

# WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.01.18 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



**BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (17-18-3, 37 pts)**  
[www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com](http://www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com)  
**@Bhamblazers**

Things weren't looking great for the Bellingham Blazers after they lost three straight to Idaho just two weeks ago, but the Blazers quickly righted the ship with an undefeated weekend that featured a 6-5 victory over West Sound as well as back-to-back wins over Seattle.

All three wins were important, but the triumph over West Sound was especially noteworthy. The Blazers are now six points behind the second-place Warriors, with three games in hand.

"I thought the boys played very well this weekend considering we have about seven players that were injured," head coach Mark Collins said. "We played with the very short bench in all three games."

Despite the numerous injuries to key players, Bellingham has been able to remain competitive. It's a testament to the work ethic of the remaining healthy players and the fantastic job Collins has done this season.

One of the most productive contributors on the Blazers' roster is standout Russian forward Ruslan Novruzov (37-32-69), who leads the club in goals, assists, and points in his first year in North America.

"Ruslan has been a very important piece to the puzzle," said Collins. "He has great speed and an ability to protect the puck. We have players that are able to play with him and move the puck to attack with speed."

While Novruzov has performed well individually, he is just one cog in a leadership group that has carried Bellingham through the grind of the regular season.

"We have a solid leadership core that understands how I want them to play," Collins continued. "Right down the line from our captain Dane Halstead and our assistants Robbie Eichelberger, Sean Meetsma, and Thomas Steven, they hold each other accountable every day."

Bellingham has just one game this weekend, and it's a big one. It will take on West Sound this Saturday night on the road with a chance to pull even closer to the Warriors in the division standings.

### **IDAHO ICECATS (31-4-1, 63 pts)**

[www.IdaholceCats.com](http://www.IdaholceCats.com)

The Idaho IceCats just keep rolling. The IceCats swept Southern Oregon is what turned out to be a competitive series to push their winning streak to nine and remain perfect in the second half.

Idaho has now swept division rivals West Sound, Bellingham, and Southern Oregon in consecutive weeks. The result is a massive 20-point lead atop the Northwest Division and an almost-certain division title.

Amazingly, the IceCats are tied for fewest games played in the division with just 36, five fewer than West Sound and four fewer than Tahoe.

Idaho has scored 211 goals on the season, most in the division and fifth-most in the WSHL. Its defense has been elite as well, allowing just 64 goals for an average of under two goals-against per contest.

February will see the IceCats play in some big series. After traveling to Utah for three games against the Outliers, Idaho will welcome Ogden to Manchester Ice Center for another challenging series.

Utah and Ogden are currently tied atop the Mountain Division with 59 points apiece, so both clubs will be hungry to take down the IceCats and pick up valuable points.

This weekend should be another close series for Idaho. It will travel to Tahoe for a three-game set against a much-improved Icemen squad that won five of six games in the month of January.

### **SEATTLE TOTEMS (10-21-5, 25 pts)**

[www.SeattleJrTotems.com](http://www.SeattleJrTotems.com)

@SeattleJrTotems

The Seattle Totems are stumbling to the finish line. After dropping close games against West Sound and Bellingham last weekend, the Totems have now lost six in a row and, at this rate, could soon be in danger of falling to last place in the Northwest Division.

Seattle has lost eight of 10 since the calendar flipped to 2018, so hopefully the new month will mark a new, clean slate for the struggling Totems.

Seattle simply hasn't scored enough goals to compete. Its 111 goals on the season rank in the bottom six in the league, and it has allowed more goals to the opposition than anyone else in the division.

Over the final weeks of the regular season, the Totems will play series against Western Division foes Ontario and Fresno. Both teams are loaded with talent and feature some of the league's best players, so both series will present a challenge.

Seattle has nine divisional games left to play. Of those nine, four will be played against Southern Oregon, including a brief two-game set at the Madhouse in Medford, Oregon, this weekend.

