

Leah helps Pandas cope with Bisons to land CanWest gold

First-year centre's breakout with three-point night against Manitoba highlights dominating weekend on the ice for Alberta

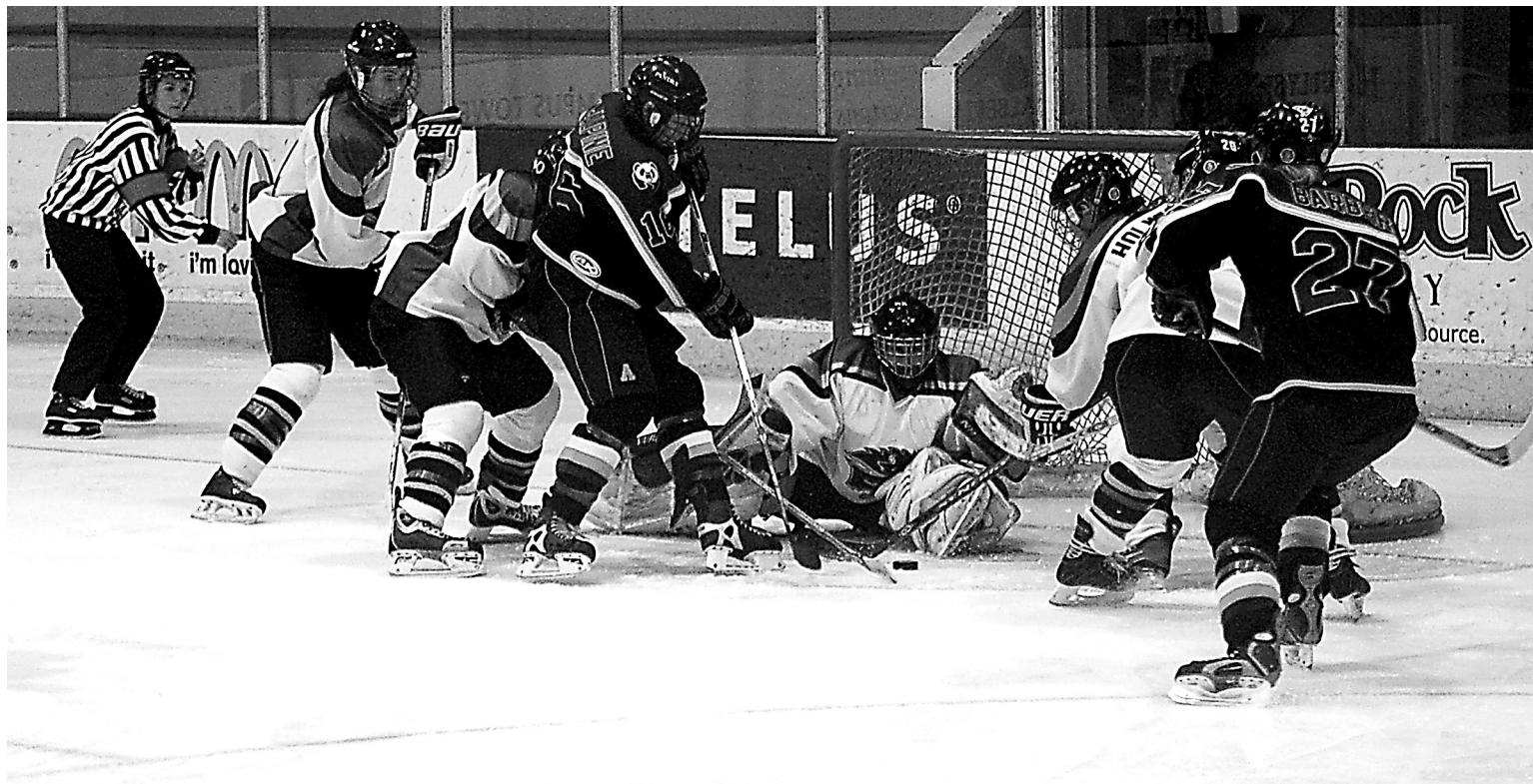
JANELLE SLOYCHUK
Sports Writer

For the ninth-consecutive time, the Pandas hockey team had reason to celebrate when the final horn sounded on the Canada West Final. With a pair of shutouts of the Manitoba Bisons, Alberta adds yet another conference banner to the rafters of Clare Drake Arena.

Friday night saw a dominant Pandas squad that outshot Manitoba 37-5, resulting in a 4-0 win, but the Bisons were able to make a better show of it on Saturday, as they were still outshot badly 24-12, but held Alberta to only two goals in a 2-0 loss. Friday night saw conference all-star Holly Terleton add another 60 minutes to her shutout streak—which is up to 214:01—while first-year Dana Vinge was between the pipes on Saturday for her first playoff action.

"Maybe we didn't finish this weekend—or we didn't generate a lot of offensive opportunities—but at least [Saturday's] game was a little more back and forth," said Bisons head coach Jon Rempel, who was named Canada West Coach of the Year. "We have to generate more scoring chances than we did. [Alberta] doesn't give you a lot of chances."

