

Saskatoon happy hosts of first Western Vanier Cup

Sellout crowd watches Laval beat Sask in the cold

CHARES HAMILTON
The Sheaf

SASKATOON (SPECIAL TO CUP)—The University of Saskatchewan Huskies may have been defeated by the Laval Rouge et Or in Saturday's championship game, but that didn't stop Saskatoon from making football history.

"They promised us that they were going to turn this year's Vanier into a football festival, and they have done just that," said Michel Belanger, media and publications director for Canadian Interuniversity Sport. "It is going to be legacy for the University and for the city of Saskatoon."

This was the first time the Vanier Cup championship was played outside of Southern Ontario, and with the success of this weekend's event, there's a chance that the Cup will be seeing more of Canada in the near future.

"We are getting exactly what we were looking for in moving this event outside of the big cities," Belanger said.

Since its inception in 1965, the Vanier Cup was played exclusively in Toronto until it moved just down the highway to Hamilton for the 2004 and 2005 games. With the CIS already looking for ways to revitalize the Vanier profile, it was an attractive bid from the University of Saskatchewan in 2003 that convinced chief organizers to hold this year's event in Saskatoon.

"We've tried moving it outside of Toronto with okay success—now we knew it was time to move it outside of Ontario," Belanger said. "We saw an occasion. Here we have Saskatchewan, who is known to be the most football-crazy province—what better opportunity?"

Former Huskies athletic director Ross Wilson made the U of S bid for the championship and was instrumental in getting the championship to Saskatoon. He sees the city as the perfect place to hold an event like the Vanier.

"Our team has done so well over the years and Vanier is a well-known word in this city—it wasn't like it was going to be a tough sell for us," he said.

Comparing it to events like the Brier and even the Grey Cup, Wilson explains that Saskatoon is a prime location for the Vanier Cup because, unlike other larger cities such as Toronto, there are no pro teams or other large-scale events threatening to steal the spotlight.

In 2000, he was a member of a national task force that examined the way in which the CIS held its championships. They found that the championships would fare better if they were moved around the country, and

it was on this principle that he made the U of S bid for the Cup.

"We were critical of having it in Toronto," Wilson said. "We felt that the Vanier Cup was lost in a huge city with so many things to do. In our bid, we convinced them that it would be a festival, a three-day event, not just a football game."

It appears they have delivered what they promised. Despite freezing temperatures, the game unfolded before a capacity crowd of 12 567. That was far from a record, but it was less than a thousand off from average attendance at Vanier Cups in the past decade in Southern Ontario—mostly at the cavernous SkyDome.

"There have been larger crowds at Vanier," Wilson said, referring to the crowd of 32 000-plus that filled a little over half of SkyDome for a Saskatchewan-Western showdown in 1994, the first Vanier Cup held at what is now the Rogers Centre. "But for our size of community, this is great."

Outside of the gates, the town was abuzz with Vanier fever—there was no doubt that it was the biggest ticket in town.

There's also no doubt that the success of this year's Huskies football club helped bolster the event. But Wilson is confident the event would have been a success regardless of who was playing in the big game.

"We were already sold out before the football season started," he said. "Of course, if the Huskies weren't in it, I think we would [have] seen more empty seats."

It seems the only thing working against event organizers this year was the weather. On game day, there was a -30C wind-chill, and the weather did have an obvious effect on the low-scoring game.

But the full extent of the weather's effect is still unknown, and Belanger explained that his organization will need more time to properly evaluate the pros and cons of hosting the Vanier in a smaller, colder city like Saskatoon.

"We came here expecting colder weather," Belanger said. "But we will have to talk to some of coaches and see if what the trade-off really is."

Next year, the Vanier Cup is going back to Toronto to coincide with Grey Cup weekend, and the year after that to Hamilton's Ivor Wynne Stadium, but Wilson hopes the success of this year's Vanier encourages other smaller centres—like Québec City for the Rouge et Or—to host future events.

"There are lots of groups who are here seeing how we did it," he said. "I think this game will move around the country in the coming years."



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

EIGHT ISN'T ENOUGH Lindsay McAlpine (16) watches the puck slide towards the UBC net on Saturday night.

Hockey routs exhibit lack of parity in Canada West

ANDREW RENFREE
Sports Staff

UBC goalie Lisa Lafreniere allowed seven goals and was peppered with 30 shots in only the first period during Saturday's game against the Pandas hockey squad. Yet instead of sulking in her locker room stall after the game, Lafreniere distributed homemade cookies to teammates and joked about the one-sided game, which the Pandas went on to win 10-2.

Despite losing by eight goals, the upbeat attitude of the Thunderbirds isn't unfathomable when you consider how often Alberta blows out their opponent; though, the seven-goal explosion in the first period of Saturday's game was the most offence the high-scoring Pandas have generated in a single period this year.

"That was an outstanding period; I don't think you can get much better than that," Pandas head coach Howie Draper noted. "We were moving the puck, moving our feet, getting lots of shots and putting away the rebounds—it was all just falling in place."

Lafreniere, who was pulled from the game after the first period Saturday, explained that that first period was likely the toughest she's had as a CIS netminder.

"Thirty shots in a period is difficult considering you might normally face 30 shots in a whole game," Lafreniere said. "I thought our team showed a

lot of character to rebound from that and the first period wasn't to the point where it was bringing us down."

With the victory Saturday night, Alberta completed a weekend sweep of UBC after a 7-1 victory the previous night. The Pandas improved their regular season record to 11-1 and remain perched atop the Canada West standings, eight points ahead of the Regina Cougars. While Alberta proved their penchant for goals again last weekend, the 10-2 drubbing may bring accusations that the Pandas are out to embarrass their opponents. But Draper noted that his team has been high-scoring for many years and has never been accused as such.

"I've never heard any other team say that [we ran up a score]," Draper said. "Maybe the people who are sympathetic to the opposition [are concerned about it] but we can't stop playing simply because we're winning by a large amount. Down the road we're preparing for playoffs and we can't prepare for that if we're taking it easy on other teams."

Lafreniere, who took the brunt of the Pandas' offence, agreed with Draper's sentiments as did UBC head coach Dave Newson.

"They've got to play their game," Newson added.

More concerning than Alberta being on the winning side of some one-sided games this year is that there seems to be less parity in Canada West

this season than there was last year. In 2004/05 it was common for the Pandas to beat their opponents by eight or nine goals, but last season the league was much more competitive. Newson voiced his concern about the lack of balance this season, and mentioned it's a challenge Canada West hockey has to resolve.

"[The disparity is a] credit to Alberta's program," Newson said. "Obviously it's not good when there's that kind of disparity, but we want teams like ourselves, and the other teams in the league, to catch up, but we don't want [Alberta] to fall back because that's not good for the sport or the conference."

He suggests Canada West should focus on preventing the best female hockey players from leaving the country to play south of the border in the NCAA.

"They've got to look to better ways to keep the top players in Canada, whether it's scholarships or those types of things," Newson said. "Alberta has demonstrated an ability to keep local talent in the area and other schools need to do that as well."

Draper also pointed out that the competition has improved since women's hockey first started.

"Our league every year gets a little bit closer, and I certainly think things will continue that way," Draper noted.

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