

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 02.13.19 – WESTERN DIVISION



WSHL standings are expressed W-L-OTW-OTL (“W” and “L” represent regulation wins and losses; shootouts are included in overtime results). Three points are awarded for a regulation win, two for an overtime win and one for an overtime loss.

FRESNO MONSTERS (28-14-3-1, 91 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

Despite a 12-game winning streak, the Fresno Monsters had to figure they were going to be knocked from their perch atop the Western Division just based on the number of games in hand the Long Beach Bombers have over them. But Fresno sped the process along by losing three games in three days last week.

The three losses – which came against three different teams in three different cities – were all against Western Division foes. Fresno did pick up one point in the standings for taking Friday’s contest in Valencia to overtime before eventually dropping the 3-2 decision to the Flyers.

Fresno then allowed 10 goals in a loss to third-place San Diego (a potential playoff opponent) before closing out the weekend by getting doubled up by the Ontario Avalanche, 6-3.

Unfortunately, the Monsters will not be able to get right back up on the horse and get the bad taste of last weekend out of their mouth. They do not play again for three weeks, returning to play out their last five regular season games on the road in March.

Goaltender Tyler Mathews saw his personal seven-game win streak snapped with an 0-1-1 weekend, but he did extend one streak – he has posted a single-game save percentage of .900 or better in nine consecutive appearances, posting a 7-1-1 mark with a 2.53 goals-against average and .934 save percentage in that span.

1998-born forward Blair Maguire has recorded seven points (3-4-7) in 10 games with Valencia. He had 12 points (3-9-12) in 25 games with the El Paso Rhinos to start the year.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (28-4-4-2, 94 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

They went 3-0 against elite teams at the Western States Shootout. They have ascended to the top of the Western Division standings. But the biggest test of the season may come this weekend for the Long Beach Bombers as they travel to Ogden, UT – site of the 2019 Thorne Cup Final – to face the league’s top team in a three-game series.

Long Beach general manager and head coach Chris White sees a tremendous opportunity for his team to not only see where they stand against the Thorne Cup hosts – and the presumptive favorite at this point – but to get comfortable at the site of the league’s championship tournament should they get a chance to make a return visit in April.

“We are 11-3-1 against top opponents, and do not have a losing record against any of them, so I think we can be confident that we’re one of the teams with a chance to maybe get some bounces and be there on April 13, if we’re playing the right way,” said White. “This weekend in Ogden will be great for us, win or lose, because it will be a true challenge, and it would make returning in April much easier. Playing at elevation is difficult, and that’s not even considering the opponent.”

White and the Bombers have returned to the top of the heap in the Western Division, and have an inside track on staying there, but they are also in a points race for Thorne Cup seeding and want to finish as high as possible.

“We have a lot of work to do to earn a trip back to Ogden and this is just one portion of the climb,” he said. “We’re coming in off a poor performance against San Diego but we have a full week of practice with our complete roster for the first time since making some

additions. I expect our players to be focused and hungry, much like in the El Paso series, or at The Showcase.”

White brought in a pair of 20-year imports to add some depth to the lineup in anticipation of a deep playoff run.

The Bombers signed Swedish forward, William Strömbäck. The 1998-born left shot stands at 5’9 and weighs 165lbs. He has been raised in his hometown’s Kiruna IF organization, where he was recently playing for their Division 1 and J20 Elit teams. In 14 games with the senior club, Strömbäck recorded two points. However, with Kiruna’s J20 Elit team, Strömbäck had 11 points in just six games played.

In total, Strömbäck has played 30 games for the senior team, and put up 65 points in 55 games for the J20 team.

Long Beach traded for Kevin Kubanek, a 6’3, 178-pound left-shot defenseman from the Bellingham Blazers. Kubanek has played 59 WSHL games, all for Bellingham, over the past two seasons. He has recorded 37 points (6-31-37) and picked up 80 penalty minutes.

In exchange, the Bombers sent 19-year-old forward Krystof Knapek to Bellingham.

“We are very excited to have the opportunity to add such a quality defenseman at this point in the season,” said White. “Kevin is a veteran and a big body. I like the way he played against some of the top teams in Las Vegas and we will expect more of the same, from him.”

This move addressed what White felt was his biggest concern, heading into the Thorne Cup Playoffs - defensive depth.

