

2018 THORNE CUP PREVIEW: EL PASO RHINOS



Photo provided by: Kat Martin

EL PASO RHINOS

Head coach: Cory Herman

49-1-1, 1st place - Mid-Western Division

Host team, won Mid-Western Division playoffs

HOW THEY GOT HERE

Earned a first-round bye

Defeated Dallas Snipers, 2 games to 0, in Mid-Western Division Semifinals

Defeated Oklahoma City Blazers, 2 games to 0, in Mid-Western Division Final

THORNE CUP SCHEDULE

Wednesday April 11; 7:00 pm vs. Long Beach Bombers

Thursday April 12; 7:00 pm vs. Oklahoma City Blazers

Friday April 13; 7:00 pm vs. Utah Outliers

AGAINST THE FIELD (9-1-1)

vs. OKC 7-0-1; three of last five decided by one goal - two in OT.

vs. Ogden 1-0-0; 4-2 win at showcase

vs. Long Beach 1-0-0; 3-2 win at showcase

vs. Idaho 0-1-0; 3-2 loss at showcase

Did not play Utah

THORNE CUP HISTORY

This marks the ninth time that the El Paso Rhinos have made it to the Thorne Cup Final. Four times they played in a head-to-head series for the championship, defeating the Phoenix Polar Bears for their first championship in 2008. In four previous appearances under the tournament format being used this year, the Rhinos have advanced past round-robin play three times and the championship game twice, defeating Idaho for the 2014 title in front of their home fans in El Paso.

OUTLOOK

The El Paso Rhinos enter the Thorne Cup with a 53-1-1 record on the season. They haven't lost since January 12 when Griffin Wiencek's OT goal beat them in Oklahoma City.

The Rhinos steamrolled the Western States Hockey League in 2017-18, posting league-best numbers for wins (49), points (99), goals scored (405), goals allowed (63), power play (32.5%), penalty kill (93.6%), shorthanded goals (38)

If you need further evidence of their dominance, consider that they out-scored teams 38-16 while playing shorthanded.

El Paso has been able to get very comfortable at the Sierra Providence Events Center. Their last road game was February 18 at Wichita. They played their final six regular season games at home, both rounds of the divisional playoffs, and now host the Thorne Cup.

Despite scoring the most goals in the league, El Paso had only one player eclipse 100 points individually - and he was brought in at the trade deadline (Jakob Kranabetter 44-84-128). An amazing 14 players scored at a point-per-game clip or better.

Forwards Austin Simpson (38-60-98), Chaseton Sare (51-45-96), Nikita Pintusov (14-12-26 in 11 games with El Paso) and Philip Pugliese (24-57-81) give the Rhinos a multi-line attack, however, and blueliners Justin-Cole Dubecky (18-58-76) and D Colby Haugen (9-36-45) provide additional production.

6'6", 230-pound El Paso netminder Filip Krasanovsky posted a .929 save percentage and led the WSHL win wins (35), goals-against average (1.35) and shutouts (11). His backup, Kayden Pickles, actually posted better numbers (0.81/.930) in limited playing time, winning all 10 of his decisions - seven of them by shutout.

El Paso's only regulation loss came at the hands of the Idaho IceCats at the league showcase in Las Vegas on December 19. The Rhinos and IceCats will not play in the round-robin, making the anticipation of an El Paso-Idaho rematch during the single-elimination stage of the tournament very enticing.

--- *Scott Harrington/Harrington Sports Media*