

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.17.17 – WESTERN DIVISION



Mark Mauno photo

FRESNO MONSTERS (9-6-0, 18 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

One of the dark horse contenders in the Western Division kept its hot streak alive last weekend.

The Fresno Monsters finished their six-game home stand with a three-game sweep of Bellingham. The Monsters have now won six in a row and nine of their last 10.

"I thought it was a solid weekend by everyone," said Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "Solid goaltending and we played some good defense. A lot of guys chipped in."

Kaminski also lauded the play of his first line, saying, "(Cody) Key, (Jacob) Rudloff, and (Dayton) Mannon were really gelling over the weekend. They moved the puck well and finished their chances."

Key registered his fourth hat trick of the season as part of a five-point effort in the opening game against Bellingham, and now leads all skaters at the Tier II level in hat tricks. The veteran forward has collected a staggering 40 points (20-20-40) in just 13 games.

Meanwhile, Mannon is leading the club with a 23-25-48 line over 15 games, putting him in second place in the league scoring race behind Ogden's Matus Spodniak (28-34-62).

Rudloff had a breakout series against Bellingham, logging 12 points (6-6-12). The four-year man out of De Pere, Wisconsin, is on pace for a career year with 23 points (8-15-23) over 13 games with the Monsters and West Sound.

Altogether, those three players make up what has arguably been the league's best offensive line. The trio has carried the Monsters on multiple occasions already this year.

Fresno will get back to work this weekend with a three-game series at Phoenix.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (16-2-0, 32 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

It was an up-and-down weekend for the Long Beach Bombers, who blew out a powerful Valencia team before suffering just their second loss of the season against Ontario a couple of nights later.

The Bombers beat Valencia 7-1 after the Flyers had handed them their first loss of the season the week before. Netminder Domenic Bosetti made 35 saves, while seven different Long Beach skaters found the back of the net in what was one of the Bombers' best team wins of the season.

But Long Beach's defense seemed tired against Ontario as it allowed a season-high seven goals in a 7-4 loss to the Avalanche.

The Bombers have lost two of three games, but there isn't a single team in the Western Division that doesn't understand what the Bombers are capable of.

After all, this is the same club that finished with the best record in the WSHL just a year ago.

Long Beach is in the midst of a stretch of nine consecutive games against Valencia and Ontario. Bombers Head Coach Chris White spoke about his team's familiarity with the two clubs.

"We feel we know the personnel and identity of both teams pretty well," said White. "It's nice to have competitive games every time we take the ice.

"I think the top four teams in the Western Division can beat each other on any given night. If you make mistakes, or have an off night, you risk the possibility of picking up a loss."

The four teams White was referring to are the Bombers, Valencia, Ontario, and Fresno. Technically, Phoenix is ahead of Ontario for fourth place, but the Knights have struggled against the top competition in the division.

Long Beach will take on Ontario at home this Saturday night, which will be followed by a rare Wednesday night contest against Valencia.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (6-7-1, 13 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

The Ontario Avalanche had a solid week, splitting a pair of games against two tough opponents in Valencia and Long Beach.

The Avs kept things close against the Flyers on Friday before putting up seven goals on league-leading Long Beach in a victory Saturday evening.

Ontario is in fifth place in the Western Division, but that can be attributed to what has been a very difficult schedule. The Avalanche appear to be one of the top teams in the division.

Because of Ontario's upcoming slate of games against Long Beach and Valencia, finishing under .500 for the first half is a possibility. Nevertheless, head coach Rob O'Rourke can't be all that worried. His club has an entire second half to work its way toward the top of the division, and the schedule will get significantly easier.

The Avalanche have 10 games remaining before the WSHL Showcase. Six of those will come against Fresno and San Diego, and while the Monsters are a contender, they have not proven to be as dominant as Long Beach or Valencia.

The Avs will get another chance to prove themselves when they battle Long Beach once again this Saturday. Ontario will face the Bombers again on Black Friday (Nov. 25).

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (6-13-2, 14 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

All of a sudden, the Phoenix Knights have won six games in a row, all against last-place San Diego.

The Knights, who began the season on a 15-game winless skid, were finally rewarded for their hard work and perseverance during the early-season rough patch with back-to-back sweeps of the Sabers.

Phoenix's most impressive win came Friday night in a 4-3 triumph. The Knights were trailing 3-1 late in the third period, but three goals in the final 2:12 of the game allowed them to steal two points from San Diego.

Starting goalie Rhett Bruckner has brought new life to the Knights since coming to the club after spending last season with the now-dormant Las Vegas Storm.

Bruckner owns a 6-3-2 record and a 3.69/.897 slash line. He has been between the Phoenix pipes in every game in which the Knights have collected at least one point.

The 18-year-old native of Huntington Beach, California, figures to get the majority of playing time for the remainder of the season, and that's a good sign for Knights fans.

Moving forward, Phoenix has just two series left before the WSHL Showcase. It will take on Fresno at home this weekend in a three-game set before playing El Paso three more times during the first weekend of December.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (1-16-1, 3 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

It was another rough week for the San Diego Sabers, who were swept by Phoenix for the second consecutive week.

The Sabers did manage to pick up a point in Sunday's 5-4 overtime loss. They had a chance to win in each of their last six games against the Knights but were not able to stop a hungry Phoenix team.

San Diego owns the longest active losing streak in the league at 13 games. Its lone win came on October 15 when it took down Fresno, 3-1.

The Sabers' current roster situation has not done much to help their cause. San Diego lists 20 skaters, but both Benjamin Jessie and Ryan Lanpheer have yet to appear in a game, while Jacob Yoakum has played in one contest.

Forward Michal Kolarik has put together a nice stretch of play, with points in four consecutive games and five of his last six overall. Kolarik (6-5-11) is now the Sabers' leading scorer. He registered his first hat trick of the season in a game against Phoenix last weekend.

San Diego will have its work cut out for it this weekend with a road matchup against Valencia. The two clubs will play a three-game series in their first meeting of the season.

VALENCIA FLYERS (12-4-0, 24 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

After suffering their first blowout loss of the year to Long Beach, the Valencia Flyers rebounded nicely with a 4-3 win over Ontario.

The Flyers built a 3-1 lead in the contest before the Avalanche cut the deficit to one goal in the third period. But Corbin Genge netted his first of the year late in the period to give Valencia a two-goal lead.

Genge's goal proved to be the game-winner as Ontario added another tally with just over a minute left in the game.

Last weekend's action ended with Valencia in the same boat as before – firmly cemented in second place, eight points out of the top spot in the division.

Next week's series against San Diego could result in three wins for the Flyers, but nothing is guaranteed. Stranger things have happened in the league, and the Flyers should not take the Sabers lightly.

After the San Diego series, Valencia will be tested with games against Long Beach, Ontario, and Fresno. That stretch will be followed by two more contests against Long Beach to close out the Flyers' first-half schedule.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media