



FILE PHOTO: STEFFI ROSSKOPF

MOTHERFUCKIN' TRAKTOR BOY The Bears won't face anyone as talented as Alexei Mikhnov(8) in Saskatoon.

Bears head to Saskatchewan for Husky Classic puck tourney

ROSS PRUSAKOWSKI
Sports Staff

Just as many students spend the early part of the semester trying to identify their deficiencies, the Golden Bears hockey team will have a similar focus as they head to Saskatoon to take on the Saskatchewan Huskies and Regina Cougars in the Husky Classic.

"I like this weekend in the sense that it gives us a chance to see where we are technically ... and because the team is going to show me [what] we need to work on," Bears head coach Eric Thurston said. "We've practiced for long enough and now we need to get a look at where we're at."

However, while this pre-season tournament will begin the serious work for Thurston, who's entering his second year at the team's helm, it will also mark a change in pace for the players. After practicing since the end of August and playing the traditional opener against the Oilers rookies, this will be the first opportunity the team's nine new players—including Chad Klassen who once

posted a 91-point season in the Western Hockey League—will have to make an impression and jockey for playing time. This is a battle that Thurston believes will take until the start of the regular season to sort out.

"I think there's two phases of the pre-season," Thurston said. "One is to see who can play, but the other part is to see who can play with who, which comes as you get a chance to evaluate guys and get to see their skill level. Then you get a chance to see and develop chemistry among lines to see these players fit together."

"Things are still too early to judge to put players in a pecking order—you just don't decide after one game and umpteen practices," he added. "Practices are great for putting technical stuff into place, but the game situations and the game competition in the Canada West that we'll get this weekend and at home next weekend will put players in order one through twelve in the roster."

While the Canada West regular season doesn't begin until 13 October

for the Bears, they will have faced the Huskies twice and the Cougars three times before then. Add that to the two regular season games against Regina and the three they're slated to face Saskatchewan before January, and the Bears will be getting to know their neighbours to the east—and perennial rivals—very well this season.

Though seeing the Saskatchewan-based teams that many times before ringing in the new year might be a bit tiresome, it's a schedule Thurston approves of for the intensity it builds between the teams.

"I don't think we get tired of seeing Regina and Saskatchewan because there's always different aspects to the games," Thurston said. "Last year, I was new so it was good to see the team put into place and developing my coaching style. This year was such a huge recruiting year with nine new players that it gets those guys a chance to develop into our system and to understand what it takes to play in Canada West and obviously at the CIS level."

NHL out to bring Jets fans more pain



PAUL OWEN

Sports
Commentary

Whoever thought that putting an exhibition game between the Phoenix Coyotes and Edmonton Oilers in Winnipeg was a good idea is an asshole. Whether it was the league, Coyotes brass or even The Great One himself, whoever said the words, "I have a great idea! Let's show the 'Peggars what they've been missing for the past ten years!" is a huge dinkwad. Either they failed to realize the sheer amount of pain that resides inside the hearts of Jets fans everywhere, or they did and still made the boneheaded decision: either way, that person deserves a corkscrew through the eyeball.

The day the Jets left is the worst day of my life. It was 28 April, 1996. I was nine. I didn't even live in Winnipeg anymore; I had moved to Prince George, but when I watched *Sportsdesk* that evening and saw that the team had been sent to Phoenix,

I cried on my parent's bed. It hurt more than when my dog died. It hurt more than the first time a girl broke my heart. It hurt more than when my grandma died. It felt like someone took all three of those events, rolled them into a giant emotion-ball and lit the fucking thing on fire before making me swallow it whole.

The 1992/93 Winnipeg Jets were the first team I ever saw play hockey. I was too young to know about contract disputes, the financial situation of the team or even what was going on in winger John Druce's home, despite living two doors down from him. All I knew was that Keith Tkachuk was the next Cam Neely—sans the injury problems—Phil Housley was the best defenceman in the NHL and Pavel Bure couldn't hold Teemu Selanne's jockstrap. Selanne was a cross between Superman, Maurice Richard with a cooler nickname and Jesus. As anyone who spent the playoffs with me and fellow Winnipeg son and Gateway writer Ben Carter can attest, "The Finnish Flash" left a lifelong impression on any kid growing up in Winnipeg, despite his too-short stint there. Upon moving to St Albert, Ben even made friends through mutual

respect for Selanne's awesomeness.

With a connection this close to the team, what did the league think would happen? That the city would be able to cheer the Coyotes as if they still belonged there? I've tried my best to be a Coyotes fan over the years, and every year it wears a little more that they play in Arizona, that they don't wear blue and red and that the only things left from the Winnipeg days are the White Out, the inability to win a playoff series and Shane Doan.

Of course the fans were going to back the Oilers on Sunday. Of course they were going to cheer "Go Jets go," instead of something like "Let's go Coyotes." It's the rhythm of their heart beats. They did it at Manitoba Moose games. They did it at the 1999 World Junior Hockey Championships and again in 2005, despite the latter games being in North Dakota. They even did it at the 1998 Brier for fuck's sake. The only thing that could have made it worse was if the Coyotes came out wearing retro Jets jerseys. You can't taunt a fan base like this—it just isn't right. Especially when their only hope for a team now is someone buying the Penguins who can't stop thinking, "Go Jets go."

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