

WSHL WESTERN DIVISION SEMIFINAL PREVIEW



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

#3 FRESNO MONSTERES @ #2 ONTARIO AVALANCHE

Best-of-three series/all games at Ontario Center Ice Arena - Ontario, CA

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 8:30 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 7:30 p.m.

GAME 3* Sunday, March 25 2:30 p.m.

**if necessary*

SEASON SERIES

Ontario 4-4-0, 8 points

Fresno 4-4-0, 8 points

December 7 Ontario 8 @ Fresno 2

December 8 Ontario 6 @ Fresno 3

December 9 Ontario 4 @ Fresno 2

January 7 Fresno 11 @ Ontario 4

January 25 Ontario 8 @ Fresno 9

March 2 Fresno 5 @ Ontario 1

March 3 Fresno 4 @ Ontario 2

March 4 Fresno 1 @ Ontario 4

PREVIOUS PLAYOFF MEETINGS

This weekend's series will mark the second time the two franchises have battled in the playoffs. Ontario and Fresno met in the postseason for the first time in the 2013-14 season, with the Monsters posting a 2-0 sweep in the Western Division finals.

PLAYOFF HISTORY

Ontario - The Avalanche made their first playoff appearance in 2014 when they beat Valencia in the first round before falling to Fresno in the division finals. In each of the last four seasons, Ontario has won its opening series before being eliminated in the second round.

Fresno - The Monsters have a history of long playoff runs, but they have failed to make it to the division finals the last two seasons. Prior to that, Fresno qualified for the division finals in five of six seasons, winning the divisional playoff three times (2012, 2014 & 2015). The Monsters have yet to win a Thorne Cup. The closest they came was 2013-14, when they fell to Idaho in the Pacific Conference finals.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE

Head coach: Rob O'Rourke

33-15-3, 2nd place - Western Division

227 GF / 177 GA

ONTARIO SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 37/159 (23.3%, 9th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 175/217 (80.6%, 11th in WSHL - 10 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Jesse Zaharichuk (27-53-80), F William Ma (35-42-77), F Reid Bosse (18-26-44), F Henrik Lohman (16-19-35), D Alex Bouchard (26-34-60), D Justin Davis (8-29-37), G Filip Subrt (15-8-0/2.81/.916), G Connor Duffy (15-6-2/3.99/.898)

FRESNO MONSTERS

Head coach: Kevin Kaminski

33-17-1, 3rd place - Western Division

298 GF / 189 GA

FRESNO SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 56/253 (22.1%, 12th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 254/307 (82.7%, 9th in WSHL - 33 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Daylon Mannon (75-75-150, WSHL leading scorer), F Cody Key (53-86-139), F

Deivids Tempelmanis (31-43-74), D Cory Hurtubise (12-37-49), D Logan Domogala (10-29-39), D Daniel Goodwin (12-27-39), G Max Karlenzig (13-3-0/3.51/.900)

ANALYSIS

As the second half of the season went on, it became more and more apparent that unless Long Beach was knocked off its perch atop the Western Division, Fresno and Ontario were almost certainly going to meet for an intense second-round series. This weekend's series will be a matchup of two of the most talented clubs in the division, who split their season series 4-4-0, and are both legitimate contenders in the Western Division.

Last weekend, Fresno swept San Diego to advance to the division semifinals, outscoring the Sabers 16-2 in the process. With a short bench, San Diego was no match for a Fresno team that employs two of the league's top three scorers.

"I thought our guys were prepared, focused, and hungry to get the job done," said Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "We'll have to do the same this weekend. It has to start with our preparation and then we have to stick to our foundation and have good execution in all areas of the game while capitalizing on our chances."

This series will not be easy for Fresno. The Avalanche represent a real test for the Monsters, who were one of the hottest teams in the league throughout the second half. Fresno won 17 of its last 19 regular season games, but Ontario didn't finish as the second seed by accident. They are a solid, well-coached team that is fully capable of winning the Western Division playoffs.

"We figured we would eventually play them and here we are," Kaminski added. "They have an all-around good game with solid goaltending, good puck-moving defensemen, and good forwards that can make plays and finish. We need to try and shut down their skilled guys with speed and be physical on them when we can."

The season series between the two teams shows just how competitive this weekend's games should be. The teams were 4-4-0 records against each other, with each club posting three-game winning streaks.

The Avalanche are a bit shorthanded as they enter the weekend and are planning to use 19 skaters. Ontario Head Coach Rob O'Rourke knows his players have a difficult challenge ahead of them.

"With a short bench, it's going to be a very tough series for the guys," O'Rourke said. "There is nowhere to hide and it's going to take a solid effort from every single

player. We have to outwork Fresno, play solid on the defensive side of the puck, and stay out of the penalty box. After that, who knows? We just need to find ways to score."

Game 1 is slated for an 8:30 puck drop at Ontario Center Ice Arena on Friday night. While Fresno holds an advantage on paper due to Ontario's lack of available players, some of that will be offset by the Avs' hometown fans. The Avalanche are running into a red-hot Fresno team, but they have shown the ability to defeat any team in the league. You can expect an entertaining back-and-forth series this weekend in Ontario.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media