

## WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 03.06.18 – MID-WESTERN DIVISION



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

**DALLAS SNIPERS (13-38-0, 26 pts)**

[WSHLDallasSnipers.pointstreaksites.com](http://WSHLDallasSnipers.pointstreaksites.com)

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

The Dallas Snipers hung in with Springfield in their final series of the regular season, ultimately getting swept by the Express to end their season on a nine-game losing streak against the three top teams in the Mid-Western Division.

Dallas wouldn't let the Express get away in Friday's game until Springfield pulled away with four straight goals in the second half of the game. New Snipers Todd Thompson and Salomon Aberg scored their first Dallas goals with Aberg also earning an assist on Thompson's strike.

Defenseman Arvidas Domeika scored his 5th goal of the year on Saturday giving him 12 points (5-7-12) in his last 13 games.

All three goalies saw the ice this weekend for Dallas, getting their shots in before the playoffs begin. Evan Williams made an astounding 53 saves on Friday including 39 in the second and third periods. Manny Legace stopped 42 on Saturday, and Brady Weiss made 46 saves on Sunday.

Williams ends the season with the team high in wins (five) and SV% with .869.

Sterling Cooper ends the season as the Snipers' leading scorer, earning a 25-40-65 line for the year with the 40 assists also leading the squad. Jaroslav Vasicek's 26-33-59 led the team in goals.

Dallas now can focus on the playoffs where they will play Wichita in the first round. The Snipers earned an 11-1-0 record against the reigning Thorne Cup champions this season. The winner of that series will be pitted up against the El Paso Rhinos in the division semifinal round.

**EL PASO RHINOS (49-1-1, 99 pts)**

[www.ElPasoRhinos.com](http://www.ElPasoRhinos.com)

**@El\_Paso\_Rhinos**

The 2018 Thorne Cup host El Paso Rhinos lit the lamp a season-high 21 times on Friday to give them a season-high 52 goals in the three-game series.

Carolo Wittor and Maxiamillan Kamper each scored the hat trick on Friday while Chaseton Sare added one on Saturday followed by Justin-Cole Dubecky's on Sunday.

This is a high-powered offense that added more fire power at the trade deadline making them a team to be reckoned with now that the playoffs are here. And, with EL Paso hosting the Thorne Cup Finals, this team is prepped for a cup-lifting after the greatest single-season record in league history (49-1-1).

Austin Simpson's 4-9-13 line against Wichita propelled him ahead of Sare to end the season leading the team with his 38-60-98 totals on the year. Sare (51-45-96) led the team in goals and also ended the season with the team lead in penalty minutes with 115.

The Rhinos' 405 goals scored this season leads the league – a full 26 goals more than the second-highest (OKC, 379). Their 63 goals against also leads the league – 37 fewer goals the next team (Utah – 100 GA).

El Paso is going to be a tough team to beat, and the first team to give it a shot will be the winner of the Dallas-Wichita series. The Thorne Cup will literally go through El Paso this season and those roads open next week.

**OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (42-7-2, 86 pts)**

[www.OKCityHockey.com](http://www.OKCityHockey.com)

**@OKCBlazersWSHL**

Vitalii Mikhailov scored two hat tricks on the weekend, helping the Oklahoma City Blazers sweep the Mountain Division's Casper Coyotes over the weekend. Mikhailov scored seven total goals against Casper over the weekend, ending his season third on the team in goals (42-23-65).

Ivan Bondarenko ended the season with a 7-2-9 series, bringing his team-leading totals to 61-65-126. The Russian now closes out his career with a 109-126-235 line in just 117 games played. Those numbers have him as the franchise leader in points, assists, and goals. Bondarenko's 217 PIM are also good for top-3 in franchise history.

Bondarenko's goals and points this season are tops for a single season in franchise history, and it should be noted that teammates Josh Chamberlain (39-73-112) and Griffin Wiencek (43-64-107) also beat the previous season high of 101 points set two ago by WSHL legend Tomas Nemeth.

Goalie Bobby Cloutier made 52 saves in earning three victories over the weekend, bringing his season totals to 30 wins and a 2.18/.924 slash line. The 30 wins are good for second in the league.

With the regular season now closed, the Blazers will turn their sights towards the playoffs where they're primed for a long run. They've already beaten some of the top teams in the league and with their depth on offense and skill on defense, they will be a threat in the later rounds.

First, they'll have two weeks off before hosting Springfield in the second round. In the meantime, OKC will look to rest and get healthy in time to blaze their trail towards the Thorne Cup championship.

**SPRINGFIELD EXPRESS (26-16-6, 58 pts)**

[www.SpringfieldExpress.com](http://www.SpringfieldExpress.com)

**@\_ExpressHockey**

The Springfield Express continued their timely play, sweeping Dallas in Texas in the final meeting between the two teams this season. The Express are now 6-1-0 in their last seven games with one more series against Wichita left on their docket.

Arkhip Ledenkov went 6-4-10 against the Snipers and brother Filimon added six assists on the weekend. Team leader Nikita Sokov matched Arkhip's 6-4-10 line and Stephane Doering added a 2-5-7 line.

This is not a top-heavy team, and their scoring depth has chosen a great time to fire on all cylinders. Eleven different Express skaters scored goals against Dallas and the team boasts seven players with at least 19 goals on the seasons.

While Sokov's 36-43-79 line leads the team, the Ledenkov twins are close behind with Arkhip's 37-35-72 leading the team in goals, and Filimon's 19-47-66 leading the team in assists. Springfield has five players with more than 60 points with an additional five skaters having scored more than 35 points.

After the first-round bye, the Express will travel to Oklahoma City to face the Blazers. They've been a thorn in OKC's side all season, having finally broken through winning three in a row in the recent six-game series with Oklahoma City. It's going to be an interesting series to be sure.

Before then, the Express have one more series – this one at home – against Wichita to close out the season. Then, the Express start their quest for the Thorne Cup.

**WICHITA JR. THUNDER (3-45-0, 6 pts)**

[www.WichitaJuniorThunder.com](http://www.WichitaJuniorThunder.com)

**@JrThunderHockey**

The Wichita Jr. Thunder went scoreless again this past weekend, extending their scoreless streak to four games. To be fair, they played El Paso, who finished the season with the WSHL's best single-season record in league history. So, silver linings.

Wichita will have one more series – at Springfield – before they close the drapes on what has been a long season in Wichita after a Thorne Cup title in 2017. Everyone starts at zero in the playoffs and the Jr. Thunder will look to turn things around when they face off with Dallas in the first round.

Nathaniel Merriman and Austin Tilton split time on Friday combining for 50 saves in the loss. Tilton was the lone backstop on Saturday, making 62 saves, while Merriman and Trace Parker split Sunday's game earning 67 saves total.

Wichita's 1,151 penalty minutes has them in the league's top-3 for that category.

So, it hasn't been the best season for Wichita but, again, the post season is a time to start over and last season proved that Wichita can never be counted out.

--- *Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media*