

Pandas to defend McCrae Cup in field hockey finals

DAN PLOUFFE
CUP Sports Bureau Chief

MONTRÉAL (CUP)—The University of British Columbia Thunderbirds will look to become just the second host team in the past 13 years to capture the CIS field hockey national championship on their home field when they welcome the four other best clubs in Canada from 2–5 November in Vancouver.

The hometown jinx bit the Thunderbirds last year when they lost in the national final to the tenth shooter—the University of Alberta's Niki Baumann—in penalty strokes after the teams played to a 1–1 tie in regulation.

The University of Victoria Vikes were the last host to win in 2000, and will seek their record eleventh championship this weekend after missing last year's tournament for the first time since it began in 1979. The Toronto Varsity Blues cruise into town with an undefeated record in Ontario play, while their cross-town rivals, the York Lions, will join them.

The 2006 tournament reunites the five programs in the country that have traditionally been the strongest, with Alberta, the defending champions, being the least experienced of the bunch in only their twelfth nationals appearance.

The teams will play each other in a round-robin tournament from Thursday to Saturday, with Sunday reserved for the medal matches.

UBC Thunderbirds

Seed: First
Conference: CW
2006 record: 5-1-3
Playoffs: 1-0-1
Nationals trip: 23rd
Medals: 9 gold, 5 silver, 4 bronze

The reigning CIS silver medallists, the UBC Thunderbirds (6-1-4), have high expectations as they make their final preparations for this weekend's tournament. Led by Canada West Player of the Year Christine De Pape, the conference champions enter the tournament with only one loss on the season, a 1–0 setback to UVic on 15 October, which they promptly avenged one week later in the Canada West final.

With only nine goals allowed over the course of eleven games this year, strong defence will continue to be the T-Birds' trademark as they welcome the opposition to Wright Field.

—Boris Korby, the *Ubysses*

Toronto Varsity Blues

Seed: Second
Conference: OUA
2006 record: 12-0-2
Playoffs: 2-0
Nationals trip: 23rd
Medals: 7 gold, 3 silver, 6 bronze

The Toronto Varsity Blues cruised to a 12-0-2 regular season record, outscoring their Ontario opponents by a 62–5 margin. Cailie O'Hara and Amanda Treacy led the conference champs' offence with twelve goals apiece, while defender Malinda Hapuarachchi and goalkeeper Sarah Goertzen are a force on the back end. The Varsity Blues are the only eastern team to ever have won a CIS title, but haven't done so since 1996.

—Dan Plouffe, CUP Sports Bureau Chief

Victoria Vikes

Seed: Third
Conference: CW
2006 record: 6-0-3
Playoffs: 1-1
Nationals trip: 25th
Medals: 10 gold, 7 silver, 5 bronze

UVic (7-1-3) just may be the favourites heading into the championships, despite being seeded third. The team outscored their Canada West opponents 25–6 this season, only losing once. Unfortunately for the islanders, that 2–0 loss came in the conference championship game against UBC.

The Vikes will be eager to prove they can win when it counts at the nationals, and will be looking for big goals from Canada West's leading goal scorer and Rookie of the Year, Robyn Pendleton. Opponents will need to beat goaltender Danielle Wilson if they want to win, which won't be easy—she posted a regular season goals-against-average of 0.57.

—David Karp, the *Martlet*

Alberta Pandas

Seed: Fourth
Conference: CW
2006 record: 3-4-2
Playoffs: 0-1-1
Nationals trip: twelfth
Medals: 1 gold, 1 silver, 5 bronze

After a 3-5-3 season that made them look like anything but the defending national champions, the University of Alberta Pandas will be out to prove their banner wasn't a fluke at nationals. All three victories on the season came against the Calgary Dinosaurs, the



FILE PHOTO: JACOB EDENLOFF

ONE OF THESE DOESN'T BELONG The Pandas hope to turn a corner on their season as they defend their national title.

doormats of the four-team Canada West conference, and Alberta managed only a 0-2-2 record against UBC and was 0-3-1 against Victoria.

In search of a repeat, the Pandas are led by third-year midfielder Erin Mason, who scored five goals in Canada West conference play, and fifth-year goaltender Sarah Houlihan—the hero of last year's championship run.

Head coach Carla Somerville was once again named Canada West Coach of the Year for the third-straight time, and Houlihan won the Gail Wilson Outstanding Contributor

award. Mason and Davinder Bal were named to the all-Conference team. It's Mason's second consecutive appearance on the list.

—Paul Owen, the *Gateway*

York Lions

Seed: Fifth
Conference: OUA
2006 record: 10-2-2
Playoffs: 1-1
Nationals trip: 20th
Medals: 5 silver, 2 bronze

The York Lions (11-3-2) have been on

fire this year, dropping just two regular-season games. Despite this enviable streak, they were unable to defeat their nemesis, the Toronto Varsity Blues, to whom the Lions lost 1–0 in the Ontario University Athletics final. York's first game at nationals will be a rematch against their cross-town rivals.

The Lions took full advantage of playing at home for the OUA championships when they handled Guelph in the semifinals by a 3–0 score to secure a berth in the national championships in Vancouver.

—Precious Yutangco, *Excalibur*

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