

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.06.18 - MID-WESTERN DIVISION



DALLAS SNIPERS (5-3-1-0, 17 pts)

The Dallas Snipers are probably pleased with their results early on. Outside of a three-game sweep at the hands of El Paso during the club's first week of play, the Snipers have posted a 5-0-1-0 record (W-L-OTW-OTL).

Most recently, Dallas took down the Steamboat Wranglers in three consecutive home games October 26-28.

The Snipers have a chance to put themselves in a great position prior to the WSHL's winter break and after the Western States Shootout. Although they will play El Paso on the road in early December, the Snipers will play six of their 12 remaining first-half contests against winless Wichita.

This weekend, Dallas will play on home ice against Northern Colorado, the team directly below it in the Mid-Western Division standings. The following weekend, the Snipers are set to take on Wichita on the road.

Winning both of series over the next couple of weeks will give Dallas some breathing room as it prepares for its upcoming battle with El Paso early next month.

One player who has developed nicely for the Snipers has been Swedish import defenseman Simon Birkehorn. Birkehorn crossed the pond to play for Dallas last season, producing 17 points (3-14-17) in 43 games. This season, he has already put up nine points (2-7-9) through the first nine contests of the season, leading all Snipers blue liners.

Birkehorn is an excellent example of a European player coming over to develop their game in the WSHL and he has played a big role in their improvement in the standings this season.

EL PASO RHINOS (6-2-0-1, 19 pts)

For the first time since January of 2016, the defending Thorne Cup champion El Paso Rhinos were swept in a three-game series.

Western Division-leading Long Beach took down the Rhinos in impressive fashion, winning 5-4 in overtime in the opening contest last Thursday before posting wins of 5-1 and 4-1.

El Paso has no reason to panic at this stage, however. It is still one of the best teams in the WSHL, had only played six regular season games together prior to the measuring stick series, and features incredible offensive depth, with six players already collecting double-digit points.

Furthermore, the series was really the only time the Rhinos' goaltending has faltered this season. Prior to playing Long Beach, El Paso's netminders had allowed two goals or fewer in five of six games, including a pair of shutouts.

19-year-old German import Nils Velm has adjusted quite well to his first exposure to North American hockey, posting a 3-1-1 record with a 1.99 goals-against average and .928 save percentage.

The Rhinos will need to regroup quickly, because this weekend they're scheduled to take on a Utah Outliers squad that has only lost to Ogden (3x) and Oklahoma City (2x) this season.

Looking past this week, the Rhinos have series coming up against Northern Colorado (x2), Oklahoma City, and Dallas before the end of the first half. El Paso will also travel to California to take on competitive Valencia and Ontario squads from the Western Division in mid-December.

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

Winners of their last two games, the Northern Colorado Eagles are on the road this weekend with a three-game series against the Dallas Snipers.

Northern Colorado's biggest issue through the first month of the season has been its inability to win in enemy territory. The Eagles have dropped six of their first seven away games, and head coach Steve Haddon and Co. look to reverse that trend this weekend at the Dr Pepper Star Center in Plano, TX.

The set will mark the first three games in the six-game season series between the two clubs.

Forward Nikita Sheberov (6-5-11) and Bradley Green (3-8-11) are pacing Northern Colorado in scoring through 10 games. Sean McMahon (4-2-6) is second on the team in goals.

Sheberov, a former 100-point scorer with the Superior RoughRiders, is off to a strong start on paper but the 19-year-old Russian has averaged nearly two points per game over the course of his WSHL career.

History would suggest that Sheberov has even more to give to an offense that could use the help, as the Eagles are averaging a modest 3.5 goals per contest.

Green and McMahon played for the Eagles last season. Green scored 27 goals and McMahon 18, and one would expect both players to build on those totals here in their 19-year-old seasons.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (11-1-0-0, 33 pts)

Although the two clubs have yet to play each other, early results seem to indicate that the Oklahoma City Blazers are ready to take another legit shot at dethroning El Paso in the Mid-Western Division.

Over the next couple of weeks, we'll find out just how good these Blazers are. After this weekend's series at home against undefeated Ogden, OKC will take on El Paso in a three-game set for the first time this season. The Blazers will have the benefit of playing all six games in front of their fans in the friendly confines of Arctic Edge Ice Arena.

By almost any measure, Oklahoma City has dominated the competition through its first dozen games. OKC owns a plus-42 goal differential and is second overall in the WSHL standings with 33 points.

With five straight wins, the Blazers are in a good place heading into this weekend's games against Ogden, but they will need to bring their "A" game to prove they can take down a club that has been the best the league has to offer this season.

Forward Vitali Mikhailov continues to lead the way for an Oklahoma City offense that already has already scored 62 goals. Mikhailov has 15 goals and 10 assists through 12 appearances, and his 25 points are tied for fifth-most in the WSHL.

Not far behind are Jordan Srgo (5-12-17) and Dominic Loubert (1-15-16). Loubert's 15 assists are tied with Ogden's Harry Gulliver for seventh-most in the league.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (0-8-1, 1 pt)

The Wichita Jr. Thunder continue to search for their first win of the season. They dropped three in a row in Oklahoma City over the weekend to close out a nine-game season-opening road trip.

Hopefully, Wichita's upcoming 12-game homestand will see Jr. Thunder fans cheer their team to its first victory. Wichita is set to take on Dallas, Steamboat, the Casper Bobcats, and Oklahoma City.

The Jr. Thunder's offense has struggled, but the Swedish trio of Erik Back (2-5-7), Sebastian Lind (1-5-6), and Marcus Ohlsson-Ornelius (1-5-6) has been a bright spot.

Back, Lind, and Ohlsson-Ornelius are the top three scorers on the team and will look to turn things around in front of Wichita's hometown fans over the coming weeks.

20-year-old goaltender Bronson Sudberry has done his part to keep the Jr. Thunder in games this season. Sudberry, a Denver native who was a backup for the WSHL's Superior RoughRiders the last two seasons, has been the main man between the pipes for Wichita, facing 320 shots – the second-most in the league through the month of the season.

If Wichita can do a better job suppressing shot totals, Sudberry has the ability to out-play the goalie at the other end of the rink most nights and win some games for them.

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media

