

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 03.08.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (25-20-3, 53 pts)
www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com
@Bhamblazers

Though they are no longer in the running for a first-round bye, the Bellingham Blazers are in a good place with the postseason right around the corner.

The Blazers had their season-long 10-game winning streak snapped by Idaho last weekend, but they managed to steal a game from the IceCats in a shootout in the opening contest of the three-game set.

"I think it was good for the players to see they can compete with Idaho," said Bellingham Head Coach Mark Collins. "The win certainly helps in getting over that hurdle. We had great games on Friday and Saturday, but we didn't play very well on Sunday."

The Blazers' second-half resurgence is one of the better storylines in the WSHL. They didn't have much success last year in their inaugural season in the league, but Collins seems to have the franchise moving in the right direction.

Bellingham is set to take on Southern Oregon in a best-of-three first-round series in which it will hold home-ice advantage. The Spartans have given the Blazers some good games this season, so you can anticipate a competitive series.

First things first, Bellingham will close out its regular season with a three-game series against West Sound this weekend. The Blazers have won 10 of 12 games against the Warriors and will look to continue that trend and end the campaign on a high note.

IDAHO ICECATS (44-4-3, 91 pts)

www.IdahoIceCats.com

The Idaho IceCats proved once again they are the class of the Northwest Division last weekend. On the road against a red-hot Bellingham squad, they claimed five of six possible points.

With 91 points on the year, Idaho is second in the overall WSHL standings. The five points against Bellingham allowed the IceCats to clinch the wild card, meaning they are guaranteed a spot in the Thorne Cup Finals tournament in El Paso, even if they are upset early in the postseason.

For the second year in a row, Idaho will finish a season with 90-plus points. It's just another milestone amidst an unprecedented run of dominance led by head coach and general manager John Olver.

The Bellingham series marked the end of the IceCats' regular season. They will take a couple of weeks off before resuming play on March 23, when they open their 2018 postseason.

Idaho has won five Thorne Cup championships, the second most all time behind the Phoenix Polar Bears, who won the Cup seven times over a 10-year span in the 2000s.

With 80 points (44-36-80), forward Lance Herning will finish as the IceCats' leading scorer. Terry Ryder (11-44-55), Matthew Kindred (21-33-54), and Jacob Hedencrona (21-32-53) are the next closest, while seven other IceCats registered 40 points or more.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (13-29-6, 32 pts)

www.SeattleJrTotems.com

[@SeattleJrTotems](#)

The Seattle Totems won a pair of games over Southern Oregon last weekend in front of their home fans at Olympicview Arena.

The back-to-back victories served as revenge for a pair of losses to the Spartans in early February. They also marked the first time Seattle has won consecutive games since it won its final game of the Western States Shootout and its first game of the second half.

It was a nice way to rebound from a tough month of February that saw the Totems post an ugly 1-8-1 record, with the lone win coming on the 11th against West Sound.

This weekend, Seattle will close out its final home stand with its last series of the regular season, a three-game set against Fresno. The games will have no effect on the standings for the Totems, but Fresno still has an outside shot at a first-round bye in the Western Division.

No matter what happens, the Totems are locked into a first-round matchup against West Sound on the road.

Despite their struggles throughout the second half, Seattle has a real shot at winning the series. The Warriors have looked like a different team for the past few weeks, and not in a good way. West Sound has been reeling ever since it propelled itself to second place in the Northwest Division earlier in the year.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (12-38-1, 25 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

[@wshlspartans](#)

For the past couple of weeks, it has seemed as though the Southern Oregon Spartans were in need of some time off to rest their legs. After last weekend's two-game sweep at the hands of Seattle, the Spartans will finally get their week off.

Despite the notable improvement it has shown, Southern Oregon ended the season by losing 10 of its last 11 games. The Spartans have played games every weekend since mid-January due to its late start to the second half, but will finally get their rest this weekend as other clubs finish out the regular season.

Southern Oregon will need to be operating at 100 percent when the playoffs start, as they're slated to take on Bellingham on the road in the first round. The Blazers swept the Spartans in a three-game series February 16-18 and took five of six matchups between the two teams during the regular season, so Southern Oregon has a tough task ahead of it.

Much of the Spartans' fortunes will rely on the play of starting netminder Austin Toussaint (4.68/.884). Toussaint, who is in his final season of eligibility, will be looking to cap off his WSHL career on a high note.

The North Dakota product figures to be Southern Oregon's postseason starter, and his team will need some big performances if its wants to upset Bellingham. The week of rest should help Toussaint more than anyone, as he has faced the second-most shots in the league with 1,208.

TAHOE ICEMEN (28-20-3, 59 pts)

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

The Tahoe Icemen ended their season with a three-game sweep of West Sound last weekend, clinching a first-round bye for the first time in franchise history.

Two years ago, the Icemen finished dead last in the Northwest Division. Last year they came in fifth. Head coach Mickey Lang has slowly improved his club, and the upcoming postseason will reveal a lot about the group he has put together.

Tahoe had a great second half, with sweeps of Seattle, Southern Oregon, and West Sound. It also took two of three games from Western Division-leading Long Beach in one of its best series of the year.

The Icemen won eight of their final nine games, propelling them to the first-round bye. They will now wait for their second-round opponent while resting up for what could be an extended playoff run.

Forward Paul Frys (51-68-119) leads the Northwest Division in scoring, and it's not particularly close. The captain and third-year veteran is 29 points ahead of Bellingham's Ruslan Novruzov (45-45-90) and ranks seventh in the league scoring race.

Frys will end his career in seventh place on the WSHL's all-time scoring list. The Portland, Oregon, native flashed his potential in previous seasons, but he never put together a campaign like this. Everything seemed to come together for him this year as the clear leader in Tahoe's locker room.

WEST SOUND WARRIORS (21-26-1, 43 pts)

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors are still searching for answers after they were swept by Tahoe last weekend. The Warriors have dropped their last eight games heading into this weekend's three-game series against Bellingham.

West Sound's first-half performance has allowed it to clinch home-ice advantage in its first-round series against Seattle, but it arguably hasn't put together a solid stretch of hockey since the calendar flipped to 2018.

For much of the season, West Sound has ridden goaltender Brian Eisele (4.42/.865). As a result, Eisele has played the sixth-most minutes of any WSHL netminder and faced the 10th-most shots.

Forward Harri Koll (33-37-70) will likely end the year as the Warriors' leading scorer, while Alec Johnson (19-25-44) is second in points and Connor Wherett (24-19-43) is second in goals.

The West Sound versus Seattle playoff series should be a good one. The two clubs split the season series, with each team winning six games. The majority of the games were tight, so the series will be a tough one to predict.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media