



Mark Mauno photo

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 09.22.17 – WESTERN DIVISION

ARIZONA HAWKS (0-0-0)

@AZHawksHockey

The Arizona Hawks have nowhere to go but up following a 2017-18 campaign that saw them win just two games all season.

The Hawks will have a new head coach at the helm in former player Jay Kouris, who appeared in 43 WSHL games from 2009-11 with the then-Arizona RedHawks.

Kouris will be replacing former head coach Luke Hernandez, who resigned during the offseason.

“I loved my time playing here and am proud to come in here and help make this team a consistent winner and playoff team,” Kouris said.

Kouris will be tasked with turning around a franchise that hasn’t had much success in its eight years of existence. Arizona, which has recorded just one winning season, has made only two postseason appearances in its history, with both ending in first-round losses to Fresno.

Owner and General Manager Greg Schursky, who was responsible for the hire of Kouris, is fully aware of his club’s desperate need for a winning season after a 47-game losing streak last year.

“I have been getting a lot of pressure, well-deserved after the way last year ended,” said Schursky. “We have to win. There is no other way to put it. We have to win, or else.”

The Hawks open up their season this weekend with a three-game series in Valencia against the Flyers.

Click here to read the Hawks’ full release on the hiring of Kouris.

<http://arizonahawkshockey.com/news/>

FRESNO MONSTERS (0-0-0)

@WSHLMonsters

Following a first-round exit in last season’s playoffs, the Fresno Monsters are looking to take the next step towards becoming a contender in the brutal Western Division.

Although it finished with a winning record and 55 points, last year’s season was a disappointment for a Fresno club that has finished as a top-two seed in six of its eight years of existence.

The Monsters have added plenty of talent this offseason, including forwards Cole Beckman, Daylon Mannon, Adam Polomsky, and Deivids Tempelmanis.

Additionally, Fresno brought back several players such as goaltender Nick Gary and blueliners Taylor Hiatt and Daniel Goodwin.

The Monsters will also welcome back veteran forward Cody Key for his final season of eligibility. The 20-year-old Fresno native logged a career-high 89 points (32-57-89) last year and has a scoring line of 68-112-180 over 143 WSHL games.

"Cody brings a wealth of experience to the table. He's a gifted offensive player who has a very creative mindset with great hands who can score and set up his linemates," said Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "He makes his teammates better around him while bringing a strong leadership and great work ethic into the locker room."

Fresno is off this weekend, giving it an extra week to prepare for a three-game series against the defending Western Division champion Long Beach Bombers next weekend.

Click here to read the Monsters' full release on the return of Key.

<http://www.fresnomonsters.com/single-post/2017/05/07/Cody-Key-returns-for-the-2017-18-season>

LAS VEGAS STORM (0-0-0)

@lvstormhockey

The Las Vegas Storm, coming off the most successful season in franchise history, seem as though it is ready to be taken seriously in the Western Division race.

Last year, the Storm posted its first winning season since joining the league as an expansion team in 2014, going 25-22-5 and making it to the second round of the playoffs before falling to Long Beach.

Las Vegas finished in fourth place in the division and swept Fresno in a best-of-three series for its first playoff series win.

The Storm will need to find a way to compensate for the loss of forward Ted Astrom, one of its top offensive producers from last season.

Astrom was acquired midseason via trade and finished as Vegas' fourth-leading scorer with a line of 23-42-65 despite appearing in just 27 games.

Las Vegas will open its season with a six-game homestand, beginning next weekend with a three-game series against Ontario.

After that, the Storm will play the El Paso Rhinos three times before traveling to San Diego for a series against the Sabers in mid-October.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (0-0-0)

@LBBombershockey

The Long Beach Bombers will once again face high expectations this season after a season of promise came up just short on the league's biggest stage last spring.

Long Beach had an incredible regular season, finishing with the best record in the WSHL and a team-record 93 points.

After winning the Western Division playoffs and making it all the way to the Thorne Cup tournament, the Bombers lost two of three games in round-robin play and failed to qualify for the championship game.

Dominant netminder Domenic Bosetti will return for his third season with the Bombers. The Long Beach native appeared in 57 and of 59 games last year and posted a 2.05 GAA to go along with a .922 save percentage during the regular season.

“Domenic was our rock last year,” said Bombers Head Coach and General Manager Chris White. “Every big game, his name was first on the lineup card.

“He has gone from a young third goalie that made the best of an opportunity to one of the top goalies in the league. His stats are fantastic, but it’s his competitiveness and will that are most impressive.”

