

## Soccer Bears take on T-Birds, Vikes at home

ROBIN COLLUM  
Sports Editor

For Bears soccer, rehearsal time is over. The young team—half the roster is made up of first- and second-year athletes—have been practicing together for weeks and have played four conference games, reaching that point in the schedule where they should be able to get a feeling of how the rest of the season will go. They'll be testing themselves against two traditional soccer powers, UBC and Victoria, this weekend.

Alberta (2-2-0) have lost to both University College of the Fraser Valley and Trinity Western on their first away trip, but redeemed themselves against Lethbridge and Calgary on the weekend. The Bears have been focusing so far on trying to work together as a team. Meeting UBC (1-2-1) and Victoria (3-2-0) will be a test of their progress.

"We'll have to work hard. We've introduced twelve new players to the squad, and in the last few games here, we've had as many as five first-year players starting," head coach Len Vickery explained. "It's going to take a little bit of time, but the more we practice together and the more familiar we become with one another—and not least, understand the demands of the Canada West schedule and the opponents—the better off we're going to be."

Opposition in the Canada West conference can be incredibly tough, especially from BC teams like UBC and UVic. Vickery sees the challenge ahead, and views it as a good chance to evaluate his team's progress.

"They're going to be two extremely tough games, and that's what we need to prepare ourselves for," he said. "UBC and Victoria have a history of competing at the highest level in CIS and Canada West."

"I fully expect that they're going to be near or



FILE PHOTO: PETE YEE

**EYES ON THE PRIZE** The soccer Bears are young, but they're determined, and what they have their eyes on next is a pair of wins at home this weekend.

close to the top at the end of the Canada West season. They're going to be a good test our young team this weekend."

Mike Mosher, head coach of the UBC Thunderbirds, isn't taking anything for granted as his team prepares to face Alberta on Saturday.

"I know they have made some changes from last year—they lost some pretty quality players," he said. "But whenever we play the U of A, it's

always a competitive game, and it's often quite an enjoyable game because there's a bit more flow when our teams get together."

Though he sees the strength of the opposition, Vickery isn't any more concerned than he would be facing the other teams in the conference.

"It will be another two tough games, but that's the way it's going to be all seven weekends where we're required to play the two games."

On Alberta's side is the fact that both UVic and UBC have had slow starts to their seasons: the T-Birds have lost to Lethbridge and TWU, the Vikes to Trinity Western and Fraser Valley.

"It's been a bit of a disappointing start," Mosher admitted. "We've had a few key injuries, but hopefully we'll have a few of those guys back over the weekend."

Both games are at Foote Field at 2:15 pm.



KATE WADE

**WHAT'S WITH THE SKIRTS?** A two-year veteran of the national team, Pandas midfielder Erin Mason (in white) is a key member of Alberta's side.

## Mason building Pandas field hockey

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When some students take a semester off to figure out their lives, it often involves backpacking across Asia, living in their parents' basement, or moving to Jasper to smoke a lot of pot. For Erin Mason, taking a break from school meant moving to Vancouver to train full-time with the women's national field hockey team.

Like other adventurers, the Pandas midfielder returned with a much clearer view of her priorities. A fourth-year mechanical engineering student, she used her time in Vancouver—from January to August—to think about what she wanted from her academic and athletic careers.

Mason had competed with the national team before, travelling with Team Canada to Wales, Scotland, and France in the summer of 2006.

"That was neat because I was brand new, fresh—one of the youngest players on the team—and I didn't know what to expect," Mason says. "I really enjoyed it. I was learning so much, so fast and had all these amazing players to play with and learn from."

Last Christmas, she went back to the national training centre on the coast after a Team Canada trip to South Africa, but this time didn't enjoy the experience as much. While she found the training rewarding and improved her game, she also realized that it wasn't what she wanted for her life.

"Coming back to centralized training after that, I sort of found myself not really sure if that was what I wanted to do," she says. "I love field hockey, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to sacrifice not being in school, giving up my whole life, and moving provinces to a city where I don't know anybody, just to play field hockey. I decided around May that I wasn't really enjoying it enough to continue to live in Vancouver, and that I wanted to come back to school and play here."

Her time training in Vancouver wasn't wasted; from a field hockey perspective, she has benefitted greatly. Even what may have been a negative at the time is now a positive since she returned to the Pandas roster.

"I think my biggest issue with the national team was my confidence level," Mason says. "The coach wasn't the best at supporting it, and that's sort of what didn't work out for me. Anyways, coming back here, it's nice because I do have the confidence, and I can try things now and feel comfortable doing them."

The Pandas are thrilled to have her back on their roster. Mason is happy to share any new expertise she picked up at the national training centre with her university teammates.

"It's good that I've come back here. I hope that I can help the rest of the team out with things that I've learned."

Pandas head coach Carla Duncan relishes having Mason on her squad for another year. Duncan has coached Mason for four years, and she says that Mason's time with Team Canada has

had a noticeable effect on her, and that the entire team has really profited.

"I think just generally she's more confident as a player," Duncan says. "She definitely now has the respect of her teammates, of course, but also of the league. We already know that other teams are going to be designing a game plan to counteract her, and that's a big step for her."

"From a coaching perspective, it's awesome. We have three or four different ways we'll use her against opponents, and it forces them to respect what we're doing. All of a sudden, they're focusing on us and what we're doing rather than what they need to be doing."

Mason knows that she has an important role as a leader of the team, and she's happy to do her best to fill it.

"I just want to lead by example, to show the younger players that if we want to do well, we have to work hard. We can't just expect it to come, so at every practice, I always try and push everybody that little extra bit. I'm not the one consoling people; I'm more the one trying to push people."

Duncan agrees with Mason's self-assessment.

"She's definitely a leader, but more a leader by example than a vocal leader," Duncan explains. "Field hockey is very important to her, and she puts a lot of time and effort into it, but she's also a very good student, and she balances that with her social life as well. Erin is an extremely well-rounded person."