

Soccer men build new side

The Bears will try to hold on to success in spite of losing many of last year's national champions

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

There are few things in sports sweeter than repeating a title, but it's rarely an easy feat, especially when there have been significant changes to a team between seasons. That's the dilemma the Bears soccer squad, last year's national champions, face right now.

The Bears graduated five fifth-year players and lost several others to injuries and other pursuits. Head coach Len Vickery expressed confidence in his team's ability to overcome the shakeup and excel this season, but acknowledged that there are significant challenges ahead.

"Our [first] goal is to make the playoffs at the Canada West level," Vickery said. "Anything goes at the playoffs—it's two semi-final games and a final, and we have to win that final to advance to nationals because UBC are hosting this year and they automatically take one of the CW berths."

In addition to the graduating players—Hilaire Kamden, Mark Korthuis, Devon Fraser, Jarin Myskiw, and Mike Kennedy—the Bears lost a few others: keeper Daniel Gusberti has decided to focus on working towards medical school instead, and new recruit Luke Jones, a forward from England, has been sidelined due to injury.

Perhaps the face most noticeably missing from this year's lineup is Eddy Sidra, the team's 2006 Rookie of the Year. He's plying his trade in Europe this year instead, having joined the under-19 side of German professional team Energie Cottbus.

"Not having those few players is going to put a bit more pressure on the first-year players to step up and make an impact early," Vickery admitted.

"We're coming off winning a national championship, and last year we did have a strong core of fifth-year players," he added. "Unfortunately, they're lost to us this year, but on the plus side we have a strong core of [returning] players, as well as a few strong transfer students and a very strong group of first-year players coming into the program."

Those include 'keeper Jas Gill, midfielder Manav Deol, and defenders Martin Andersen and Giovanni Bruno. These four—along with Sidra—were all a part of the Edmonton Juventus club team that won the provincial championship last weekend.

"When somebody has played four or five years and is lost to the program, if a first-year player is to take their place they have to be truly outstanding," Vickery said, noting that he kept that in mind as the team looked for new players to fill the roster for this year.

The stakes are high for the new team. As mentioned, there's only one open Canada West spot at nationals this year, and this conference is generally considered the most competitive in the country. There's little room for error if the Bears want to keep their title.

"It's a short but very intensive season," Vickery explained. "We've got to get better from week to week, and hopefully things come together for us by the end of the season."

Can our sports conquer Europe?



NICK FROST

Sports Commentary

If the British Empire (on a political level) or Pinky and the Brain (on a Saturday-morning-cartoon level) have taught us anything, it's that complete world domination just isn't possible—there will always be factors such as decolonization or poorly-built ACME products preventing one from attaining success on such a massive scale.

But on a sporting level, with the surprising fan support of the expansion Toronto FC and the arrival of David Beckham in America, it seems like soccer finally has the major sporting markets in its grasp (for the next five years, at least). As a result, the major North American sports leagues have got it in their heads to do the same. But two examples—hockey and football—show the problems with this plan.

Over the next two months, London will play host to two of North America's big four sporting leagues: the NHL's Anaheim Ducks and Los Angeles Kings will square off in a two-game set the on 29 and 30 September, and the Miami Dolphins and New York Giants of the NFL will entertain fans at Wembley Stadium on 28 October. Both these leagues are trying to expand their appeal into Europe, but hockey appears much more likely to succeed in the long term.

Hockey is already popular in parts of Europe—England just isn't one of them yet. But while the mass popularity might not be there, at least a semblance of a hockey league is: the Elite Ice Hockey League, which currently operates in ten locations throughout the United Kingdom.

American football is about as appealing to people outside North America as cricket is to people inside North America. With the exception of the now-defunct money pit that was NFL Europa, there are no North American-style football leagues outside of this continent, so most Europeans have no exposure to the sport outside of Hollywood movies.

One of the biggest mistakes that the NFL is making in their European foray is that they are presenting a really boring match-up. Neither the Dolphins nor the Giants have been particularly successful recently, and there really aren't any marquee players on either team, with the exception of Giants quarterback Eli Manning—although I bet there are going to be a lot of Brits seeing his name in the paper and asking themselves, "Wait, isn't his name Peyton?"

A big name is needed in this situation to give the game any legitimate hype. These teams aren't even division or conference rivals: this game couldn't be any less interesting if it tried. The only thing it has going for it is the novelty value, and while that may have created a ticket demand for 500 000 people so far, once they see what they're actually spending a ridiculous amount of money on, that number will drop for any games in the future. So much for long-term sustainability.

While it is definitely a positive thing to see North American sports leagues want to go international, the ability (or wherewithal) to do so sometimes isn't there. A better strategy would be to expand a game at the grassroots level first, and then build it up before trying to take over the world.

Both the NHL and NFL are trying to expand their appeal into Europe, but hockey appears much more likely to succeed in the long term.

The EIHL doesn't get much fan or media attention, but with the NHL rolling into town for not one but two regular-season games between one of the most well-known cities in the world, and the defending Stanley Cup champions, people will pay attention. Not to mention that the Ducks and Kings have enough international flavour between the two of them to appeal to a European crowd—they feature players from eight different countries, including the only Slovenian player in NHL history, Anze Kopitar (though it's debatable just how much interest English fans have in Slovenia).

If the NHL games are successful in finding an audience in England, it should help the EIHL develop a following as well. With a bigger fan base, it could become one of the most important European superleagues.

On the other side of the coin,

MOUNT ROYAL COLLEGE
CONTINUING EDUCATION



500+
classroom &
online courses
Visit our
website

Health & Human Service Certificate Programs

- Addiction Studies*
- Tobacco Studies
- Police Studies
- Human Justice
- Children's Mental Health*
- Supportive Counselling Skills
- Child Learning Through Play*
- Contemporary Issues in Human Service**

* Online Programs

** Qualify for Category A credits

INFORMATION: (403) 440-6867

E-MAIL: cehealth@mtroyal.ca

<http://conted.mtroyal.ca>



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA SENATE

- REQUIRES 1 UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT APPOINTED BY THE STUDENTS' UNION
- THE SENATE'S RESPONSIBILITY IS TO INQUIRE INTO ANY MATTER THAT MAY ENHANCE THE IMAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY AND ACT AS A LINK BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC. THE SENATE MAY ALSO AUTHORIZE THE CONFERRING OF HONORARY DEGREES.
- MEETS FOUR TIMES YEARLY

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATION IS MONDAY SEPTEMBER 10.
PLEASE SUBMIT COVER LETTER AND RESUME TO 2-900
SUB OR EMAIL TO EA@SU.UALBERTA.CA

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT THE VP EXTERNAL STEVEN DOLLANSKY AT 492-4236

INTERVIEWS SCHEDULED FOR THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 11