“After our final game in Ogden [last season], he pulled me aside and said, ‘Coach, I’m sorry, we’re gonna win it next year, I promise.’ I truly believe he will do whatever it takes to win a Thorne Cup, and if we have enough guys on the team that want to win as bad as he does, we’ll have a shot.”

Bosetti and his teammates will begin their quest for an elusive Thorne Cup next weekend at home against Fresno.

Click here to browse the Bombers’ website, which has been updated for the 2017-18 season.

<http://jrbombers.pointstreaksites.com/view/longbeachjrbombers/home-page-506>

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (0-0-0)

@TmOntAvs

For the fourth season in a row, the Ontario Avalanche made it to the second round of the WSHL playoffs before falling in the division semifinals.

After a tight regular-season race, the Avs fell just shy of a first-round bye but were able to take care of business with an opening-round sweep of San Diego.

Ontario faced off against second-seeded Valencia in round two but was eliminated after dropping game two in a heartbreaking 7-6 double overtime loss.

The Avalanche will have to overcome the departure of star forwards Filip Stensson and Filip Ullgren, two Swedish skaters who finished with scoring lines of 28-63-91 and 47-50-97, respectively.

The 91- and 97-point seasons were the two most productive seasons in Avalanche history.

After taking on a talented Las Vegas squad next weekend, the Avs will play back-to-back series against Phoenix and Arizona, the bottom two teams in the division last season.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (0-0-0)

@PhxKnightsJrA

The Phoenix Knights are looking for a bounce-back season after watching the playoffs from home last year.

Phoenix won just seven games in the disappointing campaign and failed to score 100 goals over its 49 games played.

Goaltender Cody Call, who spent part of the 2015-16 season with Phoenix, will make his return to the Knights this season after signing with the team in late August.

The 19-year-old Call will be playing his fourth season of junior hockey after splitting last year between the Northwest Junior Hockey League and the Kootenay International Junior Hockey League.

Forward Michael Caravella is coming back for another season with the Knights after scoring 17 points (7-10-17) over 42 games with the club in his rookie year.

Caravella has been named team captain for the upcoming season, and the left-handed shooter will be counted on to make a big leap in his sophomore campaign.

Phoenix is off this weekend, but it will begin play next week with a three-game series at home against Valencia.

Throughout the season, the Knights will be releasing a series of documentaries about the team. Click here to watch episode one.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1B-kB_80tU

SAN DIEGO SABERS (0-0-0)

@sdsabershockey

The San Diego Sabers had a solid comeback year last season, finishing at .500 after a 2015-16 season that saw them compile just 21 points.

Still, after a division-quarterfinal loss to Ontario, you get the sense that the Sabers are looking for more this year.

The Sabers will have plenty of new faces in the locker room after a busy offseason from Head Coach Petr Kankovsky and his staff.

Kankovsky signed a handful of players including French forward Romain Tardy, right winger David Grindstaff, centerman Riley Cryan, and blueliner Ben Jessie.

San Diego also brought back veteran goalie Zach Hale, who appeared in seven games with Sabers last year, posting a 3.84 GAA and an .880 save percentage.

The key for San Diego's coaching staff will be to find a way to quickly get all of the new additions to mesh together.

The Sabers, like most other WSHL teams, are dealing with a great deal of roster turnover from last season and could have an advantage over their opponents early in the year if they can develop chemistry early on.

San Diego does not have any games scheduled until October 5, when it opens up a two-game set against Long Beach on the road.

Click here to follow the Sabers on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/sdsabershockey/>

VALENCIA FLYERS (0-0-0)

@valenciaflyers

The Valencia Flyers came as close as they've ever been to a coveted Thorne Cup title last season but were unable to put the finishing touches on what was otherwise a wildly successful campaign.

The Flyers, who finished second in the Western Division with a record of 40-9-3, qualified for the Thorne Cup tournament and managed to advance to the semifinal after a 1-1-1 performance during round-robin play.

Unfortunately, Valencia fell to eventual runner-up Idaho by a score of 3-1 in the semifinal game and ended its season on a sour note.

The Flyers will once again look to challenge Long Beach for the top spot in the division. The club has finished as top-two seed in the Western Division in each of the last three years.

Valencia opens its season this weekend with a home series against the Arizona Hawks followed by a three-game set on the road against Phoenix next weekend.

It could be a prime opportunity for the Flyers to gain an early lead in the division race, as both Arizona and Phoenix had poor seasons a year ago.

Click here to browse the Flyers' website.

<http://www.valenciaflyers.com/Home.aspx>

--- *Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*