

# Tough D key for soccer Bears against Dinos, 'Horns

PAUL OWEN  
Sports Editor

The last time the Golden Bears soccer team took on the Lethbridge Pronghorns, the 'Horns scored late to force a tie. The Bears have only given up four goals in their seven games since, posting four shutouts and boasting one of the top defences in the conference. While their offence has rounded into form over the past couple of weeks, the second-ranked Bears will still be relying on a strong defensive effort when they visit Calgary and Lethbridge this weekend.

"The first goal was to get organized defensively because, philosophically, if you work to keep the other team from scoring, you're always going to be in it with a chance," Bears head coach Len Vickery explained. "It's always a little bit more difficult to get your attacking play organized. It takes a little bit longer to put it together, for players to get used to each other and to bring every attacking strength to the forefront."

With fifth-year midfielder Hilaire Kamdem missing games early in the season and more long-term injuries to defender Mike Kennedy and keeper Devon Fraser, Alberta (5-0-3) has had to find alternate sources to hold their back line.

"Dan Gusberti has stepped in [for Fraser] and played exceptionally well. Mike Kennedy has been out for some time, but we've had a number first-year players able to step in and show that they are able to play at this level—most notably Harman Braich and Eddy Sidra," Vickery said.

Gusberti has been a very bright spot, starting on short notice in the season opener and playing every game thus far. Gusberti is tops in the conference amongst goalies with more than four



FILE PHOTO: LAUREN STIEGLITZ

**TRIPPED UP** Maybe the other team's mistakes have had something to do with the Bears' outstanding defence this season. Or maybe the Bears are just real good.

games played in goals against average, 0.62, and save percentage, .872. Gusberti has had some help in posting those lofty numbers as he's faced only 39 shots, third-lowest in the conference behind only UBC and TWU.

"We've got two very good sweepers: Quenton Zalazar and Jarin Myskiw—they're interchangeable. They can both play the position as well as play a defensive midfield role. We've got exceptional goalkeeping with [Gusberti] right now," Vickery said of his defensive set-up. "We've got two centre-backs who are particularly tough and win most of their aerial and

ground challenges. We've got a little bit of speed on the flanks, whether it be Hilaire Kamdem on the left, Eddy Sidra on the right or Mike Kennedy, hopefully in the future [when he returns from injury]."

When the Pronghorns visited Edmonton early in September, Matt Hillen scored with only a minute left to tie the Bears 1-1. The Bears would recover from the letdown to defeat the Dinos 1-0 the next day. This time around, without home-field advantage, Vickery figures the games to be even more tightly contested.

"Calgary have demonstrated already

that they are a contender this year. That's going to be an extremely tough game for us," he said. "We just hope that we can build on [our win over them earlier in the year] and get the job done Saturday, and take that momentum into the game on Sunday because Lethbridge has also demonstrated that they can get good results against the better teams."

With a pair of tough road games on the horizon, Vickery noted that the Golden Bears' defensive system would need to bail them out and give them more opportunities at the other end of the pitch.

"We have to ensure that we defend collectively as a unit," he said. "We have strong defenders in the key positions, and they are organized so that the other team will find it difficult to penetrate and score against us. That becomes the platform to all our attacking play: if we can win the ball back quickly and efficiently, we'll have more time with the ball. I think we've seen that with the goals we've scored recently."

The Bears take on the Dinos at 2pm on Saturday in Calgary and the Pronghorns at the same time on Sunday, in Lethbridge.



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