

## Bears falter again on National stage

For the second-straight year, Alberta come out flat on CIS volleyball's biggest stage and are left disappointed at the colour of the medals around their necks

ANDREW RENFREE  
Sports Staff

The Achilles heel for the Golden Bears volleyball team in 2007 ended up being the Winnipeg Wesmen. Eight days after beating Alberta in the bronze medal game of the Canada West play-offs, Winnipeg beat the Bears again in the gold medal game of the CIS Finals on Sunday to capture their first National Championship since 1998. It was the second year in a row that Alberta had to watch another team celebrate on the court at McMaster.

"The guys are still looking sad; they're a bit of a somber group now. They know they had an opportunity, and they're going to be disappointed about this for a while," Bears head coach Terry Danyluk said. "I think in a few days they'll reflect back and not be completely satisfied, but they can sure be proud of what they did."

Alberta came out strong by winning the first set, but the momentum shifted towards Winnipeg who went on to win the second and third sets easily. Facing elimination, Alberta rebounded in the fourth set to tie the match. But, in the fifth and deciding set, Winnipeg led throughout and won 15-10 to claim their tenth National Championship.

For Alberta, who beat Dalhousie and Trinity Western to make the final, this weekend brought redemption after being upset twice on their home court in the Canada West Final Four.

"I thought this weekend we responded really well based on what

happened [at the Final Four], and I told them that we showed a lot of heart to come back, and we played some good volleyball," Danyluk said of his team. "Winnipeg did some things practically that worked for them, and they were similar to last weekend; we just didn't adjust well enough through the whole match."

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TERRY DANYLUK,  
BEARS VOLLEYBALL COACH

Danyluk said that his team was drained by the tough, five-set battle against TWU Saturday night, which might have given them a disadvantage in the gold medal game. Alberta finished their game against TWU at 11pm the previous night, while the Wesmen finished at 7:30pm, giving them some extra time to prepare.

"Going five sets against Trinity was a barnburner, and there were signs [Sunday] of guys being a little bit tired because they weren't executing some of the things that they normally do,"

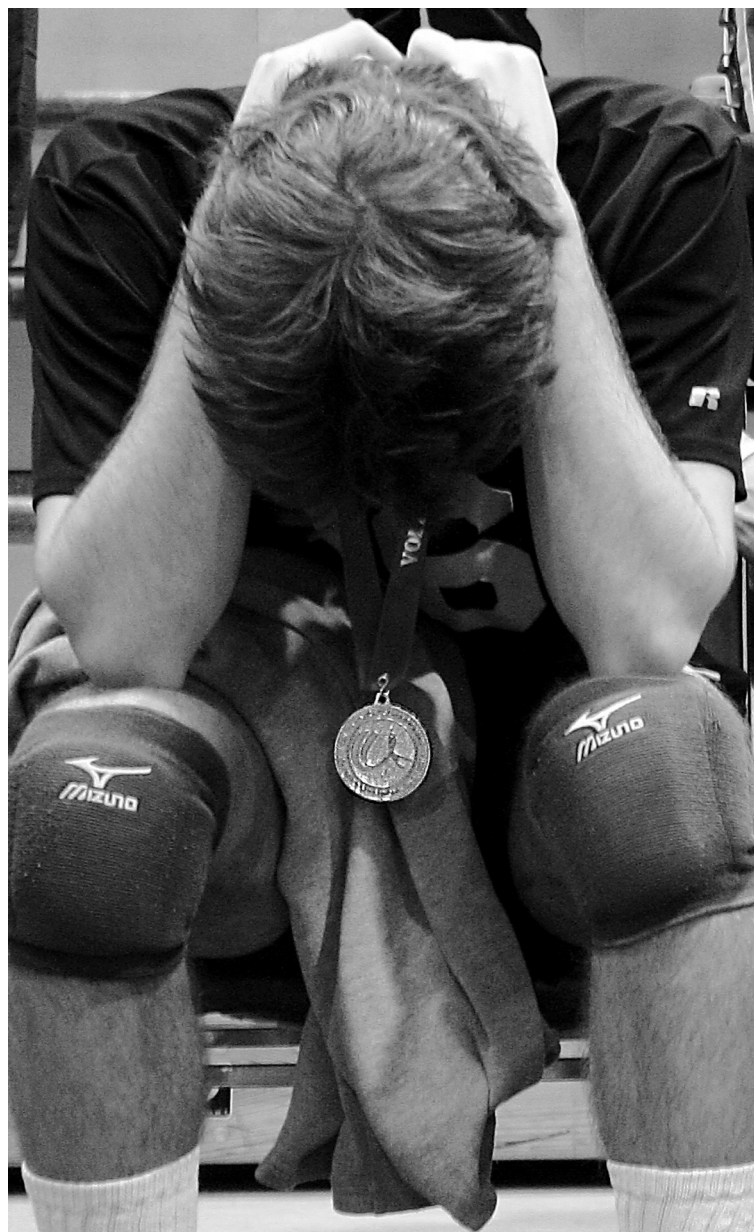
Danyluk explained. "At times like this, you have to allow the energy and adrenaline to carry you. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't."

