



Cindy Klassen has a lot of hardware around her neck. You could be just as decorated—if you were a terrific speed skater. Chances are you aren't, but that's okay. Because those of us who can't do, write about it. So stop by Gateway sports meetings Tuesdays at 5pm. We can't guarantee you gold medals, but we can guarantee warm words and improved writing skills. And maybe some hugs.

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Pandas face TWU in battle for seeding in volleyball playoffs

NICK FROST
Sports Staff

As the Pandas volleyball team (14-4) heads into their last weekend of the season, playing against Trinity Western University (15-3), they can be assured of at least one thing: they will compete in the Canada West playoffs a week from tomorrow. However, it's still anyone's guess as to who Alberta will face, as none of the playoff seeds have been decided.

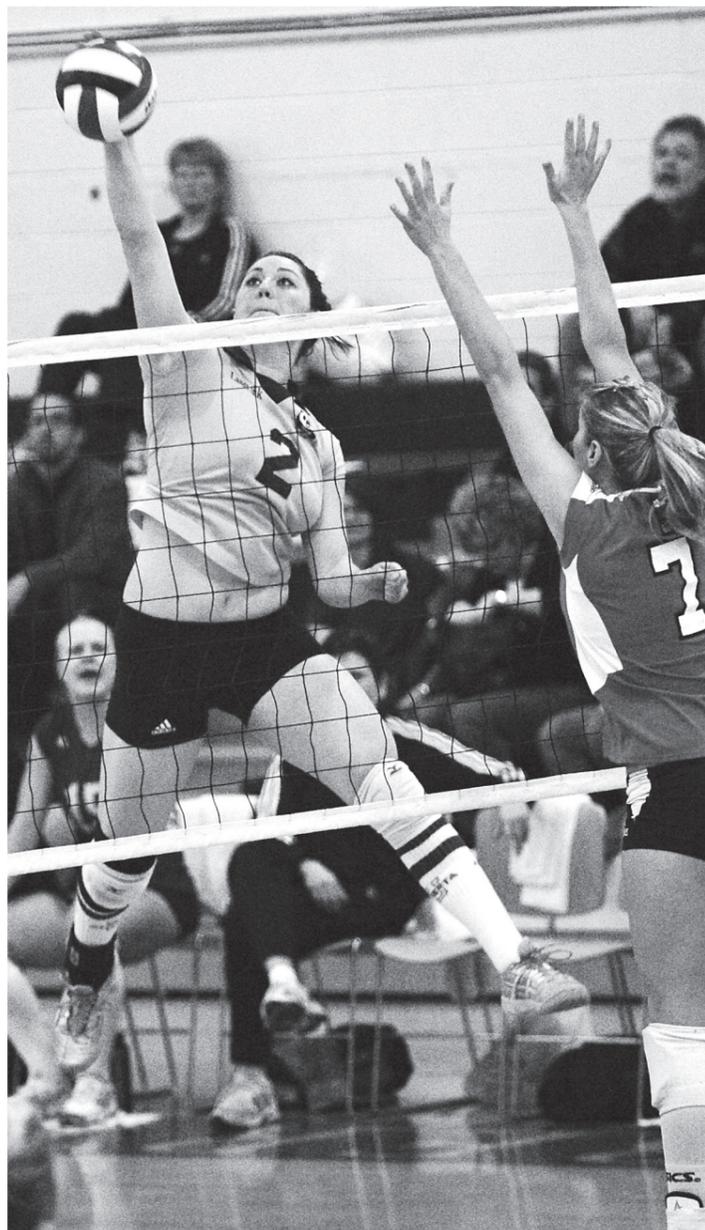
Just three wins separate the first-place Manitoba Bisons (16-2) from the fifth-place Calgary Dinos (13-5)—with TWU, the Pandas and UBC (14-6) in between. With a pair of wins, Alberta could finish tied atop the leaderboard with Manitoba, who would be ranked first, having won more sets against Alberta while splitting their four meetings this season. However, Alberta could just as easily lose both games and sit tied with UBC at the back of the pack.

