

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 10.12.18 - NORTHWEST DIVISION



BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (1-1-0)

As they enter their seventh season as a franchise, and third season in the WSHL, the Bellingham Blazers are looking for more than just one playoff series victory.

A solid corps of veterans including Jamahl Eackett, Thomas Steven, and Timothy Prexler will lead Bellingham this year. The Blazers also have a trio of returning netminders in Edward Coffey, Avery Heath, and Kolter Pawlick.

Last year's Northwest Division Quarterfinal sweep over Southern Oregon was exciting, but the Blazers are primed to do some damage in the Northwest Division. Bellingham began its regular-season schedule last weekend with a two-game split against Seattle, winning the first game at home before falling to the Totems 5-2 on the road.

"I thought we played well at the start of the first game," said Blazers Head Coach and General Manager Mark Collins. "Beyond that, I don't feel we were where we needed

to be competitively. There is quite a bit that we need to work on, but early in the season, a big part is the communication and getting used to teammates.

"We went into the weekend with a couple suspensions and injuries, so we were shorthanded right off the bat. It was going to be tough regardless."

The Blazers have competed in seven-team and six-team editions of the Northwest, but they have never competed in a four-team circuit in the WSHL.

"It will be interesting this season with just the four teams," Collins added. "We always expect to win, but we certainly have a long way to go for that to happen."

Bellingham will take on West Sound this weekend, starting with a Friday night matchup at home before traveling to Bremerton Ice Center for a pair of road games on Saturday and Sunday.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (1-1-0)

The Seattle Totems kicked off their season last weekend with a two-game split with Bellingham. It marked the first two matchups in the 12-game season series between the two clubs.

The Totems have high hopes this year with a strong group of returning players, a talented class of recruits, and a new addition to their coaching staff.

"We have big expectations this year," said Michael Murphy, Seattle's Head Coach and General Manager. "We hired Chad Olson as an assistant in the offseason to help with recruiting, and having Chad out on the road with me all summer really paid off. We have our best recruiting class in about six or seven years."

Like his Northwest Division counterparts, Murphy sees the departures of the Idaho IceCats and Tahoe Icemen as an opportunity for his club.

"Our feeling is with Idaho sitting out this year and the changes we made in the offseason, the division is up for grabs. Our goal is to get back to playing winning Totems hockey, win the Northwest Division, and ultimately make a run at the Thorne Cup."

There are numerous players looking to make an impact with Seattle this season, and Murphy pointed out a few to watch throughout the year.

"We're expecting big things from Michael Shippee and Denis Kozev, but also many others as we are four lines deep and have eight guys who can play on the back end. Keep an eye on Gabriel Sbob along with Dominik Cach up front as well, as a few speedy wingers in Temirlan Skindirov and Linus Eriksson.

"We also have veteran returners Braden O'Brien and Braden Sanchez up front and hard-hitting d-man Jimmy Frey back for another year."

The Totems are back in action this weekend with a pair of games on the road against Southern Oregon.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (2-1-0)

The Southern Oregon Spartans began their season with a loss to the San Diego Sabers before winning the next two games for a big opening-weekend series victory.

The Sabers seem to be an improved team after posting just five wins last season. They racked up seven goals in their win over the Spartans and gave Southern Oregon a run for its money in both of the losses.

Overall, Southern Oregon outscored San Diego 15-14 in the series. The pair of wins gave the Spartans an early lead in the Northwest Division, as they are the only club with multiple wins through the first week of the season.

Forward Hayden Moistner was unstoppable against the Sabers, pouring in seven goals and accumulating 28 PIMs. He had a hat trick during the Spartans' 5-3 triumph in the series finale.

Veteran Miroslav Smid chipped in with a 3-3-6 scoring line and is in a three-way tie with Italian rookie Michele Vignoli Sanin (1-5-6) and Eric Vanderhoff (0-6-6) for second place on the team in points.

The Spartans will not have to play a road game until an October 25 contest in Seattle. They will continue their current eight-game homestand this weekend with a pair against Seattle before welcoming West Sound to Southern Oregon Ice for a three-game set next weekend.

WEST SOUND ADMIRALS (0-0-0)

The West Sound Admirals are the last team in the Northwest Division to begin play this year. The puck will drop on the Ads' season Friday evening in Bellingham.

After their first game, West Sound will return to Bremerton Ice Center on Saturday and Sunday to wrap up the three-game series against the Blazers.

Hockey fans in West Sound were treated to a championship season when their entry in the Northern Pacific Hockey League, the Warriors, won the Cascade Cup back in 2015.

The Admirals are hoping this is the year they can bring championship-level hockey back to the Sound. It all starts Friday night in Bellingham.

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media