

WSHL MOUNTAIN DIVISION SEMIFINAL PREVIEW



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

#4 SUPERIOR ROUGHRIDERS @ #1 UTAH OUTLIERS

Best-of-three series/Accord Ice Arena, West Valley City UT

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

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

GAME 3* Sunday, March 25 12:15 p.m.

**if necessary*

SEASON SERIES

Utah 5-1-0, 10 points

Superior 1-4-1, 3 points

January 19 Superior 2 @ Utah 10

January 20 Superior 2 @ Utah 5

January 21 Superior 2 @ Utah 5

March 2 Utah 6 @ Superior 3

March 3 Utah 5 @ Superior 4 (2 OT)

March 4 Utah 4 @ Superior 5

PREVIOUS PLAYOFF MEETINGS

This will be the fourth straight season that sees these two franchises meet in the Mountain Division playoffs. The Outliers defeated the RoughRiders, two games to none, in the division quarterfinal round last year. The Outliers' fore-runners, the Salt Lake City Moose went to a third and deciding game in the quarterfinals in both 2015 and 2016. The Moose won in 2015 and the RoughRiders in 2016.

PLAYOFF HISTORY

Superior - This franchise has played post-season hockey every season since their inception as the Colorado Outlaws in 2007-08. Since 2010, they have won six playoff series, but their division quarterfinal win over the Salt Lake City Moose in 2016 was the only series win in the last four years. The 2010 team (as the Boulder Bison) came up one game short of a Thorne Cup championship, losing in a third and deciding game to the Phoenix Polar Bears.

Utah - The Utah franchise has made the playoffs in all five years of their existence, but they are still looking for their first trip to the division finals. They enter the playoffs as the #1 seed in the Mountain Division so maybe this will be the year.

UTAH OUTLIERS

Head coach: Paul Taylor

39-11-1, first place - Mountain Division

290 GF / 100 GA

UTAH SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 54/238 (22.7%, 10th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 34/203 (83.3%, 7th in WSHL - 12 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Jacob Wanstrom (23-43-66), F Brandon Krumpschmid (28-38-66), F Kane Toriumi (31-31-62), F Dylan Massie (31-30-61), D Zach Hoffman (16-49-65), G Dawson Rodin (22-9-1/1.96/.932)

SUPERIOR ROUGHRIDERS

Head coach: Paul DePuydt

25-25-1, fourth place - Mountain Division

213 GF / 211 GA

SUPERIOR SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 48/229 (21.0%, 13th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 38/202 (81.2%, 10th in WSHL - 5 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Nikita Sheberov (64-42-106), Thore Weyrauch (36-46-82), D Erik Buschmann (9-32-41), F David Waterman (7-8-15 in 15 GP), G Marshall Murphy (11-18-0/4.05/.891)

ANALYSIS

The Utah Outliers came out on top in what was a grueling, season long, three-team race for the top spot in the Mountain Division. They were "rewarded" for taking the top spot with a first round bye and a semifinal matchup with the lowest surviving seed.

But do not look at the Superior RoughRiders as the fourth team in a three-team race. The 'Riders are a team that was overlooked during the season because of the notable performances of Utah, Ogden and Colorado, but they are a tough out themselves.

As a matter of fact, RoughRiders earned three points against the Outliers in the final three-game series of the regular season for both teams, played in Superior. That fact has not been lost on Utah head coach Paul Taylor.

"The fact that the Roughriders took some points from us will help keep our players focused on the present," Taylor admitted. "Playoff time always offers up a few surprises with lower seeded teams knocking off higher seeds. We must come ready to play if we want to win the series."

The Ogden Mustangs may have the most prolific trio in the league with three 100-point scorers on their top line, but Utah won the division with a balanced scoring attack. Their top five scorers all finished with 61-66 points.

"I like the fact that we have a balanced offense and that different players are capable of stepping up and scoring big goals for us," said Taylor. "I think it is harder for opponents to shut us down compared to if we had one or two players carrying us offensively."

The Outliers have not played since their regular season finale in Superior on March 4. Some teams might not like to take an extended break at this time of year, preferring to keep their momentum going, but a little extra time to re-charge the batteries was just fine with Utah.

"I think it was good to have a two-week break," Taylor admitted. "We were a bit banged up and ill the last two series of the regular season so the time off has let us heal up. I think the team has re-charged itself to begin playoffs."

--- Scott Harrington/Harrington Sports Media