

# Red-hot hockey Pandas host Bisons in CW final

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Sports Writer

Currently on a four-game winning streak—a stint that has seen them score 26 goals, grab three shutouts and sweep through round one of the Canada West playoffs—the puck Pandas will host the Manitoba Bisons in the conference final this weekend in an attempt to continue their winning ways.

Though all four of those wins came against the lowly, but post-season capable, UBC Thunderbirds, when a team can put up those kinds of offensive numbers it's a sign that everyone is on the same page.

"I have loved our intensity the last couple of days, and everybody has been increasing their level of play," Pandas head coach Howie Draper said. "I like where we are right now and heading into this weekend."

This increased team play has allowed the Pandas to display a more balanced attack and take some of the load off their top line of Lindsay McAlpine, Jenna Barber and Tarin Podloski.

"I can't think of a single player [who we expect to stand out]; I think everyone is ready to go this weekend," MacAlpine said. "We've had a really high energy week, and everyone has slipped into their roles really nicely."

"I've seen really good things from

everybody," Draper added.

One of the strengths of this year's Alberta squad has been the collective way in which they approach each game, yet certain players do get to benefit from the dominating way in which the Pandas win. Goaltender Holly Tarleton is working on a shutout streak that has reached 145:59; she hasn't allowed a puck past the goal line since the 2nd period of a game on 9 February. Another player benefiting from the Pandas hot streak is MacAlpine, who picked up seven points (five goals and two assists) in the weekend rout of the T-Birds and first star nods in both games. Alberta hasn't lost a home game since a pre-season match against the Western Women's Hockey League's Calgary Oval Extreme on 23 September, 2005, and they've won the Canada West Conference Championship for five straight seasons. Despite these amazing feats in Conference play, the players still understand how important it is to focus on this weekend's matchup and not get caught up in the feats of the past.

"This is a huge weekend for us," MacAlpine said. "We would love to go to Nationals as Canada West Champions. We have won Canada West for six straight seasons, so it's important for us, and it's our first goal in winning a National Championship."

Also in Alberta's favour this weekend



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

**ROOFED** The Pandas have been scoring in bunches and getting it from unlikely sources, like Amanda Small (11).

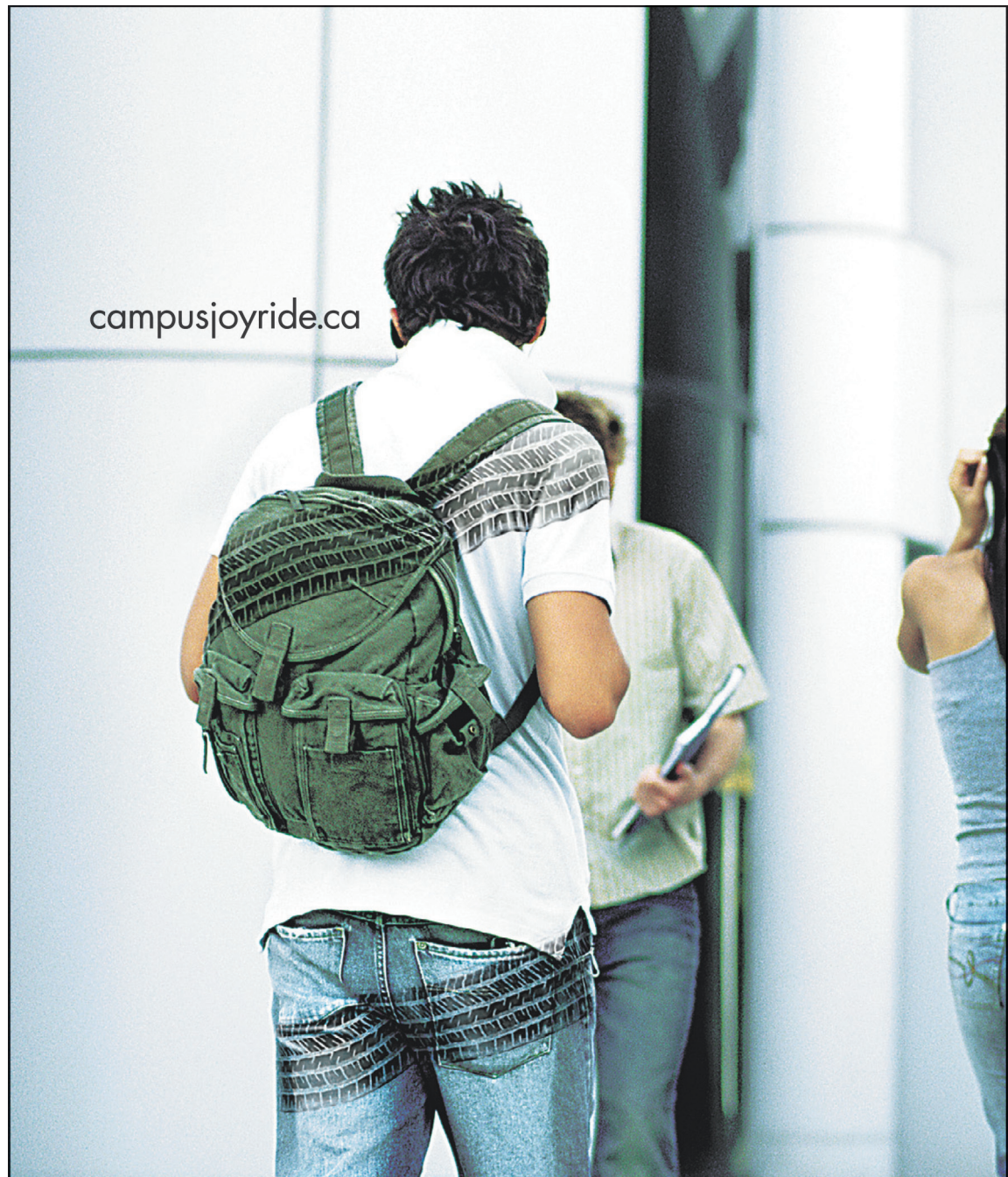
is a distinct home-ice advantage. Clare Drake Arena is an old facility, and the home team is treated much nicer than their opponents, who usually can't fit their entire team on the tiny visitors' bench. In addition, the ice conditions also play into the Pandas' hands.

"The rink guys are gonna hate me,


but the ice here is a little soft," Draper admitted. "But it helps us with our training, and I always thought, even as a player, that it made us quicker against our opponents when they came in here."

Even though the Pandas are already guaranteed a spot in the National

Championships, they will be looking to add another Conference banner to the crowded rafters at the Drake starting with the first game against Manitoba at 3pm on Friday afternoon. Game two will be at 3pm Saturday and the third game, if necessary, will be played at 3pm Sunday.



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