

Pandas head east to extend soccer winning streak

Fourth-ranked Alberta (4-0-0) will visit Regina and Manitoba hoping that their winning ways will continue on the Prairies

NICK FROST
Sports Writer

The Pandas soccer team has been on a major tear this season, winning their first four games after going undefeated in the pre-season. This weekend, they will look to continue their winning streak on the road against Regina—a team they defeated in exhibition play—and Manitoba.

However, despite the tremendous success that this team has already seen, they have had to battle through some close, hard-fought matches. Last Saturday, the Pandas side narrowly avoided a draw with the Saskatchewan Huskies after Claire Thomas netted the winner in the 85th-minute. The win was the Pandas’ fourth one-goal victory of the season. The next day, the Pandas pulled out a 3–0 victory in the second game against the Huskies. According to head coach Liz Jepsen, the team needs to continue getting ahead of their opponents early to maintain their current wave of success.

“We need to finish more,” Jepsen explained. “But I think that from last Sunday’s game, we have proven to ourselves now that we can get three goals within a game. We’re creating a lot of opportunities for ourselves—we just have to put the ball in the back of the net. That’s something that we’ll continue to work on.”

A great deal of the Pandas’ ability to win games this season can be credited to a strong, experienced midfield that has improved rapidly from earlier in the season when they were wracked with injuries.

“I think the biggest thing, from our first set of games is that our centre-mid has come together quite nicely,” Jepsen said. “It’s really quite a combined group effort—but to have that centre-mid really sorts things out and allows us to play a full game and utilize all eleven players on the field.”

The first of two road games will



FILE PHOTO: NEAL WILDING

TWO AGAINST ONE? I LIKE THOSE ODDS Janelle Janis (in white) and her Panda teammates are a weekend sweep away from matching last season's win total.

see the Pandas battle the University of Regina Cougars (0-4-0). While the Pandas dispatched the Cougars 3–1 in the pre-season, they expect a much tougher Regina team this time around.

“I expect that, since Regina is young and has some newer, better players in, that they will be pretty gung-ho,”

Jepsen explained. “So I think it will just reinforce the fact that we need to finish early to give us a little bit of breathing space.”

On Sunday, the Pandas will travel to Winnipeg to face the University of Manitoba Bisons (1-3-0). This will be the first meeting of the season between the two squads, and Jepsen

believes that their defence will need to come up big to shut down the high-octane Bison offence.

“Manitoba will make us work on our defending,” Jepsen said. “They have two very, very fast front runners, so we’ll have to work with our defence on making sure that no opportunities arise for their strikers

to get free. We’ll also work with them on defending one-on-one attacks, as well as preparing our keeper, in the unlikely event that they do get a one-on-one chance on her.”

The Pandas hit the pitch at noon on Saturday at the University of Regina, followed by Sunday’s game at the University of Manitoba at 11am.

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