

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 01.29.19 – 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 (20-15-1-0, 62 pts.)

@DallasSnipers

The Dallas Snipers had some trouble against Wichita at home last weekend, but the Snipers were able to use a pair of nine-goal efforts to take two of three games in the series.

Forward Jasa Jenko had a big weekend, racking up four goals and four assists against Wichita. Jenko’s performance gave him 50 points on the year with a 32-33-54 scoring line.

Not to be outdone, Eric Eaton put up nine points (3-6-9) to give him an even 50 points (15-35-50) this season. Eaton, a third-year veteran, has netted 10 power-play goals and has already reached a career high in points with 15 games left in the regular season.

Life in the Mid-Western Division doesn’t afford teams much time to catch their breath, and the Snipers are about to figure that out firsthand in the coming weeks. Dallas has three-game sets against El Paso, Oklahoma City (twice), and Northern Colorado coming up as well as another matchup against Wichita.

While the Snipers were able to log a 7-4 victory over Oklahoma City in their most recent series against the Blazers, they have struggled mightily in their games against division-leading El Paso. Dallas has lost all six of its games against the Rhinos, but on December 9 the Snipers gave El Paso all it could handle in a 6-4 loss.

This weekend, Dallas will close out a six-game homestand with a trio of games against the Rhinos at Dr. Pepper Star Center.

EL PASO RHINOS (27-7-3-2, 89 pts.)

@El_Paso_Rhinos

A three-game sweep of the Ontario Avalanche last weekend allowed the El Paso Rhinos to increase their lead at the top of the Mid-Western Division standings to 11 points.

Ontario had to travel over 750 miles to play in El Paso and could not get a single goal past the Rhinos' stout defense. El Paso outscored the Avalanche 22-0 in one of its most complete series of the season.

In the opening win, leading scorer Jonas Burman (26-30-56) logged a hat trick and goaltender Nils Velm earned a relatively easy shutout, making only 13 saves in a 6-0 win.

The following day, Velm had an even lighter workload with a seven-save shutout in the Rhinos' 10-0 victory. John Erramousepe (24-24-48) scored a pair of goals and had two assists while Sameul Sykes (13-19-32) dished out four helpers.

Netminder Nils Scheider made his WSHL debut in the series finale and did not see much action as the Rhinos overwhelmed the Avs en route to allowing on six shots on goal in another 6-0 win. The 19-year-old German is playing in North America for the first time, so the quiet afternoon was a good way for Scheider to begin his transition to WSHL hockey.

The Rhinos' performance over the last two weeks should put the rest of their division on notice. El Paso is historically a team that shines as the postseason approaches, and that certainly seems to be the case this year.

The Rhinos will play a three-game series on the road against Dallas before opening a nine-game homestand that will take them to the end of the regular season.

NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (19-14-0-2, 59 pts.)

@NoCoEagles

The Northern Colorado Eagles played a great series at home last weekend against a tough opponent in Oklahoma City and were rewarded with a 3-2 victory in the series finale.

The Eagles dropped the first two games of the series, both by the same score of 6-3, before prevailing in the final contest. Northern Colorado overcame a 2-0 deficit and took the lead on Jacob Elik's 10th goal of the season with 3:25 left in regulation.

Goaltender Marshall Murphy faced over 40 shots in all three contests. He was especially impressive in the Eagles' win as he stopped 42 of the 44 shots he saw.

Murphy has been the Eagles' workhorse this year with a 14-11-2 record to go along with a 2.82/.918 slash line. The Little Canada, Minnesota product has improved his numbers across the board after filling a similar role with the Superior RoughRiders last season.

The Eagles are three points behind third-place Dallas with one game in hand on the Snipers. Northern Colorado could overtake Dallas in the coming weeks, partially due to the upcoming schedules for both clubs.

While Dallas will be tasked with multiple series against the top teams in the division as well as a three-game set against the Eagles in the first weekend of March, Northern Colorado faces a relatively easy schedule with matchups against the Casper Bobcats, Steamboat Wranglers, and Wichita coming up soon.

This weekend, the Eagles will take on the Cheyenne Stampede before hosting Casper in a pair of games. From February 9-10, Northern Colorado will travel to El Paso for its final series of the season against the Rhinos.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (25-8-1-1, 78 pts.)

@OKCBlazersWSHL

The Oklahoma City Blazers won two of three games against Northern Colorado, but it wasn't enough to keep pace with El Paso as the Blazers fell an additional three points behind the Mid-Western Division leaders.

The Blazers defense allowed only eight goals in three games against the Eagles. On the season, OKC is giving up an average of only 2.4 goals per game, third-best in the WSHL.

Forward Stephane Doering (21-35-56) had a nice seven-point series against Northern Colorado with three goals and four assists. Doering is tied with Henrik Overall (21-26-47) for second on the team in goals, trailing only Vitali Mikhailov (37-35-72).

Under head coach Gary Gill, the Blazers' special teams are arguably the best in the WSHL. OKC is the only team in the league killing off at least 90 percent of their penalties and has a 92.7 percent success rate. The Blazers are the only club that is out-scoring the opposition while on the penalty kill, scoring 12 shorthanded goals while allowing only 10 power-play tallies.

On the man advantage, Oklahoma City has enjoyed similar success. The Blazers are converting on 27.9 percent of their power play chances, just a hair under the Edson Aero's league-leading 28.8 percent conversion rate.

The Blazers are also the only team in the WSHL that hasn't allowed a shorthanded goal. To sum it all up, OKC seems to have the upper hand whenever a player on either side heads to the penalty box.

This weekend, Oklahoma City will take on Wichita on the road in a three-game set. The Blazers have won all six of their games against the Jr. Thunder this season.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (8-26-0-2, 26 pts.)
@JrThunderHockey

The Wichita Jr. Thunder picked up their eighth win of the season last weekend with a 4-3 triumph over Dallas in the middle game of a three-game series.

In the win, forward Christopher Wracker netted a pair of goals while Brett Cameron, Braeden Thomas, Erik Back, and Carson Weingartner dished out a pair of assists each.

Wracker now has an 8-14-22 scoring line in 36 appearances this season. The South Carolina native scored 18 points (7-11-18) in 39 games with the Palm Beach Hawks (USP3HL) in 2016-17.

Wichita is facing a 33-point deficit at the bottom of the Mid-Western Division, so picking up points isn't the most important thing for the Jr. Thunder right now. The young team will look to keep improving as the WSHL playoffs draw nearer.

The Jr. Thunder kick off a six-game homestand this weekend with three games against Oklahoma City, a tough matchup for any WSHL team. After that, Wichita will host Dallas from February 8-10.

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media