

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 1.12.18 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (15-13-0, 30 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters posted one of their best wins of the season last week in an 11-4 blowout of Ontario that pushed the Monsters to within four points of third-place Valencia.

Forward Cody Key (33-42-75) and Daylon Mannon (41-43-84) registered seven points apiece in the victory. Mannon is now just 10 points behind WSHL leading scorer Matus Spodniak of Ogden.

The next two weeks will be challenge, but they could determine whether Fresno can be considered a true contender in the Western Division.

This weekend, the Monsters will travel to Long Beach for a three-game set against the Bombers, which will be followed by three games against Valencia next weekend.

Fresno has lost four of five games to Long Beach, but three of the losses were decided by one goal. The season series between the Monsters and the Valencia is tied at two, and most of the games have been one-sided.

If Fresno can get through those two series while remaining above .500, it will be in great shape. The Monsters will begin a season-high 11-game homestand the week after the Valencia series.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (20-5-3, 43 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

The Long Beach Bombers are probably thankful for their quick start to the season. The Bombers have lost six of their last nine games, including all three of their games at the Western States Shootout.

At the Showcase, Long Beach lost to Colorado, Utah, and El Paso. Bombers Head Coach Chris White spoke about the loss and his team's recent woes.

"It was a humbling experience that will hopefully push us to compete at the level necessary to be an elite team," said White.

"The game against El Paso was typical of our play over the past six weeks. We were in position to win and did not give 100 percent in our own zone.

"It has been a frustrating stretch of .500 hockey. We have the potential to beat anyone, but we are not playing anywhere near our best. It was another disappointing loss."

Luckily, the Bombers have an entire second half to figure things out. With 22 games left on their schedule, White's squad will have plenty of time to right the ship.

Long Beach hosts Fresno this weekend at The Rinks in Lakewood, California, in a three-game set that marks the Bombers' opening series of the second half.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (17-10-1, 35 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

The Ontario Avalanche have played one game in 2018, and it didn't go well. The Avs lost by seven goals to a Fresno team that has plenty of talent but has been hovering around the .500 mark for most of the season.

Nevertheless, the loss doesn't take away from what Ontario did at the WSHL Showcase. The Avalanche won all three of their games in Vegas, logging victories over Springfield, Superior, and the CPJHL Red Team.

"We were not at our best, we had a lot of guys sick and quite a few injuries," said Avs Head Coach Rob O'Rourke. "I was just happy that we simply found ways to win."

As the Avs head into the second half, O'Rourke knows there's plenty of room to grow. His club has had a good season, but he believes his players are capable of even more.

"In order for this team to win moving forward, we have to improve our work ethic in both games and practice. We need to focus on playing from the defensive side of the puck.

"I know there is enough talent on this team to be very successful. We just need to tighten things up."

Ontario will look to rebound on the road this weekend against San Diego. The Sabers are coming off a successful Showcase of their own, so the Avs will need to come ready to play.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (14-17-2, 30 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

It has been quite the up-and-down season for the Phoenix Knights, who returned from their holiday break last weekend to sweep San Diego in three games.

The Knights lost their first 15 games, but are 14-4-0 since then. The turnaround has brought the franchise back to relevancy after it lost 42 of 49 games last season.

Phoenix has now won six of its last seven, including a three-game sweep at the Western States Shootout. Incredibly, the Knights are just five points out of

the second seed, meaning a first-round bye in the postseason is a very real possibility.

This weekend's series against Valencia began on Thursday night with a 5-0 Phoenix loss. In the grand scheme of things it's a minor setback, but a win over the Flyers on Friday would give the Knights a huge confidence boost.

Phoenix has begun a stretch of 12 games against Valencia, Ontario, and Fresno. The next month or so will likely shake things up in the middle of the division as Western Division clubs play multiple series against one another.

Like his team, Knights forward Nolan Twerdoclib has heated up after a slow start. The 18-year-old Canadian just concluded a seven-game point streak and has at least one point in nine of his last 11 games.

Twerdoclib (8-13-21) is now fourth on the club in points, but that could soon change. He seems to have figured things out, and his offensive ability could eventually allow him to challenge Anthony Massanoti (26-11-37) for the team lead in scoring.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (3-25-2, 8 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers opened their homestand last weekend with three consecutive losses to Phoenix.

The Sabers managed to keep the series close for the most part, but could not overcome a Knights team that has turned things around and gotten back into the division race.

At this point, San Diego's best hope for better playoff seeding is a Knights-like turnaround. With just eight points on the campaign, the Sabers have the third-worst record in the league and have dug themselves a 22-point hole at the bottom of the division.

Because of teams folding or going dormant, every team will qualify for the postseason. Assuming they remain in sixth place, the Sabers will be tasked with the third seed in the division, which at this point could be any of the five other Western Division clubs.

San Diego's tough homestand continues this weekend as it welcomes Ontario to Iceoplex for a three-game weekend series.

After Ontario, the Sabers will play three games against Long Beach, followed by a single-game matchup against Valencia to close out the homestand.

VALENCIA FLYERS (17-9-0, 34 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers are back from their holiday break to take on the Phoenix Knights this weekend at home.

The Flyers began the series on Thursday night with a 5-0 shutout win. Jacob Kranabetter netted a pair of goals while dishing out two assists, and Spencer Kozlowksi made 33 saves in his first shutout of the season.

Kranabetter needs just two more assists to tie the all-time WSHL mark set by Tomas Nemeth. He will likely do so against the Knights this weekend, making the series a must-watch for WSHL fans.

Having a playmaker like Kranabetter is similar to having an elite quarterback in NFL; he makes everyone around him better.

Forwards Nikita Pintusov (25-15-40) and Dawson Keay (20-24-44) are two of the main beneficiaries of Kranabetter's passing. The duo leads the Flyers in goals, and both players are on pace for career years in goals, assists, and points.

The series-opening win against the Knights was needed. Valencia had lost five of its last six games heading into the matchup, including two of three at the Western States Shootout.

For the first time in a while, the Flyers have fallen out of second place in the division. Valencia is one point behind second-place Ontario and seven points back of division-leading Long Beach.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media