

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 12.12.17 – MID-WESTERN DIVISION



DALLAS SNIPERS (6-15-0, 12 pts)
WSHLDallasSnipers.pointstreaksites.com
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The Dallas Snipers rolled through the Jr. Thunder in the first two games, outscoring Wichita 20-2 on Friday and Saturday, only to lose Sunday's game 6-2 in a stunner.

Jaroslav Vasicek scored a 4-6-10 line in the two victories, but was held scoreless in Sunday's loss.

Three different Dallas goalies played a game with Evan Williams making 42 saves in Friday's victory and Rafael Goncalves making 27 saves on Saturday. Brady Weiss made 22 saves in Sunday's hiccup.

The Snipers have been led by the triumvirate of Vasicek (11-20-31), Sterling Cooper (14-22-36), and Alex Hladonik (14-25-39) all season. Those three

accounted for 10 of the team's 22 goals this weekend, but other players are starting to contribute.

Erik Eaton (2-5-7 against Wichita) and Danil Trenikhin (3 assists) pitching in during recent games. The added offense will serve Dallas well as they head to Vegas for the Western States Shootout. In the desert, the Snipers will be playing Phoenix (8 wins), Bellingham (9), and Casper (9) – three teams with more wins than Dallas.

Dallas could take the confidence from the series win against Wichita to Vegas, turn some heads, and have a fresh start when the calendar turns to 2018.

Western States Shootout Schedule:

Tuesday 12/19: 7:30am @ Phoenix Knights in City National Arena A

Wednesday 12/20: 2:45pm vs. Bellingham Blazers in Sobe Ice Arena

Thursday 12/21: 12:30pm @ Casper Coyotes in Sobe Ice Arena

EL PASO RHINOS (27-0-0, 54 pts)

www.EIPasoRhinos.com

@El_Paso_Rhinos

In the Series of the Week, El Paso beat up on formerly undefeated Oklahoma City to become the WSHL's lone unbeaten team. It was the Battle of the Undefeateds – a series that rarely happens this late in the season, but the Rhinos took advantage of the fanfare, showing off their offense and defensive skills, and outscoring the Blazers 17-4 in the sweep.

Rhino goalie Filip Krasanovsky continues his MVP-calibre season, winning league-leading games 21, 22, and 23 – a full nine games more than the nearest competitor. Krasanovsky's 1.39 GAA is also tops in the WSHL while his .931 SV% is second-best. He ended the weekend with 54 saves in three games.

Chaseton Sare's 6-2-8 line against OKC brought his season totals up to 28-31-59, good for second in the Mid-Western Division. El Paso and OKC now each own three of the division's top-six scoring leaders with the Rhinos skating five of the Mid-Western's top nine scorers.

New Rhino Logan Orem continues to contribute with a goal and an assist over the weekend giving him a point-per-game pace in his first six games with the club.

El Paso will take their undefeated record to Las Vegas and hope to keep the streak alive. Head Coach Cory Herman said his team's focus is on the Western States Shootout where his squad will be playing the top teams in the league.

"We just try and out work every team we play," Herman said of playing three first-place opponents. "We will have a good week of practice and prepare for the upcoming showcase."

If the Rhinos are going to enter 2018 undefeated, they're going to have to work very hard for it.

Western States Shootout Schedule:

Tuesday 12/19: 10:15am vs. Idaho IceCats in City National Arena B

Wednesday 12/20: 2:30pm vs. Ogden Mustangs in City National Arena A

Thursday 12/21: 7:05pm @ Long Beach Bombers in City National Arena B

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (21-3-0, 42 pts)

www.OKCityHockey.com

@OKCBlazersWSHL

The Oklahoma City Blazers went into the weekend one of only two remaining teams in the league without a loss. Unfortunately, they were playing the *other* undefeated team and El Paso came out on top, putting the first blemishes on OKC's record.

We posited that the Blazers' record was as much an indication of their opponents (or lack thereof) as their talent. They obviously have talented players with guys like Ivan Bondarenko leading the division with a 28-37-65 line. Josh Chamberlain and Griffin Wiencek are close behind with 52 and 51 points respectively.

