



## JEFFREY LUTZ'S ECHL REPORT

### The halfway point

With 32 games to go in a 70-game ECHL regular season, the Thunder appears to be playing for second.

Allen, which owes 20 percent of its regulation losses to Wichita, has pulled away thanks to a nine-game winning streak entering the All-Star break. The Americans have the league's best record and haven't lost in 2015. They're beginning their first ECHL season with dominance similar to the way they finished in the Central Hockey League, where they won the CHL's final two championships.

The Americans have yet to play a team outside the Central division, which consists of seven holdovers from the CHL, but they begin the second half with three games against ECHL mainstays. Chasing Allen for postseason positioning are Fort Wayne, Toledo, Florida, Greenville, Idaho, Ontario and Colorado, which all have at least 50 points but are short of the Americans' 59.

Recently, the Americans lost the league's leading scorer, Jack Combs, to an offer to play in Europe. Allen's depth has enabled the Americans to flourish despite several defections.

"It's tough to lose our fourth point-per-game player this season," Allen coach Steve Martinson told the Allen American newspaper last week. "Jack helped us get to where we are now, and I wasn't expecting to have him all season."

The Thunder is tied with

Quad City and Tulsa with 42 points and squarely in the playoff picture. Wichita, which has a regulation win and two post-regulation victories over the Americans, has also been hurt by call-ups and departures. Though the Thunder hasn't thrived like Allen has, Wichita has survived to maintain pace with the Central's second-tier teams.

Kenton Miller, Wichita's third-leading scorer, missed the last two games, losses to Allen in which the Thunder was outscored 14-6, after being promoted to the American Hockey League. Theo Peckham and Stephen Schultz have departed for Europe, and Dan Milan and goalie Tyler Bunz have made brief stops in the AHL.

The Thunder has gotten surprising if not unexpected contributions from waiver pick-up Danick Gauthier, the team's representative for Wednesday's All-Star game in Orlando, and rookie Ian Duval.

"Putting together a team so close to the start of the season because of the (ECHL consolidation) this year, making trades and getting people here ... is always tough," Thunder coach Kevin McClelland said. "But that's the nature of the business."

### Around the ECHL

■ Missouri, which is sixth in the seven-team Central division that includes the Thunder, is the only team represented by more than one ECHL All-Star. The Mavericks sent de-

fenseman Landon Oslanski and forward Chris Crane to the game in Orlando, which pits ECHL stars against the host Solar Bears.

■ Every ECHL All-Star, except for Elmira defenseman Steven Shamanski and Greenville goalie Jeff Malcolm, was born in the 1990s; Shamanski and Malcolm were both born in 1989. The youngest All-Star is Stockton forward Lukas Sutter, a 21-year-old selected in the seventh round by the New York Islanders in the 2014 NHL draft. He was a second-round selection by Winnipeg in 2012.

### ECHL alumni

Perhaps the most inventive ECHL team name during an era where creative was commonplace was the Greenville Grrrowl, which played eight seasons before folding in 2006. The Grrrowl won the championship in 2002, when Simon Gamache was their sixth-leading scorer. Gamache, then 20, scored 38 points in his only season in Greenville. He made his NHL debut the following season for the Atlanta Thrashers and played in 48 NHL games for Atlanta, Nashville, St. Louis and Toronto.

### Days gone by

The early 2000s was a haven for outlandish team names, including the Grrrowl. When Macon moved to Lexington, Ky., in 2003, the franchise became the Men O'War after the famous racehorse. Lexington joined a league that in-

cluded that season's champion, the Atlantic City Boardwalk Bullies, along with the Checkers, Nailers, Ice Pilots and the Florence, S.C.-based Pee Dee Pride.

### Climbing the ladder

Bruce Boudreau, who coached the ECHL All-Stars in 1999, is on his second NHL coaching job as coach of the Anaheim Ducks, who hired him two days after he was fired by the Washington Capitals in 2011. Boudreau played on the first All-Star teams for the now-defunct Central Hockey League in 1982 and the Triple-A American Hockey League six seasons later.

### Key statistic

#### 362

Shots taken by Wichita's three most prolific shooters and top scorers Ian Lowe (115 shots), Danick Gauthier (118) and Kenton Miller (129). Nikita Kashirsky (85) is the only other Thunder player with more than 77 shots.

### He said it

"The book on him was he got hurt last year and there were a couple AHL teams looking at him. We knew he brought a lot of speed. I didn't think he'd put up as many numbers as he has already, but it's been a great surprise."

—McClelland on Duval, who has six goals and 14 assists in 23 games

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