

WSHL MOUNTAIN DIVISION QUARTERFINAL PREVIEW



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

#6 CHEYENNE STAMPEDE @ #3 COLORADO JR. EAGLES

Best-of-three series/all games at NOCO ICE – Fort Collins, CO

GAME 1 Friday, March 16 7:45 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 17 7:30 p.m.

GAME 3* Sunday, March 18 12:00 p.m.

**if necessary*

SEASON SERIES

Colorado 9-0-0, 18 points

Cheyenne 0-9-0, 0 points

September 29 Colorado 10 @ Cheyenne 0

September 30 Cheyenne 0 @ Colorado 6

October 20 Colorado 10 @ Cheyenne 2

October 21 Colorado 9 @ Cheyenne 1

November 3 Cheyenne 0 @ Colorado 15

November 4 Cheyenne 0 @ Colorado 13

December 16 Colorado 6 @ Cheyenne 0

February 16 Cheyenne 0 @ Colorado 13

February 18 Cheyenne 0 @ Colorado 10

PREVIOUS PLAYOFF MEETINGS

Colorado eliminated Cheyenne from the Mountain Division playoffs in back-to-back seasons. Their 2014 division semifinal series went to a third and deciding game while the Jr. Eagles posted a two-game sweep in the 2015 division quarterfinal round.

PLAYOFF HISTORY

Colorado – The Colorado Jr. Eagles won at least one playoff series in each of their four seasons in the WSHL, including Thorne Cup appearances in each of the last two seasons. The 2016 playoff resulted in the Jr. Eagles going up against the Idaho Jr. Steelheads in a best-of-five series. The Jr. Eagles came up short, losing three games to none to Idaho, but knocked off Superior, Ogden and Oklahoma City along the way – winning in a third and deciding game against both the Mustangs and Blazers. Last year, Colorado placed sixth in the traditional six-team Thorne Cup tournament format.

Cheyenne – The Stampede have made the playoffs all seven years in Cheyenne – and all 12 years of the franchise dating back to their days as the Tulsa Rampage – but have not won a playoff series since the Rampage eliminated the San Antonio Diablos in the 2008 Thorne Cup quarterfinals. The Stampede were eliminated by the Casper Coyotes in the Mountain Division Quarterfinals each of the last two years.

COLORADO JR. EAGLES

Head coach: Steve Haddon

32-12-7, third place – Mountain Division

235 GF / 124 GA

COLORADO SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 38/201 (18.9%, 15th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 39/243 (84.0%, 6th in WSHL – 19 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Carter Dahl (25-24-49), F David Mitchell (16-33-49), F Vincent Mastrandrea (15-24-39), D Cory Richardson (18-31-49), D John Tower (7-32-39), G Braden Lajoie (22-8-4/2.31/.920), G Will McEwen (2-3-1/2.39/.922)

CHEYENNE STAMPEDE

Head coach: Neil Breen

2-48-0, sixth place – Mountain Division

64 GF / 463 GA

CHEYENNE SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 22/191 (11.5%, 21st in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 61/182 (66.5%, 22nd in WSHL – 3 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Logan Syrup (14-8-22 in 30 GP), Alec Sara (5-8-13 in 19 GP), F George Leech (6-7-13 in 35 GP)

ANALYSIS

The Colorado Jr. Eagles swept their season series from the Cheyenne Stampede and there is no reason to expect anything else here in the playoffs.

The quality of their opponent is the most obvious challenge facing a young Cheyenne team, but the schedule has presented them with another. Four weeks will have passed between the final regular season game and the first of the playoffs. It created a unique scenario for head coach Neil Breen to navigate – especially at such a crucial juncture of the season – but he has made the most of it.

"A young team like ours benefits from more time to develop and prepare," said Breen. "Since I arrived four months ago our goal was to improve every day and I believe that has continued to happen."

Breen and the Stampede will do their best to rise to the occasion in front of them, but there is also a bigger picture to consider as they look to rebuild their team in Cheyenne.

"We find ourselves re-energized and ready to compete against an excellent team – all a part of our stepping stones which we need to pave the way for our returners going into next season," said Breen. "We used our practice time to refine our tactical and execution game on the sheet for 60 minutes."

If Breen and the Stamps think their record, and the fact that they have not played a live game in nearly a month will help them sneak up on the Jr. Eagles they will be disappointed.

"We are not looking past Cheyenne," said Colorado head coach Steve Haddon. "The post-season is a new start for everyone. This is the best time of year and you will see what each team is made of."

If there is a criticism of the Colorado team it is that they have not been very prolific offensively when compared to some of the other top teams in the WSHL, or even the Mountain Division, the points are pretty well spread out on the Colorado stats sheet

and there was a three-way tie for the team scoring lead between three veteran players – forwards Carter Dahl and David Mitchell and defenseman Cory Richardson – none of whom cracked the 50-point barrier. Even so, the Jr. Eagles hold a clear advantage in the scoring department. Cheyenne managed just 64 goals on the season.

Logan Syrup, with 14 goals in 30 games, is one player to watch on the Stamps, but Colorado shut out Cheyenne in seven of their nine meetings – including the last five in a row. Colorado's Braden Lajoie is a seasoned veteran, but Will McEwen joined the team in the middle of the heated Mountain Division stretch drive and played well, so he may get a start in the series as well.

"We are very lucky to have two good goaltenders," said Haddon. "They will both be important for us to have success in the playoffs."

Stampede goaltenders, meanwhile, have faced their share of rubber this season and saw Colorado nine times, so they should not be intimidated going into this series. It remains to be seen what the rotation will be in the Cheyenne crease, but 17-year-old Saskatchewan native Robbie Hufnagel has garnered most of the minutes and Daniel Yockey came over from Seattle in a trade to add some depth.

--- *Scott Harrington/Harrington Sports Media*