

WSHL MOUNTAIN DIVISION QUARTERFINAL PREVIEW



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

#3 COLORADO JR. EAGLES @ #2 OGDEN MUSTANGS

Best-of-three series/all games at The Ice Sheet, Ogden UT

GAME 1 Friday, March 23 7:30 p.m.

GAME 2 Saturday, March 24 7:30 p.m.

GAME 3* Sunday, March 25 1:30 p.m.

**if necessary*

SEASON SERIES

Ogden 5-1-0, 10 points

Colorado 1-4-1, 3 points

September 22 Ogden 3 @ Colorado 2 (SO)

September 23 Ogden 8 @ Colorado 2

September 24 Ogden 6 @ Colorado 7

March 2 Colorado 2 @ Ogden 3

March 3 Colorado 1 @ Ogden 6

March 4 Colorado 0 @ Ogden 3

PREVIOUS PLAYOFF MEETINGS

Ogden-Colorado is turning into one of the better post-season rivalries in the WSHL as this will be the fourth straight year that these two teams meet in the post-season, including the last two Mountain Division Finals, both won by Colorado in a third and deciding game. The Mustangs eliminated the Jr. Eagles in the 2015 division semifinals, two games to none.

PLAYOFF HISTORY

Ogden - After failing to win a post-season series in either of their first two seasons in the WSHL, the Mustangs emerged from the Mountain Division divisional playoffs in both 2014 & 2015. They made it to the division final each of the last two years, making it four years in a row that they have gotten that far, but lost to Colorado in 2016 & 2017. Ogden participated in the Thorne Cup in 2014, where they failed to qualify for the semifinals, and last year as the tournament host. They made it out of the round robin, but lost to eventual champion Wichita, 4-2, in the semifinals.

Colorado - Following their quarterfinal win over Cheyenne, the Colorado Jr. Eagles have now won at least one playoff series in each of their five 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.

OGDEN MUSTANGS

Head coach: Jake Laime

38-12-1, second place - Mountain Division

353 GF / 133 GA

OGDEN SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 56/224 (25.0%, 6th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 26/206 (87.4%, 4th in WSHL - 20 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Matus Spodniak (69-77-146), F Jacob Laurin (47-73-120), F Ross Bartlett (41-63-104), F Rhett Rampinelli (28-55-83), F Matt McClelland (19-36-55), D Austin Dittenhafer (13-39-52), G Jonathan Chin (12-2-0/1.87/.918)

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)

ANALYSIS

The Mountain Division race was a dandy three-team affair that went on all season and how the teams finished 1-3 was of utmost importance. The third-place finisher would have to play a quarterfinal series, then go on the road to play the #2 seed who got to rest up. The first-place finisher, meanwhile, was able to avoid the other two until the final round.

The Colorado Jr. Eagles were just in Ogden three weeks ago for a three-game series which resulted in three competitive hockey games, but an Ogden sweep. That gave the Mustangs a second-place finish and home ice advantage on the Jr. Eagles for this series. Colorado swept Cheyenne in a division quarterfinal series last weekend.

"The past four seasons we have played in the division playoffs against Ogden," said Colorado head coach Steve Haddon. "So, we do know what to expect in regards to the atmosphere, rink size and how Ogden likes to play."

Knowing a Mountain Division playoff championship would require winning what would likely be two very challenging series, the Mustangs took advantage of the bye week to rest up.

"We have tried to use the past couple of weeks to nurse any nagging injuries or sicknesses," said Ogden head coach Jake Laime. "We have decreased loads and increased volume in the weight room and put emphasis on quick 200-foot practices."

Laime and the Mustangs are able to draw on that final regular season series for some positive reinforcement.

"I think the sweep (in Ogden March 2-4) gave us the ability to see results and test our character when our backs were against the wall," said Laime. "Mentally, I believe it provided an edge, but we also know we didn't face them playing their best so we need to be prepared."

White the Jr. Eagles boast a balanced attack, with three players tying for the team scoring lead with 49 points, the Mustangs have a high-octane trio of forwards who all surpassed the 100-point mark on the season, including 69-goal scorer Matus Spodniak, who just missed out on the WSHL scoring title.

"When you play against good players like Spodniak you need to take away their time and space," Haddon said. "We need to be aware when his line is out there."

Ogden's eggs are not all in one basket either, as they boast seven more players with 20+ goals or 40+ points after the Spodniak-Jacob Laurin-Ross Bartlett line.

It will be up to veteran Braden Lajoie and/or newcomer Will McEwen to stop the Ogden snipers. Both have been splitting time recently and both have been effective. It remains to be seen who will get the nod for Game One, but don't be surprised to see both of them see time between the pipes during the series.

"We have two good goalies," Haddon said. "That gives us lots of options"

Meanwhile, Tymen Edelkoort III has been carrying the load for Ogden. He started the last 14 regular season games for the Mustangs - the last six coming against Thorne Cup contenders Colorado and Idaho. Edelkoort will man the Ogden crease for Game One on Friday.

--- *Scott Harrington/Harrington Sports Media*