

# Bears hunt for sixth straight win over Oilers

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Sports Editor

In 2000, Mike Comrie was a highly touted, highly paid Oilers rookie. Five years have passed, but no other Oiler newbie has been able to duplicate Comrie's impact by leading his team to a victory over the Golden Bears in the annual contest between Alberta and the Oilers rookie squad.

While the relationship between Comrie and the Oilers soured, the one between the Bears and the Copper and Blue stayed the same as the Bears have dominated the Oilers hopefuls, shutting them out twice, and winning two others by scores of 7-2 and 8-2. Last year's 5-4 overtime victory gave the Bears the longest winning streak in the history of the matchup, which has been played every year since 1988.

But, despite the Bears' successes, head coach Eric Thurston sees this year's game, taking place tonight at 7pm at Clare Drake Arena, as a crap shoot.

"Don't kid yourself, [the Oilers] have had some very talented teams in the last five years, and their team this year should be the mirror image," he said. "Not to take anything away from them, but we've had some pretty good players come through also."

In the Oilers' corner this year are some recent CIS rule changes that have seen the league adopt the same rules as the NHL regarding obstruction penalties.

"[The Oilers] obviously got some tremendous talent, so it's going to be a very tough game for us, physically and with the new, NHL-style rules on the stick-fouls, tripping, interference and no-tolerance policy. It'll be



FILE PHOTO: JEFFREY GREENIAUS

**THAT'S HOOKING!** The Bears won't be able to get away with any illegal stick usage when they take on the Oiler rookies tonight at 7pm at the Drake.

an adjustment for us, especially in this first game, not having played [by the rules] at all yet," Thurston said.

The new rules, however, should help a Golden Bears squad that has been put together for skill and speed, and that, in recent years, has complained of teams countering with dirty play that often went unpenalized.

"We built our team looking at the new rules coming through. We have very skilled forwards; we want to

look for a lot of speed and tremendous puck control through all three zones," Thurston said. "The new rules will really help us. We'll have wide-open hockey; we've always played that way, and a lot of teams now won't be able to take the liberties—the hooking, the holding, the tackling, the jumping on our backs—that they have in the past."

The Bears will also feature a vast array of new talent, after ten players moved on from last year's national

championship team. Goaltender Aaron Sorochan, defenceman Harlan Anderson and a skilled set of veteran forwards will be tasked with picking up some of the slack and leading a group of nine new Bears.

Most of those new faces will see action in the game against the Oilers, but Ian MacDonald and Chad Klassen are both nursing injuries, and Brian Woolger is in camp with the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Still, Thurston sees the game against the pros as the perfect starting point for the new season.

"It really jump starts us," he said. "Physically it gets you into what's expected [in the season], and it's almost a mirror-image of what the other teams are like in Canada West or CIS that you're going to face at nationals. It gives you a great show of what you have to work on to get prepared."



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