

WSHL PLAYOFF WRAP-UP; March 22-24, 2019



DIVISION SEMIFINAL ROUND – And then there were 10...Playoff finalists in each of the WSHL's five divisions have been decided. That leaves 10 teams alive in the hunt for the 2019 Thorne Cup. Four more will be eliminated this week as the five division playoff champions will advance to the Thorne Cup. Ogden is automatically going to be in the Thorne Cup event as either the Mountain Divisional Champion or the Host Team if Utah Outliers were to win the Mountain Division. If Ogden is the Mountain Division Champion, then the Wild Card position would be filled by the divisional championship runner-up team with the highest win percentage during the regular season. In all five weekend series coming up the intensity level will ratchet up a notch as the league's top teams find themselves one step closer to their goal.

MID-WESTERN DIVISION

El Paso Rhinos defeat Dallas Snipers, 2 games to 0.

The El Paso Rhinos kept their Thorne Cup title defense alive with a convincing sweep of the Mid-Western Division's #4 seed, the Dallas Snipers. The Rhinos out-scored the Snipers, 14-0, in the two-game series.

El Paso 11, Dallas 0 – Eimantas Noreika scored four goals, and assisted on a fifth, as the El Paso Rhinos opened up their post-season with an 11-0 win over the Dallas Snipers in Game One of their Mid-Western Division Semifinal series.

El Paso took control of the game in the second period, scoring seven times. The last six Rhinos goals of the period came in a span of 6:21.

Dillon Manchester and Adam Stalzer scored two goals apiece and Samuel Robinson and Jonas Burman each had a goal and three assists.

El Paso goaltender Richie Parent made 13 saves for the shutout in his Thorne Cup playoff debut.

El Paso 3, Dallas 0 – The Rhinos scored twice in the first 6:42 of Game Two on Saturday, but the Snipers and Alexander Aleshkin clamped down and kept them off the board until midway through the third period when Manchester's second goal of the game made it 3-0 El Paso. Dallas could not generate any offense of their own and that's how the game ended.

Dallas goalie Alexander Aleshkin made 44 saves and Nils Velm notched the shutout for El Paso.

Just 1:39 after the opening faceoff, Norieka got a shot off from the slot that Aleshkin stopped, but Norieka was able to get to his own rebound first and break the ice.

About five minutes later, Manchester picked up a loose puck along the right-wing wall, skated through the faceoff circle, and beat Aleshkin with a 10-foot backhand up over his blocker.

Oklahoma City Blazers defeat Northern Colorado Eagles, 2 games to 1.

The Northern Colorado Eagles had their chance to put the Oklahoma City Blazers but they did not. In the span of 38 seconds on Saturday night, in the last minute of Game Two, the Eagles went from pulling off an amazing upset on the road to preparing for a Game 3 on Sunday. The Blazers responded well to being pushed to the brink of elimination, coming back with a vengeance to win the series in three games and advance to next week's Mid-Western Division Final against El Paso.

Northern Colorado 3, Oklahoma City 2 – The Northern Colorado Eagles score three times in a span of 7:16 in the second period Friday, turning a one-goal deficit into a

two-goal lead, and holding on for a 3-2 win over the Oklahoma City Blazers in Game One of their Mid-Western Division Semifinal series.

The Blazers got one back before the second intermission but the Eagles and Marshall Murphy protected a 3-2 lead for the entire third period with Murphy making 15 of his 36 saves in the final period to preserve the win.

Reese Tambellini's goal at 10:14 of the second period held up as the game-winner for NoCo. Zach Vanderwal made a stretch pass from the end boards in the Eagles end all the way to Cameron Braun at the center red line. He had room to skate into the OKC zone and rip a shot from the top of the left circle. Blazers netminder Bobby Cloutier made the save but Tambellini drove the net and knocked the rebound home as he fell to the ice with a defender draped all over him.

Darrian White and Eric Hildebrand scored the other Eagles goals.

Bobby Cloutier made 30 saves in the OKC crease.

Oklahoma City 3, Northern Colorado 2 – Michael Jensen scored an extra attacker goal to tie the game with :45 left in the third period, then Vitalii Mikhailov scored with 7.5 seconds left on the clock to give the Blazers a 3-2 Game Two comeback win on Saturday, forcing a third and deciding game in the series.

With Cloutier pulled for the extra attacker, Dominic Loubert passed the puck from the left point across to Jensen at the top of the right circle and his wrist shot found the net inside the far post.

With the game tied, Cloutier (21 saves) returned the net, and it appeared the game was headed to overtime but Mikhailov made good use of the time remaining on the clock. Jensen head-manned the puck to Jordan Sgro along the left-wing boards at the Northern Colorado blue line. He sent a pass to Mikhailov as he split the Eagles defenders, and he quickly roofed a shot up over Murphy's glove to stun the Eagles and force Game Three on Sunday.

Murphy (35 saves) stopped all 22 shots he faced through the first two periods of the game, but was beaten three times in the final frame.

The Eagles held a 2-0 lead after the first period on a pair of goals from Jarret Marks.

