

Who's the best, Alberta or Wilfrid Laurier?

The Golden Hawks will destroy the Pandas and avenge last year

The '05/06 winners have more talent Dan, and your helmet's ugly



DAN PLOUFFE

point

Let me start by saying that I really hold no particular hatred towards the Pandas women's hockey team except that they aren't Wilfrid Laurier—and therefore suck. Furthermore, Paul Owen is a certified idiot, and he seems to think they're good—meaning they suck even more because he knows nothing.

Paul seems to think that the only reason Alberta isn't seeded first in this tournament is because they lost to McGill in a game where they didn't play their best players. I'll suggest that maybe you shouldn't lose to low-lights like Saskatchewan (7-16-1) if you want to be ranked number one.

The Golden Hawks lost fewer games than the Pandas this year, two to Alberta's three, and their conference is much stronger than Canada West. Fact is, while Alberta may have traditionally been the best program in the country, it's time to officially usher in the new era—an era that will begin once Laurier creams Alberta this weekend.

Veterans lead WLU on the front and back end, but the Hawks keep the talent flowing with youngsters providing depth throughout the lineup. While Alberta may have a few good front-liners, Laurier has weapons like Andrea Ironside and Lauren Barch who can turn defenders inside out, but who also provide depth away from the top line.

Paul can argue all he wants about history—like last year's fluky 2-1 Pandas victory—but if you're going to play that card, let's get the facts straight. Take, for instance, two years ago, when the Hawks slaughtered Alberta 4-1 in the championship match to end the Pandas 122-game undefeated streak—only one game of which came against Laurier. Paul will have you believe that that was all due to first-team All-Canadian goalie Cindy Eadie—now an assistant coach with the Hawks—but anyone who watched that game knows that Alberta barely even got into Laurier's zone until the third, when the Hawks were already ahead by three.

I fail to see how Alberta's 2000 title, for instance, will come in handy this year. None of those players are left. And don't forget that there isn't a player on the Golden Hawks who hasn't finished a season with a trip to Nationals, winning the past four OUA titles against top challengers from Toronto and Queen's.

When it comes down to their meeting in pool play, the Hawks will prove themselves superior. Their team will also be playing with added motivation from the 2006 defeat, and the desire to allow final-year assistant captain Fiona Aiston to celebrate a National Championship in her hometown.

Don't underestimate the impact of her group of purple-and-gold-painted supporters, like myself. Once Holly Tartleton pulls the puck from the net behind her—having been mystified by the incredible speed of Aiston, captain Laurissa Kenworthy and OUA Player of the Year Andrea Bevan—the unproven “Haw-lee” will be even more overwhelmed by the pressure of actually seeing some rubber directed towards her. A shaky goaltending situation means doom for Alberta; it's Golden Hawks all the way.



PAUL OWEN

counterpoint

Where's the love for the defending champs, Dan? After their victory last season made Jake Troughton look stupid for picking against them, I've learned to never predict the Pandas will lose. And with good reason: Lindsay McAlpine is the country's top scorer, Tarin Podloski is the only CIS forward donning a Team Canada jersey this year, and imposing 5'10" defenceman Rayanne Reeve has been called the Chris Pronger of women's hockey. Clearly your East Coast media bias is showing through here, as you've picked Wilfrid Laurier as National Champs.

I mean, don't you remember what happened when the two met in last year's final? A 2-1 Alberta win and a fifth National banner. Of course, only a dozen players on each team remember that—or perhaps women hockey players take too many pucks off the helmet and none of them are supposed to recollect that it was Alberta wearing gold after last season's final. And sure, you could cite 2004/05, when Laurier ended Alberta's 37 614-game undefeated streak, but WLU has changed so much since then that there's little point. Only seven of them are old enough to have been around for that, while six of the Pandas have double CIS gold. Experience counts Dan, and it resides firmly in the hands of the Pandas.

Of course, you could argue that this is a down year for the Alberta program. After all,

they did lose three conference games this year, almost doubling their previous all-time total of four. But the teams that beat them this season also suffered 7-2, 5-0 and 8-0 losses to the Pandas at different points in the season. This is a dominant hockey club, and while they may get complacent and take some nights off, it doesn't detract from the sheer amount of talent that hits the ice. Their mental focus is strong enough that the chances of them having a lapse on the national stage are low.

Besides, how is Laurier going to beat Alberta this year? How do they plan on scoring on a team that hasn't been scored on since 9 February—a stretch of 525:59? This defence has allowed only 29 shots in the five games since that goal, and

Laurier doesn't have the scorers to get past them. And Morgan Wielgosz may be the third best goaltender in the country, but Holly Tartleton is the second. On the back-end, Laurier is inferior in almost every way.

And it's not like they're any more adept up front. The Golden Hawks had two players average a point per game. Alberta had five, and Podloski and McAlpine both averaged over two en route to leading the country in scoring. All five of those Pandas are in the top-20 in the country in scoring. WLU is pitting an inferior offence against a superior defence, while the Pandas offence could probably outscore the Laurier men on a good day.

It's just a shame that they're in the same pool so that Alberta can't flaunt their gold medals after kicking around Laurier as though they were UBC for the second-straight year. As it stands, the Purple and Yellow will have to settle for bronze while the Pandas prove that green and gold really do look good together. Still, at least we can agree on one thing: fuck McGill.



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