



FILE PHOTO: SHAHEED MENARI

**SPLITTING THE D** Tiffany Dodds (6) and the Pandas face their toughest task yet when they host Calgary this weekend.

## Spike Pandas, Dinos renew rivalry

Four consecutive playoff eliminations add hostility to provincial volleyballers

VERONICA DOLEMAN  
Sports Staff

Despite sitting atop the Canada West standings with an undefeated record, the Pandas volleyball team (8-0) has yet to face a true test this season: of the five other conference schools in this week's national top ten, only ninth-ranked Regina (1-5) has faced third-ranked Alberta so far this season. All that will change this weekend, however, when the Pandas play host to the second-ranked Calgary Dinos (6-2) in a pair of matches that should be anything but cordial.

"Calgary, our rival, [is] always a tough match for sure," Pandas setter Daryll Roper said. "It's the battle of Alberta; they want to beat us no matter what."

While the Pandas have had an impressive season so far, having lost only six sets on the year, Alberta head coach Laurie Eisler feels that they still have a lot of work to do.

"We're not perfect and we're not

there yet, thankfully, otherwise it would be a really long second half of the season," Eisler said. "We've risen to the challenges we've had to face so far in Canada West. [We] haven't always done it in a really resounding way, but it's been good enough to get the successes that we needed to position ourselves where we are right now."

Calgary, however, will offer an entirely different set of challenges for the Pandas. The rivalry between the two teams reached a boiling point in the last few seasons, which saw Alberta knock the Dinos out of the playoffs in 2005/06 after losing to their rivals in the 2004/05 Canada West championship game and the 2003/04 national gold medal match. The two teams also met for national bronze in 2002/03 with Alberta winning that match.

Eisler noted that this year's Calgary team is once again very talented and should matchup well against Alberta, providing a solid test for both clubs.

"They're a great team [with] really good athletes. [They] can go to [their]

bench and just keep pulling great athletes off of that bench. It's challenging from a preparation standpoint," Eisler said. "They have a lot of different things that they can bring [to the court]. We're really excited about playing a strong team."

While it's too early in the season to really affect the Pandas substantially, Eisler noted that this weekend's outcome will be important outside of the standings.

"It's like a measuring stick; it indicates where we're at right now," she said. "It would be awesome to have a couple more in the win column but at the same time it's really early. There's a lot of volleyball left, it's not going to ride on this weekend—although it will be a really good chance to see where we're at against a really strong team who will be at Nationals because they are hosting."

The Pandas will be playing the University of Calgary Dinos at 2pm on Saturday and Sunday in the Main Gym.

## SPORTS LONG JOHNS

Written by Paul Owen

### Pandas Hockey

The second-ranked Pandas (11-1-0) will board the bus to Lethbridge this weekend to take on the Pronghorns (3-8-1). Since Alberta won 8-1 and 9-0 when the two met in Clare Drake in October, I have a strong feeling that the Pandas will score more goals than the 'Horns have shots.

### Bears Volleyball

Also heading on the road will be the top-ranked Golden Bears volleyballers. The Bears gained the position after having spent the entire season in second when Trinity Western lost to Winnipeg. Of course, now the Bears (8-0) have to take on the toughest team they'll face in the first half: sixth-ranked Manitoba (4-3), and do so on the road.

### Ringette

The U of A ringette club is hosting a charity game this Friday at 7:45pm in

Clare Drake, with proceeds going to the Cross Cancer Institute. *Gateway* Opinion Editor Adam Gaumont will be participating on the celebrity team along with former Oiler Dave Hunter, the *Journal's* Scott Petersen and Cam Tait, the *Score's* Christy Chorley and Bob Stauffer, among others. Hopefully the Stauff does better than he did in the celebrity shootout at the Oilers Rookies game.

### Shorts

We're freezing, so we're all donning long-johns, some actually and some metaphorically. Happy Christmas everyone.

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