

## WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.12.19 – 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 (21-19-1-1, 66 pts.)**

**@DallasSnipers**

It was a frustrating weekend for the Dallas Snipers, who dropped three consecutive one-goal games to last-place Wichita and failed to take advantage of an opportunity to surpass Northern Colorado in the Mid-Western Division standings.

The Eagles didn’t pick up any points last week as they were swept by El Paso. After a full slate of weekend action between both clubs, Dallas only gained a single point on Northern Colorado by virtue of a 3-2 overtime loss on Saturday night.

To its credit, Wichita is a much-improved team than the club that Dallas saw earlier in the year when it beat the Jr. Thunder seven out of nine times.

The Snipers came into last weekend's series having just logged their first win of the year over division-leading El Paso, a 7-5 victory at home, so they were likely hoping for a better result against a Wichita team that trails them by 32 points.

Dallas needs to move on quickly with a tough matchup on the road in Oklahoma City looming this Friday. The opening puck drop for the three-game series is slated for this Friday night at Arctic Edge Ice Arena.

The Snipers have nine games remaining on their schedule, and six of them are against the Blazers. Dallas has dropped two of three games against Oklahoma City this season, but it has put up a solid fight in each matchup.

It will be interesting to see how the Snipers perform this weekend. Although it has a three-game set coming up against Northern Colorado over the first weekend of March, Dallas' needs to play well against Oklahoma City in order to have a realistic chance at surpassing third-place Northern Colorado.

### **EL PASO RHINOS (32-8-3-2, 104 pts.)**

#### **@El\_Paso\_Rhinos**

The El Paso Rhinos became the second team in the WSHL to reach 100 points with last weekend's three-game sweep of Northern Colorado.

The Eagles gave the Rhinos all they could handle, but El Paso's defense ultimately gave it the upper hand as the Rhinos allowed only two goals throughout the entire series.

El Paso is off this weekend, giving it additional time off to prepare for a three-game matchup against Oklahoma City that could play a huge factor in which club takes home regular season Mid-Western Division crown.

Goaltender Richie Parent made his WSHL debut on Saturday night and went home a winner after stopping 18 of 19 shots in the Rhinos' 4-1 win over Northern Colorado.

The following afternoon, Parent turned aside 32 Eagles shots in a 3-0 Rhinos win that completed the sweep. Overall, Parent has stopped 50 of 51 shots over his first two WSHL games.

El Paso's strong defensive play made things easier on Parent, but the emergence of the 19-year-old could spell trouble for the rest of the Mid-Western Division. Parent, a Gulf Breeze, Florida product, has joined a Rhinos goaltending corps that

already features 20-year-old German Nils Velm, a 28-game winner with a 1.79/.921 line in a workhorse role.

El Paso is already a top-two defensive team in the league in terms of goals against per game, and, if Parent's early play is any indication of what's to come, the Rhinos' defense could become even more dominant as the postseason approaches.

### **NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (22-17-0-2, 68 pts.)**

**@NoCoEagles**

The Northern Colorado Eagles three-game set against El Paso last weekend was indicative of a trend that's been happening throughout the entire season: Northern Colorado gave the Rhinos all they could handle but were ultimately unable to find the back of the net consistently enough to come out on top.

Due to their proximity to clubs in the Mountain Division, it's not difficult to make the argument that the Eagles have the toughest schedule of any team in their division. Northern Colorado has to take on top teams such as the Ogden Mustangs and Utah Outliers while dealing with clubs in their own division like El Paso and Oklahoma City.

All things considered, it hasn't been a bad year for the Eagles, who sit in third place in the five-team Mid-Western Division with nine games to go.

Northern Colorado has struggled on the road, but it's been a different team at Greeley Ice Haus, where it has posted a 10-4-0-1 record. In enemy territory, the Eagles have faltered to a 12-13-0-1 mark, partially due to tough road series against Ogden and Utah.

Veteran forward Nikita Sheberov has netted 25 of his team's 152 goals and scoring or assisting on 30 percent (46 of 152) of Northern Colorado's total tallies.

Not far behind him is Jacob Elik, a 44-point-scorer (11-33-44), and Mark Revniaga (13-22-35). Jarret Marks (14-12-26) is second on the club in goals while Michael Petrotto (8-26-34) leads all Eagles defensemen in scoring.

Northern Colorado travels to Cheyenne for a matchup against the Stampede on Friday before returning home for a couple of contests against the Steamboat Wranglers on Saturday and Sunday.

### **OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (28-8-1-1, 87 pts.)**

**@OKCBlazersWSHL**

The Oklahoma City Blazers return to the ice this weekend for three home games against division-rival Dallas. The Blazers need to pick up as many points as possible in the coming weeks as they currently trail first-place El Paso by 17 points but hold seven games in hand on the Rhinos.

That means that, even though it may be a bit early to be using this thought process, the Blazers still control their destiny, no matter what happens to El Paso.

WSHL teams earn three points per regulation win, so a hot stretch of play could vault Oklahoma City to the top of the division. Next weekend's three-game series between OKC and El Paso at Sierra County Events Center in Texas will be one of the more anticipated matchups of the season due to the potential playoff implications.

Oklahoma City's remaining 12 games are quite balanced, with six games on home ice and six road games. The Blazers remaining home games are against Dallas and the Casper Bobcats, a couple of opponents who will be underdogs but still present a challenge.

The good news for Oklahoma City is that it has been a remarkably consistent team no matter where it plays its games. The Blazers have earned exactly half of their wins in front of their hometown fans while claiming the other half in opposing rinks.

Under head coach Gary Gill, OKC has been one of the most disciplined teams in the WSHL. With only 525 penalty minutes, the Blazers are the second-least penalized team in the league.

**WICHITA JR. THUNDER (10-29-1-2, 34 pts.)**  
**@JrThunderHockey**

Things are looking up for the Wichita Jr. Thunder, who beat Dallas in three consecutive one-goal games over the weekend, quite an achievement for a team as young and inexperienced as Wichita. The Jr. Thunder will finish the regular season having won five of 12 games against the Snipers.

The sweep allowed the Jr. Thunder to reach double-digit wins. Wichita now has more points than any other last-place team in the WSHL, a testament to the depth and talent found in the Mid-Western Division.

“We told our boys to expect playoff-style hockey,” said Jr. Thunder Head Coach and General Manager Rob Weingartner. “They were one-goal games that were decided by hard work and not giving up.”

As a former Thorne Cup champion coach, Weingartner is not accustomed to the struggles the Jr. Thunder have gone through over the last two seasons. He’s beginning to see some noticeable improvement after having little to celebrate since Wichita won the championship in 2017.

“We are starting to put it all together, which is fun to see as a coach. The boys are starting to experience some success from their hard work throughout the year. It’s easy to give up, but working through and paying attention to our systems and, more importantly, helping each other is starting to pay off.

“Our boys know they can beat Dallas. They came close all year and finally broke through this weekend, so I’m sure that will help if we meet in the first round of the playoffs.”

It was a great series for Wichita, but Weingartner knows it won’t mean much if his team can’t bring the same consistent effort to this weekend’s three-game set in Casper against the Bobcats.

“We need to stay focused and continue to play good hockey,” Weingartner added. “We have a talented young group, and they’re starting to believe in themselves. I’m excited to see what they bring this weekend in Casper.”

*---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*