

ATHLETICS

For those of you looking to get a bit of a show with your alcohol, Edmonton serves as the home base for plenty of elite-level athletic squads, all of whom serve beer at their home games. If you enjoy spending your down time in bleachers instead of bars, there are plenty of different options for you to don the colours of something besides camo green.

Rexall Place (7424 118 Avenue): The most coveted tickets in town belong to the NHL's Edmonton Oilers. As such, only the most well-endowed veterans will be able to secure seats on a regular basis. This year's Oiler team is drastically different from the team that came one win short of a Stanley Cup in 2005/06—not to mention the team that was historically bad at the end of last season.

Since Oilers tickets are a little steep for those living off a soldier's pay, so you may want to look for other hockey-related options. Luckily for you cash-strapped cadets, the WHL's Edmonton Oil Kings will begin play this coming season. With significantly lower prices, rookies can watch up-and-coming pucksters go to work for next to nothing. In addition, the Oil Kings will host the CHL Top Prospects game in January.

If hockey isn't your thing, agents can attempt to blend themselves into local customs, traditions, and activities, by attending any of the Canadian Finals Rodeo events in November. Just think of it as infiltrating a hostile base, except all the hostiles have four legs and hooves. Rexall also plays host to major curling events should they happen through Edmonton.

Cost of Entry: Oilers: \$30-\$195; Oil Kings: \$25-\$29; CFR: \$16-\$46

Commonwealth Stadium (11000 Stadium Road): The CFL's Edmonton Eskimos play on the league's natural-grass turf in its biggest venue. The size of Commonwealth can be daunting for first-time visitors, but its confines offer (usually) high-quality football—the Esks snapped a 34-year playoff streak last season—for a very reasonable price. There is even a College Corner section that offers discounted seating for students, though venturing there can be a dangerous endeavour, as rivalries and alcohol can lead to physical confrontations. Be sure to secure yourself a vantage point with easy access to your escape route, lest you get sucked into the fray.

If you prefer the other type of football, Commonwealth also plays host to national team matches, as well as occasionally holding major international soccer events. There are also often international rugby games and tournaments held there in the spring before football season kicks off.

Cost of Entry: Eskimos: \$20-\$60.

Clare Drake Arena: PAV The Drake, named after the longtime head coach of the Alberta men's hockey team, plays home to the men's and women's hockey squads here at the U of A. Though the old building may look and smell like an insurgent's lair, it's home to two of the most consistently successful hockey programs in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). The Pandas are coming off of back-to-back national titles, while the Bears hosted and won titles in 2004/05 and 2005/06. Both squads are packed with conference all-stars and all-Canadians.

While the Pandas play in front of sparse crowds, the Golden Bears pack the arena, but there's usually room for a couple extra cadets to squeeze in before the puck drops. Tickets are student-priced, and seating is general admission, but the squads cater to a lot of minor hockey teams in the city and alumni as well, so the crowd is a mixed bunch.

The hottest ticket of the year is the annual Bears exhibition game against the Edmonton Oilers rookies on 10 September. The event draws huge crowds, and is generally the first time Edmonton fans get to see the newest Oilers. The Bears lost last year's game, bringing a five-year winning streak to an end, so they should be keen to avenge that this year.

Cost of entry: \$4 for students



Main Gym: PAV Home to four varsity teams at the U of A, the Main Gym is the busiest athletic hub on campus during the winter months. Both basketball and volleyball compete out of this facility, providing Friday and Saturday double headers almost every weekend between November and March. The Pandas volleyball squad is coming off a CIS championship last season, while the Golden Bears have appeared in each of the past four national finals, winning it all in 2004/05. When the court is reconfigured for basketball, you can bear witness to the defending CIS silver medallists on the women's side, as well as an always-competitive men's squad.

Gaining access to the early half at a double header will allow you to stay for both games, and the mascots GUBA and Patches can normally be seen colluding with small children during these games. If you're lucky you may even get a performance from the U of A dance team, though if you stay for both games, be prepared to see the same routine twice.

Cost of entry: \$4 for students.

Foote Field (11601 68 Avenue): Located on the South Campus, this multi-purpose facility features both a natural-grass field for soccer and an artificial one for football and field hockey. The Bears soccer team is the defending national champs, and play weekend afternoon matches, which makes them ideal for those late-summer Saturdays when the weather is still nice, and the same can be said for the Pandas. Later in the season be sure to come equipped with climate-resistant clothing and a blanket, as it can get chilly in the stands.

The same rule applies for football, with the added bonus of sitting through any potentially inclement weather systems that may be affecting the area. The gridiron is busy rain or snow, so should you decide to brave the elements, be sure to bring along some extra cover.

Cost of Entry: Soccer: \$3 for students. Football: \$4 for students.

