

# Taking it one Stempfle at a time

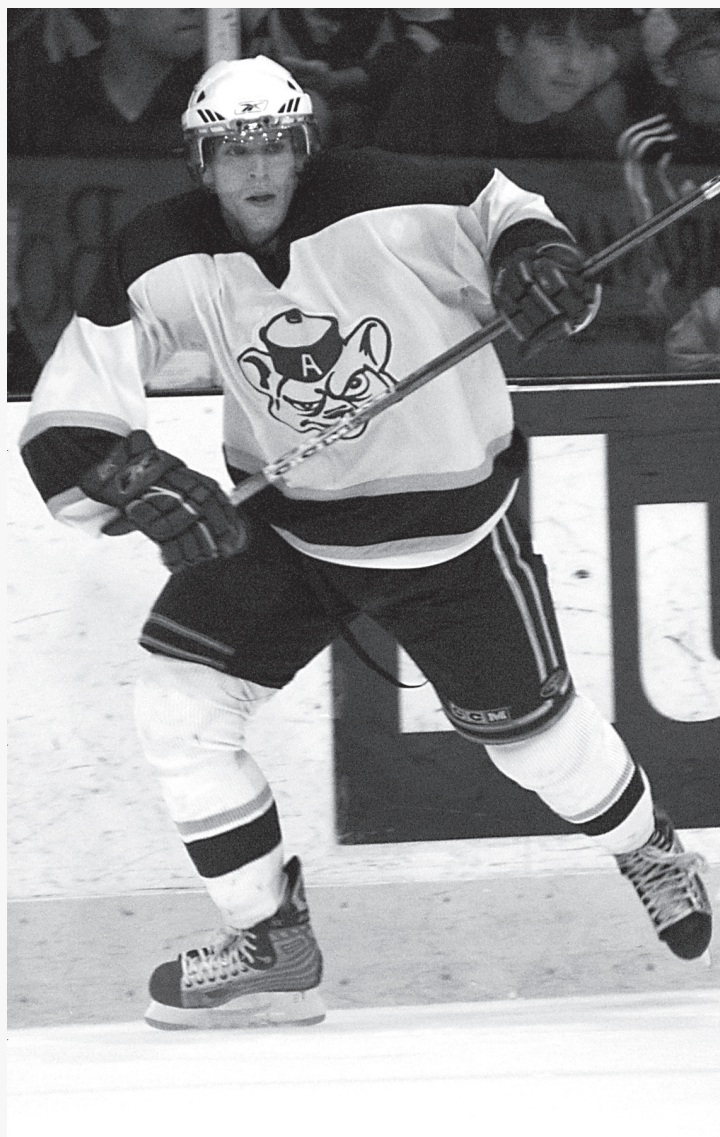
PAUL OWEN  
Sports Editor

With only eight returning skaters from last year's championship team, it would be easy to write off the Golden Bears hockey squad for the year. Yet, despite the high turnover, Alberta is still one of the favourites to hoist the University Cup at the end of the season. One big reason for this is blueliner Ryan Stempfle. With defencemen Chris Ovington, Gavin McLeod and Perry Johnson all finishing their fifth year of eligibility last season, Stempfle has much more responsibility as one of the few veteran defencemen on this year's squad. "Certainly I'm going to have a larger role than last year," the fourth-year out of Sherwood Park says. "I really need to solidify things back there, but also bring leadership in the dressing room. There's a group of guys, including myself, who need to take the bull by the horns and lead these rookies we have coming in." With last year's captain—McLeod—and the four alternates all gone from this year's team, leadership will be a big aspect of Stempfle's game this season.

"Stempfle is a warrior, and he battles every minute and every chance," head coach Eric Thurston says. "He blocks shots and puts his head in front of things, and he's a tough kid, and he'll be called on for that leadership, not just on the ice, but also in the dressing room."

Stempfle figures to play with a variety of different defence partners. He and fellow veteran Harlan Anderson have been charged with bringing along the young defencemen in the Bears' system. Paired up with rookie Derek Price, Stempfle has already been showing the youngster the ins and outs of CIS hockey.

"I've been paired up with him pretty much right out of camp, and it's been a big help for me to adjust to the systems and the style of play," Price says. "He's always talking, always helping



NICK WIEBE

**STEMPFLING UP** Stempfle will be required to handle a bigger load this year.

me out and giving me options." While he's not known as an offensive defenceman, having scored only four goals in 64 games for the University of Alberta, Stempfle notched Alberta's first goal against the Edmonton Oilers Rookies Tuesday night, a powerplay marker at 8:28 of the second. Still, Stempfle sees his role this season being primarily defensive.

"I want to be a force on the [penalty kill] and keep a solid plus/minus.

Primarily, I want to play a lot of minutes—I did a ton of conditioning over the summer and I'm ready. I want to be on the ice at the end of the game and really solidify the back end for us," Stempfle says.

"I can't fill the shoes of McLeod, but I'm going to be way better than I was last year. We've worked hard over the summer, and I think that's not going to show only in March, but also in October, at the start of the season."

# Amount of racism still in basketball senseless

CHRIS O'LEARY

Sports  
Commentary



There are certain places that you never expect to find certain things. In life, you sometimes come across pairings that befuddle you—groupings that go against every fibre of rationality and common sense that you just assume the rest of the world has. Yet, there they are, rubbed in your face like the girl you crushed on all through high school who inexplicably dated a goon from the Bantam AA hockey team that sat next to you in Social 10 and spit tobacco on the floor. That happened to a friend of mine once.

The pairing I'm talking about, though, is one that's much more serious, far less likely and for some reason, prevalent nonetheless. The unlikely duo: basketball and racism.

This of course, stems from a story out of Ryerson's the *Eyeopener*, where five players quit the women's basketball team, fed up with head coach Sandra Pothier, who allegedly made countless culturally-insensitive remarks to her players.

I might be quoting the old/naïve school in saying this, but in my years of playing and being around the game of basketball, I thought the game was supposed to transcend race. We live in a world that's consumed with racial issues, but to me basketball has always been something where the colour of your skin takes a back seat to your abilities once you get on the court.

I learned early on, however, that there was plenty of space left on the car with this train of thought.

I've heard high school coaches talk about using black players as an intimidation tactic; I've seen this tactic work on opposing teams; I've seen refs in every level of ball get whistle-happy

when a black player checks into the game. Sadly, those aren't the only stories I can reel off for you.

Over the summer, I was watching the championship game of the NBA 3on3 tournament, formerly known as Hoop It Up. The team that won featured former Bears Robbie Valpreda, Cody Darrah and two Calgary Dinos in Ross Bekkering and his older brother, dunking phenom Henry, who has become an Internet legend for a now famous video of his dunking ability that's made its way around the world.

**We live in a world that's consumed with racial issues, but to me, basketball has always been something where the colour of your skin takes a backseat to your abilities.**

While watching the final, I looked around the court and saw a number of familiar faces: university athletes, people I recognized from pickup games on campus, and a guy I had met last summer, who I had interviewed at the World Masters Games. He was playing against Henry in the final. After Henry handled the comp on the court, this guy came off the court and said to his wife, "What a great white athlete."

So much for athletic ability overshadowing colour. So much for sports bringing people together and teaching us that, at least on this one basic level, we're not that different. It seems, like more often than not, whether it's a coach allegedly waxing stereotypical on shortcomings of the black community, or a random guy making comments about what an outstanding white person Henry Bekkering is, the only thing that's transcending in basketball lately is ignorance.

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