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FILE PHOTO: KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

WHACK IT GOOD The Pandas will hope to avoid the deadened championship hangover when they hit the turf in Calgary.

Pandas start title defence

TREVOR PHILLIPS
Sports Writer

Every year in sports, there seems to be one championship team that has an inexplicably poor showing the following year. A shortened off-season, lack of focus or loss of key players can cause a downswing and lead to a championship hangover. This Friday, in Calgary, when the Pandas field hockey team takes to Hawkings Field for the first of three major conference tournaments, the rest of Canada West will get to see if any of these factors will have contributed to a drop in the defending champions play.

"We're confident in our conditioning level and know we will be decent, our team knows how to work; we're certainly not unfit," remarked head coach Carla Somerville on the physical readiness of her club. "We also understand that if we come prepared to work we can compete against anyone."

Preparation might be the biggest factor on this weekend's results. The Pandas three opponents, the University of British Columbia Thunderbirds, University of Victoria Vikes and University of Calgary Dinos have all been playing challenging matches for

over a month. Somerville admitted that the extended training opportunities for the other clubs have left the Pandas a bit behind.

The Dinos and the Vikes both headed east for pre-season conditioning. Calgary went 7-2-1 in whirlwind eleven-day tour of Ontario and the Maritimes, while Victoria finished second in the illustrious Big Apple Hockey Festival in New York, which draws top teams from across North America.

While both those trips were impressive, ten-time national champions UBC headed to Australia, a hotbed of international field hockey, to play some of the top teams in the world. Despite going 0-5-3, the trip set up UBC for success on the year.

"Obviously taking a trip like that is beneficial for any club," Somerville said. "I felt that two years ago, when we took our trip to Holland, that it was a vital step in becoming a National Champion. Nowadays, to go on an international trip is essential and important for any club."

For the Pandas, a few pre-season tilts against the U of C and the Calgary Extreme were all the competition to be had. With the opponents at Calgary's Tournament seemingly in mid-season

form, questions swirl on the readiness of the defending champions.

"We opened camp in mid-August, so we have been working hard the last month," Somerville said. "The speed might be the biggest factor, but if we keep our composure and our team approach, we can make the adjustments and out-work anyone."

This tournament isn't only important to see where the Pandas are in terms of their fundamentals and their systems, but will also be a good indication of any sort of hangover from the party the season before.

"I'm a little worried [about a let-down season], there are too many examples in sports, like the Eskimos right now; but there are also many examples where teams have gone on to win back to back championships," Somerville said. "We intend to remain focused on what we can control now and not on what we can control later."

The Pandas begin their bid to become only the fourth team in history to win the CIS field hockey trophy in back-to-back years on Friday at 1pm when they take on the host Dinos. They go again at 1pm on Saturday and Sunday, facing the Vikes and T-Birds respectively.

SPORTS SHORTS

Compiled by Paul Owen

Volleyball

The Pandas head to Regina today for a tournament this weekend, fresh off a victory over the Canadian Masters. The team will take on Briercrest College Friday at 2pm and Simon Fraser that same day at 7pm, before facing Regina at 1pm on Saturday afternoon. After the round robin, Alberta will have two more games. Opponents and times are to be determined.

Hockey

The Pandas will take on the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Trojans Friday evening in Canmore. The game goes at 5pm. It will be the third exhibition game this season for the defending CIS champions.

Athletes of the Week

Alberta running back Tendayi Jozzy earned CIS football Offensive Player of the Week for his 176-yard two-touchdown performance against the UBC Thunderbirds. Bears linebacker David Lowry was named Canada West Football Defensive Player of the Week.

Football

The Eskimos lost again, this time to Hamilton. Who the hell loses to Hamilton? Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg, that's who. Are we supposed to take solace in the fact that Robert Brown was CFL Lineman of the Week? The Esks are 4-8! Edmonton doesn't go 4-8! Saskatchewan goes 4-8!

Shorts

Gateway Editor-in-Chief Matt Frehner is wearing green cotton boxer shorts today. Clearly he's supporting the Green and Gold in this weekend's sporting events. Good on you Mr Frehner, good on you.