Oklahoma City 5, Northern Colorado 1 – The Blazers completed their comeback from the brink of elimination with a 5-1 win in the deciding third game on Sunday.

Oklahoma City was leading, 2-1, late in the second period when Jeremy Van Dyke scored to give the Blazers a little breathing room with a two-goal lead. Van Dyke scored again with 3:33 remaining to make it 4-1 OKC, then Mikhailov put the final nail in the coffin when he added one with 2:48 left to go.

The Blazers turned to Cloutier to play his third game in as many days and he got the job done again, stopping 22 of 23 shots.

Tyler Trombly scored the Northern Colorado goal, getting the Eagles within one late in the first period, but they were unable to build on that momentum as the Blazers controlled the puck for long stretches and Cloutier was there when needed.

WESTERN DIVISION

Long Beach Bombers defeat Ontario Avalanche, 2 games to 0.

The Western Division champion Long Beach Bombers kept their drive for a fourth straight division playoff championship alive with a two-game series win over the fourth-seeded Ontario Avalanche.

Long Beach 6, Ontario 1 – Gennady Malashenko scored his second and third goals of the game during a four-goal third period as the Long Beach Bombers pulled away with a 6-1 victory over the Ontario Avalanche in the first game of their Western Division semifinal series.

The Avalanche generated their share of scoring opportunities against Long Beach netminder Domenic Bosetti, but he turned aside 35 of 36 shots, including all 29 shots he faced over the first two periods of the game.

Long Beach 4, Ontario 0 – Game Two on Saturday was a 1-0 game until the 7:32 mark of the third period when Tomas Urbanec's second goal of the game gave the Bombers some breathing room and they went on to a series-clinching 4-0 win behind a 31-save shutout from Bosetti.

Late in an Ontario power play, William Cederstam fired the puck around the boards and out from deep in the Long Beach zone. Urbanec chased it down in the neutral

zone and broke in on Connor Duffy (42 saves). Urbanec made a quick move to his backhand and finished to make it 2-0 Long Beach.

Christoffer Juvas added two more goals in the third period to put the game, and the series, away for the Bombers.

Bosetti stopped 66 of 67 shots in the series (.985).

Fresno Monsters defeat San Diego Sabers, 2 games to 0.

The Fresno Monsters advanced with a two-game sweep of the San Diego Sabers, setting up a re-match in the Western Division Final against Long Beach.

Fresno 5, San Diego 2 – Karel Kankovsky's goal 1:08 before the second intermission got the San Diego Sabers within a goal with 20 minutes to go, but the Fresno Monsters got the job done and came away with a 5-2 win in Game One of their Western Division Semifinal series.

Stanislav Danaev gave Fresno some breathing room at 8:50 of the third and Petr Philippov put the game out of reach about five minutes later.

With the Monsters clinging to a one-goal lead, Tyler Mathews made a big save at one end, then the puck quickly transitioned the other way with Deakan Fielder creating a two-on-one with Danaev. He slid the puck to his line mate at just the right time and he was able to cut behind the defender and convert a backhand attempt to make it 4-2 Fresno.

Mathews stopped 20 of 22 shots for Fresno while Aaron Parsons made 44 saves for the Sabers.

Fresno 6, San Diego 1 – The Monsters scored twice in each period on their way to a 6-1 win in Game Two on Saturday. Six different Fresno skaters scored goals and Matthews stopped 25 of 26 shots to clinch the series.

Danaev and Blaire Maguire were among the goal-scorers for the Monsters and they also both collected a pair of assists.

Aleksis Leskinen scored the San Diego goal midway through the third period but it was too late for the Sabers to mount a comeback at that point.

Parsons made 35 saves for San Diego.

MOUNTAIN DIVISION

Ogden Mustangs defeat Steamboat Wranglers, 2 games to 0.

In a series that looked like a mis-match going in proved to be just that as the Thorne Cup favorites, the Ogden Mustangs, out-scored the Steamboat Wranglers, 25-1 in a two-game sweep.

Ogden 10, Steamboat 1 – Ian Currie and Rhett Rampinelli (2-2-4) scored two goals apiece as the Ogden Mustangs opened the playoffs with a 10-1 win over the Steamboat Wranglers.

Ammon Anderson (1-3-4) was another major contributor to the Mustangs attack.

Chad Storey scored the Steamboat goal with 2:37 left in the game.

Artur Ogandzhanyan (seven shots/seven saves) and Jacob Hough (13 saves) shared the goaltending duties for Ogden.

Ogden 15, Steamboat 0 – Alex Engan scored a hat trick and Alexander Nerverve posted a 21-save shutout as the Mustangs left no doubt with a 15-0 win in Game Two.

Anderson, Currie (2-2-4), Lukas Vacin (2-3-5) and Bryson Bartell (2-1-3) all had two goals for the Mustangs.

Utah Outliers defeat Casper Bobcats, 2 games to 0.

The Utah Outliers secured a spot in the 2019 Thorne Cup tournament by advancing to the Mountain Division Final against the host Ogden Mustangs following a convincing two-game sweep of the Casper Bobcats in West Valley City.

