

Coachella Valley Firebirds 2024-2025 Season Preview

By Sean D. Liming October 11, 2024 – seanliming.com

When Dan Bylsma was named the first coach of the Firebirds, Coachella Valley locals with hockey knowledge were impressed the new Seattle Kraken franchise hired a high caliber NHL winning coach for their new AHL affiliate. In their first two seasons of existence, the Firebirds have made two trips to the Calder Cup finals. The success wasn't limited to the Firebirds. The Kraken's ECHL affiliate, the Kansas City Mavericks, went to the ECHL Kelly Cup finals last season. The success of both minor league teams demonstrates the Seattle Kraken's commitment to create a winning organization.

The Kraken parted ways with their head coach Dave Hakstol last season, and it was no surprise that Dan Bylsma was named the Kraken's new head coach. To fill the vacancy, the Kraken hired Derek Laxdal as the new coach of the Firebirds. A smart choice as Coach Laxdal has coach at all levels of hockey. In 19 seasons as a head coach, Coach Laxdal has enjoyed a winning regular season record and won 3 championships (one ECHL and two WHL).

With the all the coaching changes, the third season for the Firebirds is an important one. Establishing the Kraken system will be a focal point for this season. The ability for players to move up the organization and fit right in without a learning curve will help develop continuity, player success, and hopefully a winning result. Coach Laxdal's solid understanding of player and organization development is key reasons why he was bought in as the Firebirds head coach.

Last year, the Firebirds started slow. There were areas of their game that needed work, but as the season moved on, the team cleaned up the weak areas and starting in December began a run that saw them finish first place in the Pacific Division by 11 points and continue the drive into the Calder Finals. The Calder Cup final's result was not what anyone wanted, but the overall successful run during the season is something very positive to building that winning organization.

Life of an AHL team means constant change. There are new players coming to the team. Firebirds will have some returning players, and several new ones as many of the Kraken draftees make their way through the organization. It will not be surprising to see a slow start, but as the season progresses, players develop the on ice chemistry to make another run in the playoffs.

Speed, solid defense, effective penalty kills, tenacity, and great goal tending were keys to the Firebirds success. Core strength and conditioning also shined through as opponents were worn down as the games progress to the 3rd period. Expect to see the same this year.

The real key to the success is all the fans that come to the Acrisure Arena (aka the Bird Barn). Coachella Valley Firebirds have one of the highest attendance records in the past two seasons. The energy the fans provide is an important part of the team's success.

New head coach, new players, and the best fans in the AHL should make for an incredible season.