

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 03.05.19 – 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 (22-23-1-2, 70 pts.)

@DallasSnipers

At this point in the season, last weekend’s three-game series between Northern Colorado and the Dallas Snipers didn’t have a notable effect on the Mid-Western Division standings for either club.

But a Dallas team in desperate need of getting back on track played a solid series and was rewarded with a 5-1 victory in the series finale. The three-game set closed out the road portion of the Snipers’ regular season schedule.

“It was a very good series and a very tight series; every game could have gone either way,” said Dallas Head Coach Aaron Davis. “We looked much better as the series went on and hopefully that will carry over.”

The Snipers are locked into a best-of-three play-in series against Wichita to be played between March 14-17 (dates and times TBD). Dallas has lost three games in a row against the Jr. Thunder, but the Snipers know they’re capable of taking down the Mid-Western Division’s fifth place team.

Davis is confident in his club, but he knows they must play a certain way in order to take down a Wichita team that has been improving all season.

“I think if we play our game and stay out of the box, we have a pretty good chance,” he said. “Our penalty kill has to be much better against them than it has been in the six games we’ve played them. They are a good hardworking team and we have to be ready for that.”

The Snipers will play their final regular season series this weekend with three home games against Oklahoma City.

EL PASO RHINOS (34-8-3-3, 111 pts.)

@El_Paso_Rhinos

The El Paso Rhinos are back in action this weekend with their final series before the playoffs, a three-game matchup against Wichita at County Events Center in front of their hometown fans.

Last season’s edition of the Rhinos was historically great, but this year’s team has another opportunity to make a deep playoff run. During their championship season in 2017-18, the Rhinos posted a ridiculous 49-1-1 record en-route to their third Thorne Cup title.

El Paso has won its division title in 11 of its 12 WSHL seasons, and if it takes care of business this weekend, it will clinch its third straight division crown and set up a division semi-final series against the winner of the Dallas-Wichita play-in series.

The Rhinos have won all six of their matchups against Wichita this season, and outside of a 3-1 win in late October, none of the games have been particularly close. The Jr. Thunder are the only thing standing between El Paso and another first-place finish to add to its collection.

The recent emergence of Richie Parent gives the Rhinos a formidable goaltending tandem with the playoffs quickly approaching. The 19-year-old Florida native has a 1.00 goals-against average to go along with a WSHL-best .961 save percentage through three starts.

Parent joins workhorse netminder Nils Velm (1.77/.922) to give El Paso some of the best goaltending in the WSHL. That bodes well for the Rhinos' chances at another appearance in the Thorne Cup tournament this spring.

NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES (28-19-1-2, 88 pts.)

@NoCoEagles

The Northern Colorado Eagles have a little under three weeks to prepare for what will undoubtedly be a tough division semi-final series against Oklahoma City from March 21-24.

Last weekend, the Eagles finished out their regular season by taking two of three games against Dallas. On the year, Northern Colorado won five of six matchups against the Snipers.

One of the Eagles' best traits is their depth scoring, something that has been apparent throughout the year. Led by 50-point scorers Jacob Elik (15-43-58) and Mark Revniaga (23-32-55), Northern Colorado has 18 players with double-digit points.

The Eagles have nine players with at least 30 points, including a trio of defensemen in Zach Vanderwal (12-25-37), Trent Hines (12-24-36), and Michael Petrotto (8-26-34). Additionally, three 20-goal scorers are listed on the active roster: Revniaga, Nikita Sheberov (25-21-46), and Jarret Marks (21-21-42).

If anything is going to carry Northern Colorado to an upset over Oklahoma City in a few weeks' time, it's probably going to be depth and solid goaltending.

The Eagles have dropped six of eight games against the Blazers, but only a couple of the losses were one-sided. It will be quite interesting to see how Northern Colorado performs this postseason.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (34-10-2-1, 107 pts.)

@OKCBlazersWSHL

The Oklahoma City Blazers kept their hopes for the division title alive last weekend with a three-game sweep of the Casper Bobcats. The Blazers won by an 11-0 final on Saturday night, but the other two contests were decided by only two goals.

In order for OKC to finish in first place in their division for the second time in franchise history, El Paso must not sweep Wichita with regulation wins this weekend. Additionally, the Blazers need to win all three of their games against Dallas.

The Snipers have given Oklahoma City some great games this year, so nothing is guaranteed this weekend. If current trends continue, it looks as though the Blazers will have to settle for the second seed and a first-round matchup against Northern Colorado.

Blazers fans should keep an eye on Vitali Mikhailov's performance over the last few games of the season. The 20-year-old needs only two more goals to tie the all-time WSHL goal-scoring record of 135.

It looks like Mikhailov will finish his career in eighth place on the WSHL's all-time scoring list, but a strong performance this weekend would give him more goals than anyone else in league history. You can bet that Dallas will be looking to keep Mikhailov from making history when the puck drops on the three-game series this Friday night at Dr. Pepper Star Center.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (13-32-1-2, 43 pts.)
@JrThunderHockey

While their record isn't what they would like it to be, the Wichita Jr. Thunder will be a threat come playoff time. The team has shown consistent improvement and recently swept Dallas in a three-game set.

"I feel that our boys have come a long way, but they have to push harder to become a championship caliber team," said Wichita Head Coach and former Thorne Cup champion Rob Weingartner. "As a coaching staff, we feel we're providing a solid environment for these players to get better, and what they put in ultimately equates to their success."

While there have been plenty of bumps in the road, the Jr. Thunder have been a different team since the second half of the season began in early January. They'll get to see just how far they've come when they get their final tune-up before the playoffs this weekend in El Paso against the Rhinos.

“We’ve had a solid seven weeks in a row since the WSHL Showcase, and we’re excited to see how we measure up to El Paso,” Weingartner continued. “They are a tough matchup, but I expect our guys to play their best.”

“It looks like the Mid-Western Division will once again run through El Paso, so if we play well and beat Dallas in the play-in round, we’ll have to turn around and head right back down south.”

Weingartner knows what needs to happen for his club to shock the rest of the division with a lengthy playoff run.

“We’ll need to have dedication to details, have a strong work ethic, score some timely goals, get some good goaltending, and of course, get a little luck.”

---Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media