

## WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.15.19 – NORTHWESTERN 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.*

### **BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (30-11-0-2, 92 pts.)**

**@BhamBlazers**

After defeating Southern Oregon 7-4 in the series opener last weekend, the Bellingham Blazers dropped consecutive one-goal games against the Spartans on home ice.

The Blazers are still in firm control of the Northwest Division with a 22-point lead, but second-place Seattle has seven games in hand on Bellingham, so the race for the division crown is far from over.

This weekend, the Blazers will battle West Sound in a three-game set. After opening the series at home, the two clubs will travel to Bremerton Ice Center to for a pair of contests that will wrap up their 15-game season series.

Although there have been a couple of close calls, Bellingham is undefeated against West Sound through 12 matchups.

The Blazers were one of the more active teams in the WSHL prior to the trade deadline, adding a total of nine players over the last few weeks. One of those players was goaltender Jack Walsh, who takes the spot of two-year veteran netminder Avery Heath after the 20-year-old was sent to the Hinton Wildcats.

Forward Ruslan Abianov, another recent addition, is off to a hot start with his new club. Abianov, 17, has a goal and five assists through eight appearances with Bellingham. Also, Krystof Knapek has three points in three games since joining the Blazers.

### **SEATTLE TOTEMS (22-11-1-2, 70 pts)** **@SeattleJrTotems**

The Seattle Totems are back in action this weekend with a three-game set on the road against the Valencia Flyers, the only series of the season between the two clubs.

The Flyers are sitting at the bottom of the Western Division with an 8-24-1-4 record, but they won't be an easy win for the Totes. Valencia has taken two of three games against West Sound and logged an overtime victory over the Fresno Monsters recently.

"With the Flyers playing some good hockey lately and our 20-hour snowy bus ride, I'm sure we'll have our hands full this weekend," said Totems Head Coach and General Manager Michael Murphy.

The Totems have been bolstering their roster over the last few weeks without losing much talent. The only player Seattle traded at the deadline was defenseman Pavel Simak, and it brought in seven different skaters.

Among the recent additions are forward Tom Ignatovich, who has 11 points (4-7-11) in six games, and goaltender Rustam Kulizade, a 17-year-old Russian who has compiled a 2.16 goals-against average to go along with a .936 save percentage over four appearances.

Kulizade joins incumbent netminder Wyatt Monear, a veteran who has compiled a 3.84 goals-against average and an .883 save percentage, to form a solid goaltending duo.

“We feel with our goalie situation, we now have a solid one-two punch with Rusty and Wyatt,” said Murphy. “If one guy gets hot and takes over, we’ll ride them a bit, but for now we’ll keep using both of them.”

## **SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (11-25-2-1, 38 pts.)**

**@wshlspartans**

We’re starting to see a much-improved version of the Southern Oregon Spartans, who won their road series against division-leading Bellingham with a pair of dramatic victories.

After the Blazers threw the first punch with a 7-2 win on Friday night, Southern Oregon responded the following evening with a 5-4 win in overtime.

Forward Logan Emery was the hero as he netted his second goal of the game three minutes into the extra period to cap off a four-point night and give his team one of its most impressive victories of the season. Blueliner Axel Low contributed a pair of goals and an assist while newcomer Matej Valicek added a goal and a helper.

In the rubber match last Sunday afternoon, a fantastic 37-save effort from netminder Kayden Pickles propelled the Spartans to a 2-1 win in a game that had a playoff-like atmosphere.

Some of the Spartans’ recent improvement could potentially be traced back to several recent roster moves made by head coach Ken Hoey and company. Among the additions are Valicek and forwards Mitchell Rutledge, a former El Paso Rhino, and Jan Sokolik, who has played for the Ontario Avalanche and San Diego Sabers this season.

Sokolik is off to a great start with a pair of goals and an assist through three games. Perhaps the most notable newcomer could be four-year veteran Harmen Vining, a blueliner who has developed as an offensive threat in his fourth WSHL season.

Vining has 10 goals and 41 assists for a total of 51 points in 33 games and is one of the highest-scoring defensemen in the league. He will join forces with Low (16-31-47) to give the Spartans defensive corps quite a scoring punch.

Southern Oregon will begin its final homestand of the season this weekend with a three-game series against West Sound.

**WEST SOUND ADMIRALS (7-29-2-0, 25 pts.)**

**@wsadmirals**

Even with all of the player movement that occurred within the Northwest Division as the trade deadline approached, the West Sound Admirals seem to have had a bit more roster turnover than their division rivals.

Forwards Oliwer Stensson, Alec Johnson, and Caleb Travis are no longer with the team along with offensive-minded defenseman Harmen Vining.

Eight new skaters have joined the Admirals' roster as the club heads into this weekend's series against Southern Oregon, including former Spartans Sarp Demirezen, Yehor Honcharenko, Madiyar Zhaxylykov, and Adam Van Akin.

The top scorer currently listed on West Sounds' active roster is Cory Kane, a 17-goal scorer averaging nearly a point per game in his first WSHL season. He's followed by Artem Popov (13-6-19), a 19-year-old who appeared in six games with the Utah Outliers last season, collecting five points (1-4-5).

The Admirals only have four home games left in the regular season. West Sound will play nine of its final 13 games in enemy territory.

*---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*