

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.21.18 – WESTERN DIVISION



WSHL standings are expressed W-L-OTW-OTL (“W” and “L” represent regulation wins and losses; shootouts are included in overtime results). Three points are awarded for a regulation win, two for an overtime win and one for an overtime loss.

FRESNO MONSTERS (10-6-0-0, 30 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

A three-game sweep of the Valencia Flyers in the friendly confines of Selland Arena gave the Fresno Monsters seven wins in their last nine games and kept them within seven points of the first-place Long Beach Bombers at the top of the Western Division standings.

The Monsters stay at home for Thanksgiving this week, hosting the third-place San Diego Sabers in what should be a spirited three-game set beginning on Friday.

San Diego sits directly behind the Monsters and have been making noise in the division race. This series is an opportunity for Fresno to quiet the upstart Sabers.

While the Monsters have been solid at five-on-five, out-scoring the opposition 40-32, it has been Fresno’s special teams that have been the main driver of their success in the early part of the season. Both the power play and penalty kill have been outstanding, ranking in the top five in the league. The power play has been operating at 22.6% and the PK at 87.6%.

The Monsters have also done a great job drawing penalties. They have been on the power play more times than any other team in the league (115), giving that efficient power play plenty of opportunities.

Connor Hyden's Monsters career was a relatively short one, but he made an impact in his time in the WSHL, scoring 18 goals in 26 games for Fresno during the 2014-15 season.

The 22-year-old Lakeville, MN native has taken his scoring touch to the Naval Academy's ACHA team. After putting up 36 points (12-24-36) in 34 games as a freshman last season, Hyden has lit the lamp 14 times in the first 19 games this season and added 13 assists for 27 points.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (11-3-2-0, 37 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

The Long Beach Bombers remain in first place in the Western Division – a perch they have come accustomed to having finished atop the division standings the past two seasons.

But, after losing a total of 16 regular season games in regulation over the last two seasons, Long Beach has not been as dominant this season. They still have a seven-point lead on second-place Fresno, but eight of their last 10 games against Division opponents have been decided by two goals or fewer. That includes losses to Fresno and Valencia and one-goal wins over all four division opponents.

Friday night in San Diego, the Sabers were leading the Bombers in the third period but took repeated penalties that allowed Long Beach to come back and win with their power play. Had San Diego displayed more discipline maybe that would have been another in the loss column for the Bombers.

Of course, right in the middle of all of those close division games was a three-game sweep of the El Paso Rhinos, so the Bombers are still clearly capable of playing with the league's elite teams.

One thing is for sure. The parity and depth in the Western Division is at an all-time high and that should make for a grueling regular season that will prepare all five teams – including the Bombers – for the divisional playoffs and Thorne Cup.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (3-7-0-2, 11 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

The Ontario Avalanche played a single game last week, dropping a 3-2 decision in San Diego on Saturday. Logan Corrigan scored his first goal of the season for the Avalanche in that one, and Liam Massie his second.

Goals from new sources is definitely something that is welcome in Ontario. The Avs historically have played a low-scoring, grinding, style of hockey but they need to find some goals. 20-year-old forward Jeremy Van Dyke is the only Avalanche player with more than five goals on the season (9).

Despite the fact that their power play is producing at a respectable 20% clip, the Avalanche have the fewest goals scored in the Western Division (43). They have lit the lamp just 28 times at five-on-five through their first 12 games.

The unconventional schedule continues this week for the Avs: three games with a day of rest in between each – a change from the usual three-in-three weekend grind of junior hockey. They will play a mid-week game at Long Beach before enjoying the Thanksgiving Holiday, then commence a five-game homestand with games against Valencia on Friday and Sunday.

Ontario will probably welcome the opportunity to play somebody other than the Sabers, who they played their last five games against, winning just one.

Connor Duffy's .927 save percentage ranks him eighth in the league among goaltenders with 300 or more minutes played. Over his last four appearances – all against San Diego – he has stopped 151 of 160 shots (.944) for a stingy 2.43 goals-against average, but does not have any wins to show for it.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (5-9-3-1, 22 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers have to be the most impressive five-win team in the entire WSHL. Make that five regulation wins as the Sabers have picked up an additional three two-pointers with wins past regulation.

Despite having just five RWs through their first 18 games, 11 of those 18 games have been decided by two goals or fewer. Three went to overtime and a fourth went to a shootout. The Sabers have been clutch, winning their first three games to go past regulation before losing in OT to Long Beach last Friday.

San Diego has remained competitive despite significant struggles on special teams – especially a penalty kill that ranks 22 out of 23 WSHL teams at just 69.0%.

Long Beach victimized the Sabers over the weekend. They scored the game-tying and OT game-winning goals on the power play on Friday, then scored four of their five goals on the power play to beat the Sabers in another close game on Sunday.

The power play has been sup-par as well (15.9%), resulting in a special teams index (PP+PK) of just 84.9% for the Sabers – 21st in the league.

The Sabers are already light years ahead of where they were a year ago – when they only won five games all season – but if San Diego can clean up their special teams they should be able to reach an even higher level of play and compete for home ice in the playoffs.

VALENCIA FLYERS (4-7-0-1, 13 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers are looking to get back on track after dropping three games in Fresno last week. They remain in fourth place – nine points behind third-place San Diego – but with six games (and a possible 18 points) in hand on the Sabers.

The Flyers resume play the day after Thanksgiving in Ontario, then take a day off before playing the Avalanche again on Sunday. The last two games between the Flyers and Avalanche have been decided by one goal, with each team winning one.

The Valencia penalty kill has been solid at 85.9%, but the power play has converted just eight of 69 opportunities, putting them 22nd in the 23-team WSHL at 11.6%.

Only six Flyers have found the net more than once this year, so finding some scoring depth is something that the team needs to address if they want to remain in the thick of the competitive Western Division race.

Brooks Dimarino has played sparingly this season but was ready when called upon, making 48 saves to keep the Flyers in the game despite a 4-3 loss in Fresno on Friday. He stopped 34 of 36 shots through the first 40 minutes of that game.

--- Compiled by Scott Harrington for Harrington Sports Media