

Weekend Preview

FRESNO MONSTERS VS. SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS

The Fresno Monsters will host the visiting Southern Oregon Spartans for three games. The Monsters will say *adios* to the Gateway Ice Center after the first game, and shift their season into Selland Arena for the remainder of the series, and select games.

The two clubs have yet to play this season but the 3-14-0-0 Spartans will want to steal a road win in order to snap their 11 game winless streak. Fresno opens the month of Dec. as the top team in the Western Division with 39-points and have won seven of their last eight.

Fresno has played five games against a Northwest Division rival and defeated the West Sound Admirals in the five games. This is the first time all season that the Spartans will face a Western Division opponent.

Monsters starting netminder, Max Karlenzig, holds a .938 SV% having won eight of his 10 games.

EL PASO RHINOS VS. PUEBLO BULLS



(Photo by Tyler Deloach, El Paso)

The El Paso Rhinos and Pueblo Bulls have six games against each other and the Rhinos have been triumphant on all occasions. The Bulls have presented their fair share of adversity for the Rhinos, but ultimately El Paso has found a way to get past them both at home and at the Pueblo Ice Arena—where they continue the season series this weekend.

The Rhinos managed to score 22 goals in six games on the Bulls and have conceded 11 en route to six straight wins from Oct. 25 to Nov. 3. Pueblo is coming off a very close series against the Oklahoma City Blazers but were ultimately swept in three games, at home, as their last win came on Nov. 10 in a shootout against the Dallas Snipers.

El Paso has claimed four wins in their last four games including three monstrous wins over the Wichita Jr. Thunder and one over the Northern Colorado Eagles.

Of note, Rhinos goalie Sawyer Schmidt, is the league leader in wins with 11 in his last 12 and a .937 SV%.

LAS VEGAS THUNDERBIRDS VS. UTAH OUTLIERS

The Las Vegas Thunderbirds will have another great test before they head back home for the Western States Shootout. After playing eight straight home games, the Thunderbirds will pay the Acord Ice Center a visit for two games against the Outliers. The clubs will also play a game at the County Ice Center.

Vegas and Utah are both second in their divisions and each has played against opponents from the other's division. Essentially, the Outliers are second in the Northwest Division and have three wins against the Valencia Flyers. Unfortunately for Vegas, their experience against a Northwest opponent resulted in a sweep by the Ogden Mustangs.

Vegas has played the second fewest games in the league and after dismantling their division in the first few weeks, they simmered down somewhat following the Ogden series, only winning three of five.

The Outliers are well suited for the weekend challenge as they recently snapped Ogden's 20-game win streak with a 4-3 win at the Acord Ice Center. The 14-5-0-0 Outliers have only lost to the Ogden Mustangs and Northern Colorado Eagles.

DALLAS SNIPERS VS. WICHITA JR. THUNDER

The Dallas Snipers had a weekend to stew over their back-to-back wins against the Oklahoma City Blazers at the Arctic Edge Ice Arena. The Jr. Thunder are certainly trying to forget their most recent showing against the Rhinos.

The two Midwest-Mountain Division teams have yet to face each other this season and the first clash of 2019-2020 will surely evoke themes of the past. The Snipers won seven of 12 regular season games against the Jr. Thunder in 2018-2019. Of their wins, Wichita won the final three regular season games at home but then dropped two straight in the division playoffs at the StarCenter in Plano.

Neither team was able to reach a shutout against each other therefore goals are expected in the series. Wichita isn't far removed from a pair of wins against the Steamboat Wranglers and need to gain some points urgently.

The Snipers have consistently earned points every single weekend they are called to duty. Dallas has gone to overtime or shootout a league-leading eight times this season. Where the extra point in an overtime loss can be good, their struggle to close out games in regulation is keeping them from valuable extra points.

SEATTLE TOTEMS VS. BELLINGHAM BLAZERS

The Northwest Division rivals played a single game against each other last Wednesday and the Blazers defeated Seattle for the first time this season. The rivalry continues this weekend with one game at Olympicview Arena and two at the Bellingham Sportsplex.

The Totems won four straight games against Bellingham and reached eight goals on two instances including one shutout. Bellingham's recent 3-1 win should serve as a boost in confidence as they were able to keep Seattle to one goal for the first time in their season series.

