

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 12.04.18 – MID-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.

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

@DallasSnipers

It’s a big week for the Dallas Snipers, who are preparing to take on El Paso for the second time this season. The first meeting between the clubs didn’t go well for Dallas, which was swept in the three-game series.

El Paso is hovering around .500 on the road, but it has yet to lose in regulation on home ice, winning seven games while posting just one overtime loss.

After taking on the Rhinos, Dallas will wrap up its first-half schedule with a three-game set at home against last-place Wichita before traveling to Las Vegas for the WSHL Showcase.

“I think we have a ton to improve on over the next few weeks before the Showcase hits,” Snipers Head Coach Aaron Davis said last week. “I like parts of our game and I don’t like other parts. If we can clean some things up, we will be in much better shape.”

The Snipers haven’t played a game since November 18 when they wrapped up a series sweep over Wichita. The additional practice time gave the team plenty of time to work out some issues and prepare for El Paso.

Dallas’ trio of games at the Western States Shootout will be played against Wichita, the CPJHL White Team, and the West Sound Admirals.

EL PASO RHINOS (12-5-2-2, 42 pts.)

@El_Paso_Rhinos

In a series that had a playoff-like atmosphere between the top two teams in the Mid-Western Division, the El Paso Rhinos dropped two of three games and fell two points behind division-leading Oklahoma City.

The Rhinos dropped the first two games of the series in regulation before salvaging three points in a 4-2 victory in the series finale.

The Blazers held a 2-1 edge late in the second period and seemed to be on their way to a series sweep, but the Rhinos tied the game in the final minute of the period before netting a pair of goals in the third.

El Paso is still the defending WSHL champion, but Oklahoma City holds a slight edge in the head-to-head matchup and the division standings as the calendar turns to December.

With six games left before the Western States Shootout, the Rhinos have plenty of time to make up some ground before the Christmas break.

Forward Jonas Burman (10-13-23) paces El Paso in scoring, closely followed by John Erramousepe (13-9-22). Depth has been a trademark of the Rhinos organization for quite a while now, and this year’s roster is no exception.

Twelve players have logged double-digit points already, including Donald Alchin (3-16-19), the team’s highest-scoring defenseman.

The Rhinos will host Dallas this weekend in a three-game series. They will be looking to maintain an eight-game point streak on home ice that started at the beginning of the season.

El Paso will face a challenging slate of games at the Western States Shootout later this month, playing against three division leaders in the Edson Aeros, Bellingham Blazers, and Ogden Mustangs.

NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (10-9-0-2, 32 pts.)

@NoCoEagles

A pair of wins over the Steamboat Wranglers over the weekend pushed the Northern Colorado Eagles back above .500 with perhaps their toughest stretch of the season coming up over the next few weeks.

The Eagles are on the road this weekend battling the Utah Outliers before facing off against first-place Oklahoma City next week. Utah has won 10 of its 14 home games and trails only the league-leading Ogden Mustangs in the Mountain Division standings. They represent a tough matchup for any WSHL squad.

Northern Colorado is scheduled to take on Seattle, Hinton, and Long Beach as the WSHL Showcase. Those are all three skilled clubs, but they may be a slight step down from the brutal schedule the Eagles have been faced with up to this point.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (14-3-1-0, 44 pts.)

@OKCBlazersWSHL

For the time being, the Oklahoma City Blazers seem to have established themselves as one of the top teams in the WSHL, and could make an argument as the early “team to beat” in the league.

Over the last two weeks, the Blazers have posted series wins over Ogden and El Paso. Ogden leads the league in points while El Paso is the defending league champion.

Prior to last week’s series, Blazers Head Coach Gary Gill said his team doesn’t look to change how it operates from week to week. That won’t change any time soon, especially after the positive steps the club has taken over the last couple of weeks.

An underrated aspect of Oklahoma City’s success is the discipline it has shown under Gill. The Blazers have only earned 270 penalty minutes, the third-lowest total of any WSHL team.

They've also been shorthanded fewer times than any other team, which has probably contributed to keeping their dominant penalty kill unit fresh and ready to go. OKC is killing off a ridiculous 91.7 percent of its penalties while converting on 25.6 percent of its power-play chances.

The Blazers will look to continue their special teams dominance in a three-game series on the road against Wichita this weekend.

Oklahoma City will play some big games at the league showcase in Las Vegas in a few weeks. The Blazers will take on the Bellingham Blazers (first place, Northwest), Fresno Monsters (second place, Western) and Long Beach Bombers (first place, Western) in three heavyweight matchups.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (4-13-0-1, 13 pts.)

@JrThunderHockey

The Wichita Jr. Thunder logged their second consecutive series win last weekend, taking two of three games at home against the Casper Bobcats.

This comes after the Jr. Thunder took two of three from the Steamboat Wranglers the previous week. All of a sudden, a team that dropped its first 12 games of the season has won four of its last six contests.

Before his team had won a game this season, Wichita Head Coach Rob Weingartner expressed confidence in his club's ability to compete despite some unlucky breaks.

"The team has been played well, we just didn't earn our bounces yet," said Weingartner. "I think we have a competitive group that is getting better every series."

The past couple of weeks seem to support Weingartner's thoughts. Wichita is getting better, but it still has to compete in the stacked Mid-Western Division. Divisional games will remain a tough challenge, especially this week's series against first-place Oklahoma City.

The OKC series will conclude a 12-game homestand that began back on November 16. Wichita will have the chance to show just how far it has come since its slow start.

The Jr. Thunder's Western States Shootout schedule will see them open the showcase against the Cold Lake Wings before matching up with the CPJHL White Team and the Cheyenne Stampede.

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media