

WHO'S WHO IN CIS SOCCER

Compiled by Dan Plouffe, CUP Sports Bureau Chief

Alberta Golden Bears

National ranking: First
Conference: CW
2006 record: 9-0-5
Playoffs: 0-2
Nationals trip: eleventh
Medals: three gold, six silver, one bronze

Montréal Carabins

National ranking: Second
Conference: QSSF
2006 record: 9-0-3
Playoffs: 2-0
Nationals trip: fourth
Medals: one bronze

Toronto Varsity Blues

National ranking: Seventh
Conference: OUA
2006 record: 8-3-3
Playoffs: 3-1
Nationals trip: ninth
Medals: one gold, one silver, one bronze

Western Ontario Mustangs

National ranking: Ninth
Conference: OUA
2006 record: 9-2-3
Playoffs: 3-0
Nationals trip: ninth
Medals: one gold, two silver, one bronze

New Brunswick Varsity Reds

National ranking: Not ranked
Conference: AUS
2006 record: 7-3-3
Playoffs: 3-0
Nationals trip: fifth
Medals: one gold

Laval Rouge et Or

National ranking: Not ranked
Conference: QSSF
2006 record: 5-1-6
Playoffs: 1-1
Nationals trip: second
Medals: none

St. Mary's Huskies

National ranking: Not ranked
Conference: AUS
2006 record: 7-3-3
Playoffs: 2-1
Nationals trip: tenth
Medals: four silver, two bronze

Trinity Western Spartans

National ranking: Not ranked
Conference: CW
2006 record: 7-5-2
Playoffs: 2-0
Nationals trip: second
Medals: one bronze

CIS Final Top Ten

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| 1) Alberta | 6) Queen's |
| 2) Montréal | 7) Toronto |
| 3) Brock | 8) Calgary |
| 4) UBC | 9) Western |
| 5) Cape Breton | 10) UPEI |

Bears look for soccer redemption

National hosts out to prove that pair of playoff losses—and not their unbeaten season—were the fluke



FILE PHOTO: NICK WIEBE

GETTING THEIR KICKS IN The Bears will be looking to put it past their competition as they host the CIS men's soccer national championships this weekend.

ROSS PRUSAKOWSKI
Sports Staff

A week ago the Golden Bears soccer team was on top as the only undefeated team in Canada West, ranked first in the nation and looked confident and poised to capture their first CIS National title in three years. Just seven days, two decisive defeats and a disappointing fourth-place finish at the Canada West finals later, that slightly overconfident Alberta team has been replaced.

In their place sits a Bears squad trying to regroup after its first big dose of adversity all season and trying to once again find its offence. Meanwhile, the team welcomes the best of the Canadian university soccer world to campus this weekend for the CIS Championship tournament. Alberta head coach Len Vickery believes that the teams 9-0-5 regular season record masks just how mentally tough and resilient the team has been all year long.

"It wasn't as if we went through the season without any trouble," Vickery

said. "We had some truly competitive games throughout the Canada West, that's why it makes it quite remarkable that we went undefeated through a 14-game schedule when, at the time, three of the other [Canada West] teams were nationally ranked. It wasn't [a season] without its problems and challenges."

While Alberta may have had some difficult contests in arguably the toughest conference in CIS soccer, the twin defeats last weekend at the hands of the University of British Columbia and the eventual Canada West Champions, Trinity Western University, exposed some problems in the Bears offensive game. For the first time in three games against TWU, the Bears were held off the score sheet, and they failed to convert key chances against UBC.

"We've always created the offensive opportunities this year, but at times our finishing hasn't been there, there's no question," Vickery admitted. "While the defence can keep you in a game, it's your attacking play that's going to win you the game."

While they may have had the luxury of being able to look ahead last weekend knowing they were guaranteed a spot in nationals, the Bears won't get that opportunity this time around; the CIS tournament is a single elimination contest. With the transition away from the round-robin format previously used to decide the CIS finalists, every team has the potential to be upset this weekend, something Vickery thinks makes it hard to choose a favourite coming into the tournament.

"We saw a very good Trinity Western squad at the Canada West championships and they could be a factor, Montréal is now the only undefeated team, and they've been to the national championships in each of the last few years," Vickery said. "But they're up against a very strong University of Toronto squad, so there will not be an easy game for anyone at this national championship and ... [with the change in format] even a lesser light might be able to cause an upset."

The Bears won't have the luxury

of about facing a weaker team when they open the tournament today against the Ontario University Athletics champions the University of Western Ontario Mustangs. With an offence paced by CIS leading scorer Jason De Thomas and a perfect 3-0 playoff record, Western Ontario will provide a tough challenge for the hosts.

"Western's got a strong history in the CIS National Championships, much the same as we do," Vickery noted.

For Alberta to win the game they'll have to wind back the clock a week and rediscover the same confidence and execution that led them atop the Canada West in the regular season, ignore the weather and embrace the pressures of trying to capture a championship on their home field.

"There's a little bit of pressure, as there is for every player and every team at the tournament this weekend because of the challenge of the competition," Vickery said. "But to balance that off, we're more familiar in our own surroundings."

BEAR BITES

- Golden Bears head coach Len Vickery was named Canada West Coach of the Year this season for his part in guiding the Bears to a 9-0-5 regular season record.

- Joining Vickery in collecting conference hardware this season was second-year midfielder Junior Castrillion-Rendon. His eight goals, good for tops in the conference, and three assists helped earn him the Canada West MVP.

- Defender Eric Kuhn joined Castrillion-Rendon on the first-team conference

all-star team, while teammates Mark Korthuis, John Konye and first-year Harman Braich all wound up on the second-team.

- Alberta wasn't the only team in this tournament to bring home some serious conference hardware. Canada West champions Trinity Western placed two athletes—Diaz Kambere and Nicola Perugini—on the top all-star team and a third—Stefan Leslie—on the second team. Leslie took home Rookie of the Year honours, and teammate Perugini took home the Student-Athlete Award.

- Saint Mary's players Eduardo Farias and Perry Harvey, along with UNB defender Ryan Slaney are representing the AUS all-conference team. The AUS awards were dominated by the Cape Breton Capers, who were upset in the conference semifinals.

- Western's Jason De Thomas enters the tournament as the CIS leading scorer with nine goals. Montréal's Boubacar Coulibaly tied for the lead in the QSSF with seven goals, and Hugh Mosher from SMU finished second in AUS scoring with eight goals.

SCHEDULE

Thursday November 9, 2006

- A) 10am TWU vs SMU, Clarke
- B) 10am Montreal vs Toronto, Foote
- C) 1pm UNB vs Laval, Clarke
- D) 1pm Western vs Alberta, Foote

Friday November 10, 2006

- 10am Loser A vs Loser B, Clarke
- 10am Loser C vs Loser D, Foote
- 1pm Winner A vs Winner B, Clarke
- 1pm Winner C vs Winner D, Foote

Saturday November 11, 2006

- 1pm 5th Place Game, Foote

Sunday November 12, 2006

- 10am Bronze Medal Game, Foote
- 1pm Gold Medal Game, Foote