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**Wesmen pose first test for Bears**

ANDREW RENFREE  
Sports Staff

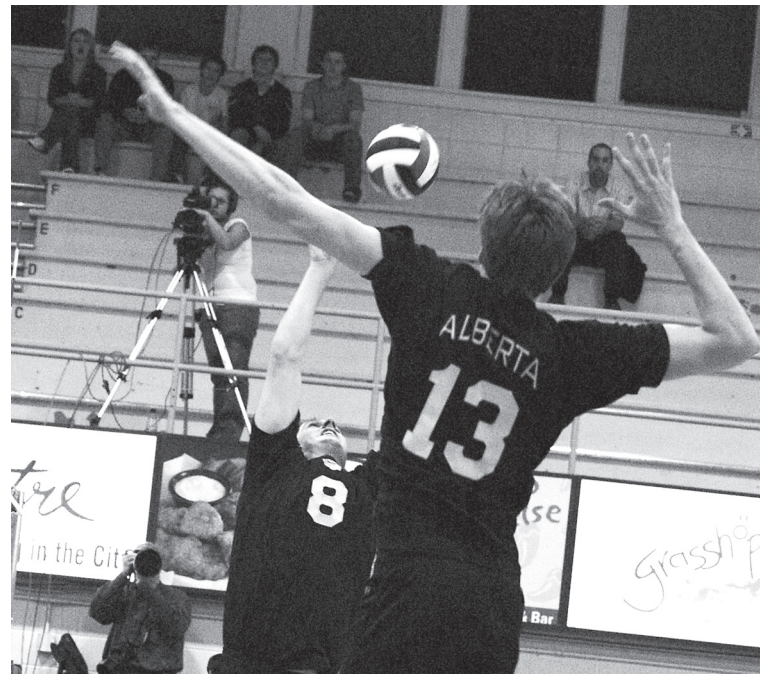
While university has been in session for more than two months now, the Bears volleyball team has yet to have a real test. Their toughest competition has come in pre-season tilts, and Alberta's first four games against Brandon and Regina, schools that aren't known for their volleyball prowess, were more like pop-quizzes for the perennially strong Golden Bears squad. However, two matches against the Winnipeg Wesmen this weekend will be the first real exam for the Bears in the 2006/07 volleyball campaign.

"The games against Brandon we executed very well but they didn't all of the time, so it can be a challenge to play well against teams that don't really push you," Bears head coach Terry Danyluk said of Alberta's early contests. "I thought we got complacent last weekend [against Regina] so I don't think [our first regular season games] were a true test."

This weekend's contests will be a battle of two undefeated teams. Alberta, ranked second in CIS, hasn't lost a set in the regular season and comes in with an overall record of 12-2. Winnipeg also boasts an impressive overall record of 11-3, and is undefeated in the regular season after beating solid clubs in Manitoba and UBC early on to earn themselves a third-place ranking in the country.

"Winnipeg is very well coached and I think they're a scrappy team," Danyluk said. "They're a team that returned pretty much their entire lineup from last year so it's a team with a lot of continuity and one of the top-ranked teams in the country—I think this will be our first true test of the year."

While Winnipeg fronts a veteran squad this year, Alberta hasn't had



FILEPHOTO: ANDREW RURAK

**NEED A CHALLENGE** The Bears haven't faced a tough team this season.

that advantage with the loss of five graduating players and two veterans to the national team. Typically this would signal a year of rebuilding while the team members learned to gel as a unit, but Danyluk noted that his team's early cohesiveness has surprised critics.

"I'm sure there probably are some people who are surprised [that we've been playing well so far] but the quality of athletes we've had return and the ones that came into the program are good guys," Danyluk said. "Maybe how well we're playing together at this stage has surprised some people because I think we've been clicking pretty well, and that might be the biggest surprise: that it's happened as fast as it has."

Winnipeg might also view these matches this weekend as a way to prove that they belong amongst the top volleyball squads in Canada West.

Over the last three seasons the Wesmen have steadily improved—posting a combined record of 28-32 since the 2003/04 season. Winnipeg was ranked as high as third in Canada last year and tenth at the end of the regular season, but they had always been in the shadow of other strong Canada West teams, like Alberta and Trinity Western, who've dominated the court for several years. This year may mark the first time the Wesmen are a legitimate threat.

"I think Winnipeg is one of the best teams in the country this year so I would say that they will be competing for the Canada West title this year, for sure," Danyluk said. "There's a lot of teams that are good in Canada West and there's not a lot of separation so [Winnipeg] is definitely a contender."

The matches begin at 6:30pm Friday and 8pm Saturday in the Main Gym.

**Cross-country teams hope to break away from field at Nationals**

NICK FROST  
Sports Staff

It's been a long, arduous road for both the Bears and Pandas cross-country teams this year, but with the CIS championships looming, the team is looking to put a positive spin on the ending of what has been a season otherwise filled with negatives.

Having started the season without many of the veterans from last year's team, and uncertainty about a good number of rookies, it seemed that this team may not be as capable of putting up the kind of results as some of its predecessors (the men's team has medalled or threatened to in four of the past six years). If that weren't enough, the team has been decimated by injuries this season.

"Injuries have made our team weaker this year," Reed explained. "We lost some key members of our program to injuries that couldn't be helped—not to training injuries, but freak injuries. Terra Manca probably would've been our second-fastest [woman] runner, and maybe would've even challenged for first, but she ended up with a stress fracture in her ankle. And then, Mike Metcalfe, who has always been in our top-three [men], has had some real bad problems with his ankles this year. He's still going to go to the CIS Championships, but it'll be a gutsy performance—one of those things

that's mind over matter."

However, despite being plagued with significant injuries throughout the season, on top of everything else, both the Bears and Pandas squads managed to stay extremely focused and have looked to the remainder of their runners to pick up the slack. Ian Manyfingers won the University of Regina Cougar Trot Open and fourth at a meet in Saskatoon this year while establishing himself as the top Bear this season.

"Ian Manyfingers had been incredible this year. He's been inspiring for the whole team and he's just been running like a man with a mission. This is his last year, and I think his mandate is being able to go out there and definitely be an All-Canadian, but maybe even try to win the whole thing," Reed explained.

On the women's side, Laura Wilson, a transfer from McGill, has provided experience for a young squad.

"Laura Wilson has come into our program and become a really great leader," Reed said. "This is her fifth year, too, so it'll be great to see her put on a good show and maybe even beat some of her old McGill teammates."

The tenacity of both of Alberta's teams will be put to the test at this Saturday's CIS championships. Both the Bears and Pandas teams are excited, though, at the prospect of going in with something to prove—that they are still one of the better teams in the

country and that they aren't that easily hampered.

"They're all really positive and really excited," Reed said. "To be able to go out to Québec City and even be a little bit of an underdog is a good feeling. People haven't really picked us to do much this year; whereas, in years past, people have been gunning for our guys and nobody's given our Pandas team much respect. I think that, this year, we've got one of the strongest Pandas teams that we've had in, probably, four or five years, and our guys team is still really strong."

As far as stacking up against the competition, Alberta believes they should be a formidable opponent to their eastern rivals because while the teams from out East still pose a threat to finish in the top three, they may not be as much of a force as they have been in years past.

"Guelph is a powerhouse this year, and has been a powerhouse for the last couple of years. With a lot of the eastern teams, though, some are up and some are down. It's one of those years where the strong teams, like Windsor, are having kind of an off-year, whereas they had been dominant for the last four or five years. So, it'll be nice to see ourselves maybe a little more competitive with them," Reed said.

The CIS Championships run this Saturday at the Université Laval in Sainte-Foy, Québec.

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