

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.20.18 – MID-WESTERN DIVISION



DALLAS SNIPERS (8-6-1-0, 26 pts.)
@DallasSnipers

Three consecutive wins over Wichita last weekend pushed the Dallas Snipers' record above .500 for the first time since late October. The Jr. Thunder kept things close, but the Snipers ultimately prevailed with a trio of regulation victories, good for three points each in the division standings.

It was important for the Snipers to pick up every point they could against Wichita, as they are set to match up with El Paso on the road when they return to the ice.

From December 7-9, Dallas will be play three games against the Rhinos in El Paso. The defending Thorne Cup champions have yet to lose at home in regulation.

The Snipers played their first three games of the season against El Paso, and it didn't go well. The Rhinos swept the series and outscored Dallas 22-3 in the process, including a pair of shutouts.

Despite its winning record, Dallas still owns a negative goal differential at minus-6. That's partially due to the lopsided results against El Paso.

After playing the Rhinos, the Snipers will close out their first-half schedule with another series against Wichita before traveling to Las Vegas for the annual Western States Shootout.

EL PASO RHINOS (9-3-1-2, 31 pts.)
@El_Paso_Rhinos

Based off the ridiculously high standard the El Paso Rhinos have set for themselves over the last few seasons, their 9-3-1-2 record at this stage is a slight disappointment.

But for most WSHL teams, sitting in second place in the Mid-Western Division within striking distance of the top spot as December approaches is a pretty good spot to be in.

The Rhinos earned five of nine possible points against Northern Colorado on the road last weekend, falling 6-3 in the opener before posting back-to-back wins in overtime and regulation to close out the series.

El Paso will get another crack at Northern Colorado this weekend, but this time it will come on home ice, where the Rhinos have yet to lose in regulation.

El Paso owns a 4-3-1-0 mark in enemy territory. It has already traveled to Long Beach and Northern Colorado for tough road matchups this season.

It seems that every year, El Paso owns one of the deepest rosters in the WSHL. That looks to be the case once again as nine Rhinos have registered double-digit points, including leading scorers Donald Alchin (3-16-19), Jonas Burman (6-12-18), and John Erramousepe (11-6-17).

NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (8-7-0-0, 24 pts.)

The Northern Colorado Eagles continue to play better than their record would indicate. The Eagles have shown the ability to play with the top talent in the league on multiple occasions, yet they sit only one game above .500, partially as a result of a difficult schedule.

Northern Colorado's schedule is different than other Mid-Western Division teams because of the team's location. The team has multiple series against opponents from the Mountain Division, of which the Eagles were a member last season.

At home last weekend, Northern Colorado dropped two of three against El Paso but picked up four points in the process.

Goaltender Marshall Murphy has been reliable, logging a 2.65 goals-against average to go along with a .912 save percentage.

Murphy, a Minnesota native, owns a 6-4-0-0 record and has shown plenty of improvement after serving as the Superior RoughRiders' go-to netminder last season.

Things aren't going to get much easier for Northern Colorado, which travels to El Paso this weekend for a three-game series. The Eagles will look to rebound from a 7-1 loss to the Rhinos the last time the two clubs matched up.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (12-2-1-0, 58 pts.)

If there were any questions lingering about the legitimacy of the Oklahoma City Blazers, they came to an end last weekend. The Blazers took two of three from Ogden at home to end the Mustangs' 18-game unbeaten run to open the season.

OKC won what was arguably the most anticipated series prior to the WSHL Showcase in mid-December. The Mustangs remain in first place in the league standings by a wide margin, but Oklahoma City has six games in hand on Ogden.

Last weekend, Blazers Head Coach Gary Gill spoke about how the road to the Thorne Cup goes through Ogden. After last weekend's entertaining, back-and-forth series, Gill's team showed that this season, the road to the championship may go through OKC, as well.

One of the reasons why Oklahoma City has so much success is its discipline, which is a sign of a well-coached team. The Blazers only have 194 penalty minutes, the least in the WSHL by a mile.

Forward Vitali Mikhailov has netted a team-high 16 goals and 12 assists, establishing himself as Oklahoma City's go-to option in the offensive zone.

Mikhailov, 20, is a fourth-year veteran and third-year Blazer. The Russian is on pace for a career high in scoring after racking up 65 points (42-23-65) last season.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (0-11-1, 1 pt.)

The Wichita Jr. Thunder twice narrowly missed earning their first win of the year last weekend, falling to Dallas by scores of 2-1 and 6-4 before dropping the series finale, 6-1.

Erik Back (3-8-11) became the first Jr. Thunder reach double-digit points. The 20-year-old Swede had 26 points (8-18-26) over 47 games with the Superior RoughRiders in 2017-18.

Wichita will continue to look for its first victory this weekend as it hosts the Steamboat Wranglers in a three-game series at home.

The Wranglers are 3-14-1-0 and have lost their first nine road games in the WSHL. Wichita will have a great chance to pick up some points this weekend.

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media