Pandas head coach Laurie Eisler noted that, with the level of parity in Canada West, the standings were bound to be tight at the end of the season, and hopes that her team can capitalize on their last opportunity to put themselves in the best possible position going into the playoffs.

"[The playoff battle] puts more at stake than maybe we would've once thought," Eisler said. "That's partly because of the Calgary losses in early December—it's enabled us to be in a position where we are in control of our own destiny. As far as mindset goes, it doesn't add any more pressure or change the way we approach things; we've approached every match this year feeling like we needed to win, and we wanted to achieve the goals we set before us. For us, it's very consistent with our approach, and it's really exciting to know how much is on the line."

Perhaps the reason the importance of this weekend doesn't seem to phase the Pandas is because they're consistently playing as though every game carried the kind of pressure of a playoff game. Eisler explained that her team's been playing with a playoff mentality throughout the second half of the season, and welcomes the challenge that any team will present to them when the real postseason begins.

"We've shown [that we're] a team that really thrives under pressure, and we know, obviously, with the



FILE PHOTO: JOHANN BROWN

HARD-HITTING Jocelyn Blair (2) hopes that she can smack the ball very forcefully, and that doing so will put her team into the playoffs with a high seed.

playoffs that the pressure just mounts; it doesn't dissipate," she said. "Our team performs well under it, and we're not afraid of anyone. We've seen all of the teams in the West and there isn't really anyone to fear, but we respect all of them."

This weekend, Alberta faces a Spartans' team that's also jousting for position in the Canada West playoffs and, with two wins against the Pandas, could potentially finish in sole possession of first place, should Manitoba falter.

"They're a team that's very well balanced across the board, and there

aren't really any glaring weaknesses—you just have to try to match them punch for punch, and see who holds up at the end," Eisler said. "We're going to have to serve well, get them out of system and defend. They have a very good offence—one that works its way around the block pretty well, so backcourt will be critical. As well, their power-hitter Jodi Schaufele is very dynamic, so we should see a lot of balls."

The Pandas close out the regular season at the Main Gym on Friday night at 8pm, and Saturday night at 6:30pm.

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SPORTS SHORTS

by Paul Owen

Bears Basketball

The hardwood Bears (13-7) head south to Lethbridge for their final games of the season. One win over the bottom-dwelling Pronghorns (6-14) will secure top spot in the division for Alberta. Of course, should Saskatchewan (12-8) lose one to Calgary (10-10) this weekend, then Alberta will be guaranteed first, regardless of what they do.

Pandas Basketball

The ladies (14-6) also head to Lethbridge (3-17) for their final games of the season. The Pandas will need a sweep of the 'Horns and Saskatchewan (15-5) to lose

one game in Calgary against the Dinos (13-7) in order to take first place and receive a first-round playoff bye.

Pandas Hockey

The defending national champs (19-3-0) take to the ice against the UBC Thunderbirds (8-13-1) this weekend in Prince George, as the T-Birds continue to wait for their home facilities to finish being rebuilt/renovated. Prince George is a ponderous choice, as it puts UBC at a severe disadvantage: the travel from Edmonton is considerably shorter than it is from Vancouver. Also, the Prince George Coliseum is quite cavernous, and if the Pandas can't draw here, they certainly aren't going to be able to drag in fans in northern BC.

Wrestling

The wrestling teams will be crossing the border this week to partake in the Dave

Schultz International in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Schultz was a highly decorated American wrestler who died in 1996. He won gold in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. Sure those medals don't mean much because the Eastern Bloc boycotted, but it's still Olympic gold.

Track and Field

The runners and throwers and jumpers head to Regina this weekend for the Wheat City Invitational on Friday and Saturday. As with all teams who have to head to the Queen City, they have our sympathy.

Shorts

Amanda Ash's microfibre bikini-briefs sound like they were made at that new nanotech building. Of course, what cut they were spawned a five-minute debate as to how much ass must be shown in order to qualify as bikini briefs.