

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.30.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (15-4-0-0, 45 pts.)
@BhamBlazers

The Bellingham Blazers enter this weekend's home series against Southern Oregon coming off their first one-sided loss of the season, an 8-2 defeat at the hands of Seattle.

The Blazers are still holding onto their lead in the Northwest Division standings, six points ahead of the second-place Totems.

"I think I always expected that we would be in first by this point," said Blazers General Manager and Head Coach Mark Collins. "We typically start the season then work on building good habits before things really start coming together.

"We aren't necessarily playing our best hockey, but we're finding ways to win. A lot of that is due to our veteran guys."

That could mean trouble is coming for the rest of the Northwest. If the Blazers have managed a 15-4-0-0 record without being at their best, they could have a shot at running away with the division title if things go according to plan.

But Collins knows his players have a ton of work to do to get to that point. As Bellingham's core group of player knows, the season is a marathon, not a sprint.

"We still need to work hard at building good habits," Collins continued. "We still don't quite play a full 60-minute game on a regular basis and need to make sure that we are committed to that process to have success moving forward."

SEATTLE TOTEMS (12-4-1-1, 39 pts)

@SeattleJrTotems

Winners of four consecutive games and five of their last six, the Seattle Totems head into this weekend's series against the West Sound Admirals looking to continue their first-half success.

The Totems, who are one victory away from tying their win total from all of last season, are experiencing some unprecedented success. Seattle has never finished with a winning record since joining the WSHL in 2012 and ended last season in fifth place in the division.

Seattle has yet to lose a game at Olympicview Arena, logging a 5-0-0-0 record on home ice. Two of the Totems' three contests against West Sound will be played in front of their hometown fans, giving them a slight advantage heading into three-game set.

West Sound may be an expansion club, but it's hungry for an upset win or two over the surging Totems. Seattle will need to bring its best as it looks to inch closer to the top spot in the division.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (6-10-0-1, 19 pts.)

@wshlspartans

During their six-game road trip through Canada last week, the Southern Oregon Spartans saw up-and-down results. The Spartans opened the trip with three blowout wins before dropping the final three against the Edson Aeros (twice) and Hinton Wildcats.

As a result, Southern Oregon couldn't gain much ground in the Northwest Division standings. It remains firmly in third place, 20 points behind second-place Seattle.

"I thought the 10-day road trip really helped identify our character," said Spartans Head Coach Ken Hoey. "We traveled 28 hours on a bus to play our first few games. We were treated very well by these new Canadian teams."

The Spartans overcame some obstacles during their trek through Alberta. Four players were unable to make it to Canada due to visa complications, and the team bus broke down twice.

Despite taking a 6-3 loss, Hoey thought his team played very well against Edson on November 15. In the game, netminder Austin Johnson took a tough loss despite making 48 saves.

"We were down 2-0 at the end of the first period, then it was back and forth the rest of the game," Hoey explained. "I think if we had stayed a little more disciplined, we could have taken two points. Our goalie, Austin, was outstanding, but penalties hurt us as Edson scored five goals on the power play."

The Spartans will be ready to face division-leading Bellingham this weekend in a series that could potentially change the team's outlook for the rest of the season.

"We are excited to face Bellingham," said Hoey. "If we play physical, stay out of the box, and stay true to our system, we are a threat to any team in the league."

WEST SOUND ADMIRALS (4-12-1-0, 14 pts.)

@wsadmirals

The West Sound Admirals are back from a two-week hiatus this weekend to take on the Seattle Totems in a three-game series. A pair of games in Seattle on Friday and Sunday will be sandwiched around a Saturday-night matchup at Bremeton Ice Center.

As an expansion team, the Admirals have had to overcome numerous hurdles this season. The team's head coach, Dave Daniello, thinks the process of joining the WSHL has gone as he anticipated.

"The adjustment has been as expected," Daniello said. "We didn't have a long time to recruit so we have gains that need to be made, but right now we're working in the right direction."

“We have shown we can be competitive, we just haven’t done it consistently. I think we need to play better defensive hockey, we have forwards who can score but we are very young and inexperienced on the back end.”

The numbers seem to support Daniello’s point. The Ads have given up 95 goals, more than any other team in the Northwest Division. West Sound is allowing an average of close to six goals per game, something that needs to be rectified for the Admirals to get back into the thick of things in the division.

“To get back into the division race, we need to win these crucial divisional games and we need to figure out Bellingham.”

Forwards Alec Johnson (6-14-20), a two-year veteran, and Oliwer Stensson (8-14-22), an 18-year-old Swede, represent West Sound’s top two offensive threats. The duo has powered the Admirals’ offensive effort throughout the first half.

“Alec has been huge for us. He is our captain and is the heart of the team,” said Daniello. “Oliwer is turning out to be a great player. Once he gets more time on these smaller rinks, he will just get better and better.

“Those guys are keys to our game and are big holes to fill if they’re not in the lineup.”

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media