

GAME REPORT

Home: CV Firebirds vs. Away: CHI Wolves

Date: Jan 11, 2025 6:00PM PST

Pre-Game

The Wolves are 8-2-0-0 in their last 10 games. The Carolina Hurricanes affiliate has started to make their run up the Central Division standings. The new agreement between the Hurricanes and Wolves gives the Hurricanes an AHL team for player development. Like the Firebirds, the Wolves are going with a youth movement and have a couple players (Justin Robidas and Scott Morrow) that are in the top of the AHL rookie rankings. Spencer Martin is one of the top goalies in the AHL. The Wolves are coming off of a back-to-back night split with the Rockford IceHogs.

The Firebirds are 5-4-0-1 in their last 10 games. The team has run hot and cold. Rising up to face challenges and then falling backward when an effort is not there. Part of the issues was the cycle of call ups and send downs from the Kraken that has created a little inconsistency. The last game against the Roadrunners resulted in a 4-1 loss, and there were some positives and negative to look at. They were able to get a power play goal on a 5 on 3, but not on a 5 on 4. There were several opportunities to get back into the game on the power play, but nothing could be managed. The Roadrunners were the dominate team in that game, and the positive for the Firebirds is that they were able to prevent the Roadrunners from running away with the game with a solid defense. There are 3 more games in the home stand before a more balanced home-road schedule for the remainder of the season.

Head-to-Head: This is the first time these two teams have faced each other in their history. They will play back-to-back nights here in Coachella Valley and then play in Chicago at the end of March. Playing teams in other division is important for team and player comparison. For comparison, both teams have played the Texas Stars. The Wolves are 2-0-0-0 and the Firebirds are 1-0-0-1 against the Stars. Another note is that the Wolves are 1-1 against Hershy Bears, the Calder Cup defending champs. The two games this weekend will be an interesting test to see how these two teams stand up.

1st Period

The game started fast. Both teams came out with energy. The Wolves had the better part of the period in creating scoring chances. They are making clean cross ice passes, but the Firebirds are able to eat any shot attempts. The Wolves got the only goal on a bad turn over by the Firebirds in the defensive zone. On a puck that should have gotten out of the zone, Domenick Fensore was able to intercept the puck off a half wall break out attempt and pass the puck to Bradly Nadeau who put it behind Alex Stezka. The Wolves are sniffing out the Firebird breakout and intercepting the puck to start the game. The Firebirds adjusted later in the period and started to get some more offensive zone time.

2nd Period

The Firebirds took over the period especially the last 10 minutes. The Firebirds even the score with Wolves over committing to the forecheck. With 4 of the 5 players below the hash marks, the Firebirds broke out with an easy 2 on 1. Ben Meyers passed to Daniel Sprong who didn't miss the opportunity to score a goal.

The Wolves were probably angry with themselves and made a push. On scramble in the Firebirds defensive zone, Jordan Martel got puck that he put home to take back the lead. After that it was the Daniel Sprong show who inspired the rest of the Firebirds to turn their offensive push into a shooting gallery on Spencer Martin. Nifty passes and grade A scoring opportunities followed. It was another rush up the ice that tied the game. Daniel Sprong led the charge and a pass to Lleyton Roed who power moved to the goal and flip the puck over Spencer Martin. The Firebirds push continued with several shots that wowed those in attendance. The Firebirds set a team record 22 shots on goal in the period.

3rd Period

The Firebirds own the period. On a 2 on 1 rush up the ice Lleyton Roed made a pass to Daniel Sprong who put it home for his second goal. 4 minutes later the Firebirds where on the power play. A nice cycle with Logan Morrison making a pass down low to Ben Meyers who found an open Jani Nyman in the circle. Using his patent Jani's Hammer (okay it is work in progress) put the puck pass Spencer Martin with ease. On another rush up the ice, Spencer Martin made a stop and then got into a scrum with the Ian McKinnon. This brought Ales Stezka into the neutral zone. With Spencer Martin coming out tried to egg Ales on for a goalie fight. Ales thought better of it and played the psychological game well to let the moment pass. The Wolves attempt to get something going in spirits, but Brandon Biro stole a puck and made was the faster skater to create a breakaway and scoring the 5th goal of the game for the Firebirds.

Post-Game

The Wolves play a fast and hard checking game. The Firebirds were able to match the intensity and turn things around to get the win. The Wolves made the mistake of over pressing a Firebirds team that met the challenge with speed of their own. The real star of the game was Daniel Sprong who made his Firebird debut. The journey man was traded to the Kraken earlier in the season, but he couldn't find consistency to stay in the lineup. After clearing wavers, he arrived in Coachella Valley looking to get his game going. As he stated in the postgame news conference, he is an NHL player and that is where he wants to be. His NHL level experience was on full display. No matter how long he is with the Firebirds, he is a great addition for the younger players to learn from. You can see that he is accepting his roll and is going to do what he can to get back to the NHL. Tonight's game was a good first step for Daniel.

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	Total
Wolves	1	1	0	2
Firebirds	0	2	3	5

Full game statistic can be found on the AHL site: <https://theahl.com/stats/game-center/1027001>

Team Game Stats:

	Wolves	Firebirds
Shots	30	47
PP	0 / 3	1 / 2
PIM	6	6
SH	0	0

Unofficial stats:

The following are unofficial statistics. The AHL doesn't show faceoff wins, icing, or offsides on the score sheet. I am tracking this on my own so there is a margin of error.

Icing	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Wolves	4	1	0	5
Firebirds	1	1	0	2

Offsides	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Wolves	1	0	0	1
Firebirds	1	2	0	3

Faceoff Wins	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Wolves	12	9	9	30
Firebirds	8	10	12	30

The following is a breakdown of faceoff wins based on zone and player count.

	Wolves			Firebirds		
Zone	ES	PP	PK	ES	PP	PK
Attack	4	1	0	8	2	0
Neutral	9	1	0	10	0	0
Defense	15	0	0	9	0	1

ES – Even Strength

PP – Power Play

PK – Penalty Kill