

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.09.18 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (22-16-1, 45 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters continued their successful homestand by taking two of three from the Phoenix Knights last weekend, pushing themselves even closer to second-place Ontario in the Western Division standings.

The Monsters shook off an 8-3 setback in the series opener to win the next two games by a combined score of 16-6.

"The guys are committed to Monster hockey," said Fresno Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "They know what's at stake for a final push to try and get the second seed and home-ice advantage."

Kaminski credits his team's success to its stifling defensive effort coupled with talented scorers.

"We've mostly been playing solid, stingy defense, and the offense is still rolling and getting some secondary scoring, which is huge."

Forward Daylon Mannon (56-57-113) has taken over as the league's leading goal-scorer, surpassing Ogden's Matus Spodniak (55-62-117). Mannon steadily closed the gap between himself and Spodniak over the last month or so, and the rookie now has a real chance to win the league scoring race.

This weekend, the Monsters are taking on San Diego in a three-game series at home. It would be easy to look past the series and focus on next weekend's huge matchup against Long Beach at Selland Arena, but Kaminski says his players take things one step at a time.

"I'm sure they're excited, but they're just trying to focus on getting better every day and worrying about the games in front of us," Kaminski said. "We have to play San Diego like they're in first. We can't get complacent and take a night off and think it's going to work."

So far, so good for the Monsters this weekend. They took down San Diego 6-2 last night and will wrap up the series over the next two days.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (28-7-4, 60 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

For much of the second half, it has been clear that the Long Beach Bombers are not playing like the team that thoroughly dominated its first-half schedule. But the past couple of weeks have been a different story, as the Bombers have won seven of their last eight games, including a pair of wins over Ontario and Valencia last weekend on back-to-back nights.

The win over Valencia was particularly exciting. Long Beach trailed 4-3 with under four minutes to play, but it came back to win 5-4 with clutch goals from Miroslav Rohlik (35-36-71) and Tomas Urbanec (33-35-68) in the final minutes of the contest.

Long Beach has added some help for star goalie Domenic Bossetti, acquiring frequent rival Spencer Kozlowski from Valencia. Kozlowski will provide another veteran presence and will fit right in with the stacked Bombers roster.

The Bombers are in excellent position to clinch their second straight Western Division title over the next few weeks if they can take care of business against division rivals.

This weekend's home-and-home series against Ontario could turn out to be a pivotal couple of games. If the Avalanche have any hope of taking over the top spot in the division, they would almost certainly have to win both contests in regulation. This means that a strong weekend from Long Beach could essentially wrap up the division race.

Long Beach will battle Fresno in a hostile environment at Selland Arena next week. That series will precede a two-week break that will give the Bombers time to rest their legs for what they hope will be a long playoff run.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (24-12-2, 50 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

Last weekend featured another tough divisional contest for the Ontario Avalanche, who fell to Long Beach 5-3.

While they likely wouldn't meet until the division final round, it almost seems as if the Avs are destined for a playoff series against the Bombers. The rivalry between the two clubs has been growing throughout the season, and a playoff match-up could be very entertaining.

The Avs have been active as the trade deadline approaches, sending veteran defenseman Adam Cech (0-9-9) to Oklahoma City while bringing in new additions in Angelos Tsalafos and Alec Johnson.

Tsalafos previously played in the Ontario Junior Hockey League as well as the Central Canada Hockey League this season. His first game with the Avalanche will mark his WSHL debut.

Johnson is in his first year in the WSHL and has been a productive player, registering 39 points (16-23-39) over 41 appearances with West Sound.

Ontario could be a team that makes more moves quite soon as it prepares for the final month of the regular season as well as the postseason.

This weekend, the Avalanche will continue their string of matchups against Long Beach with a home-and-home series against the Bombers starting Friday evening at Ontario Center Ice Arena.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (17-23-2, 36 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

The Phoenix Knights concluded their season series with Fresno last weekend with a win and a pair of regulation losses, finishing the year with three wins in nine tries against the Monsters – although three of those losses came during the Knights' ugly start to the season.

