

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 11.30.17 – NORTHWEST DIVISION



BELLINGHAM BLAZERS (6-11-3, 15 pts)
www.BellinghamBlazers.pointstreaksites.com
@Bhamblazers

The Bellingham Blazers' Thanksgiving break will conclude this weekend as the club plays a pair of road games against West Sound and Seattle.

The Blazers are looking to build on their 7-3 victory over Seattle last weekend. The Blazers led that game 3-2 late in the second period before blowing things open and cruising to a big win.

Bellingham features a pair of 30-point scorers in Russian forwards Ruzlan Novruzov (18-18-36) and Ilya Abubakirov (16-17-33). Other than those two, the only other Blazer with double-digit goals is Jamahl Eackett, who has lit the lamp 12 times to go along with his 11 assists.

Defenseman Samuel Whitehouse (5-9-14) is Bellingham's highest-scoring blueliner and the only d-man on the Blazers' roster with multiple goals.

Whitehouse, 18, is playing his first season in the WSHL after spending the last two years with the Brewster Bulldogs in the Metropolitan Junior Hockey League and the Eastern Hockey League.

Following this weekend's contests, the Blazers will play two more games in a home-and-home series against West Sound, their last series before the Western States Shootout.

Bellingham is scheduled for three games at the Showcase. It will take on the CPJHL White Team and the Dallas Snipers at SOBE Arena before closing things out with a game against Phoenix at City National Arena on the final evening of the tournament.

IDAHO ICECATS (15-0-0, 38 pts)
www.IdaholceCats.com

The Idaho IceCats are beginning their final preparations for a huge series this weekend on the road against Ogden.

The Mustangs will be the toughest opponent the IceCats have faced this year and seem to be more than talented enough to give Idaho a run for its money. Heading into the weekend, the IceCats' only competitive game of the season came in a 5-4 win over Tahoe on opening night.

Ogden owns a 19-4-0 record, good for 38 points and second place in the WSHL, trailing only El Paso's perfect 21-0-0 mark.

Nevertheless, Idaho should still be considered the favorite in this series. The IceCats are one of only three remaining undefeated teams and have thoroughly dominated opponents throughout the first half of the season.

Idaho's slate of games at the WSHL Showcase looks quite similar to years past, with matchups against elite teams such as El Paso, Oklahoma City, and Colorado.

Those teams have combined for a record of 54-5-3, and Colorado owns all eight of the losses. It will be a tall task for the IceCats, but they have given us no reason to believe it will be too much to handle.

SEATTLE TOTEMS (7-9-2, 16 pts)
www.SeattleJrTotems.com
[@SeattleJrTotems](https://twitter.com/SeattleJrTotems)

The Seattle Totems head into this weekend having dropped 10 of their last 11 games, including a 7-3 loss to division rival Bellingham last week.

The Totems are still clinging onto fourth place thanks to a quick 6-0-1 start that saw them jump out to an early division lead.

Forward Tom Ignatovich seems to be getting back on track after a brief slump, and that's great news for a Seattle team that is in the bottom five in the league in goals scored.

Ignatovich (20-10-30), who is enjoying a breakout sophomore season, has 10 points (8-2-10) over his last three games after being held without a point in a series against Idaho in mid-November. Being held scoreless for just one series wouldn't be all that noticeable for most players, but Seattle is lacking offense and needs Ignatovich to produce in order to be successful.

The Totems will play two games this weekend: a Friday night matchup against West Sound and a contest against Bellingham on Sunday afternoon.

Over the course of the next two weeks, Seattle will close out its regular first-half schedule with another game against West Sound, followed by a two-game set against Southern Oregon on the road.

"We have a lot of very important divisional games coming up before the Showcase and Christmas break," said Totems Head Coach Michael Murphy. "We are hoping to get back on track and start winning some of these close games like we were able to do the first six weeks of the season."

Seattle will take on Casper, Phoenix, and the CPJHL Red Team at the Western States Shootout. Although the game against CPJHL Red will not count in the standings, the other two contests should be a good opportunity to pick up some points against a pair of clubs of similar skill levels.

