

Multi-pronged Pandas attack trying to stick 'Horns

PAUL OWEN
Sports Editor

If Pandas basketball head coach Scott Edwards had any doubts about his decision to spread the scoring amongst his players, they were erased with a pair of high-scoring affairs against the Calgary Dinos this weekend. Now, fifth-ranked Alberta (7-1) will look to run up their offensive totals again this weekend when they host the Lethbridge Pronghorns (1-7).

"We definitely think we can run against Lethbridge and try to get back to working on our transition game," Edwards said. "After scoring a boatload of points, I'm a little more comfortable with [scoring by committee]. That we've been doing it for seven straight weekends now makes it seem like [we'll be able to continue it]. They seem to want to pick each other up when the others aren't scoring."

Divisional foe Saskatchewan leads the conference with almost 84 points per game behind the duo of Sarah Crooks (24.1) and Ashley Dutchak (19.1), but the Pandas are sitting third with 80 per game despite not having a player average more than Trish Ariss' 12.5 points per game. According to Edwards, the choice to score by committee was a reflection of his coaching style.

"It's my personal philosophy. I don't like to coach teams where certain people have to score for us to be successful," he said. "I like the idea that we're going to give everyone the confidence to shoot the basketball, and they'll just do whatever it is that they do really well within the structure of the team offence and we'll give everyone the same green light to shoot the ball when they feel comfortable."



ANDREW RURAK

RUNNING BACK TO EDMONTON The Pandas have been able to put up a bunch of points by fast-breaking and spreading the points amongst all their players.

The strategy has paid off for the players as well, four of whom—Ariss, Kristin Jarock, Michelle Smith and Ashley Wigg—are averaging double figures in scoring. Wigg appreciates the style of play because it affords her many choices when directing the offence.

"It gives me all the options in the world. I don't have to rely on one person; I don't look to go to one person all the time. You can play freely and not be worried when the ball is in a certain person's hands," she said.

For Edwards, the biggest advantage it gives his team is their ability to surprise teams offensively.

"[It makes us] a tough team to scout and prepare for. Teams can't come in and say, 'We have to stop this player,' or, 'We have to stop their second option,' because options three, four and five are still scoring," he said.

"It's great. We get our [posts] both in and out; everyone gets a fair chance at every spot, every opportunity to get the ball. That's another reason why we

don't have one dominant scorer all the time—the cycle on our offence," Wigg added.

However, the downside to this style of play is what happens when the nets go cold, as they did in the Pandas 58-52 win over Regina on 17 November that saw them shoot .327 from the field.

"There's going to be a night where no one can shoot, and those nights we have to rely on our defence," Edwards explained. "It means there's that much more pressure on us to rebound every

shot and that we play tough and only give teams one opportunity to score."

If it comes down to a defensive struggle this weekend, Alberta could be in tight against the Pronghorns whose record, according to Edwards, belies a talented club.

"[They have] a great starting lineup, and they can compete with anyone. They're bigger than us inside, so we have to compete with that," he said.

The games go at 6pm Friday and Saturday in the Main Gym.



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