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GETTING A GOOD START The competition should be tough for the swimmers at the Canada West finals this weekend.

SPORTS SHORTS

by Nick Frost and Paul Owen

Track and Field

From 19-21 January, the Bears and Pandas track squads host the 33rd Annual Golden Bears and Pandas Open Track & Field Classic at the Universiade Pavilion. Along with our own U of A talent, between 750-1000 competitors from across Canada are expected to participate. Special guests are also pegged for the meet, including Canadian shot put champion Dylan Armstrong, US men's hammer champion James Parker, and Commonwealth Silver Medalist in men's hammer toss, Jim Steacy. Action gets underway on Friday at 5pm, Saturday at 9am and Sunday, also at 9am.

Swimming

Both the Bears and Pandas will look to make waves as they compete in the Canada West finals this weekend at the University of Calgary. Having already qualified twelve swimmers for Nationals, both sides will be looking to qualify more,

and maybe even bring home a medal or two while they're at it. The meet goes Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 10am.

Wrestling

On Friday and Saturday, the University of Alberta wrestling team will hit the mat at the Guelph Open. The Pandas side have recently seen disappointing results, and will be looking to improve, while the Bears side will look to have success similar to last Saturday's first-place team performance at the U of A Invitational. The rasslin' kicks off at noon on Friday and 10am on Saturday.

Pandas Basketball

The Pandas (11-3) travel to BC this weekend for their only matchups of the year against Simon Fraser on Friday and Trinity Western on Saturday. After splitting the last two weekend sets against Calgary and Winnipeg, the girls will look to get back to winning like they did at the beginning of the year, when they took nine of their first ten conference games. One player the Pandas will continue to look for contributions from is Kristin Jarock, who nabbed a game-high 22 points against the Bison last weekend. Both games tip off Friday and Saturday night at 7 pm in Burnaby and Langley, respectively.

Bears Basketball

The boys of the hardwood also take off for the lower mainland to take on TWU and SFU in a pair of games. Alberta (10-4) remains outside the CIS top-ten, but has received the most votes amongst the also-rans. This weekend will mark the first meeting of the year between the Bears and the Clan and Spartans, with the former playing host Friday at 9pm and the latter Saturday, also at 9pm.

Pandas Hockey

After a week off, the Pandas (15-1-0) head east to Saskatoon to take on the Huskies (5-12-1) in what should be a lopsided battle. If saying that jinxes them, then I'm sorry girls, but really, after the spanking you gave to the Huskies earlier in the season, we're all expecting it.

Shorts

Acting Managing Editor Natalie Climenhaga's panties match her shirt today in a glorious exhibition of clothing co-ordination. Here's hoping that she continues this trend as the Gateway staff jet off for Vancouver. We'd hate for her to embarrass us and look shoddy in front of the Ubysey. That job falls to Amanda Ash, who has washed her favourite underwear too often and frayed it.

Signing Beckham expands America's soccer galaxy



ANDREW RENFREE

When the news broke that Real Madrid soccer star David Beckham signed with the Los Angeles Galaxy, most people asked why a soccer team would waste \$250 million to convince an aging athlete to come play for their team. The media buzz has been persistent since the announcement, and most casual observers are shocked that Beckham is crossing the pond, but I can't help but think that I've seen this movie before and can predict the ending.

In 1972 Bobby Hull signed with the Winnipeg Jets of the newly formed World Hockey Association for \$1 million, which, at the time, had fans reacting in the same way people are today with Beckham's quarter-of-a-billion dollar payday. Hull's signing astounded everybody, but looking back, that monumental deal had very positive results for North American hockey. Several prominent players followed suit and left the NHL for the new league in response to Hull's defection. Also, four of the teams in the WHA eventually merged with the NHL in 1979—Edmonton, Québec, Winnipeg and Hartford—and went

on to win a combined eight Stanley Cups. Not bad for what was originally deemed a reject league. Hull was the poster-boy for the upstart league and his move, while shocking at the time, made for a more promising future of North American hockey. Beckham may have the same impact on North American soccer.

In only a week, Beckham has already generated more interest for Major League Soccer than the league had managed to generate in its first ten years of operation. As many sports pundits have said, Beckham's more than a player: his popularity beyond sports makes him a salesperson for soccer in the US, and he's been doing that very well his first week on the job. I say, what better salesperson than the most powerful marketing tool in all of sports? Furthermore, there will also be secondary buzz created from the Los Angeles celebrities who flock to rub shoulders with Beckham and his ex-Spice Girl wife. So far, Hollywood elite including Jennifer Lopez and Steven Spielberg have reportedly bought season tickets, and the LA Galaxy website encourages fans to "be a part of history" and get their own—surely the Galaxy will sell out every game this season. There will also be enough buzz around the league to generate significant ticket sales for the next few years.

However, there are many more critics than supporters of the Beckham deal. They argue that MLS was built upon a rigid salary structure (each

team has a salary cap of \$2 million, but they're allowed to sign one player for any amount) and that overspending will lead to demise in the league. The North American Soccer League (NASL) operated from 1968-1984 and folded because of overspending and low attendance. The Beckham deal is certainly overspending if I've ever seen it, but Beckham's celebrity could bolster league attendance enough to justify his \$250 million price tag.

Others argue that even the most famous footballers can't generate interest in American soccer. The NASL signed Brazilian soccer great Pelé in 1975 and while his arrival generated interest in the subsequent year, season ticket sales waned in the years following. But, while Pelé was considered the greatest soccer player of the day (and perhaps of all time) he still didn't have the celebrity status that Beckham does in the age of the Internet, mass advertising and 24/7 satellite sports coverage. Furthermore, Beckham is half of one of the world's most famous celebrity couples and his fame can increase interest in American soccer more than Pelé ever could in the '70s.

Only time will tell what will become of MLS, but I think that Beckham's arrival to the US will be more like Hull coming to Canada in '72 than Pelé going to the US in '75. One thing is for sure, though: David Beckham won't have to line up for welfare when he retires—even if he gives Posh a credit card.

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