



FILE PHOTO: PETE YEE

**SQUEEZING BY** Alberta's Trish Ariss (dark) will be counted on to be an inside presence against UCFV and TRU.

## Panda hoopsters prepared for season tip-off versus BC foes

CIS newcomers UCFV and Thompson Rivers open the season in the Main Gym

JANELLE SLOYCHUK  
Sports Writer

With a lot to prove after opening the season ranked ninth in the country, the Pandas basketball team kicks off their regular season play by hosting the Thompson Rivers University Wolfpack and University College of the Fraser Valley Cascades this weekend.

The Pandas are led by a maturing bunch of third-years, many of whom have seen significant playing time as starters over their first two seasons with the team. But despite the team's maturation, interim head coach Scott Edwards is careful to acknowledge Alberta's deficient characteristics.

"We're certainly not a big team—that's a weakness we have, and just learning how to win big basketball games has been a problem for us," Edwards said. "We're just working on our composure and learning how to play every possession like it's the last possession in a game."

While height should be a non-factor against the Wolfpack, a team that boasts only two six-footers, the Cascades present an entirely different problem. In their first season in CIS play, coming over from the British Columbia College Athletic Association, the Fraser Valley lineup consists of ten returning players, including all of last season's starters.

UCFV's Heather Boer, a 6'2" forward who averaged 6.8 rebounds per

game last season, and Michelle Buhler who led the BCCAA in scoring with 15.7 point per game, should also offer a challenge for the Pandas.

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**SCOTT EDWARDS,  
PANDAS HEAD COACH**

"I know [Thompson Rivers is] going to come ready to play," Edwards said. "They've got a new coach who I know is an excellent coach out of BC and they'll play a high tempo of basketball."

Last season, their first in CIS play, TRU finished last in the Pacific division while Alberta earned their first playoff berth since 2002/03. Since Alberta is at the opposite end of the spectrum from their weekend opponents—the Pandas are a dark-horse contender for the national title while TRU and UCFV are just hoping to be competitive—the Pandas may be focusing more on their own game than that of their opponents.

"We've got to go in with no expectations, play our game and not worry about our opponent," third-year point guard Ashley Wigg said. "[Our weakness] would just be our inconsistency right now, but it's the beginning of the season and it's coming along already."

Wigg has every reason to be optimistic. Last season she was fourth in the country in assists and steals in leading the Pandas to the post-season. After having spent the past two years learning from the veterans and showing immaturity at times, Wigg and her fellow third-years now find themselves the veterans and being relied upon to tutor the eight new Pandas on the team this season.

"I wouldn't say that our age is a weakness, I would say it's one of our strengths," Wigg said. "We're coming together really quick; we have a lot of young bodies that people don't know about."

"We can be a really athletic, entertaining team to watch," Edwards said of his youthful lineup that features only two players above their third year. "We really push the ball. We play good high-tempo basketball defensively, and I'm excited about where we can get to this year with our athleticism."

TRU gets first dibs on the Pandas at 6pm on Friday, while UCFV will draw the Albertans in their second CIS game on Saturday at the same time. Both games go in the Main Gym.

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