



DALLAS SNIPERS (0-0-0, 0pts)

@DallasSnipers

The Dallas Snipers are still waiting for their chance to begin their season, with their first game coming this weekend against Mid-Western Division rival El Paso.

Coach Aaron Davis says the team is getting anxious to get some game action.

“Yes guys are ready to go,” coach Davis said. “We have two extra weeks of practice, so we have had a little more time to go over systems. Also I got a few new players in that extra two weeks. But all the boys are ready to get going.”

Coach Davis’ squad looks to skate a young team, but he’s excited for the opportunity to see how they do. “We have a few young guys like Chris Mingus who got a good taste of the WSHL last season playing as a 2000, and I think he will have a very productive season. I like our defense as well – they all are good skaters and move the puck well. I have a fairly young team this season so I am excited to see how they compete, react and learn.”

With so much time before their first game, Davis said he isn’t concerned about nerves.

“I am sure there will be some nerves Friday night,” added Davis. “But only takes a shift or two to shake those.”

Dallas will look to make an impression as they host the Rhinos for three games before traveling to first-place Superior the following weekend.

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

@El_Paso_Rhinos

The Rhinos are waiting for their chance to begin their defense of their Division crown from last season.

Coach Cory Herman said his players are getting ready to go full tilt after weeks of practice.

“They are getting really excited to start the season,” Herman said. “Practice is getting old to say the least.”

In the meantime, the Rhinos continue to lead by example with their community engagement.

A simple follow of their Twitter account (@El_Paso_Rhinos) shows the players participating in community events including helping lead the way in local Album Park for Mt. West Weight Loss Walk-a-Thon.

And, in turn, the community gets involved with the team, including joining the Crash booster club, promoting the team and players with local events.

In the meantime, the Rhinos are one of the only teams in the league to be playing against teams from other divisions. On the Rhino dance card this season includes Las Vegas, San Diego, and Phoenix as El Paso looks to leave their mark across the WSHL.

The team travels to cross-state rival Dallas to open the season this weekend.

For more information, you can visit ElPasoRhinos.com or follow all their goings on about town at their Twitter, [@El_Paso_Rhinos](https://twitter.com/El_Paso_Rhinos).

OKLAHOMA CITY BLAZERS (3-0-0, 6pts)
@OKCBlazersWSHL

Ivan Bondarenko started this season right where he left off after his breakout year last season. After scoring a 29-41-70 line in 47 games last year, Bondarenko scored a 4-10-14 line in OKC's opening three-game series with Wichita.

Newcomer Josh Chamberlain from Spokane, WA also got in on the fun, scoring a 6-6-12 line in his first bit of action for the Blazers.

Thirteen Blazer skaters scored against the Thunder, ten of whom scored more than one. Seventeen players scored a point, and OKC is looking to set the league on fire, but they still have three more weeks before their next game, which is a lot of time to cool off.

The Blazers are sporting new jerseys this year, with the flame-adorned "OKC" on the front. Photos available at OKCityHockey.com

SPRINGFIELD EXPRESS (3-0-0, 0pts)
@_ExpressHockey

The Express were one of the few active teams this weekend, beating the Thunder of Wichita in a decisive three-game sweep.

Vegard Faret (2-2-4) and Kyle Cagnoni (2-5-7) led the way in the team's 10-1 victory on Friday. Goalies William Cawthorn and Chad Purdy combined for 14 saves, while the skaters got 66 shots on Wichita's net.

Saturday's 11-1 victory had no less than eight goal scorers with Nikita Sokov's 3-2-5 line pacing the players.

The Express continued to roll on Sunday, dropping double digit goals again. This time, four players scored multiple goals and 15 players scored at least one point.

Massachusetts-native Cagnoni had 28 points in 64 WSHL games before this season playing for OKC and Superior. In his first three games with the 417s, he now has a 5-5-10 line.

German-born Stephane Doering opened his play in North American hockey with a 3-5-8 line over the weekend, and all 21 Express skaters got on the scoresheet.

If Springfield continues to roll like this, the Mid-Western Division may have to make room at top for the Express.

WICHITA JR. THUNDER (0-6-0, 0pts)
@JrThunderHockey

Wichita continues to suffer from a championship hangover, dropping three games in Springfield over the weekend.

Tyler Alverson, Braeden Thomas, and Corey Steinbarger scored the only goals for Wichita all weekend, the Thunder have now been outscored 65-9 in their first six games.

Coach Rob Weingartner knows it's been a tough slog to open the year, but it's a tough division and wins will be difficult to come by.

"We haven't exactly had easy match-ups to start the year," Weingartner said. "Oklahoma was big and aggressive and wore us down each game, while Springfield could be one of the best skating teams I've seen in the WSHL, they are fast and move the puck very well."

It's a completely different team than last year's Thorne Cup champions, with many of that squad's leaders aging out of the league. But, Weingartner sees room for the team find it's groove.

"I was certainly hoping for a better start to the year, but the reality is we only have around 40 games total of junior hockey experience in our line-up," Coach Weingartner said. "We have a good group of young players that need to start trusting each other, once the we get over that, I believe things will turn around."

The Thunder will host the Mountain Division's Cheyenne Stampede who are a young team in their own right and are off to an 0-4 start.

"I'm hoping for a competitive series," Weingartner said. "I want our players to just play one shift at a time, when we start winning shifts, we can move on to winning periods, then eventually winning games."

There is going to be some adjustment for young players making their junior hockey debuts, and Weingartner is no stranger to the work needed in building a championship caliber team.

"I like our compete level, especially our goaltenders. I keep reminding myself and our team that it took time to build our Thorne Cup Championship team," he said. "It didn't happen over night, it was hard work and we need to trust in the system."

For more information, including pictures from their championship run last season, visit the Jr. Thunder at WichitaJuniorThunder.com or follow them on twitter [@JrThunderHockey](https://twitter.com/JrThunderHockey).

--- Tyler Whidden for Harrington Sports Media