

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.24.17 – WESTERN DIVISION



Mark Mauno photo

FRESNO MONSTERS (10-8-0, 20 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters ran into a Phoenix team that seems to be finding its way, and the result was a pair of losses over the course of the three-game series.

The Monsters took the opening game 6-3 before dropping the next two contests by scores of 7-5 and 4-3. In their lone win, Fresno needed to score three unanswered goals after Phoenix jumped out to leads of 1-0 and 2-1.

Heading into the series, Fresno had won six in a row and nine of its last 10. That stretch included a three-game sweep of the Knights that saw the Monsters win games by huge margins of 11-0 and 9-3, so the results last weekend against Phoenix were unexpected.

Unfortunately, Fresno really could have used some additional points. Its next six games before the WSHL Showcase in Las Vegas will be played against a combination of Long Beach, Valencia, and Ontario.

The Monsters will need more out of their supporting cast against those clubs. Their top line of Daylon Mannon (26-26-52), Jacob Rudloff (10-12-22), and Cody Key (22-24-46) has been consistently producing, but after that there is a drop-off in production.

Outside of that trio, no Fresno player has registered double-digit goals. A few others have contributed offensively, but they will need to show more as the Monsters face off against some of the best teams in the division.

At the end of the day, all Fresno can do at this point is prepare for its upcoming schedule with a strong week of practice after a bye this Thanksgiving weekend.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (17-2-1, 35 pts)

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The Long Beach Bombers have yet to be challenged for their spot atop the Western Division, but Valencia is coming close. After defeating Ontario 5-3 last Saturday, the Bombers fell to Valencia 5-4 in overtime the night before Thanksgiving.

The Bombers lost an early 3-1 lead and watched as the Flyers tied things up at four goals apiece, sending the game into OT. The Flyers went on to win 5-4 with a power-play goal in double overtime.

The Bombers are quickly approaching the conclusion of their first-half schedule. They will play two games each against Ontario, Fresno, and Valencia before heading to Las Vegas for the Showcase.

Long Beach's slate of games in Vegas has not yet been announced, but you can safely assume it will face off against other division leaders such as Idaho, Ogden, El Paso, and Oklahoma City, a club that is not in first place in its division but owns a perfect 16-0-0 record.

With nine players who have tallied 20 or more points, the Bombers enjoy a plethora of scorers. Miroslav Rohlik leads the Bombers with a 21-20-41 line over 19 games, while Tomas Urbanec is not far behind at 20-19-39.

The only other Long Beach skater to reach 30 points is forward Artem Korolev, who hit the milestone with an assist against Valencia on Wednesday evening.

This Saturday night, the Bombers are back in action as they take on Ontario for the fourth time this season. Long Beach has taken two of three games from the Avalanche thus far.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (6-8-1, 13 pts)

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After handing Long Beach its second loss of the season on Veterans Day, the Ontario Avalanche were unable to keep the momentum going in a 5-3 loss to the Bombers this past weekend.

Despite owning some marquee wins, the Avalanche have yet to put together any kind of significant winning streak. The result is a sub-.500 record and fifth place in the division.

"Right now we are not one of the best teams in the division, and our record proves that," said Ontario Head Coach Rob O'Rourke. "The guys are not winning because they are not finding ways to win.

"I still feel we have the talent to be as good as the top teams, but until all of our players buy into their roles and start playing for each other, we will remain mediocre."

O'Rourke is not worried about his players' attitudes, as he believes they know just how talented they are as a whole.

"I don't think the guys are discouraged. I think they are aware of their capabilities as a team," he said. "We just need to play with more urgency on a consistent basis. Again, the talent is there, and I refuse to make excuses."

The good news for Ontario is that it has played only 15 games. It has at least three games in hand on every divisional opponent, including a staggering nine games on Phoenix, the team currently sitting directly above the Avs in the Western Division.

Ontario will look for revenge against Long Beach at home this Saturday night. After that, its next game will come on November 30 against Valencia.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (8-14-2, 18 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

Even though they had won six consecutive games heading into last weekend, the Phoenix Knights had plenty to prove in their series against Fresno. They responded with a solid weekend, taking two of three from the Monsters and pulling to within two points of third place.

The Knights have turned the season around after dropping their first 15 games. They have won eight of their last nine and suddenly look like one of the league's most improved teams.

Rookie forward Anthony Masanotti has been on a quite a tear recently. The 19-year-old is just outside of the top 10 in the league with 19 goals, and is now scoring at a point-per-game pace with a 19-6-25 line over 24 contests.

Masanotti has scored nine goals over his last seven games, including a hat trick against San Diego on November 5. He has emerged as the go-to option for a Phoenix offense that has found new life over the past few weeks.

The Knights will not play again until the first weekend of the December, when they battle an undefeated El Paso squad that is one of the best collections of talent the league has to offer.

The El Paso series marks Phoenix's final games before the WSHL Showcase in mid-December. The Knights will open the second half at home against San Diego on January 5.

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

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The San Diego Sabers losing streak hit 16 games last weekend as they were defeated by Valencia on three consecutive days.

After dropping a 12-3 decision in a series-opening blowout, the Sabers battled back and played much better during the next two games but lost both by three goals.

The Sabers' defense has not been anything special, but their offense is what needs the most work. San Diego is averaging less than two goals per contest,

which is not a great way to win in a league in which offense seems to dominate most of the headlines.

The Sabers have totaled just 39 goals as a team. Ogden forward and WSHL goal-scoring leader Matus Spodniak has already tallied 36 goals this season by himself.

Despite the lack of goals, San Diego's power play has not been all that bad. It is converting at a 15.1% clip, a mark that isn't great but certainly could be much worse.

The Sabers will be off for nearly a month. They will not play again until opening up a three-game series against Ontario on December 15.

VALENCIA FLYERS (16-4-0, 32 pts)

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The Valencia Flyers added three more wins against San Diego last week to move their home record to a 8-0-0.

But Valencia wasn't finished. On Wednesday night it handed Long Beach its third loss of the season. It marked the second time this season the Flyers had beaten the Bombers.

Star forward Jakob Kranabetter, who scored the game-winning goal against Long Beach in overtime, could soon become the WSHL's all-time leader in points. Kranabetter owns a scoring line of 15-44-59 and is in second place in the league scoring race while staying on pace for his most productive season yet.

The Mission, British Columbia, native has an 84-198-282 line over 169 career games, all with Valencia. He is just 43 points away from Tomas Nemeth's 325 points, a milestone that was reached after Nemeth put up three consecutive 100-point seasons.

Kranabetter has taken a different path to his point production. His single-season best is 76, but he has consistently produced over the past five years. If Kranabetter continues to pile up points at this rate, he will become the league's all-time leading scorer in the late-January to early-February range.

The Flyers will open a season-long 11-game homestand on November 30 against Ontario before taking on Fresno the following night.

--- *Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*