Even though every team in the division will qualify for the postseason, but Seattle will do its best to log as many points as possible in its remaining matchups with the Spartans.

## **SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (9-28-1, 19 pts)**

[www.SOSpartans.com](http://www.SOSpartans.com)

@wshlspartans

After being swept by Idaho despite giving the IceCats all they could handle, the Southern Oregon Spartans have lost five of six games in the second half, all at home.

Despite the negative results, the club's improvement after a disappointing first half is noticeable. They lost by scores of 6-4, 4-0, and 2-1 in the Idaho series.

The series finale needed overtime to decide a winner, and the Spartans can thank netminder Austin Toussaint for that. Toussaint put up one of the best performances of his WSHL career in the loss, making a staggering 82 saves to single-handedly earn his team a point.

In the third period of that game, Idaho pelted the Southern Oregon backstop with 33 shots, but he managed to stop all of them. Even though the Spartans scored just one goal in the contest and allowed 84 shots, their veteran netminder kept things close until the very end.

Furthermore, Toussaint's performance came after he made a combined 117 saves in the first two games of the series. When it was all said and done, the North Dakota native made 199 saves over the course of the series.

Unfortunately, the Spartans can't rely on the goaltender to do that every week. They need to clean things up on the defensive end, and some extra goal support would go a long way.

Southern Oregon will close out its eight-game homestand this weekend with a pair of games against Seattle. Two regulation wins would put the Spartans within two points of the Totems in the division standings.

## **TAHOE ICEMEN (20-16-3, 43 pts)**

[www.Tahoelcemen.com](http://www.Tahoelcemen.com)

@Tahoelcemen

It has been a good stretch of hockey for the Tahoe Icemen, and that trend continued last weekend as Tahoe took two of three games from Western Division-leading Long Beach.

It was an odd series, as both clubs recorded a blowout win in the first two games before Tahoe closed out the series with a dramatic 7-6 overtime victory.

The game saw numerous lead changes. Forward Illya Cetertak (20-27-47) gave the Icemen a huge win with his 20th goal of the season just over a minute into the extra period.

Tahoe Head Coach Mickey Lang has liked what he has seen recently, but still believes there's plenty of work left to be done.

"We aren't quite there yet, we have more to do," Lang said. "We are close, but not where I envision us being. However, our players are hungry, I'm hungry, and we are out to be the best we can be.

"As long as the team is willing to work, I most certainly am, and we will get to where we want to be."

Tahoe will be tasked with another brutal series this weekend, this time against Idaho. It will be difficult, but the Icemen know that the road to the Thorne Cup goes through the IceCats.

"We can't wait for Idaho," Lang added. "They are another challenge for us, considering we are facing the most-disciplined and best-coached team in the

league. We are always confident in what we do."

### **WEST SOUND WARRIORS (21-19-1, 43 pts)**

[www.WestSoundWarriors.com](http://www.WestSoundWarriors.com)

@WS\_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors have seen their grip on second place loosen over the past few weeks, and their lead finally disappeared last week as Tahoe took advantage of the Warriors' loss to Bellingham to tie West Sound at 43 points.

If West Sound and Tahoe remain relatively close throughout February, the three-game series between the teams over the first weekend in March will likely decide which club earns the first-round bye that comes with the second seed.

There was a positive that came from last weekend's loss to Bellingham. Forward Harri Koll (30-34-64) tallied his 30th goal of the season, putting him in the top 20 in the league goal-scoring race.

Koll was solid last season with the Butte Cobras, but he has hit another level this year. The 19-year-old Estonian has nearly doubled his 34-point performance from last year and still has 10 games left in the regular season.

With just six more points, Koll will have 100 points in his two-year WSHL career. He currently leads the Warriors in both goals and points.

This weekend, West Sound will look for revenge on Bellingham as it takes on the Blazers in a one-game matchup at home on Saturday evening.

*--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*