

WSHL WESTERN DIVISION FINAL PREVIEW



Photo provided by: Mark Mauno

#3 FRESNO MONSTERS @ #1 LONG BEACH BOMBERS

Best-of-three series/all games at The Rinks - Lakewood, CA

GAME 1 Thursday, March 29 7:45 p.m.

GAME 2 Friday, March 30 7:45 p.m.

GAME 3* Saturday, March 31 3:00 p.m.

**if necessary*

SEASON SERIES

Long Beach 6-5-0, 12 points

Fresno 5-5-1, 11 points

September 28 Fresno 4 @ Long Beach 5

September 29 Fresno 3 @ Long Beach 4

September 30 Fresno 2 @ Long Beach 3

November 30 Long Beach 2 @ Fresno 7

December 2 Fresno 5 @ Long Beach 9

January 12 Fresno 2 @ Long Beach 3 (SO)

January 13 Fresno 3 @ Long Beach 5

January 14 Fresno 7 @ Long Beach 3

February 15 Long Beach 1 @ Fresno 4

February 16 Long Beach 2 @ Fresno 3

February 17 Long Beach 4 @ Fresno 5

PREVIOUS PLAYOFF MEETINGS

Long Beach and Fresno faced off in a postseason series for the first time in 2014, when the Monsters posted a 2-0 sweep in the Western Division Semifinal. The Bombers got their revenge two years later when they logged a division semifinal sweep of their own over the Monsters.

PLAYOFF HISTORY

Long Beach - Long Beach has won the Western Division playoffs in each of the last two seasons. Last year they were eliminated in the round-robin portion of the Thorne Cup tournament, and the year before they fell in the Thorne Cup semifinals. Prior to those two memorable campaigns, the Bombers failed to win a playoff series through their first five seasons in the WSHL.

Fresno - The Monsters have a history of long playoff runs, but this season breaks a two-year drought of failing to qualify for the division finals. Prior to that, Fresno made the division finals in five of six seasons from 2011-16, winning three times. The Monsters have yet to win a Thorne Cup. The closest they came was 2013-14, when they fell to Idaho in the Pacific Conference finals.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS

Head coach: Chris White

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

263 GF / 158 GA

LONG BEACH SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 56/217 (25.8%, 5th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 143/174 (82.2%, 9th in WSHL - 9 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Tomas Urbanec (42-49-91), F Miroslav Rohlik (39-43-82), F Artem Korolev (23-48-71), F Parker Moskal (31-37-68), D Amir Burguev (12-46-58), D Erik Lundgren (11-41-52), D Anton Ahlin (11-36-47), G Spencer Kozlowski (8-3-0/3.49/.909; .949 save percentage since joining Long Beach), G Domenic Bosetti (22-8-2/3.47/.899)

FRESNO MONSTERS

Head coach: Kevin Kaminski

33-17-1, 3rd place - Western Division

298 GF / 189 GA

FRESNO SPECIAL TEAMS

POWER PLAY 56/253 (22.1%, 12th in WSHL)

PENALTY KILL 254/307 (82.7%, 9th in WSHL - 33 SHG)

KEY PLAYERS

F Daylon Mannon (75-75-150, WSHL leading scorer), F Cody Key (53-86-139), F

Deivids Tempelmanis (31-43-74), D Cory Hurtubise (12-37-49), D Logan Domogala (10-29-39), D Daniel Goodwin (12-27-39), G Max Karlenzig (13-3-0/3.51/.900)

ANALYSIS

After a three-team battle for the top spot in the Western Division for most of the second half, the Long Beach Bombers and the Fresno Monsters are the only two clubs in the division left standing. Long Beach seemed to be in the driver's seat against the Monsters after winning six of the first seven contests between the two teams during the regular season, but Fresno came storming back with four straight victories over the Bombers, including a pivotal three-game sweep at Selland Arena in Fresno.

The Bombers, who earned a first-round bye by finishing as the top seed in the Western Division, needed three games to take down an upstart Phoenix team that showed massive improvement after a nightmare start to the season. Long Beach won the opener by five goals before the Knights rallied for a 3-2 overtime win in Game 2. The Bombers were able to close out the series the next day with a 5-2 victory.

"Losing Game 2 against Phoenix was an opportunity for us to look ourselves in the mirror and check ourselves," said Long Beach Head Coach Chris White. "We need to continue to be better and play the right way."

Long Beach failed to earn a wild card spot during the regular season, meaning it will not participate in the Thorne Cup tournament unless it defeats Fresno. White feels that's a good thing for his players.

"We don't want to back into the finals," White said. "We earned home ice in the division championship, and we want to earn our spot in El Paso."

Fresno is not a team that will go down easily. The Monsters are battle-tested and proved themselves to be elite with a great second half that allowed them to recover from a mediocre start to the season.

The Monsters have already won two playoff series this year. They took care of business against lowly San Diego in the first round before beating Ontario in an intense three-game series last weekend.

"Against Ontario, we just needed to tighten up defensively, have stronger puck decisions and get everyone back into the foundation" said Fresno Head Coach Kevin Kaminski. "We'll have to be more committed to each other this week. Long Beach is

very good offensively, and we have to take away time and space to make them earn it."

Kaminski's Monsters have every reason to believe they can win this series. They recovered from a heartbreaking 8-7 loss to Ontario to outscore the Avalanche 10-1 over the final two games of the series.

"Guys are holding each other accountable and everyone is chipping in one way or another," Kaminski added. "With everyone being on the same page and everyone caring about each other, you get that confidence and the guys have rolled with it. Everyone is being a leader and stepping up to the plate."

Still, there's a reason the Bombers won the Western Division title. They're a balanced team that features a dominant goaltender in Spencer Kozlowski, and they can beat any team in the WSHL. It's going to take one of Fresno's best performances to win the series.

"They're a pretty consistent team," Kaminski said. "We just need to focus on us. The playoffs are a new season and I believe that sweeping the Bombers in February gave our team a lot of confidence, knowing we can beat the best. We know it's going to be a battle and we have to be just a little bit better in all areas of the game to move on."

--- *Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media*