Utah 12, Casper 0 – Jan Dvorak notched a hat trick and Oscar Wahlgren posted a shutout as the Utah Outliers got their Mountain Division Semifinal series off on the right foot with a 12-0 win over the Casper Bobcats on Friday night.

Dvorak also had a pair of assists for a five-point game while Benji Mickel and Zach Dornseifer each had two goals and two assists.

Utah 5, Casper 0 – Niklas Lejon scored twice and Charles-Olivier Lepage stopped all 16 Casper shots in a 5-0 Outliers win in Game Two.

The game was scoreless until late in the second period when Utah scored a pair in a span of 1:11 to take a two-goal lead into the third period.

The Outliers added three more goals in the final period, including the last two off the stick of Lejon.

Gabel Longshore had a goal and two assists.

Henry Dennee stopped 47 of 49 shots through the first two periods and ended the game with 65 saves for the Bobcats.

NORTHWESTERN DIVISION

Bellingham Blazers defeated Southern Oregon, 2 games to 0.

The Bellingham Blazers will get a chance to get back at the Seattle Totems for snagging the Northwest Division title from under their noses last week when the two teams meet again in the division playoff final. The Blazers allowed eight goals, but scored 15 of their own to advance in two games over the Southern Oregon Express.

Bellingham 5, Southern Oregon 2 – Aidan McNabb scored a pair of clutch goals in the third period and Matej Valicek scored just :28 into the third period to get the Spartans within a goal at 2-1, but McNabb scored the next two goals to give the Blazers a three-goal lead.

Kolter Pawlick stopped all 21 shots he faced through the first two periods, and finished the game with 35 shots.

Ruslan Abianov also had a pair of goals for the Blazers.

Bellingham 10, Southern Oregon 6 – Timothy Prexler scored four goals and assisted on two others, as the Blazers pulled away late and won Game Two, 6-2, to advance to next week's division final against the Seattle Totems.

McNabb added another pair of goals and Timon Prexler had a goal and four assists.

PROVINCIAL DIVISION

Edson Aeros defeated Cold Lake Wings, 2 games to 0.

The Edson Aeros moved one step closer to the Provincial Division playoff championship with a two-game sweep that saw them out-score the Cold Lake Wings, 22-3.

Edson 16, Cold Lake 1 – Kevin Lundin and Ryley Bast scored hat trick and Liam Austin shut out the Cold Lake Wings for the first 57:22 as the Edson Aeros rolled to a 16-1 win in Game One.

Six different Aeros scored in the first period.

Cold Lake's Riley Smith ruined Austin's shutout bid with 2:38 to go in the game.

Edson 6, Cold Lake 2 – Olle Berndtsson's hat trick sparked the Aeros to a series-clinching 6-2 win.

Edson built a 4-0 lead in the first period and cruised from there.

Sebastian Lind collected four assists in the game, including on all three of Berndtsson's tallies.

Hinton Wildcats defeat Meadow Lake Mustangs, 2 games to 1.

The Hinton Wildcats dropped Game One on Friday, but rallied to take the next two games and avoid elimination at the hands of the Meadow Lake Mustangs in the Thorne Cup playoff debut for both clubs.

Meadow Lake 6, Hinton 4 – The Meadow Lake Mustangs were one of only two road teams to win the first game of a division semifinal series, posting a 6-4 win over the Wildcats in Hinton.

Andrew Hawes scored a natural hat trick in the first 4:07 of the game as Hinton spotted Meadow Lake a 3-0 lead. Hinton closed the gap to 3-2, but Shane Hounsell scored the next two goals to restore Meadow Lake's three-goal lead.

Hounsell (2-3-5) figured in five of the six Mustangs goals and Meadow Lake goaltender Scott Danylak made 34 of his 47 saves over the first two periods.

Four different players scored for the Wildcats, including Shaun Peacock, who's goal with 2:22 left in the third period drew Hinton to within two goals again, but it was too little-too late at that point.

Hinton 5, Meadow Lake 1 – Three different Hinton skaters scored in the first 10:30 of Game Two as the Wildcats staved off elimination with a 5-1 win on Saturday.

Max Gaudet allowed just one goal on 39 shots, frustrating the Mustangs and making sure they never really gained much momentum in the game.

Max Sturko scored the game-winning goal and added an assist for the Wildcats.

Danylak made 29 of his 33 saves in the first two periods and Erik Ehrmantraut scored for Meadow Lake.

Hinton 11, Meadow Lake 1 – Sunday's Game Three ended up being somewhat anti-climatic as the Wildcats scored five times in the second period – three in a span of 5:11 – to move onto the division final with an 11-1 win.

Amazingly, 11 different players scored for Hinton. Jacob Delorme (1-3-4) was the top scorer in the game. Dimitri Buttazzoni and Emilio Ficaccio matched his three assists.

Dallas Muskegon scored the Meadow Lake goal late in the second period. It was the only shot to elude Gaudet, who made 26 saves for Hinton.

Gaudet stopped 64 of 66 shots (.970) over two elimination games.

--- Compiled by Scott Harrington for Harrington Sports Media