Seattle is the team with fewest games played in the league and are behind third place, Bellingham, by five points in the division. After the weekend series, Seattle will travel to El Paso for the first time in team history.

BARRHEAD BOMBERS VS. MEADOW LAKE MUSTANGS

BARRHEAD BOMBERS VS. COLD LAKE HORNETS

The Barrhead Bombers will hit the road for a single game at the District Rec. Center against the Meadow Lake Mustangs, and two games at the Energy Centre against the Cold Lake Hornets.

The Bombers picked up just their third win of the season, against the Mustangs, last weekend. The 7-2 win at the Barrhead Arena snapped a nine game losing streak that sunk them to the bottom of the Provincial Division.

Although they dropped a game against Hinton after the fact, they will need more of their winning side as they embark on four straight road games stretching into next week.

Although Cold Lake endured a dramatic loss to the Edson Aeros, they have gained some steam with two wins in their last three, including a win over the Bombers. The high-powered Edson team was too much but the Hornets are now sizing up well against the remainder of the division.

When looking at the Bombers/Hornets season series, one will notice the Bombers opened the season in dominating fashion with 19 goals in two games. Barrhead faltered after that and the ostensive potency was usurped when they entered the season slump.

The Mustangs/Bombers season series indicates a different story as Meadow Lake won the first two scoring 13 goals in two games.

EDSON AEROS VS. MEADOW LAKE MUSTANGS

The Edson Aeros haven't lost to the Mustangs in their three prior games this season. Furthermore, they have outscored the Mustangs 37 to one.

It is important to note that all games were played at Repsol Place where the Aeros are undefeated through 10 games. This time, the Aeros will give the District Rec. Center a look for two road games in Saskatchewan.

The Aeros won all six games at the District Rec. Center in 2018-2019.

VALENCIA FLYERS VS. OGDEN MUSTANGS

After the weekend against Ogden, Valencia will have played three of the four division leaders in the league including Fresno and El Paso. The Flyers have the arduous task of going to the Ice Sheet where the Ogden Mustangs are still undefeated at eight wins.

Ogden is coming off a win over the Utah Outliers after they had their record-setting win streak snap at 20 games. Their win over the Outliers in subsequent action kept their undefeated home record intact.

No. 1 overall, Ogden, also leads the league in scoring with 177 goals and has the most short-handed goals in favor with 15.

The Flyers are currently in a four game skid with losses to the San Diego Sabers, Fresno Monsters, and Ontario Avalanche. Valencia has only one road victory that stems back to their first game of the season against the San Diego Sabers.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE VS. SAN DIEGO SABERS



(Photo by Mark Mauno, WSHL)

The Ontario Avalanche will travel south to the Escondido Iceoplex for a single matchup against the familiar San Diego Sabers.

The Sabers withstood an 8-5 defeat to the Avalanche last weekend at Anaheim Ice in a game where they had a three-goal lead. The Sabers will want to be cautious about letting off the throttle, as they have given up multi goal leads in the last two games against Ontario.

The evenly matched Western Division is starting to manifest a logjam of teams as the drop from second to fourth place is only buffered by two regulation wins, or six points.

The Sabers can inch closer to third and even second place, pending on the Vegas/Utah series, with a win.

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS VS. NORTHERN COLORADO EAGLES

The first of nine meetings between the Midwest-Mountain division teams will start at the Greeley Ice Haus as the Eagles seek to continue their positive home record.

Northern Colorado recently earned a hard fought win over the El Paso Rhinos and will be hard pressed to turn heads again when they welcome the Blazers. Oklahoma City has ambitions of their own seeking to build on three straight wins over the Pueblo Bulls from last weekend.

Oklahoma is the second-highest scoring team in the division with 124 goals, and are in second place. The Eagles are nipping at their heels just four points behind with 86 goals in favor.

The weekend will be huge for the teams who both want the second spot prior to the Western States Shootout.

Though the Blazers are such a high-scoring team, the Eagle's Marshall Murphy is third overall in wins and has a .938 SV%. He will go to work against Joel Svensson who is fourth in wins with a .945 SV%.

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