While veterans Lindsay McAlpine and Tarin Podloski—the country's top-two scorers—were held relatively quiet on the weekend, combining for only three points and one goal, the sweep of the Bisons marked a breakout weekend for first-year centre Leah Copeland, who potted a pair of goals and an assist



MAD SCRAMBLE IN FRONT Lindsay McAlpine fights for the puck in front of Manitoba goalie Stacy Corfield during Saturday's 2-0 Alberta victory.

KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

in Friday's Alberta victory.

Among those first-year players who proved their value is product of Calgary centre Leah Copeland, who contributed to Friday's final score against the Bisons with two of her own goals and one assist.

"Copeland is an awesome rookie with a lot of skill," said McAlpine, who was named Canada West Player of the Year. "She's quick; she's a huge asset to our team, and she's really stepped into

her role on the second line and was a big part of our win [this weekend]."

"I wouldn't say that I'm taking a lead, I'm playing my role," Copeland added.

Copeland's emergence is important for a veteran-laden Alberta squad that loses McAlpine, Taryn Berry and team captain Kaye London after this year.

"We're going to take a blow," Copeland said. "We'll be able to fill

some of those roles though not to the extent of their experience, but we have a lot of strong young players coming up."

While Copeland stood out for Alberta, it was Manitoba goaltender Stacy Corfield—who made 55 saves over the weekend—who stood on her head for Manitoba. While Corfield was proud of the effort her team put forth, she was disappointed they didn't adjust sooner to the flow

of the game.

"[The officiating] was little different than what we're used to," Corfield said. "They were letting a lot go, but when we picked up on the fact that they weren't calling as much, we were able to pick it up a little bit and started using it to our advantage."

While the Bisons fell this weekend, they will join the Pandas as both teams head to Ottawa in two weeks for the CIS Championships.

Trio of blueliners pick up defensive intensity for puck Pandas in playoffs

TREVOR PHILLIPS
Sports Writer

Even when the Pandas hockey squad's ninth Canada West Championship banner was all but guaranteed, the Manitoba Bisons still couldn't enter the Alberta zone to try a last ditch effort at stirring up some offence.

By holding the Herd without a goal, the Pandas stretched their shutout streak to 525:59 and haven't given up a goal since 9 February, when they beat UBC 7-1. Whether the goalie has been Holly Tarleton, Danielle Bles or Dana Vinge, the Pandas defensive corps has stood tall and completely shut down the opposition.

"Our defensive unit has been improving the entire year, and they're peaking right now," Pandas head coach Howie Draper explained. "I think they're doing great, and that's really important for us heading into Nationals."

There are three defencemen who form a solid core on the Alberta blue-line, and each bring a unique element to the team. Alanna Donahue is a gifted veteran that the Pandas coaching staff thinks has the ability to be the best defenceman in CIS, Trisha McNeill is a hard-working bundle of aggression and Rayanne Reeve is the rookie sensation fresh off the top women's team in Canada, the Oval Extreme. The trio log big minutes and pitch in offensively, while sticking to defensive coach Judy Diduck's backend philosophy.

"Make the quick pass, tape to tape and keep things simple," Diduck said.

"[The simplicity] keeps it consistent."

Against Manitoba, McNeill was all over the ice, blocking shots, playing physical and directing traffic. Her ear-shattering screams were audible throughout Clare Drake as she kept her teammates focused and responsible.

"Trish probably had her best game of the year [Friday night]," Diduck said. "Her game is simple and hard. She is a great team player and a great communicator."

"She plays a huge role on the team," Reeve added of McNeill. "She looks like this little innocent girl, but she plays a game twice her size."

Reeve has also emerged on the Pandas and done so in a big way. The 19-year-old Calgary product has made the adjustment from the Western Women's Hockey League quite easily. She leads the conference in points, assists, and plus/minus among defencemen while playing on the first power-play unit with the Big Three—Jenna Barber, Tarin Podloski, and Lindsay McAlpine.

"Having Rayanne on the power play gives us options," Draper explained. "By moving [Podloski] to the point, it gives us three good shots up high and makes our power play very dangerous."

"[Reeve is] a great person," McNeill adds. "She is one of those people you need around because she has so much talent, and she has a great shot."

While Reeve's abilities have been a welcome arrival, Donahue has slowly made herself one of the top defencemen on this talented group. The fourth-year Phys Ed and Rec student

attributes her steady growth to having confidence in her own game.

"For me to be successful I just need to stay calm and believe in myself," Donahue said. "I have really worked hard on my confidence, staying calm and reading the plays."

"She is one of our most skilled players; she just needs to believe in her ability," Draper adds. "I think she has a huge impact in any game she plays in, and she has really stepped up her play recently."

Heading into Nationals, the Pandas are in top form and are among the favourites as they try to repeat as champions and take their sixth title in eight years. With Donahue, Reeve and McNeill watching the backend, Alberta is proving that good things do come in threes.

REARGUARD

Alanna Donahue

A fourth-year from Grand Cache, Alberta, Donahue has two goals, 14 assists and is plus-25.

Rayanne Reeve

A first-year out of Calgary, Reeve is a first-team Canada West all-star this season.

Trisha McNeill

The third-year Edmonton native has one goal and three assists, but is plus-eleven for the season.



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

CLEARs THE CREASE LIKE A SNOWPLOW Rayanne Reeve (18) has been a big part of a Pandas defence that hasn't allowed a goal in almost a month.