

# WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 10.30.18 – MID-WESTERN DIVISION



## **DALLAS SNIPERS 6-3-0, 17 pts.)**

A weekend sweep of the Steamboat Wranglers has put the Dallas Snipers right back in the thick of things in the Mid-Western Division, and has given the team six consecutive wins.

Forward Danil Trenikhin, a second-year player who put up 23 points (8-15-23) with Dallas last season, went off to the tune of a 5-5-10 scoring line over three games against the Wranglers, including a hat trick in an 11-5 victory in the series finale.

Trenikhin now leads the club with 14 points (7-7-14). After a hot start to the year, the 20-year-old Russian must now continue to produce in order to truly be considered an elite player in the WSHL.

Netminder Alexander Aleshkin has been a huge part of the Snipers' current win streak as well. He has a 2.58/.938 slash line with a 4-0-0 record and has

provided the type of goaltending that can carry a team throughout the regular season.

After a bye this weekend, the Snipers will be tested with a three-game set at home against Northern Colorado. The Eagles have wins in just four of their 10 games but are certainly more talented than their record would indicate.

### **EL PASO RHINOS (6-0-0, 18 pts.)**

The El Paso Rhinos continued their early-season tear with a sweep of Wichita, putting the team at six wins in a row to open the year.

Through six games, the Rhinos already have five players with double-digit points, including leading scorers Jonas Burman (3-10-13) and Dillon Manchester (6-6-12).

Overall, 11 Rhinos are averaging at least a point per game as El Paso leads the Mid-Western Division with 47 goals scored despite playing only six games.

Early on, these Rhinos are looking a lot like last year's version. The overwhelming offensive attack and incredible depth combined with dominant goaltending is a tough combination for opposing squads.

El Paso already owns a ridiculous plus-40 goal differential and has allowed just seven goals in six contests.

The Rhinos are set to take on the Long Beach Bombers on the road this weekend. The Bombers are historically one of the league's better teams and currently lead the Western Division with a 6-2-0 mark. They will likely present an excellent challenge for El Paso.

### **NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (4-6-0, 12 pts.)**

The Northern Colorado Eagles responded well to being swept by Oklahoma City a couple of weeks ago. They outscored the Cheyenne Stampede by a 13-2 margin in back-to-back wins over the weekend.

Northern Colorado was trailing 2-1 heading into the third period of the first game, but it responded with four unanswered goals to put away the Stampede.

Forwards Sean McMahon (4-2-6) and Cameron Braun (3-1-4) each netted a pair of goals in the win, showcasing the Eagles' offensive depth.

Northern Colorado's defense hasn't been all that bad, giving up an average of 3.6 goals per game, but the defensive juggernauts in the Mid-Western Division such as Oklahoma City and El Paso make it tough to win games unless you can keep the opponent off the board.

Northern Colorado is in the midst of a stretch in which 10 of 11 games are on the road. It will wrap up that portion of its schedule this weekend with three games in Dallas.

The frequent road games are part of the reason why the Eagles are under .500. They have won all three home games but have just one win in seven tries in enemy territory.

### **OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (8-1-0, 24 pts.)**

Despite suffering their first loss, the Oklahoma City Blazers lead the Mid-Western Division through the first month of the season.

The Blazers blew a third-period lead and lost their opening game against the Utah Outliers last weekend before posting back-to-back quality road wins over last year's regular-season Mountain Division champions.

In the third and final contest of the series, OKC goalie Bobby Cloutier shut out the Outliers, making 28 saves and moving his record to 3-1-0.

Oklahoma City's goaltending has been unbelievably good so far. Cloutier has a 2.15 goals-against average to go along with a .933 save percentage and earning the majority of the ice time.

Xavier Garneau has been just as good as Cloutier if not better, boasting an unreal 0.56/.979 slash line to go along with a 4-0-0 mark. Garneau, who has a shutout of his own, leads the WSHL in goals-against average and save percentage, giving up just two goals to this point.

OKC will open a season-long nine-game homestand this weekend against Wichita. Blazers fans should mark their calendars for the other two series in the homestand, matchups against undefeated squads from Ogden and El Paso.

The next few weeks will reveal much about whether or not the Blazers should be taken seriously this year as Thorne Cup contenders.

Strong performances against Ogden and El Paso, two teams that have outscored their opponents by a combined 115-25 and are considered by many to be the best clubs in the league, will provide a statement to the rest of the WSHL.

### **WICHITA JR. THUNDER (0-5-1, 1 pt.)**

The young Wichita Jr. Thunder are still searching for their first win after dropping three in a row to El Paso over the weekend.

The Jr. Thunder were blown out twice in the series, but they gave the Rhinos a run for their money in a 3-1 defeat on Saturday night.

In the loss, goaltender Bronson Sudberry played his best game of the young season, stopping 51 of 54 Rhinos attempts. The Denver, Colorado, product had allowed just one goal on 35 shots heading into the final period.

Center Erik Back scored Wichita's lone goal, his first of the season. Back scored 26 points (8-18-26) over 47 appearances with the Superior RoughRiders last season.

Things don't get much easier for the Jr. Thunder. They are in the middle of a brutal stretch of six games in a row against El Paso and Oklahoma City, the top two teams in the division.

The good news is that this weekend's series marks Wichita's final road games before it begins a stretch of 13 consecutive at home. The Jr. Thunder have yet to play in front of their hometown fans this season.

Wichita's biggest problem has been its lack of offense. With just 13 goals in six games, the Jr. Thunder are relying on strong play from their goaltenders to keep them in games.

Only three Jr. Thunder skaters have scored multiple goals. They will need to figure things out quickly or will soon dig themselves into a sizeable hole at the bottom of the Mid-Western Division.

*---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*