

WHAAA-BAMM Leo Carroll (14) and six others have departed the Bears, but the animosity for Trinity Western remains.

Bears open season versus arch-rival TWU Spartans

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The upcoming match between Alberta and the Trinity Western Spartans is set to have plenty of pent-up animosity in what has arguably become the biggest rivalry in university volleyball over the last two seasons. Alberta doesn't have many returning players who have played against their BC foes, but Bears head coach Terry Danyluk still expects the rivalry to flare up this season.

"I think all the guys who played in the last game of the season against Trinity Western last year still have a bitter taste in their mouths," Danyluk said. "I'd hope that they'd come out wanting to play the best game possible whether they were on the floor for us during the final or not."

It's only the first exhibition match of the season, but this game has more significance than most pre-season forays typically do. Alberta and TWU have been the top two volleyball clubs in the country for the last two seasons, with the Bears claiming CIS gold with a victory over Trinity in 2005, and the Spartans avenging that loss the following year by upsetting the top-ranked Bears in straight sets for the title.

"We've been in the final the last

two years together, and we've had lots of tough matches against them," said Danyluk. "It's a rivalry. Whether it's the biggest, who can say that? We've had good rivalries with Manitoba and Saskatchewan over the years, but of late Alberta and Trinity are two teams that have been very good, and any time that happens, it's a rivalry."

The Bears will certainly have their work cut out for them this weekend having lost the bulk of their top players in the off-season. Nicholas Cundy, Leo Carrol and Brock Davidiuk all graduated last year, and Dallas Soonias and Alex Gaumont Casias chose to drop out of the Alberta program and play with the national team in Winnipeg this fall. TWU, on the other hand, has five of their starting six returning this year and they're coming off one of their strongest seasons ever with a national championship in tow. With such large gaps to fill before the season begins, Danyluk believes that teams might write-off the Bears this year.

"We've got some very good young players that shouldn't be underestimated," he said. "You never know how other people are thinking, though. I think they're all thinking, 'These guys are all in Winnipeg now,' but there's a good core of returning


guys from last year's group, plus the young guys that are very substantial athletes—hopefully no one will take them for granted."

There still might be roster cuts before the season begins, but for now there are eight new players on the roster from last year. A few of those players are coming with national and provincial experience from the summer including Ben Saxton, who was on the junior national team, Justin Merta, who was on Team BC, and Simon Lidster, who was on Team Alberta. There have also been some strong college additions in Craig Proudfoot from Grant MacEwan and Tim Gourlay from Red Deer College. Danyluk has also recruited two players from Norway to vie for a starting spot on the roster. He says that while his team is young, they still have strong volleyball backgrounds.

"I really like the potential that our team has, and there are lots of guys that are young guys but are good players and have good upsides," he said. "I'm really looking forward to the season. It's a different group of guys but it's a group that leaves me very excited."

The exhibition matches against the Spartans will go today and Friday in Langley, both at 5pm.

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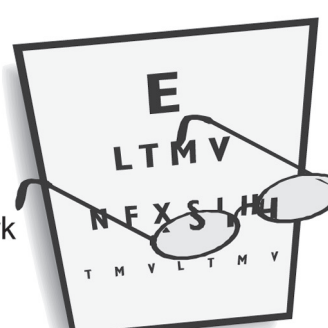
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