

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 10.18.17 – WESTERN DIVISION



Mark Mauno photo

FRESNO MONSTERS (3-6-0)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

A successful series against San Diego last weekend has the Fresno Monsters back on track after the club lost five of its first six contests.

Fresno took the first two games in the three-game set before falling in the finale by a 3-1 margin.

The Monsters, who are in fourth place in the Western Division, have now won three of their last four games.

Over the next month or so, Fresno needs to establish itself as a contender in the division. The Monsters have an upcoming schedule that features six matchups against winless Phoenix and a series against Bellingham, another club that is near the bottom of the Northwest Division.

Everything is set up for the Monsters to make a huge run, but thinking it and actually doing it are two very different things.

Following that stretch, Fresno will play its next three games against Long Beach and Valencia in mid-November.

For now, the Monsters are back at home for a three-game series against Phoenix, followed by a two-week hiatus.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (8-0-0)
@LBBombersHockey
www.JrBombers.pointstreaksites.com

The Long Beach Bombers have seized control of the division with a three-game sweep of Phoenix.

Technically, the club is tied with Valencia at 16 points apiece, but the Bombers have a game in hand on the Flyers, who lost to Fresno earlier in the month.

Long Beach is riding an eight-game winning streak to open its season. It outscored Phoenix 23-3 last weekend in a dominant showing.

Backup netminder Rhett Arnold has played sparingly behind workhorse starter Domenic Bosetti. Arnold made his first start of the year against Phoenix and stopped 36 of 38 shots (.950 save percentage).

Arnold could be the starting goaltender on many WSHL teams but the continued excellence of Bosetti, who is first in the league in save percentage (.949) and second in goals-against average (1.67) among qualified starters, has kept Arnold on the bench.

The Bombers already have eight players with double-digit points through their first eight games, including leading scorer Miroslav Rohlik (11-7-18).

The Czech Republic native is playing in his first season in North America and is making a massive impact early on.

Long Beach will play four games against San Diego this weekend. The series begins Thursday night at Glacial Garden Arena.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (5-4-0)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

Despite playing three hard-fought games, the Ontario Avalanche were swept by El Paso last weekend.

The Avalanche dropped the opening match 5-1 before falling in back-to-back 4-3 games. Ontario seemed to be headed to overtime in Sunday's game, but El Paso netted a goal with just nine seconds remaining in regulation to deny the Avs a valuable point in the standings.

Ontario is alone in third place in the Western Division. The club is six points behind division leaders Long Beach and Valencia.

The Avs' power play is once again one of the league's best, converting on 25.6% of its opportunities. Ontario already has 10 power-play goals this season.

Canadian winger Jesse Zaharichuk has been one of the Avs' go-to options on offense, with a scoring line of 5-9-14.

The Sherwood Park, Alberta, native played 25 games with his hometown Sherwood Park Crusaders last season in the Alberta Junior Hockey League, collecting 21 points (6-15-21).

The 20-year-old Zaharichuk has also spent parts of the last three seasons in the Western Hockey League with three different clubs. He has scored 73 points (23-50-73) over 125 games in his career.

Ontario will be tested this weekend with a home-and-home series against Valencia, starting Friday night on the road.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (0-9-0)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

The Phoenix Knights are struggling through the first month of the season and have yet to pick up a point through nine games.

The Knights have been hurt by a brutal opening schedule with three series in a row against Valencia, Ontario, and Long Beach.

Phoenix was swept by Long Beach last weekend and, despite the lopsided results, the team managed to keep things close in almost every game before the Bombers pulled away in the final period.

Scoring has been a huge issue for the Knights. Forwards Colton Schneiderman and Kohl Hedquist share the team lead with three goals each.

Phoenix has found the back of the net just 11 times through nine games. It will need some new players to step up if it wants to have a chance this weekend against a Fresno squad that has won three of its last four.

The Knights are planning on releasing a series of video documentaries about the team throughout the season. You can watch episode two of Hard Day's Knight at the link below.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=n7R3yVAkkXg

SAN DIEGO SABERS (1-4-0)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers lost their first two games to Fresno last weekend but pulled off a 3-1 victory in the third game for the team's first win of the season.

San Diego is another club that is still finding its way offensively, lighting the lamp just seven times through their first five games.

Take away the win over Fresno and the Sabers have only four goals over four games.

Forward David Grindstaff is off to a nice start with four points (2-2-4), but he hasn't had much help. Karel Kankovsky has also netted a pair of goals, but no other Saber has registered multiple goals.

The Sabers will need to quickly figure out their goal-scoring issue or they could risk digging themselves into a sizeable hole. The club is tasked with four games in four days against undefeated Long Beach this weekend.

After the Long Beach series, things won't get much easier as the Sabers play a three-game set against El Paso – another unbeaten team – at home.

VALENCIA FLYERS (8-1-0)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers return from their bye week this Friday night to take on Ontario at Ice Station in game one of a brief home-and-home series.

The series against the Avalanche should be a good prelude to what is becoming one of the most anticipated matchups of the first half of the season when the Flyers take on Long Beach in a four-game set.

Valencia will play three of the four contests at home, which could give it a slight edge in a series in which every advantage will be magnified.

The Flyers' special teams have been a strength early on. Their power play, which seems to dominate every year, is scoring on 28.9% of its opportunities.

The penalty kill has not been as great, but it is still holding opponents off the board a respectable 84.2% of the time.

Valencia holds a share of first place in the Western Division despite being idle last week. It is locked into a 16-point tie atop the division standings.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media