

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.23.18 – WESTERN DIVISION



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

FRESNO MONSTERS (28-16-1, 57 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters accomplished two things last weekend: They recorded perhaps their biggest sweep of the season over Long Beach, and they proved that Fresno fans can and will support hockey at Selland Arena.

The Monsters reported an average of 4,000 fans over the course of the three-game sweep, which propelled Fresno to within five points of first place and just one point back of second, making the Western Division race much more enticing.

"I just feel the boys have gelled together, jumped on the same page, and upped the ante on the care factor and work ethic," said Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski.

"They are just more committed to playing Monsters hockey and playing with confidence and having fun.

"We seem to be peaking at the right time, but now we have to stay committed to each other and keep our foot on the gas. It was a huge six points against Long Beach, but now we're going to have to win out to have a chance, as you know Long Beach is going to win games."

This weekend's series against Ontario is a big one for both clubs. The Monsters and the Avalanche both need to win the series handily in order to have a shot at first place, and an evenly matched series probably means that neither club will have a shot at catching Long Beach.

The season series between Fresno and Ontario has been a back-and-forth battle. After being swept by the Avalanche through the first three games of the matchup, Fresno has rebounded nicely with two straight wins over Ontario.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (29-11-4, 62 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

Despite their issues throughout the second half, the Long Beach Bombers are still in full control of their own destiny.

The Bombers have the fewest points (62) of any division leader in the WSHL. They have certainly benefited from being in the Western Division, where teams are very evenly matched, leading to more losses from clubs that might dominate other divisions.

Five of the Bombers' final six games will take place at home, where they have posted a 17-2-2 record. After next weekend's series against Phoenix, Long Beach will close out its season with a three-game set against Valencia.

The Bombers have yet to lose to Phoenix this year, and Valencia's remade roster has not impressed thus far. It lost to San Diego last week, giving the Sabers just their fourth win all season.

The next few weeks are simple for the Bombers: Win out, and they will take home the Western Division crown for the second time in two seasons.

Star forward Miroslav Rohlik continues to pace Long Beach scorers with 73 points (36-37-73), but he has been joined by veteran Tomas Urbanec (35-38-73). Urbanec, a fourth-year Bomber, has 187 points in 141 career games. He has a shot to hit 200 points over the final weeks of the regular season.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (29-13-2, 60 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

After logging back-to-back victories over Seattle last weekend, the Ontario Avalanche began their three-game set against Valencia with a 6-3 win last night.

The Avs are within two points of first place. Like Fresno, they will likely need to win out to have a shot at dethroning Long Beach. Ontario should be circling next weekend's three-game series against Fresno on the calendar, as it could be the club's most important series of the season.

First things first, the Avalanche need to take care of business in their final two games against Valencia. The Flyers are full of brand new faces, and they could improve as they gain chemistry and become more familiar with each other.

One of Ontario's biggest strengths has been its power play, which scores at an excellent 25 percent clip.

The Avs' power play is second in the division to Valencia's, but most of those goals were scored when the Flyers roster was littered with veteran players.

Most of those experienced players have been shipped out in trades, including forward Jakob Kranabetter, who is three points shy of becoming the league's all-time leading scorer.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (20-23-2, 42 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

The Phoenix Knights were idle last weekend and lost ground on fourth-place Valencia, which is now six points ahead of the Knights with three games in hand.

Phoenix will have its work cut out for it as it vies for the fourth seed and home-ice advantage in the opening round of the postseason. The Knights will play their last

home series of the regular season this weekend against San Diego before closing their schedule with a three-game set in Long Beach.

Valencia also has series remaining against San Diego and Long Beach, meaning both clubs' performances against the Sabers and Bombers will go a long way toward deciding how seeding in the middle of the division plays out.

It seems that Phoenix takes on San Diego every other week, and that's close to being true. The Knights are Sabers will have faced off 12 times when the regular season concludes, and the Knights have posted a 9-0-0 record against them so far.

Still, a deeper look suggests that some of those Phoenix victories have been close calls. When Phoenix was struggling throughout the first half, it needed to put together a few comebacks to take down San Diego, including a flurry of three goals in the last two minutes in one game back in November.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (4-35-4, 12 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers' long stretch of losing is finally over. The Sabers took three of four points from Valencia last weekend to put a halt to their 16-game losing streak.

After falling in double overtime in the first contest, San Diego rebounded for a 4-3 win in a second game that saw defenseman Ryan Conover score the game-winner with 12:16 left in the third period.

Conover (3-3-6) had just three points in 36 games heading into the series, but he collected three against Valencia, giving him his first point streak of the season.

Now San Diego has a chance to play spoiler over the next few weeks. After taking on Phoenix this weekend, it will play series against Valencia and Ontario to close out the season.

All three of those clubs are playing for something, whether it be a division title, a first-round bye, or home-ice advantage in the playoffs. San Diego, which has spent all year at the bottom of the division, could seriously affect the fortunes of other Western Division clubs by stealing a game or two.

VALENCIA FLYERS (22-16-4, 48 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers earned their first win since overhauling their roster last weekend, taking down San Diego in double overtime.

The Flyers have been in a downward spiral since the end of January, and they've lost eight of their last nine games.

Valencia is still working on integrating its new players. A staggering 12 players on its roster have appeared in fewer than 10 games.

Blueliner Daniel Klinecky is the only player to appear in all 42 games for Valencia this season. The talented defenseman is scoring at nearly a point-per-game pace with a 14-27-41 line. Klinecky is Valencia's leading scorer now, and he will be relied upon heavily as the playoffs draw near.

Klinecky is a rookie out of the Czech Republic. He has put up quite a productive campaign and is just outside of the top 10 in scoring among defensemen in the league.

This weekend, the Flyers are battling Ontario in a three-game matchup. The series did not get off to a good start for Valencia, which fell by a 6-3 final on Thursday night, but it will have two more chances to beat the Avalanche.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media