



FILE PHOTO: PETE YEE

KEEP AWAY Alix Strap (white) and her Pandas teammates have a tough battle for position Saturday in Calgary.

Soccer Pandas take on Dinos in battle for second

Weekend series against Calgary, Lethbridge could alter Canada West standings

PAUL OWEN
Sports Editor

Halfway through the season might be too early to start watching the standings, but a battle for second place this weekend in Calgary has the Pandas soccer squad counting up the points.

"I always watch the standings," head coach Liz Jepsen said with a laugh. "But for us it's really important to not look past our next game because when you do that, you tend to lose focus."

The Dinos (5-1-2) enter the contest without a loss, since falling to Alberta at Foote, and in the midst of a seven-game homestand. The Calgarians currently sit only one point back of their northern foes. This will be the third meeting of the two squads this year; Alberta beat the Dinos 1-0 on the pitch at Foote Field on 10 September and in exhibition play in August. Both contests were closer than expected for Jepsen.

"The first time we saw [Calgary], I thought we had a lot of opportunities to finish, but I didn't really anticipate Calgary to be as tough as they are," she said.

In addition to often matching up in CIS competition, the players of both squads frequently meet while playing club soccer during the off-season,

creating a familiarity that Jepsen believes will be a factor.

"You have to be that much sharper on the day of [the game]," she said. "You have a good idea of what your opponent is trying to execute, and they know what you're trying to do, so it's whether or not you can win that battle."

"[Losing to UVic] was a good lesson, so we'll be able to carry that through and have a little fresh pinch for what it feels like to not necessarily achieve that goal."

LIZ JEPSEN,
PANDAS HEAD COACH

This will be the second straight weekend series that sees the Pandas in a battle for positioning in the tightly packed Canada West leaderboard; Alberta hosted Victoria in a battle for first place. The loss to the undefeated Vikes dropped them to 6-2-0 on the

season and proved that they could play well and still lose.

"We played UVic and we were battling them for first place and battling them for a higher ranking, and we didn't come out on top. [Losing to UVic] was a good lesson, so we'll be able to carry that through and have a little fresh pinch for what it feels like to not necessarily achieve that goal," Jepsen said.

After their game against the Dinos, the Pandas have a short trek down highways two and three to Lethbridge to take on the Pronghorns for the third time this year. The Pandas downed them 4-0 in exhibition play in Lethbridge and shut them out again, 1-0, when they hosted them to start the regular season. Still the Pronghorns' 1-7-0 record belies the dangerous team, according to Jepsen.

"They're having a few more struggles in the season—that makes them unpredictable. We have to come and be focused because they can be rip-roarin' and ready to go and say, 'We've got to bear down in the second half and do better,' or they can be a defeated team," she said.

The Pandas take on Calgary at 12pm and face Lethbridge at the same time the next day.

Sidney Crosby in a Winnipeg Jets jersey?



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