

WSHL MIDWEST DIVISION NOTEBOOK – October 9, 2018



DALLAS SNIPERS (0-3-0)

The Dallas Snipers are looking for a bounce-back year after winning just 13 games last season, but they ran into an El Paso squad that looks every bit as good as last year. The result was three consecutive losses in an opening weekend sweep.

The Snipers scored three goals in the series, and newly-acquired Slovenian forward Jasa Jenko figured in all three of them with a goal and a pair of assists.

Jenko, 18, is playing hockey in North America for the first time. Dallas Head Coach Aaron Davis and Co. would be thrilled if he can maintain his current point-per-game clip.

Last year's edition of the Snipers had a tough season in what was arguably the WSHL's toughest division as they dealt with several key injuries. Dallas is hoping its returning players can build off of last year's struggles.

"We had a very young team," Davis said. "A lot of guys played in tough situations last year, and we are counting on them to bring that experience this time around."

The Snipers will continue the first month of their campaign with a three-game set on the road against Cheyenne this weekend before opening up a six-game homestand on October 26 against the Steamboat Wranglers.

EL PASO RHINOS (3-0-0)

Through their first series, the defending Thorne Cup champion El Paso Rhinos are showing no signs of a championship hangover. They dominated Dallas over the weekend to start off their campaign with a three-game sweep.

As is customary in El Paso, the Rhinos will once again be looking to contend for a championship. The club doesn't have a ton of returning players, but it remains one of the top recruiting teams in the league.

Forward Chaseton Sare is entering his third year with El Paso and is primed for another big season. The Regina, Saskatchewan, product has 209 points (104-105-209) over 92 games in the WSHL.

Some other notable returners include blueliner Justin-Cole Dubecky and forwards Adam Stalzer, Maximillian Kamper, and John Erramousepe.

Netminder Kayden Pickles is back after serving his time as a backup to Filip Krasanovsky last season. Krasanovsky is playing junior hockey in Eurasia this season in the MHL.

Pickles posted a spectacular 0.81/.930 over 10 appearances last year and should see more time between the Rhinos' pipes. The 6-foot-3, 200-pounder will be battling for playing time with newcomers Adrian Morales and Nils Velm.

El Paso is off this weekend, but will return to action on October 26 with a three-game matchup against Wichita.

NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (2-0-0)

The Northern Colorado Eagles began their campaign with a pair of two-goal wins at home against Cheyenne over the weekend.

The Eagles were led by forward Tyler Trombly, who posted a 2-3-5 line. Israeli rookie Mark Revniaga was also impressive with a pair of goals and an assist.

Sixth-year head coach Steve Haddon feels his team's offensive depth will be a valuable asset throughout the season.

"We are pretty deep up front," Haddon said. "Forward-wise, I feel like we have a lot of good supporting players and guys that can play multiple roles. There's never too much depth. You have to deal with injuries or suspensions, and someone can step up. We never try to rely on one guy or line."

Haddon's statement was certainly proven true last year when the Eagles finished third in the brutal Midwest Division by using a balanced offense attack combined with dominant goaltending.

Speaking of goalies, the duo of Mitchell Robinson and Marshall Murphy will look to hold things down between the pipes. Robinson is entering his first WSHL season, but the 19-year-old Murphy has a year of experience under his belt after appearing in 29 games with the Superior RoughRiders last season.

Colorado will be tested this weekend with a tough three-game matchup on the road in Ogden. The Mustangs were a Thorne Cup finalist last spring and figure to serve as an early-season measuring stick for Haddon's squad.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (0-0-0)

The Oklahoma City Blazers have been one of the best teams in the Midwest Division over their four seasons of existence, finishing in a top-two slot every year. But OKC has faltered in the postseason each time, something the club will look to change this season under second-year head coach Gary Gill.

The Blazers suffered some big losses in the offseason, but they also added plenty of talent to their roster.

Stephane Doering, a former member of the Springfield Express, was signed in mid-September. The talented German racked up 81 points (27-54-81) and figures to be a huge part of the Blazers' offense.

Oklahoma City also added an experience coach to their staff in Ty Smith. Smith served as the head coach of the West Sound Warriors last season and the Butte Cobras from 2015 to 2017.

For the third straight year, veteran Harri Koll will play under Smith. The Estonian forward, who has 102 points (49-53-102) over 90 WSHL games, played for Smith in Butte two years ago and in West Sound last season.

The return of both netminder Bobby Cloutier and forward Vitali Mikhailov is huge for Oklahoma City. Cloutier set team records for wins, goals-against average, and shutouts during the 2017-18 season, and will be the team's primary goalie this year.

Mikhailov, meanwhile, appeared in just 39 games but was the team's fifth-leading scorer with a 42-23-65 line.

OKC will begin its regular-season schedule this weekend with a three-game series on the road against the newly-renamed Casper Bobcats.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (0-0-0)

The 2017 Thorne Cup champion Wichita Jr. Thunder suffered through a dreadful season last year, finishing with just three wins over 51 games and missing out on the playoffs.

Ever since coming out of nowhere to take down the powerhouse Idaho Jr. Steelheads in 2017, the Jr. Thunder have been trying to re-build their roster with young players.

Wichita is bringing back several youngsters from last season, likely banking on some improvement after a year of playing in the WSHL.

The Jr. Thunders' returning players include Tyler Inlow, Quinn O'Reilly, Corey Scultheis, Corey Steinbarger, and Braeden Thomas.

Thomas, 17, was Wichita's leading scorer last season with 14 goals and 11 assists, good for 25 points. The talented young forward will look to continue his development with another solid campaign.

In addition to goaltender Austin Tilton, who is back for his second season, former Superior RoughRider and Denver, Colorado, native Bronson Sudberry will join the goaltending mix.

Wichita will play its first series this weekend on the road against the Steamboat Wranglers. The three-game set will be the first-ever meeting between the two clubs.

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media

