

WSHL WEEKLY NOTES 12.1.17 – WESTERN DIVISION



FRESNO MONSTERS (11-8-0, 22 pts)

@WSHLMonsters

www.FresnoMonsters.com

The Fresno Monsters' up-and-down season continued, as they rebounded from a series loss to Phoenix, a sub-.500 team, to defeat division-leading Long Beach 7-2 on Thursday night.

First-line forward Jacob Rudloff contributed two goals and an assist, while linemate Daylon Mannon dished out four helpers to bring his line to 26-30-56, tied for fifth in the league scoring race.

The win was one of the most impressive of the year for any team in the WSHL. Long Beach had just two regulation losses heading into the contest, and it had not lost by more than one goal.

Before the Long Beach game, Monsters Head Coach Kevin Kaminski spoke about his club's need to bring a consistent effort night in and night out.

"We need to have a way better work ethic and play a much better defensive game," said Kaminski. "You win seven in a row and think it's going to be easy, but anybody can beat anybody on any given night if you're not mentally and physically ready to play for 60 minutes.

"This is a huge weekend if we want to try to catch these guys above us in the standings. We know what's at stake, and we'll prepare with high-intensity practices and go over our systems."

Kaminski also recognized the support of the Monsters faithful this season, saying, "We seem to thrive at home in front of our great fans."

The statistics support that statement, as Fresno has won eight of 10 games on home ice this season heading into the weekend, including the win over Long Beach.

The Monsters will now take on Valencia and Long Beach on the road on back-to-back nights this Friday and Saturday. If Fresno can bring the same effort and intensity as it did Thursday, it could have one of its most successful weekends of the season.

The Monsters' Western States Shootout schedule was recently announced. The club will play games against Springfield, West Sound, and Tahoe.

LONG BEACH BOMBERS (18-3-1, 37 pts)

@LBBombersHockey

www.JrBombers.org

The Long Beach Bombers have not been playing up to their potential as of late, and things culminated on Thursday night with a blowout loss to Fresno, a team the Bombers swept in three games opening weekend.

Long Beach still enjoys a comfortable five-point lead atop the Western Division, but Valencia is waiting close behind and could take advantage of any sustained stretch of subpar play by the Bombers.

"We're not so much focused on our opponent as we are playing the right way," said Long Beach Head Coach Chris White. "We've had some poor outings recently, and we need to get better in order to be where we want to be in April."

The Bombers get another shot at the Monsters this Saturday, and this time it's on their home ice. Long Beach is undefeated in regulation through 13 games at The Rinks in Lakewood, California, so it will look to continue that trend while exacting revenge on Fresno.

This Sunday, the Bombers face Ontario on the road, which will not be an easy contest despite the Avalanche's fifth-place standing in the division. Ontario defeated Long Beach 7-4 on Veterans Day and has given the Bombers a competitive game every time the two teams have faced off.

Next week, Long Beach is scheduled to play a two-game set against Valencia on the road. If things don't go the Bombers' way against Fresno and Ontario, that series could determine which club holds the top spot in the division heading into the Western States Shootout.

The difficult upcoming stretch will help the Bombers prepare for some big games down the road, according to White.

"I think the Western Division schedule is great for us, and it should really help us at the Showcase and in the playoffs," he said.

Similar to last year, Long Beach will take on some of the best talent the league has to offer in Las Vegas. After a game against Colorado on opening day, the Bombers are slated to play Utah and El Paso.

ONTARIO AVALANCHE (7-9-1, 15 pts)

@TmOntAvs

www.OntarioAvalanche.com

After dropping another close game against Long Beach, the Ontario Avalanche bounced back with a narrow 5-4 win over Valencia on the last day of November.

In the Long Beach game, Ontario jumped out to an early 2-0 lead and later held a 3-2 advantage before allowing three consecutive goals in the second period that would prove to be too much to overcome.

Against Valencia, things went better for the Avs as they played in another intense, competitive game that is beginning to become a staple in the brutal Western Division. Valencia held a 4-2 lead at the beginning of the final period, but Ontario fought back to score three unanswered goals and steal a vital pair of points.

Forward Thomas King (7-6-13) netted the game-winner with just 40 seconds remaining, completing a two-point outing and giving him multiple points in each of his last two games.

The marker gave King, a third-year veteran, a new single-season career-high in goals. He seems to be well on his way to surpassing last season's scoring line of 6-20-26.

