

Soccer Bears to host the great unknown: UCFV

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Staff

The Bears soccer team may not be familiar with the team they'll be meeting this Saturday, but they hope to be prepared for them anyway. Their mysterious opponents are the University College of the Fraser Valley Cascades, who are competing in Canada West this year for the first time.

"I know nothing about Fraser Valley, because they're brand new to the conference," Bears head coach Len Vickery admitted. "I don't even know a single player on their team."

In the absence of detailed knowledge of their opponent, the Bears will continue to work on playing together as a cohesive whole and strengthening their attacking game.

"The team is a bit slower out of the gate this year," Vickery said. "We've had some players return to us, and we've added younger players to the squad. It would maybe [be] too much to expect that we would come out of the gate quickly with the kind of changes we've made in the lineup. Defensively, we've come together very well. Offensively, we're just trying to find our groove a little bit better."

The main challenge facing Fraser Valley, on the other hand, is getting used to the level of play required in CIS games.

"Being our first season in, we're still learning to keep up to the pace of the game, and be able to compete in CIS," Cascades head coach Al Errington said. "We've had a bit of a slow start, but we feel a bit stronger at this point. We're



FILE PHOTO: PETE YEE

YOU BETTER SCORE HERE Head coach Len Vickery wants more than one goal per game, so the Golden Bears will need to get more chances like this one.

coming in hoping to do well, but realizing that the Alberta team is going to be a really strong team."

According to their coach, this season has been a learning experience for the Cascades. Being accepted into CIS competition has meant quite a bit of change for many of Fraser Valley's players.

"I knew what I was getting myself into, but I don't know if my players did," Errington said. "I think some of the new players, especially, are finding it a little different than they're used to. They're used to just getting out, playing

soccer and having a good time, but it's a bit more of a professional approach in this league, and some of them are taking a bit of time to adjust to that. We're the new kids on the block, and there's going to be some growing pains for us."

Fraser Valley has a 0-1-3 record coming into Edmonton, having scored their first point in a 1-1 draw against the University of Lethbridge last weekend, while the Bears tied once and won once against the University of Saskatchewan.

"We'll be bringing much the same game on Saturday [against UCFV] and Sunday [versus Trinity Western]," Vickery said. "We need to remain strong defensively, work on our finishing, and score more than a goal a game."

Vickery is looking to Alex Campos and John Konye, who scored the game-winner against Saskatchewan, to help achieve that objective. Alberta will be playing backup keeper Dan Gusberti in place of the injured Devon Fraser.

A pair of late goals cost the Bears (2-0-2) two wins already this season, but Errington realizes that Alberta's still one of the top squads in Canada West.

"They're a very good side, very well coached, very well organized," he said. "So if we're going to try to take some points from the Bears, we're going to have to be at our best this weekend."

Alberta takes on UCFV at 2:15pm at Foote Field Saturday afternoon before squaring off against TWU at the same time and place the next day.



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

WANTED: BETTER GAME The Bears will need to play better to beat Manitoba.

Baffling Bears bring battle to Bisons' bloodthirsty bode

ANDREW RENFREE
Sports Staff

It's not really clear how the Bears managed to get past the third week of the football season with a 2-1 record and a ninth-place ranking in CIS. Alberta has yet to throw for a touchdown this season, and the kicking situation has left some scratching their heads as a safety and former benchwarmer take turns booting the ball. Frankly, if it weren't for the fact that Alberta has the best running back in the league, they could very well have been winless as the mid-season mark quickly approaches.

The victories against Calgary and UBC in the last two games seemed to have come more from their opponents blunders than from Alberta's successes. Or perhaps it was just divine intervention—the gridiron gods taking pity on a hapless passing game and two makeshift kickers. Call it luck or good fortune, but whatever the reason for the Bears' decent start this year, the upcoming contest against the Manitoba Bisons will be anything but easy.

"One of the things that we have to do as a team in order for us to compete against tougher teams is we have to eliminate self-inflicted problems: turnovers, penalties," Bears head coach Jerry Friesen said. "Those are all

in-house things that we control. If we don't take care of those things against Manitoba, they're going to hurt us."

In the early part of the season, Manitoba has established itself as one of the strongest teams in Canada West, posting a 3-0 record and outscoring their opponents 144-41. Manitoba is now ranked fourth in the country, the highest position they've held since 2002.

There are many signs that point to a Bison victory on Saturday the most noticeable being their strong defence: all twelve of their starting defensive players are returning from last season and several of them have been playing together for a few seasons now. If Manitoba can shut down Alberta's strong ground attack better than Calgary or UBC were able to, it might be an easy victory for the veteran Bison squad.

"We just have to make sure that we stay methodical and we have to make sure we don't give them any more opportunities than they have, 'cause right now we're just giving teams more opportunities based on what we do on the field; based on our penalties and lack of ball control," Friesen noted. "You just can't do that against good football teams."

While Manitoba's defence might be

their strongest asset, their offence is not far behind. Though the Bisons lost five players on the offensive side of the field, they have demonstrated offensive prowess by beating the Simon Fraser Clan 77-7 a couple of weeks ago. Granted, the Clan is the doormat of Canada West, but the lopsided victory showed that the Bisons have the ability to score with both their top starters and second-string, who got the call for most of the second half against SFU.

The Bisons' key loss on offence was all-star quarterback Ryan Zahara, but it appears that his replacement, John Makie, has filled in nicely, earning Canada West Athlete of the Week after the SFU game. The third-year quarterback is also ranked fifth in CIS for passing yards, and has a strong completion percentage early in the season.

Saturday's game will be in Winnipeg and the Bisons still remember last season when Alberta ousted them from the playoffs in the Canada West semifinal, and despite Friesen's attempt to down-play the revenge factor, those returning players want revenge, for being eliminated after making the playoffs for the first time in three years.

The Saturday game will be broadcast live in Edmonton on Shaw TV and on the Team 1260 on the radio. Kickoff is at 1pm.