SOUTHERN OREGON SPARTANS (3-21-0, 6 pts)

www.SOSpartans.com

@wshlspartans

The Southern Oregon Spartans showed signs of improvement last weekend as they won their third game of the season against West Sound.

The 6-5 win was intense for all 60 minutes. The game was deadlocked at 5-5 with just over six minutes remaining in the third period when forward Joel

Holmberg (8-5-13) scored his team-leading eighth goal off a rebound to give the Spartans a lead that they would not relinquish.

Southern Oregon battled once again in the second game of the series but ultimately fell by a 3-2 final. The series finale lacked the competitiveness of the first two contests as West Sound took an early lead and coasted to a 7-3 victory.

Still, nearly winning its first series of the season is significant progress for a team that has looked lost for most of the year. Hopefully, the Spartans will be able to build on that series this weekend when they take on undefeated Idaho on the road in a three-game set.

Southern Oregon has already played a series against Idaho this season, and it did not go well. The Spartans were outscored 23-2 over the course of three consecutive losses.

After taking on Idaho, Southern Oregon will play a two-game set against Seattle on December 15-16 before heading to Las Vegas to battle Cheyenne, Wichita, and San Diego, three clubs currently at the bottom of their respective divisions.

For the Spartans, it's a chance to show that their poor record is a product of a tough division, not a representation of their skill level.

TAHOE ICEMEN (13-8-2, 20 pts)

www.Tahoelcemen.com

@Tahoelcemen

Winners of three in a row, the Tahoe Icemen return to the ice this weekend for a three-game series against Utah at Accord Ice Arena in West Valley City, Utah. The Outliers are a strong team, as evidenced by their 15-5-0 record. Tahoe will definitely be tested throughout the series.

"We are in second," said head coach Mickey Lang, who has rebuilt the Icemen into a contender over the past couple of seasons. "Idaho is a better team right now, but with hard work and desire we expect to compete for first place in the division."

Lang is well aware of Tahoe's shortcomings, and he plans to improve the club through extensive practice and repetition.

"We need to work on everything: 5-on-5, defensive zone, neutral zone, offensive zone, power play, and penalty kill," he said.

If it wasn't for Tahoe's abundance of penalty minutes, the penalty kill wouldn't be as much of an issue. But the Icemen have accumulated 675 PIMs, second-most in the league behind only Southern Oregon's 750. Still, Tahoe has managed to kill 83.2% of its penalties, the seventh-best clip in the league. Lang holds his club to a high standard and would like to see that number further improve.

After this weekend's series, the Icemen will welcome Idaho to South Lake Tahoe Arena for a three-game set right before the Western States Shootout.

After arriving in Vegas, Tahoe is scheduled to play games against Superior, the CPJHL Red Team, and Fresno.

WEST SOUND WARRIORS (11-11-0, 22 pts)

www.WestSoundWarriors.com

@WS_Warriors

The West Sound Warriors are firmly in control of third place in the Northwest Division after pulling themselves back to .500 by taking two of three from Southern Oregon last weekend.

The Warriors have a six-point cushion over fourth-place Seattle and trail second-place Tahoe by seven points. It looks as though the club will be in third at the conclusion of the first half, which is a solid way to start its debut season in the WSHL.

Swedish forward Erik Säfström (15-21-36) has adjusted well to the North American game and is riding a 10-game point streak. The 20-year-old rookie has seven multi-point efforts during that stretch, including a seven-point outburst (1-6-7) in a blowout win over Seattle.

The hot streak has made Säfström the Warriors' top scorer after he registered just eight points over his first 11 games.

West Sound has five games left before the Western States Shootout, all against division rivals Bellingham and Seattle.

After a road game against Seattle on Friday night, the Warriors will return home the next day to take on Bellingham. That trend will continue December

8-10 as West Sound will play a pair of games against Bellingham sandwiched around another contest against Seattle to close out the first half.

The Warriors will see plenty of new opponents at their first-ever WSHL Showcase. They will kick things off on the first day of the event with a game against the CPJHL Red Team before taking on Fresno and Springfield over the next couple of days.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media