Ontario is still in fifth place, but its strong play against elite competition suggests its fortunes will improve during the second half, when the schedule gets significantly easier.

The Avalanche have one game left this week against Long Beach on Sunday afternoon. After that, they will play three-game series against Fresno and San Diego before heading to Las Vegas for the WSHL Showcase.

Ontario will contest games against the CPJHL Red Team, Springfield, and Superior at the tournament. While the first one will not count in the standings, the games against the latter two teams will provide the Avs with a chance to prove they are better than their record indicates.

Superior and Springfield are both hovering around .500, so Ontario can show it should be taken seriously as a contender if it takes care of business against those two clubs.

PHOENIX KNIGHTS (8-14-2, 18 pts)

@PhoenixKnightsJrA

www.PhoenixKnightsHockey.com

The Phoenix Knights, 8-1-2 over their last 11 games, are back in action this weekend with a big three-game set against undefeated El Paso, arguably the league's best team.

If the Knights can give the Rhinos a run for their money, they will show the rest of the league that their resurgence over the past few weeks is legit.

It's quite possible that El Paso will overlook the Knights. It has its biggest series of the year coming up next weekend against Oklahoma City, and Rhinos players may be looking ahead to that as well as their tough slate of games at the Western States Shootout.

The El Paso series will be Phoenix's last game action until mid-December at the Showcase. It has played 24 games, more than any other team in the division, and will likely welcome a chance for an extended period of rest.

The Knights still have a long way to go to dig themselves out of the early-season hole they dug. Phoenix dropped its first 15 games before finally breaking through in an 8-4 win over San Diego back on November 3.

Phoenix's Showcase schedule should not be too difficult. It will play games against Dallas, Seattle, and Bellingham, three struggling clubs that, on paper, do not seem to have more talent than the Knights.

Throughout the course of the season, Phoenix has released a series of documentaries called "A Hard Day's Knight." The latest episode was released a couple of weeks ago and focuses on the Knights' rookies. It can be found on the team's official YouTube channel, Phoenix Knights, or on their Twitter feed, @PhoenixKnightsJrA.

SAN DIEGO SABERS (1-19-1, 3 pts)

@sdsabershockey

www.SanDiegoSabersHockey.com

The San Diego Sabers continue their extended break this week. The Sabers, who last played in mid-November in a series against Valencia, will not see live game action again until welcoming the Ontario Avalanche to Iceoplex in Escondido, California, for a three-game set December 15-17.

The Sabers' offense has struggled for most of the year, but it has seen some improvement lately, led by leading scorer Michael Kolarik (8-8-16).

Karel Kankovsky (5-7-12), Cole Parker (3-7-10), David Grindstaff (4-10-14), Ondrej Imrich (5-6-11), and Kolarik have all reached double-digit points for the Sabers.

Over its last four games, San Diego has scored 15 goals. That may not seem like much at first, but it's definitely a step up for a club that has just one win in 21 tries.

San Diego will take on Wichita, Cheyenne, and Southern Oregon at the WSHL Showcase. Those teams have combined for a 6-61-0 record and give the Sabers a chance to finally collect some points and pull themselves closer to the rest of the pack in the Western Division.

VALENCIA FLYERS (16-5-0, 32 pts)

@valenciaflyers

www.ValenciaFlyers.com

As we begin the month of December, the Valencia Flyers still have a firm grasp on second place in the division with just a few weeks left until the league Showcase in Las Vegas.

On Thursday night, the Flyers opened an 11-game homestand with a one-goal loss to Ontario, which proved once again that it can stick with the best teams in the division.

Valencia has three games left before the Showcase. After taking on Fresno this Friday, it will welcome Long Beach to town for a two-game set that will be a final tune-up for Las Vegas.

The Flyers will take a brief tour of the Mountain Division at the Showcase, with games against Utah, Colorado, and Ogden. Those clubs represent the top three teams in the Mountain Division and have been beating each other up throughout the course of the first half. All three are good enough to give the Flyers a competitive game.

Looking ahead, Valencia will continue its homestand as the second half of the season begins in early January. It will play series against Long Beach, Phoenix, and Fresno before taking on San Diego in a single-game matchup.

After that, the Flyers will play 12 of their last 17 games on the road at Phoenix, San Diego, and Bellingham.

--- Jared Tennant for Harrington Sports Media