



WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 09.19.17 – MOUNTAIN DIVISION

CASPER COYOTES (29-17-6, 64 pts last season)

@CasperCoyotes

The Casper Coyotes made it to the second round of the playoffs last season before losing to Ogden in three games in the Divisional Semifinal round.

The Coyotes played tough all season and seemed to be picking up steam in battling their way to the #3 seed.

With a whole new squad, a new coach in former Southern Oregon bench boss David Cole, and new logo, Casper is looking for a fresh start this season.

To help the team transition to the upcoming season, they've added some local kids to the squad. Defenseman Hunter Brown, forward Will Chapman, forward Logan Spiegelberg, and WSHL vet Dallen Neese are all Casper natives, with Brown, Chapman, and Neese having developed with the Casper Oilers.

Neese put up 10 points in 39 games last season with Southern Oregon, and brings former Spartan teammate, defenseman A.J. Holenski, who sported a 1-2-3 line in 26 games last season.

The new-look Coyotes open their season at home in two weeks against Superior.

>>> David Cole interview with Casper Star Tribune

http://trib.com/sports/high-school/new-casper-coyotes-coach-offers-thoughts-on-upcoming-season/article_350bd14f-1ae2-5b54-a220-9914acdc0933.html

CHEYENNE STAMPEDE (17-32-3, 37 pts)

@Stampshockey

After starting strong last year, the Cheyenne Stampede just couldn't keep up in one of the league's toughest divisions, trading away many of their veteran players and eventually losing in the first round of the playoffs.

The new coach is Joe Pflieger, formerly of the Ogden Mustangs and Utah State University. He will have four players returning from last year, including third-year defenseman Brody Knelsen (9-8-17 last year with 74 PIM).

A home-and-home with division rivals Superior this weekend will be a big test for the Stamps looking to start fresh in the new season.

For more information including the team's planned "First Responders" jerseys, check out www.cheyennestampede.com.

COLORADO EAGLES (38-11-3, 79 pts)
@COJrEagles

The Colorado Jr. Eagles were one of the better teams in the WSHL last season, but managed to stay under the radar for most of the season. After a short cup of coffee at the top of the division, they eventually ceded to Ogden before playing their way to the Thorne Cup.

In four years in the WSHL, the Jr. Eagles have made the playoffs each season, and it looks to be no different this year for head coach Steve Haddon's squad.

Even after several of last year's players moved on to college (including several going to NCAA DIII Finlandia University in Michigan), the Eagles still bring back an incredible amount of talent.

Returning for this season are starting goaltender Braden Lajoie (2.21/.928 last season), forward Carter Dahl (24-27-51), leading scorer Vincent Mastrandrea (29-48-77) and the Tower of Power defenseman John Tower (16-22-38 in 38 games).

With some key pieces back in Fort Collins, it looks like the Jr. Eagles will be favorites to make the leap and have a real chance at winning their first Thorne Cup.

Colorado looks to get their march to the The Cup going this weekend with heated rival Ogden at home.

OGDEN MUSTANGS (42-7-3, 87 pts)
@OgdenMustangs

The Ogden Mustangs accumulated the third-most points in the league last season, trailing only Idaho and Long Beach, but bested both teams in leading the WSHL in goals against with a paltry 98 goals allowed in 52 games.

The Mustangs were also in the top-five in goals for, scoring 267 led by forward Matus Spodniak and his 43-46-87 line on the year.

Head Coach Jake Laime sees big things coming Spodniak again saying his veteran will "have a year."

Ogden had a bit of turnover in the offseason, but Laime doesn't see his squad missing a step.

"Last year we graduated many players, most of them 2-3 year guys," Laime said. "We will have less veterans, but we will be competitive. I expect the same (out of the team) every year."

The Mustang departures include several NCAA commits: Henrik Axelsson (Plymouth State), Nick Frankich (New England College), Brandon Barillaro (University of Wisconsin-Superior), Austin Shea (Saint Mary's University of Minnesota), and former captain Alex Forbes (British pro league EIHL).

There's a slew of talented players coming to Ogden, including Utah native Ammon Anderson. Born in 2001, Anderson becomes the franchise's first player born 2000 or later.

"I'm very thankful for the opportunity to play for this great organization," Anderson said. "I've got high expectations for the season and am ready to work hard."

The 'Stangs open their season at Colorado this weekend before hosting the Outliers for their home opener to close out September.

SUPERIOR ROUGHRIDERS (15-31-6, 36 pts)

@SPR_RoughRiders

After making the playoffs last season, the Superior Roughriders will be bringing a new-look squad to the rink in hopes of going even deeper.

While primarily skating Colorado-based players in the past, this year's team looks to be a bit more international according to head coach Paul DePuydt.

"We have two players from Germany in Erik Buschmann and Thore Weyrauch and one from Lithuania in Daniel Benilov who have represented their respective countries in IIHF Tournaments," DePuydt said. "All three have strong playing backgrounds and their experience will help lead our young team."

The Riders lost several players to the college ranks, including Dylan Van Leuwen-Hall (Iowa State University), C.J. Nitchen (Colorado State), and Jake Siebold and goalie Ashton Opperman who will both be playing for the University of Northern Colorado.

While there won't be players from last year's team wearing the RoughRider green this season, fans may recognize hard-nosed defenseman Avery Albert who played 30 games for Superior in 2015.

Superior opens the season with a home-and-home against Cheyenne this weekend.

UTAH OUTLIERS (30-18-4, 64 pts)

@UtahOutliers

After making an incredible run last season that saw the Outliers claw their way out of the division cellar and into the conversation as one of the league's best teams, returning head coach Paul Taylor hopes to see more of the same in this Utah squad.

"I would like to think we will another strong team this season," Taylor said. "We had a slow start last year but we're able to pick it up and I thought we got really hot from December on. This season we have six returners so I am hoping they can help lead the way and we can have some carry over from last season. But in saying that, it is primarily a new group and a new season."

The Outliers return six players this season including Bogdan Khvatov (22-27-49 last season) and Jacob Wanstrom (17-20-37), and Coach Taylor sees big things coming from his vets particularly Wanstrom.

“I think our fans from last season will see a stronger and more skilled player this season (in Wanstrom),” Taylo said. “He has a high hockey IQ and I expect a few nice plays to come from him that may turn some heads.”

With some new energy coming in the form of new players to the team, Utah is looking to be in mid-season form in September. “We have a lot of good new players this season that I’m excited about,” said Taylor. “I expect some mature play from Brandon Krumpschmid and Zack Hoffman. Both these players have solid junior hockey experience and I expect both to be big contributors for us.”

The Outliers will get tested early as they travel to Ogden for a season opening series against the Mustangs. Utah’s home opener will be October 13 against the Spartans of Southern Oregon.

--- Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media