



ANDREW RURAK

UNMASKED Holly Tartleton (above) and Danielle Bles have given the Pandas a top pair between the pipes.

Goalies give Pandas winning hand

Three queens up front and a pair of aces in the hole give Alberta a full house

TREVOR PHILLIPS
Sports Writer

With the oodles of offence the puck Pandas have produced this year, it's no surprise a majority of the spotlight has gone to their high scoring front three. But, from the shadows of the Pandas' goal, another set of talented ladies has emerged this year—rookie Dana Vinge, and veterans Danielle Bles and Holly Tarleton.

Together the trio has made Alberta the top team in goals against average (1.02), save percentage (.929) and second in the conference in shutouts (three). On top of that, the Alberta puck stoppers have done so while facing the least amount of rubber per game, which has made it difficult to maintain focus this season.

"It has been a constant work in progress, focus is always the focus," Tarleton explained. "If you take it just a minute at a time and try not to think of the game as a whole that seems to help the most."

Having three capable goalies on the roster has given head coach Howie

Draper a real advantage—one he thinks helps to spark the offence.

"When you have good goaltenders, the players in front of them are more willing and able to take risks that are necessary to be successful," he said. "I think that no matter who goes in net, that if something doesn't go our way and a chance is created going the other way we are confident they're going to stop it."

For the most part, Draper has rotated Bles and Tarleton in the two-game weekend format, giving each tender equal playing time so far. But both Bles and Tarleton think that pushing for the number one position has been a rewarding experience and helped their relationship rather than weakened it.

"We get along great," Bles confirmed confidently. "I mean it's a battle on the ice because we all want to play, but we are great off of it."

"Yeah, our relationship has been really good," Tarleton echoed. "We work together on the ice and go to class together—it's actually been really good. I like having two good goaltenders around to push me in

practice."

Not even the ongoing pursuit for statistical bragging rights has stepped in the way of their friendship.

"To tell you the truth [stats] don't even matter," said Tarleton, who leads the two in goals against average, save percentage and shutouts. "The outcome of the game is more important."

"Stats are more about bounces than performance," agreed Bles, who has more victories. "So, they aren't that important."

With the defensive-minded and suddenly hot UBC Thunderbirds making a stop at Clare Drake Arena, the Pandas net minders are probably not going to see very many shots again this weekend. On 13 and 14 October, Tarleton and Vinge needed to make only 20 saves combined to earn 6-0 and 6-1 victories respectively, but Tarleton isn't taking this scrappy team lightly.

"UBC is a team that builds up momentum by keeping the game close, so we want to focus on penetrating their defence and maintaining our focus on the backend," she said.

SPORTS SHORTS

Written by Paul Owen

Pandas Volleyball

In a scheduling quirk, the Pandas volleyball squad (6-0) will start their weekend series against the University of Saskatchewan Huskies (2-6) on Thursday night at 6:15pm and go Friday as well at 6:15pm, for a very early finish on their weekend road trip. Alberta will be looking to continue their undefeated season, while Saskatchewan will be hoping to get back in the playoff hunt coming off a sweep at the hands of UBC.

Bears Volleyball

With only one set loss in their 6-0 season, the Bears have been quite dominant once again this year. They will play the same unusual schedule that the women play, also in Saskatoon against the Huskies (4-4). It will be the last time the Bears see action before the Christmas break, when they will embark on a trip to Tampa Bay for the

CI South Invitational. The nicest thing about being a varsity athlete has to be the winter trips to warmer climates. It's almost enough to make me wish Steve Smith had succeeded in taking away their Legacy Fund three years ago. Their two games against the Huskies go Thursday and Friday at 8pm.

Bears Hockey

Coming off a weekend that saw them swept out of Saskatoon for the first time since 1990, the Bears (8-2-2) will be heading to the lower mainland for a pair of games against the UBC Thunderbirds (6-5-1) this weekend. The last time these teams met on 21/22 October resulted in an overtime loss for the Bears that snapped an impressively long winning streak against the T-Birds. The games will go at 7:30pm Friday and Saturday in the Burnaby Winter Club as UBC's hockey teams continue their travelling show while their arena is renovated for the coming Olympics.

Football

The CIS Championship, the PotashCorp Vanier Cup, will go this Saturday at the University of Saskatchewan, explaining

why the volleyball teams are playing there on Thursday instead of Saturday. The Laval Rouge et Or will take on the host Huskies in search of their fourth title in eight years, while Saskatchewan will be hoping not to lose their fourth Vanier Cup in the same time span. The two met in an epically sloppy match in the 2004 Vanier Cup in Hamilton, with Laval prevailing 7-1.

Track and Field

The U of A's track team will kick off the season by participating in the Last Chance Meet this weekend. It goes at 12pm on Sunday in the Butterdome and is the last meet for the kids in their particular age groupings, but doubles as the first meet of the year for senior and university athletes.

Shorts

Since Andrew Renfree couldn't understand that I only talk about underwear on Thursdays and whined about the lack of a haiku about them in the last issue, here's the Paul Owen underwear haiku:
The S logo rocks
As it adorns my crotch zone.
Makes me feel like Kent.