In the lone win over Fresno, Phoenix scored four unanswered goals on two separate occasions as it cruised to an 8-3 win.

Phoenix bolstered its goaltending corps with the acquisition of netminder Rafael Goncalves from Dallas. Goncalves will join Owen Petten and Rhett Bruckner on the Knights' goalie depth chart.

Goncalves, 19, hails from Troy, Michigan. He has logged a 5.92/.864 slash line this season with a shutout. He has experience racking up large numbers of saves, including 63-, 53-, and 51-save performances this year.

As the season has gone on, forward Anthony Massanotti has continued to set the bar higher for himself. The rookie has posted a 35-14-49 line and already holds the Knights record for goals in a season. With nine games left in the season, he could soon become the first Knight to score 40 goals in one campaign.

This weekend, Phoenix will begin its final homestand of the year, a six-game stretch that runs February 9-25. After this weekend's three-game set against new-look Valencia, the Knights will take a week off before closing out their home schedule with a series against San Diego.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (3-32-3, 9 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers were off last weekend, but the team will be back in action as it tries to upset Fresno in a three-game series.

The series started on Thursday evening, with the Monsters earning a 6-2 win over the struggling Sabers. San Diego will have two more tries to take down Fresno for the first time since it beat the Monsters 3-1 back in mid-October.

Even though their losing streak now stands at 12 games, the Sabers will have a few opportunities for wins in the coming weeks. Five of its last 10 games are against Valencia, which has traded away most of its top scorers.

Furthermore, San Diego's regular-season-ending series against Ontario could come at a time when the division standings have been decided, meaning there's a chance the Avs could be resting players or looking ahead to the postseason.

Despite their struggles, the Sabers' power-play unit has been effective. They've converted on 23.8 percent of their opportunities and have put up nearly half of their goals on the man advantage.

Overall, San Diego is tied for ninth in the league in power-play percentage, and is just outside of the top 10 in power-play goals scored.

VALENCIA FLYERS (21-12-3, 45 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers have made more moves than any other club as the trade deadline nears, transforming their roster with a little over a month until postseason play begins.

The Flyers began by shipping veteran backstop Spencer Kozlowski to Long Beach, and followed that with a blockbuster move, sending potentially soon-to-be all-time WSHL leading scorer Jakob Kranabetter, star forward Nikita Pintusov, and experienced blueliner Christopher Westover to El Paso.

The trade gives the trio of talented players a great shot at the first Thorne Cup of their careers. Kranabetter, Pintusov, and Westover will be joining an El Paso squad that sits at the top of the league with a ridiculous 37-1-1 record.

In return, El Paso sent Nicholas Hames and Lukas Moravsky to Valencia. Hames has 12 points (7-5-12) over 24 games with the Rhinos while Moravsky has posted a 4-5-9 line in 21 appearances.

The Flyers continued their maneuvering by sending another long-tenured Flyer, forward Dawson Keay, to Colorado in exchange for defenseman Jacob Yoho and forwards Cameron Tobey and Hudson Kubasek.

Keay, along with Kranabetter and Westover, have played for Valencia in each of the last four seasons. While Flyer fans will surely be sad to see them go, each player will have exciting opportunities with their new clubs.

Yoho will provide Valencia with a reliable d-man. He has posted only seven points (1-6-7) this season, but he has two years of junior experience in the North American Tier III Hockey League and the United States Premier III Hockey League.

Tobey also brings a wealth of junior experience, appearing in six different leagues since the beginning of the 2014 season. He has played in only three games with Colorado, scoring a goal and earning four PIMs.

Hubasek, another veteran junior player, has mainly been a playmaker throughout his career. The 20-year-old Ohio native has dished out 10 assists through 18 games in Colorado. He has also played in 13 games with the NA3HL's Pittsburgh Vengeance this season, registering one assist.

Valencia will try to blend its new pieces and allow players to step into new roles this weekend when it takes on Phoenix on the road.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media