the full 60 minutes each game. I'm not sure whether that was just their team mentality or trying to end our winning streak, they just played hard.

"I think they are better than their record indicates. They beat Tahoe Sunday and were ahead in the other two games as well."

Bellingham is two points behind second-place Tahoe with three games in hand on the Icemen. But those three games are against powerhouse Idaho, which will visit Bellingham Sportsplex this weekend.

"I think we'll probably need one win at least," Collins said of the series. "This weekend will be interesting with West Sound and Tahoe playing each other. Depending on how that goes, it may help us one way or the other."

IDAHO ICECATS (42-4-2, 86 pts)

www.IdahoIceCats.com

The Idaho IceCats are showing no mercy to the rest of the league. After suffering their only loss of the second half a couple of weeks ago in overtime against Ogden, the IceCats responded by outscoring Seattle 30-3 over the course of a three-game sweep last week.

Idaho has never been a team to look past its next game. Despite already being crowned Northwest Division champions and being considered one of the favorites to take home the Thorne Cup, it played another fantastic series against Seattle.

The IceCats' defensive prowess provides the club with a chance to win every game, no matter the opponent. Idaho has allowed just 95 goals in 48 games, and it could finish the regular season with under 100 goals scored by the opposition.

A potential Thorne Cup final matchup between Idaho and El Paso would be very intriguing. The IceCats fell to the Rhinos in an intense one-goal game at the Western States Shootout, but both clubs have looked even better as the second half marches on.

The IceCats close out their regular season this weekend with three games in Bellingham. While Idaho has nothing left to play for in the standings, the Blazers are working to secure a first-round bye.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (11-29-6, 28 pts)

www.SeattleJrTotems.com

@SeattleJrTotems

The Seattle Totems were swept for the second time in a row last weekend, pushing their losing streak to six games.

The Totems didn't have much of a chance against an Idaho squad that has been out for blood since the Western States Shootout. They managed just three goals over the course of the three-game set.

Seattle will now begin its final homestand of the season, a five-game stretch that will start with this weekend's two-game set against Southern Oregon.

After that, the Totems will finish out the regular season with a three-game series against Fresno. Seattle can expect a strong effort from the Monsters, who essentially need to win the rest of their games to have a real shot at the Western Division title.

This weekend's series is especially important for the Totems, who are just three points ahead of cellar-dwelling Southern Oregon. If they fail to pick up a point in the series, they will find themselves in last place in the division for the first time this season.

There are more reasons for Seattle to avoid the basement than maintaining its pride. The sixth-place club in the Northwest Division will take on either Bellingham or Tahoe, two of the more talented teams in the division.

On the other hand, the fifth seed will be matched up with a West Sound club that seems to have lost itself since an early second-half run.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (12-36-1, 25 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

@wshlspartans

The Southern Oregon Spartans have made a habit of giving higher-seeded teams a hard time, and they were rewarded for their efforts last weekend with a win in the finale of a three-game series against Tahoe.

The 6-2 triumph saw netminder Austin Toussaint (4.65, .886) put up another solid performance, stopping 43 of the 45 shots he faced, while forwards Joel Holmberg (29-31-60), Yanneck Kumli (17-28-45), and Miroslav Smid (11-10-21) netted two goals apiece.

Toussaint has been one of the more consistent goaltenders in the league this season. He likely would have produced better statistics if he had not been tasked with a heavier workload than any other WSHL goalie, facing a league-high 1,189 shots.

Southern Oregon's second-half resurgence has proven that it can match up well with any club in the division outside of Idaho. It will be a tough draw in a first-round playoff series.

The Spartans will play their final series this weekend with a pair of games on the road against Seattle. The brief encounter represents Southern Oregon's last chance to avoid a sixth-place finish.

TAHOE ICEMEN (25-20-3, 53 pts)

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

With just one series left, the Tahoe Icemen are fighting hard to avoid having to play a first-round series against an improved Southern Oregon team.

The Icemen took two of three games from the Spartans last weekend in a competitive series. The four points gave Tahoe a two-point cushion over Bellingham for second place, with both teams wrapping up the regular season over the next couple of weeks.

Either Tahoe or Bellingham will have to play Southern Oregon in the first round, and that could be a dangerous matchup for either club.

This weekend's series against West Sound is crucial. A sweep would almost guarantee the Icemen the second seed and the first-round bye that comes with it.

One of Tahoe's biggest problems this year is the enormous amount of time it has spent with a man in the penalty box. With 1,385 penalty minutes as a team, the Icemen are second in the WSHL in PIMs, trailing only Southern Oregon's 1,404.

"We just need to learn to be disciplined and play by the rules, very simple," said Tahoe Head Coach Mickey Lang.

Through 48 games, Tahoe is averaging close to 30 penalty minutes per contest. It's not a formula for success and is something that needs to be rectified in order for the club to go on an extended postseason run.

WEST SOUND WARRIORS (21-23-1, 43 pts)

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors to continue to struggle in the second half of their inaugural WSHL season, and they're starting to run out of time to figure things out.

West Sound has struggled mightily against division rival Bellingham, and the Blazers proved to be too much once again in last week's 5-0 loss.

Because the Warriors are locked into the fourth seed, the remaining regular-season games are meaningless for them in terms of playoff seeding. But West Sound needs to regain its confidence, and the best way to do that is to win games.

The Warriors are going to partially dictate the race for the second seed, which is the main source of drama within the Northwest at this point. After this weekend's three-game series against Tahoe, West Sound will take on Bellingham over the final weekend before the playoffs.

Forward Harri Koll (32-35-67) leads the Warriors in scoring but has gone cold with just one point over his last three contests. Koll has the fourth-most goals among Northwest Division skaters.

With 26 points more than the next highest-scoring Warrior, Koll is relied upon heavily in the West Sound offense. When he produces, the Warriors are much more likely to win, and they'll need him to get going for the postseason.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media