The one consolation, if such a thing exists in a loss to end the season, is that no one expected Alberta to be in the gold medal game after losing seven players last season, five of whom were starters. The Bears don't see silver as a victory, but perhaps with such a young team, it produces optimism for the future of this club.

"If you were to ask me at the start of the year, I guess we thought we would be able to compete, but I don't think I would have went out on a limb and told you that we would have been in the National Finals," Bears Libero Justin Wong said. "No matter how crappy this feeling is, we do have a lot to be proud of, so we can take some positives out of this situation."

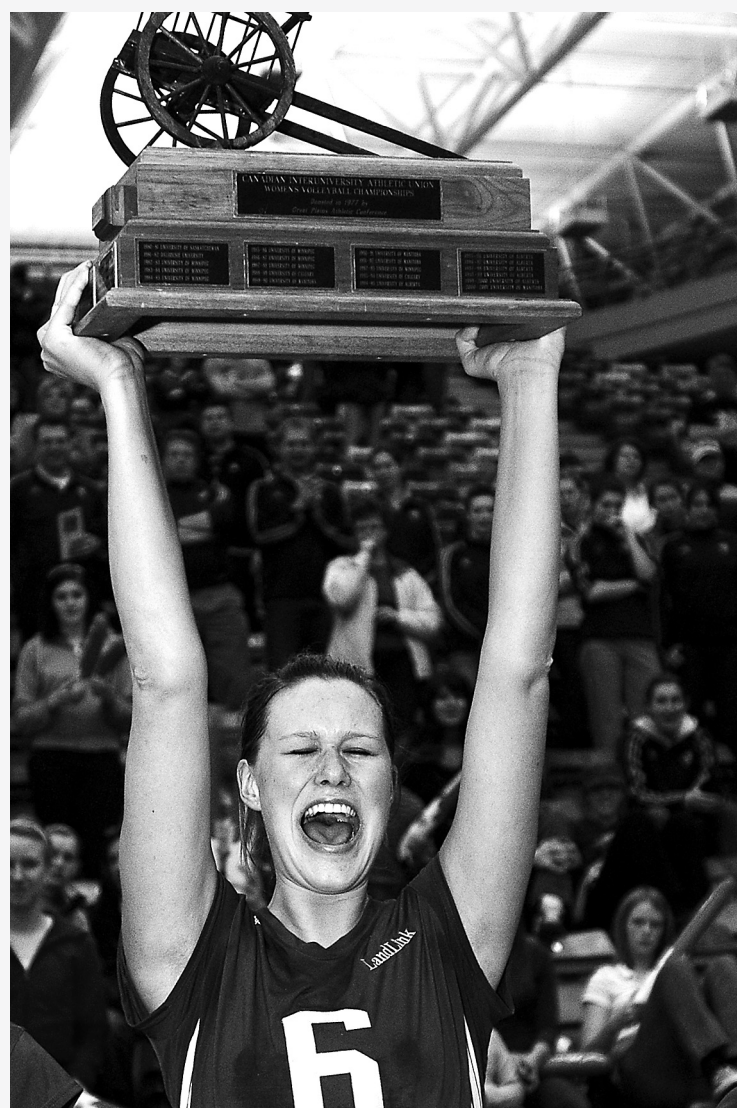
The loss was especially tough on Wong, who won gold with Alberta two years ago, but suffered defeat in the final the past two seasons. Sunday's game was Wong's last as a Golden Bear, as he and middle Derek Proudfoot have exhausted their eligibility.

