

2018 THORNE CUP PREVIEW: LONG BEACH BOMBERS



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

LONG BEACH BOMBERS

Head coach: Chris White

36-11-4, 1st place - Western Division

Won Western Division Playoffs

HOW THEY GOT HERE

Earned a first-round bye

Defeated Phoenix, 2 games to 1, in Western Division Semifinals

Defeated Fresno, 2 games to 0, in Western Division Final

THORNE CUP SCHEDULE

Wednesday April 11; 7:00 pm vs. El Paso Rhinos

Thursday April 12; 2:00 pm vs. Ogden Mustangs

Friday April 13; 10:00 am vs. Idaho IceCats

AGAINST THE FIELD (0-2-0)

vs. El Paso 0-1-0; 3-2 loss at showcase

vs. Utah 0-1-0; 6-3 loss at showcase

Did not play Ogden, Oklahoma City or Idaho

THORNE CUP HISTORY

The Bombers won the Western Division playoff championship for the third straight season. They were eliminated in the round-robin stage last season and lost a league semifinal series to the Idaho Jr. Steelheads in 2016 under a different format.

OUTLOOK

The Long Beach Bombers went wire to wire in the Western Division but saw their lead over Ontario and Fresno shrink considerably in the second half. They righted the ship down the stretch, due largely in part to the red-hot play of goaltender Spencer Kozlowski, who was picked up from the rival Valencia Flyers.

With his team playing some of their best hockey of the year, Bombers head coach Chris White is not over-focusing on scouting the opposition in El Paso.

"I think we're focused on our own style of play, which is at a level far better now than at any other point in the season," said White. "We still have room to improve, and if we continue in the right direction, I think we'll give ourselves a chance to advance."

The Bombers go up against the host El Paso Rhinos in their tournament opener. With just one regulation loss in 55 games this season - and playing on their home ice - it is fair to call El Paso the tournament favorites.

White was asked if it is an advantage to get their game with the Rhinos out of the way early.

"Maybe the Rhinos are a bad team, at home, on Wednesday nights," joked White. "No, I don't think there is an advantage, but we have to go in there ready for a dog fight."

White was non-committal as far as his goaltending strategy. In addition to Kozlowski, Long Beach native Domenic Bosetti is a veteran of three seasons with the club and has seen action in the post-season.

"We're just looking at that first game and trying to put ourselves in the best possible position to earn points," he said.

White sees the six-team field as a deep one and, even if some people want to call the Rhinos the favorites, it is a testament to the depth of the WSHL that any of the teams

that made it to El Paso - including Long Beach - is capable of claiming the hardware on Sunday.

"There will be no Cinderella story this year," White said. "All six teams are elite and anyone can beat anyone here."

The Bombers have had the least amount of exposure to the competition during the regular season. They are the only representative from the Western Division and have only faced Utah and El Paso - losing to both at the league showcase in December.

Long Beach was not playing up to their abilities for much of the second half, but a seven-game winning streak to close the regular season allowed them to comfortably clinch the Western Division title, and after an early hiccup against Phoenix in the division semifinals looked strong in their sweep of Fresno.

"We feel our depth was a key to our success coming out of the Western Division," said White. "Our ability to play simple and make smart decisions with the puck will be crucial."

--- *Scott Harrington/Harrington Sports Media*