

Familiar foes meet in Canada West hockey final

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Sports Editor

It's not surprising that the Golden Bears and Saskatchewan Huskies are facing off for the Canada West hockey title this weekend. After all, this will be the sixth-straight season that the two teams have met in the conference final.

"The two programs respect each other and they've both been battling for that top spot in Canada West year-after-year," Alberta head coach Eric Thurston said. "It breeds bitterness, rivalry and respect. There's only really one way to describe it: it's going to be war. These guys have also played against each other in the Western Hockey League, so there's a healthy hate built up between the two programs."

Adding to the tension between the two clubs this season is that only the winner will advance to the CIS Championships in Moncton. For the past two years, Canada West had three and then two spots in the National tournament since Alberta was hosting, but with the tournament moving to New Brunswick this year, Canada West only has one bid.

"It's a real shame that—for the quality of teams in Canada West—only one team gets to go," Thurston said. "It's something that was decided by CIS, so we knew [before the season] what we were getting ourselves into."

While Alberta's defensive core has been decimated by injuries this season, the unit is finally healthy again and, according to Thurston, their performance is crucial to the Bears' success against the Huskies.

"The key is going to be playing solid



FILEPHOTO: JOSH NAULT

TAKING A SHOT AT THE TITLE Alberta will renew hostilities with Saskatchewan this weekend, and their play had better be as sharp as their skates.

defensively in our end; they're going to get chances, but we need to eliminate the number of chances and eliminating the good scoring chances," he said. "Aaron [Sorochan]'s going to make those stops, and we need to be there to clear out the rebounds or the guys in front of the net."

Keeping Saskatchewan out of the Alberta zone will be made more difficult by the Saskatchewan offence. The Husky forwards are adept at controlling the puck along the boards and wearing

down defences.

"[Saskatchewan does] a very good job of cycling the puck and changing the point of attack going from side to side. So we need to finish our check and come back on the defensive side," Thurston explained.

In order to negate the Saskatchewan cycle, Alberta will need to be a "puck possession" team, according to Thurston, who added that getting the nerves out early and putting pressure on the Huskies defenders will give

Alberta the advantage.

"To start the games—the first five or ten minutes—you're going to have a little bit of the jitters, but our guys trust each other and they have confidence that our talent will always be there. But if you don't work hard and win those one-on-one battles, you're talent doesn't mean anything," he explained.

"Defencemen aren't going to be good when their noses are pressed up against the glass and they know

they're going to get hit, so you have to be quick and get on the forecheck and establish yourselves down low early in the game."

The weekend set kicks off at Clare Drake Arena on Friday at 7:30pm and continues Saturday at the same time. Should a third game be necessary to decide a winner, it will go Sunday at 7pm. All three games can be heard live on CJSR, with the call brought to you by Bob "GM" Stauffer and Dean Millard.

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All members of the university and larger community are invited to attend this **FREE** event.

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