

PROVINCIAL DIVISION SEMIFINAL PREVIEW



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.

4. COLD LAKE WINGS (4-37-2-2) @ 1. EDSON AEROS (37-6-1-1)

Best-of-three series; all games at Repsol Place – Edson

GAME 1 Friday, March 22 8:15 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 23 8:15 p.m.

GAME 3 Sunday, March 24 8:15 p.m. (if necessary)

The Edson Aeros and Cold Lake Wings make their Thorne Cup playoff debuts in a best-of-three Provincial Division Semifinal series at Repsol Place in Edson.

The Aeros were the wire-to-wire leaders in the Western States Hockey League’s new Provincial Division, running away with the division title by 41 points. In the process, they put together the second-best winning percentage in the entire league.

Only one team (Ogden, 341) scored more goals than Edson's 316 but, on a per-game basis the Aeros were the most prolific offensive team in the league at just over seven goals per outing. Three Edson skaters hit the century mark individually: Sebastian Heden (62-86-148), Emil Johansson (76-65-141) and Kevin Lundin (38-62-100). Heden just missed tying the all-time league record for points in a season (150) while Johansson set a new mark for goals with 76.

It is easy to focus on the big guns at the top of the lineup when looking at this team but there is also depth, with seven more players registering 36+ points, and stellar goaltending.

Liam Austin (26-5-0, 2.66, .922 SV%) is among the league's elite goaltenders. If the Aeros go on a long post-season run he will certainly be tested. Giving him an easy go through this round could pay dividends later in the post-season as the competition intensifies.

It was a long, cold winter for the Cold Lake Wings who won only four games in their inaugural campaign. This series is less about trying to advance and more about having one last look – a final exam if you will – for a young roster. Decisions will be made over the summer on who to bring back and this series is an opportunity for players to make an impression.

The five players who hit double-digit goals and 20+ points are all eligible to come back a year stronger and a year wiser. Nine players born in 2001 or later (3+ years of junior eligibility remaining) still dot the roster.

**3. MEADOW LAKE MUSTANGS (14-30-1-0) @
2. HINTON WILDCATS (23-19-1-2)**

Best-of-three series; all games at Murray Rec Center – Hinton

GAME 1 Friday, March 22 8:00 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 23 7:30 p.m.

GAME 3 Sunday, March 24 4:30 p.m. (if necessary)

The Provincial Division Semifinal series between Meadow Lake and Hinton is shaping up to be a good one. The second-seeded Wildcats finished well ahead of the #3 Mustangs, but the gap between the two narrowed in the second half of the season as Meadow Lake played improved hockey – including in their head-to-head season series with the Wildcats.

Hinton won the first seven meetings between the two teams but, from January 26 through the end of the season, Meadow Lake won three of the next five.

The Mustangs posted their third win of the season just before American Thanksgiving (November 24), but won 11 after that as difference-makers like Shane Hounsell (33-36-69 in 32 games), Erik Ehrmantraut (11-28-39 in 28 games), Andrew Hawes (18 goals in 15 games) and Tobie Opikokew (14 goals in 12 games) were added to the lineup.

The Wildcats, meanwhile, were the clear #2 team in the division behind Edson for the first half of the season. But this is a series where the records are thrown out the window for sure. Meadow Lake's season record is deceiving and they could just as easily win this series as Hinton could.

While the Mustangs brought in some prolific scorers to change their fortunes, Hinton's lineup has been a little more stable from the beginning of the season to the end, with forwards Brendan Auger (32-40-72) and Dmitri Buttazzoni (30-36-66) creating the most offense with help from blue liner Noah Kwasny (16-42-58).

Former Bellingham Blazer goaltender Heath has posted an impressive .927 save percentage in his brief stint since joining the Wildcats (4+ games). It remains to be seen if that will earn him any playing time in this series over Max Gaudet (4.65/.897) or Samuel Gendron (3.91/.885).

If the series comes down to special teams, Hinton held an edge on both power play and penalty kill rates during the regular season.

--- Compiled by Scott Harrington for Harrington Sports Media