"I don't know if it's really hit me yet, but it will sometime, and I'll definitely make sure I take it all in," Wong said. "I'll miss being able to compete. It's a privilege to play in this league, and I'll miss the guys on the team. You spend so much time with them every day they become like family, so I'm definitely going to miss that."



ADAM HURAS, THE EYEOPENER (CUP)

LET IT OUT Ben Saxton hangs his head over the medal hanging from his neck.



CHRIS TAIT, THE GAUNTLET

AND THE QUEEN PLAYED ON Tiffany Dodds hoists the rather unimpressive Red River trophy over her head after guiding Alberta to the National Title.

## Pandas rewarded for faith in Dodds

ANDREW RENFREE  
Sports Staff

CALGARY—It's only fitting that third-year outside hitter Tiffany Dodds ended the title match of CIS Championships on Saturday with a kill.

One night earlier, the Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan product limped up the stairs of the Calgary Kinesiology building, her muscles aching from the 32 kills, seven blocks and seven digs she had in leading the Pandas to victory over the Calgary Dinos in the semi-finals. Her thumb, which she hurt on the second block she made in the game, was wrapped in an ice-pack, but she says the pain didn't set in until after the final whistle. Yet there's no way these minor injuries could keep her from the National Final, where she had 17 more kills on the way to gold.

Last week, Dodds was presented with the Mary Lyons Award, given to the CIS Female Player of the Year. Her ability to set and hit earned her the nod, but there was plenty of competition for the award from Marylène Laplante from Laval and Joanna Niemczewska from Calgary, both of whom had been chosen as player of the year twice before. Dodds was definitely surprised when she heard the announcement.

"I was shocked; I was speechless and shaking. It was an amazing feeling," the 21-year-old says. True to her character, though, she's quick to

share credit with her teammates. "It's my team that helped me get there. It's great to be recognized, but I would not be there without my team."

"She just never fails to amaze me, and she has just gone to a whole new level this year," Pandas coach Laurie Eisler adds. "It's a nice honour for her, but she's got lots of upward left in her; she's just scratching the surface."

What makes her award even more impressive is that this has been a transition year for Dodds. She moved from her role as setter last year to that of an outside hitter this year—a switch that shows her versatility and ability to refine her game.

"It's rare that a player can go from setting to attacking, and not many kids have the ability to set and hit well, but [Tiffany] is a real universal-style player," Eisler says. "She hasn't played middle, although she probably would be able to do it and she could probably play libero. Maybe part of it was playing the game really young so the skill set was there. We probably have had one other player that could have done anything and that was [member of the late '90s Pandas dynasty] Miroslava Pribylova."

"I knew my role both years, and it's not so much that I like one or the other better; it's whatever each individual team needs, and I'll do what I need to do," Dodds adds.

Dodds' humility about her many

accomplishments is unwavering, so it might be left up to her family to brag about what she's accomplished in CIS volleyball. But the award cabinet in the Dodds' basement is getting a little full, as Tiffany's brother Mark has been one of the best men's volleyball players in the country over the past five years.

"Our parents have a little wall downstairs—a 'Mark' wall and a 'Tiffany' wall," she laughs. "At home with other games we're competitive but I don't compare myself to him [in volleyball]. It's not like we compare statistics or anything. He's my big brother and I look up to him because he's done so well with volleyball."

Mark and Tiffany's parents both played volleyball and got their children involved in the sport at a very young age. It also helped that they're both teachers and coaches, so the volleyball lessons came early.

"Since we were babies they've been bringing us to games and throwing us in the coat piles in the corner. Once Mark and I got old enough, we started playing off to the side," Dodds says.

After a dominant weekend performance, Dodds was also selected as tournament MVP. Despite the personal hardware she's going to add to her parents' award wall, it's the National Championship she cherishes.

"Those [personal] awards don't matter as much as this gold medal around the neck," she says.