Speaking of depth, the Bombers also added goaltender Josh Martinez from Oklahoma City. Martinez, 20, was 5-1-0 with the Blazers. He sports a 1.75 goals-against average, .923 save percentage and one shutout.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (12-24-1-3, 41 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

Take out five games against division leaders El Paso (3x) and Long Beach (2x) and the Ontario Avalanche are on a 6-4-0-1 run. Actually, that stretch includes three straight losses to Fresno January 10-12, but the Avs beat the Monsters in their most recent meeting on Saturday, so they would welcome the opportunity for a do-over of that series as well.

The point is the Avs have been a harder and harder out as the season has progressed, and they are starting to look like one of those teams nobody wants to play come playoff time.

The 14-point gap between Ontario and third-place San Diego looks pretty daunting this late in the season, but the Sabers are coming to Ontario Center Ice Arena for their last two head-to-head meetings of the campaign Saturday and Sunday. A pair of regulation wins would put the Avalanche just eight points back with nine games to play (27 possible points).

Daniel Baranek has responded well to a trade to Ontario from Oklahoma City, producing eight points (2-6-8) in his first six games with the Avs. Baranek, 20, had 10 goals in 31 games for the Blazers.

David Baranek also came over from OKC and has two assists in six games since arriving in Ontario in the package deal that sent 25-goal sniper Jeremy Van Dyke the other way.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (15-20-4-2, 55 pts)

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The San Diego Sabers collected seven of a possible nine points over a unique weekend where they hosted three different division rivals over three days. The Sabers scored 10 goals in a win over Fresno to start the weekend off, took Long Beach to OT before losing on Saturday, and wrapped the weekend up with a 7-3 win over Valencia.

It was possibly the best three-in-three showing of the season for the team under challenging circumstances.

Josef (3-3-6) and Karel (1-5-6) Kankovsky spearheaded the offensive outburst against Fresno with Aleksis Leskinen (2-2-4) and Jakub Vesely (2-1-3) providing support.

The San Diego Sabers had leads of 2-0 and 3-1 over the Bombers Saturday night, but the Bombers tied the game with :42 left in regulation, then pulled out a 5-4 win in overtime.

Karel Kankovsky (2-2-4) and Ashton Jones each scored twice against Valencia as the Sabers built a six-goal lead that allowed them to cruise to a weekend-capping win.

Karel Kankovsky (20-41-61) is the most prolific scoring defenseman in the WSHL this season. The 5'10", 200-pound blue liner is very involved in the San Diego power play, collecting more points with the man-advantage (7-16-23) than any other defenseman in the league.

Kankovsky has 10 more points than the second-highest scoring D-man in the league: West Sound's Harmen Vining (10-41-51).

Marshall McKallip is still the #1 goalie in San Diego, but he has some support. Aidan Harding has won two of his three starts since coming over from Ontario and Vinay Pathak made 45 in his WSHL debut – a win over Fresno.

Twenty-year-old forward Ethan Gill, who has junior experience with a handful of teams in the USPHL and EHL, was added to the roster prior to Wednesday's deadline.

VALENCIA FLYERS (8-24-1-4, 30 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

The Valencia Flyers were very busy ahead of Wednesday's WSHL trading deadline, bringing in a total of eight players from other WSHL clubs.

Forwards Nikita Garin and Oscar Andersson were acquired from the El Paso Rhinos.

Garin, 18, is on his third WSHL team of the season after moving from El Paso to Valencia. He had 3-11-14 in 15 games for the Rhinos. Garin began the season with the Fresno Monsters, scoring 16 goals (16-10-26) in just 21 games played.

Andersson, 20, has produced 10 goals and 28 points in 37 games between Casper and El Paso.

It is the first taste of North American hockey for both players.

Nineteen-year-old Samuel Sabos, a 6'2", 185-pound defenseman, was acquired from the Ogden Mustangs. A Slovak import, Sabos scored seven goals for Ogden (7-6-13) in 36 games played.

Defenseman Ryan Rachui, who had a pair of assists in four games for Oklahoma City, joined the Flyers last weekend. Rachui, 19, played four years of high school hockey in Texas.

Other players arriving in Valencia: forwards Mason Churpek (Los Angeles Jr. Kings U18) and Austin Lykins (Oklahoma City Blazers) and defensemen Cameron Bauler (West Sound Admirals) and Pavel Simak (Seattle Totems).

Forward Eimantas Norieka and defenseman Matas Mikalauskas were moved out by the Flyers.

--- Compiled by Scott Harrington for Harrington Sports Media