

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 12.8.17 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (12-9-0, 24 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

After a couple of statement wins over Long Beach and Valencia last weekend, the Fresno Monsters seemed to run out of gas in a 9-5 loss to Long Beach on Sunday.

Still, the Monsters once again proved they can compete with the best teams in the Western Division.

Fresno has now logged a win over Long Beach and a pair of victories over Valencia this season. Moreover, the Monsters played the Bombers to three consecutive one-goal games during Fresno's first series of the season.

Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski was pleased with the effort from his team in the first game against the Bombers.

"I thought we played a very solid defensive game against the Bombers," said Kaminski. "We only gave up 22 shots, and we capitalized on our chances. Plus, our work ethic was on another level."

He pointed out the biggest problem with the Long Beach loss, saying, "On the road on Sunday, we gave up way too many chances to a team that can finish. It was a turnover festival, and we paid for it."

"Three games in three nights, you have to keep it simple and eliminate the turnovers."

The duo of Daylon Mannon (31-33-64) and Cody Key (25-33-58) continues to dazzle night in and night out. Mannon is one point out of second in the league scoring race, while Key is closing in on a top-five spot.

Both players are averaging 3.05 points per game, though Mannon has played in two more games than Key. The pair has combined to score nearly half of Fresno's total goals.

This weekend, the Monsters will take on the Ontario Avalanche in a three-game set at home. It will be the club's final series before the Western States Shootout.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (19-3-2, 40 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

The Long Beach Bombers seem to have fallen off a bit since their amazing 15-game unbeaten run to open the season.

The Bombers, who beat Fresno before falling to Ontario in a one-goal contest last week, are just 4-3-2 over their last nine games.

Long Beach built such a sizeable lead that it still enjoys an eight-point advantage in the division. Until proven otherwise, the Bombers are the team to beat in the Western Division.

Long Beach is still undefeated in regulation at home through 14 games at The Rinks in Lakewood, California. It is 6-3-1 on the road, which is still solid but is not on the same level as its mark on home ice.

Head Coach Chris White and his staff will need to have the Bombers ready to give it their all at the WSHL Showcase in a couple of weeks. Long Beach is slated to take on Colorado, Utah, and El Paso.

The stiff competition can only help the Bombers going forward. After all, the team has made it clear that its goal this season is to raise the Thorne Cup.

This weekend, Long Beach will look to build some momentum as it takes on Valencia on Saturday night. The two clubs were originally scheduled to play a two-game set, but Thursday night's contest was postponed due to the wildfires in California.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (8-9-1, 17 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

In each of their last two matchups, the Ontario Avalanche have found ways to win in close games against top competition.

After taking down Valencia 5-4 last Thursday, the Avs pulled off a victory over Long Beach by the same score just a few days later.

Ontario Head Coach Rob O'Rourke was happy with the wins but is more focused on the bigger picture of his club's season.

"Obviously it's encouraging to the guys to beat those teams, but we realize that we need to strive towards being consistent," said O'Rourke. "As far as the standings are concerned, right now that's not an issue.

"We need to worry about playing a complete 60-minute game, one game at a time."

This season, the Avalanche have played in several low-scoring, intense games. They have scored the second-fewest goals in the division with 69 heading into the weekend, but they have held the opposition to a division-low 67 goals.

Holding opponents to under four goals per game is a huge accomplishment in the WSHL, a league in which most good teams hover around five or six goals per night offensively.

The effort has been spearheaded by starting goaltender Filip Subrt (3.34/.904), who has played well in a workhorse role in his third season with Ontario. Backup Connor Duffy (4.12/.900) has also impressed at times and has provided a reliable second option for O'Rourke.

The Avs still have two series left before the Western States Shootout. After taking on Fresno on the road this weekend in a three-game set, they will travel to Iceoplex in Escondido, California, for a three-game matchup with San Diego.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (8-17-2, 18 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

The Phoenix Knights were overmatched against what is arguably the league's best team last weekend. Phoenix dropped three in a row to El Paso, including a pair of shutouts.

After being outscored 17-0 through the first two games of the series, the Knights played the Rhinos to a much closer 7-4 decision to close out the weekend.

Phoenix still holds a one-point lead over Ontario for fourth place in the division. The two teams will not face off until the Knights welcome the Avalanche to Arizona Ice for a three-game set January 19-21.

Forward Anthony Masanotti became the Knights' first 20-goal scorer when he collected a goal and an assist in the final game against El Paso. Masanotti, who has compiled a line of 20-7-27, has emerged as one of the league's better rookies at 19 years old.

Kohl Hedquist has the second-most goals on the Knights roster with nine, while captain Michael Caravella is the club's only other 20-point scorer with a 6-14-20 line.

Phoenix has completed its regular first-half schedule. It has three weeks to prepare for the Western States Shootout, where it will take on Dallas, Phoenix, and Bellingham in Las Vegas.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (1-19-1, 3 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers will continue their one-month hiatus with another week of practice.

The Sabers' last game was the weekend before Thanksgiving, when they were swept by Valencia over three games despite playing in competitive games in two of the three matchups.

When San Diego does return, it will begin a stretch of six games over the course of seven days. After a three-game series against Ontario at home, it will take a travel day before opening its WSHL Showcase schedule with an afternoon game against Wichita on the first day of the tournament.

The Sabers will take on Cheyenne and Southern Oregon over the next two days of the Showcase. All of San Diego's game will be played at Sobe Ice Arena.

When the Sabers return for the second half of the season, they will begin a season-long eight-game homestand. San Diego will welcome Phoenix, Ontario, and Long Beach to Iceoplex for three-game sets.

After that, the Sabers will embark on a nine-game road trip that will take them through Ontario, Fresno, Valencia and Phoenix.

San Diego will close out its regular-season schedule by playing four of five games at home. By that point, we should know if the Sabers have made any significant improvements since their poor start to the season.

VALENCIA FLYERS (16-6-0, 32 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers lost a pair of games last week to division rivals Ontario and Fresno. The Flyers fell by one goal to the Avalanche last Thursday night before losing 8-4 to the Monsters on Friday.

The Flyers were supposed to play the first of two games against Long Beach on Thursday night, but the contest was postponed as a result of the nearby wildfires. Instead, the Flyers will play the Bombers on Saturday night, their final game until the Western States Shootout the week before Christmas.

Valencia could have used the extra game experience against an opponent like Long Beach, because the Flyers will be taking on some strong teams at the

WSHL Showcase. Over the course of three days, Valencia will take a brief tour of the Mountain Division with games against Utah, Colorado, and Ogden. Those clubs currently occupy the top three spots in that division.

As the season goes on, it seems that star forward Jakob Kranabetter is getting better and better. The 20-year-old, four-year veteran has already scored 64 points (15-49-64) and will soon surpass his previous single-season best of 76 points, set during the 2015-16 season.

Kranabetter is doing a great job leading a Valencia offense that features eight 20-point scorers, including five players with 30 or more points.

Technically, Kranabetter is sitting in fifth place in the league scoring race, but he's just one point out of second. The Mission, British Columbia, native is in the middle of a logjam, with four players all within one point of each other.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media