



FILEPHOTO: ANDREW RURAK

**REACH FOR THE TOP** Pandas setter Daryll Roper goes for a hit last year. She and teammates Jocelyn Blair and Tiffany Dodds just made Team Canada.

## U of A athletes on world stage

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Sports Editor

The U of A court has become a breeding ground for volleyball success: in addition to the CIS and Canada West banners lining the walls, 13 former and current U of A players have made the Canadian senior national teams this year.

Seven former Bears and one current one, along with five current and former Pandas, made it through Team Canada selection camps in May. Three members of this season's CIS champion Pandas team are on the roster: setters Tiffany Dodds and Daryll Roper and left side Jocelyn Blair. Graduated Pandas Larissa Cundy, another setter, and middle blocker Tasha Holness also made the team.

The Bears alumni who'll be representing Canada are setter Brock Davidiuk, right-side hitters Dallas Soonias and Alexandre Gaumont Casias, left sides Pascal Cardinal and Nicholas Cundy, and middle blockers Leo Carol, and Murray Grapentine. Adam Kaminski, a current Bear, also made it.

Canada's women are in Winnipeg right now continuing their training, while the men's team is in the Dominican Republic competing in the Pan American Cup.

The players' varsity coaches, following their progress from Edmonton, are extremely proud, and aren't surprised at their athletes' successes. Pandas head coach Laurie Eisler was full of praise for the five of her players who made it through the selection camp—Dodds, Roper, and Blair in particular.

"They have emerged over the last couple of years as being the dominant players in their positions at the CIS level," she said. "Part of it is due to their commitment to training; whether that be physically, technically, tactically, mentally, they're very committed to the process of training."

"They have continued to grow each year. I would say with these three that we've seen a lot of growth and development as athletes. That's really attributable to their commitment, and never being satisfied, and always finding

other ways to become a better player."

Terry Danyluk, who has headed up the Bears volleyball program for 14 years and who himself has played for Canada, considers making the national team to be just the latest step in the already successful careers of some of his players.

"Murray Grapentine was part of our 1997 championship team, and Pascal Cardinal was also on that championship team. If you go through the list, they're all guys who have been in our program but they've also been CIS champions," he said. "Several of them have also participated in the national team program before and provincial team programs. They've done a lot of winning in their days."

**"They've done a lot of winning in their days."**

**TERRY DANYLUK,  
BEARS VOLLEYBALL HEAD COACH**

Having this many Alberta athletes playing at a national level at the same time reflects well on the Pandas and Bears volleyball programs at the University, according to the coaches.

"It says a lot for the quality of the athletes we've been able to attract here," Danyluk said. "There are a lot of athletes who have made it to the national team program from our program in the past ten years. I'd like to think that we've helped those guys get to be as good as they are. All of those guys came here with that something special, and I think we were able to help them build that."

"I think it says that the U of A is a good option for athletes who aspire to that, who have the dream of making it to the national team," Eisler added.

But despite the high-profile success of these five, Eisler doesn't want people to think of that as the only goal of her program.

"I wouldn't consider us as producers of professional volleyball players," she said. "I think what we're really about is helping people achieve their potential in whatever they choose to do, whether that's to be a physiotherapist or a teacher or a volleyball player."

We try to equip our student-athletes with whatever it is that they need while they're here, and to create that foundation for them so they can excel in whatever it is that they set their mind to."

Eisler also thinks that the athletes are lucky to have current and former teammates with them now.

"It absolutely makes the transition easier," said Eisler. "You have someone who understands you and what your needs are as a player and a person, and someone to confide in off the court. There are huge challenges to playing at that level. Anytime you can have a buddy along with you, someone who gets you on and off the court, that's a huge advantage."

Friends by their sides or not, the rest of the summer will be hard work for the players. Just having made the national team doesn't guarantee playing time, and they'll be working to move up the depth charts and to grab spots on Team Canada's travel rosters. For the women, the big tournaments this summer are the Pan Am Cup in Mexico at the end of June, a tour of Japan in July, and the FISU (International University Sport Federation) Games in Thailand in August.

Similarly, highlights for the men's team include the Pan Am Cup, being contested this week, the FISU Games, the Pan Am Games, and America's Cup in Brazil.

There are also events in the fall and winter for both teams, including the qualifying tournaments for the Beijing Olympics. It's still uncertain whether Roper, Blair, and Dodds, who all just finished their third year, and Kaminski, who has a year of CIS eligibility left, will continue with Team Canada in the fall or return to the U of A.

"I'm just trying not to put any pressure on them," Eisler said. "I want them to strive there and enjoy what they're doing and get the most out of it without being worried about what's down the road. At the same time, I can tell you that it does send a shiver up my spine when I have to think about not having them [next season]."

## WEARING THE MAPLE LEAF

### Tiffany Dodds

She helped the Pandas win a national championship last season, and was named a CIS Tournament all-star and CIS Player of the Year. She competed for Canada at the 2005 FISU Games in Turkey. Her brother Mark is also on Team Canada.

### Daryll Roper

She was a CIS Tournament All-Star last season, helping the Pandas win their most recent CIS title.

### Jocelyn Blair

Also on last year's gold medal-winning team, she was a Canada West All-Star and CIS Tournament all-star in 2006/07.

### Tasha Holness

A 2005/06 CIS second-team All-Star, she first made Team Canada in 2006.

### Larissa Cundy

She was team MVP from 2002/03-2004/05, and 2004 CIS Tournament all-star. Her brother is Nicholas Cundy.

### Brock Davidiuk

CIS Tournament MVP in 2004/05 and a CIS all-Canadian, he helped his team win the national championship that year.

### Dallas Soonias

Was also a key player on the 2004/05 Bears championship team.

### Leo Carol

He was on the national championship team in 2005 and won CIS's Dale Iwanoczko student-athlete award that year, awarded to the player who most excels in academics, athletics, and community involvement.

### Nicholas Cundy

Was CIS Player of the Year in 2004/05. He made Team Canada for the first time in 2005.

### Alexandre Gaumont Casias

On the 2004/05 championship team, he left the Bears early to train with Team Canada.

### Adam Kaminski

2003/04 CIS Rookie of the Year, he was also on the 2005 championship team.

### Murray Grapentine

On Team Canada since 1997, he was on the 1997 national championship team and CIS Player of the Year for 1998/99.

### Pascal Cardinal

CIS Rookie of the Year in 1998/99 and Player of the Year in 2002/03, he first played for Canada in 2001.