Fourteen Blazer skaters are averaging a point-per-game this season, but that wasn't enough against El Paso as only four players scored against the Rhinos.

OKC has Springfield this weekend before they head to Las Vegas. The Express played the Blazers to two one-goal games the last time they met, so OKC will be looking to get themselves back on track with a worthy in-division rival.

In Vegas, Oklahoma City will continue their run against top-notch opponents as they are set to play three of the top teams in the WSHL in Ogden, Utah, and Idaho. After the Shootout, it's a three-game stand with El Paso again.

So, the Blazers' schedule has taken a 180, and we'll see if they're up for the challenge come this weekend.

Western States Shootout Schedule:

Tuesday 12/19: 8am @ Ogden Mustangs in City National Arena B

Wednesday 12/20: 4:45pm vs. Idaho IceCats in City National Arena A

Thursday 12/21: 12:30pm @ Utah Outliers in City National Arena B

SPRINGFIELD EXPRESS (11-10-3, 25 pts)

www.SpringfieldExpress.com

@_ExpressHockey

The Springfield Express have been on a run of playing six straight games against the Mid-Western Division's top teams and that will continue with two more games against OKC this weekend. This is all in preparation for the Western States Shootout where they will play three more worthy opponents.

It's been an up-and-down season for Springfield, blowing out teams that are beneath them in the standings, and keeping better teams at bay with seven games within two goals against teams with better records.

Six skaters have more than 29 points in the team's first 24 games with Nikita Sokov leading the way with a 17-20-37 line while also leading the team with 67 PIMs.

In Vegas, they'll play Fresno, Ontario, and West Sound – three teams also hovering around .500. Our guess is, given their schedule the last few weeks and their ability to go toe-to-toe with really good teams, Springfield will come out of Vegas with three wins against teams who haven't had to play the same quality opponents the Express have been rolling with.

Western States Shootout Schedule:

Tuesday 12/19: 3:30pm vs. Fresno Monsters in City National Arena A

Wednesday 12/20: 12:30pm @ Ontario Avalanche in Sobe Ice Arena

Thursday 12/21: 1:15pm vs. West Sound Warriors in City National Arena A

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (2-22-0, 4 pts)

www.WichitaJuniorThunder.com

@JrThunderHockey

After losing the first two games to Dallas, Wichita fought back and won Sunday's game to avoid the series sweep. The 6-2 victory snapped the Jr. Thunder's 15-game losing streak.

New Jr. Thunder player Hunter Litman scored a goal and an assist in Sunday's victory giving him a 2-2-4 line in his first five games. Tyler Inlow added two goals and two assists on Sunday including one of the team's three goals scored in the first period.

While their record may not show it, coach Rob Weingartner continues to have his team playing hard every game and last week we extolled the coach's approach to turning things around for a team with a losing record.

"I have the experience of being at this point before," Weingartner said of the team's fate thus far. "Four years ago, we had exactly four wins – last year, Thorne Cup Champions. That doesn't happen by accident. We returned big numbers each year and added players along the way, and the boys relished in beating the powerhouses like Long Beach and Idaho – they worked at it."

With Vegas next on the schedule for Wichita, Weingartner sees the Western States Shootout as another opportunity for his players to improve.

"I think each player has different improvement needs," he added. "Some need to work on skills like skating or shooting, while some need to get a better grasp of the systems we use, both of these happen through practice and in especially games. We have a short roster this year, so everyone is getting opportunities to work on their game each night as opposed to watching from the stands."

The Shootout will give these players a chance to earn some confidence heading into the new year as they will play teams with similar records. Vegas may be the time to prove they're better than their record.

Western States Shootout Schedule:

Tuesday 12/19: 2:45pm vs. San Diego Sabers in Sobe Ice Arena

Wednesday 12/20: 8am @ Southern Oregon Spartans in City National Arena

B

Thursday 12/21: 10:15am @ Cheyenne Stampede in Sobe Ice Arena

--- *Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media*