

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 03.13.19 – 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.

WESTERN DIVISION PLAYOFFS – FIRST ROUND

5. VALENCIA FLYERS (12-30-2-6) @

4. ONTARIO AVALANCHE (18-28-3-3)

Best-of-three series; all games at Ontario Center Ice Arena

GAME 1 Friday, March 15 8:00 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 16 7:30 p.m.

GAME 3 Sunday, March 17 2:30 p.m. (if necessary)

The Ontario Avalanche will try to maintain the momentum they built with a strong finish to the season and carry it into their first-round playoff series with the Valencia Flyers this weekend.

The Avalanche will host the series at Ontario Center Ice Arena and will be trying to reach the division semifinal stage of the playoffs for the sixth straight season.

The Avs and Sabers met in the playoffs four years in a row, from 2014-2017, with the Flyers winning division semifinal series in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The fifth-place finish in the division was Valencia's lowest since 2010-11, but they have been better in the second half.

"We've had a good stretch since the trade deadline and we have also beaten every team in our division since then as well," said Flyers head coach Justin Dyke. "It definitely gives us confidence going into playoffs that we can beat anyone."

Each team won four games in the eight-game season series, but one of Ontario's wins came via shootout, so the Flyers won on points (13-11) despite being the lower-seeded team for this series.

Even more interesting is the fact that the Flyers won three of four games in Ontario this season, so they should not be intimidated going into the Avs' barn.

"The last week has been rough with injuries and flu has been going through the team but everyone should be back and healthy for the weekend series!" said Dyke.

Dylan Moroz (50-53-103) is the player that the Flyers must stop. He became the first player in Valencia franchise history to top both the 50-goal and 100-point marks in a season.

Dominik Knap (28-55-83) is also a big-time offensive threat but, after him, Tristan Warr (30-14-44) is the only other Flyer to break the 40-point barrier.

The Avalanche did not see any player reach 20 goals and Brett Ruiz (15-27-42) and Logan Corrigan (14-28-42) tied for the team lead with just 42 points.

In goal, Connor Duffy has been one of the more underrated netminders in the WSHL. His save percentage settled at an even .900 for the season, while Mack Willy (.872) was the most frequently-used goaltender in Valencia.

This series likely comes down to the Flyers star players – Moroz and Knap – against Duffy. That could be where this series gets settled, and the stars feasted on Duffy and the Avs during the regular season. Moroz (10) and Knap (5) combined for 15 goals on the season against Ontario.

FRESNO MONSTERS (31-16-3-1, 100 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

A five-game losing streak (with a three-week break in the middle of it) finally came to an end and the Fresno Monsters broke out of their slumber, winning their final three games of the regular season on the road to finish with an even 100 points in the standings.

The Monsters seemed like they were just getting their legs back. They probably would have preferred to keep playing this week.

Their second-place finish in the Western Division means they will host the San Diego Sabers in a best-of-three division semifinal series March 22-24.

Fresno swept San Diego, two games to none, in a division quarterfinal series a year ago. Their only other playoff meeting was in 2015, when the Monsters prevailed – again in two straight games – in a division semifinal series.

It took a while for 20-year-old Tyler Mathews to settle in with the Monsters after returning from the NAHL early in the season but, down the stretch, he took the reins in the Fresno crease. He has had a single-game save percentage of .900 or higher in 12 straight starts.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (35-8-6-2, 119 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

The only thing that would be nicer than a third straight Western Division regular season title for the Long Beach Bombers would be a fourth straight division playoff championship.

The Bombers will take a week off to rest up and sharpen their focus in practice as they await the winner of a first-round series between Ontario and Valencia. Long Beach defeated Valencia in the 2016 and 2017 division finals but have never face Ontario in the post-season.

The best-of-three Western Division Semifinal series will be played at The Rinks, Lakewood March 21-23.

Long Beach is attempting to qualify for the Thorne Cup tournament for the fourth year running. They qualified for the semifinal round last year but their season ended there at the hands of the Ogden Mustangs.

The Bombers also reach the Thorne Cup Semifinals in 2016 under a more standard playoff format but lost to the Idaho Jr. Steelheads, two games to none, in that series.

Tomas Urbanec became the first player in Long Beach Bomber history to score 40 goals in a season twice, and just the seventh player in Western States Hockey League history to surpass the 300-point plateau for his career. Urbanec has accumulated 302 points (287 regular season + 15 playoffs).

The franchise career leader in goals, assists and points surprisingly has only three hat-tricks in his career, but two of those have come in the last two weekends. In their first three games played together, Urbanec and fellow winger Gennady Malaschenko, have combined for 12 goals and 26 points.

“This is a very special milestone for a very special player,” said Long Beach head coach and general manager Chris White. “It’s amazing to think he still has one more year of junior eligibility. He broke into the league at the age of 15, and really only has two accomplishments left to earn: becoming the All-Time Points Leader, and winning a Thorne Cup.”

Urbanec may need that extra year to extend his records if he wants to keep them safe from 18-year-old Artem Korolev. Korolev already has 163 points (48-115-

163) over his first two seasons with the club and still has two seasons of junior eligibility remaining.

“He is playing his best hockey of the season right now,” said White. “We will be counting on him and his experience to lead the way through the playoff gauntlet. Hockey is a team sport, and there are dozens of players that have helped Tomáš reach this milestone. His work ethic, determination, and skill are all huge factors, as well. We’re very happy for him, but we hope the best is yet to come.”

SAN DIEGO SABERS (17-26-4-3, 62 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

This year’s third-place finish was the best for the San Diego Sabers in the Western Division since they finished second place in the 2011-12 season.

They lost eight of 10 games to their division semifinal opponent Fresno during the season, but the last four games of the season series included a 10-6 San Diego win and two of the three losses coming by 1-2 goals.

The Sabers scored 183 goals as a team. They have topped that mark just once in the last nine seasons (189 in 2016-17).

San Diego scored 71 more goals than it did a year ago while allowing 91 fewer. That lifted them from five wins in 2017-18 to 21 this season.

Karel Kankovsky (23-50-73) finished second in the entire WSHL for points by a defenseman, trailing only Axel Low of Southern Oregon (27-55-82). He was one of only two defensemen to lead his team in scoring, along with Harmen Vining of West Sound.

--- *Compiled by Scott Harrington for Harrington Sports Media*