



PETEYEE

OUCH! Jacqueline Smith takes one for the team here, and might have to do it again against U of M.



MIKEOTTO

OOH YEAH! Brett Colvin and John Konye (13) hope this weekend gives them more to celebrate.

Soccer squads seek two wins to stay in it

It's been an up-and-down season for the Pandas so far, and it'll take a pair of wins at home to keep them in playoff contention

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

Whether their record shows it or not, the Alberta women's soccer squad feels that they're having a successful season. The rookie-heavy team is at home again this weekend, and they're hoping that last Sunday's big victory against UCFV was the beginning of a trend.

The Pandas (2-4-0) play the Manitoba Bisons (5-1-0) on Saturday and the Regina Cougars (0-6-0) on Sunday, and they need to be successful if they want to stay in contention for the conference finals after a rocky start to the season.

"It'd be nice to say we could continue on and drop some more points, but—and I don't want to jinx us—winning this game would have a real impact," Pandas head coach Liz Jepsen said. "One win isn't as big from where Manitoba sits, but for us, [since] Manitoba's beaten some big teams, if we beat them, it brings us up and sort of makes up for some of those early losses we had. It would impact the standings hugely."

Dealing with the Bisons rather than the struggling Cougars will be the biggest challenge for Alberta: they share the top Canada West spot with Trinity Western, and are ranked eighth-overall nationally. They're returning almost all of their players from last year—an edge the Pandas lack.

"Manitoba's good; their start this year indicates they're better than they've ever been," Jepsen said. "They have the same team that's more or less been playing for three years, so they should not have any of those jitters that we've been sort of working our way through."

Bisons head coach Walter McKee thinks that his players' familiarity with each other has been key to their success.

"You have to develop camaraderie—relationships have to be developed—and get to know how people are playing, and I think that's where we are now. We're getting better in that area," he said.

For all of Jepsen's respect for the Bisons, she's hardly pessimistic about the outcome of the match, as long as they can put together everything they've been working on in the past weeks and exploit Manitoba's weaknesses.

"I do think two wins are feasible, but it's just being able to finish at net," she said. "Soccer's a game of performance, so it's not going to be an easy deal," she said. "Manitoba is extremely skilled up front, but I think they're a bit more susceptible in the back, and we've been attacking in numbers and getting better."

Fourth-year Pandas midfielder Lindsay Stewart has an even more positive outlook on the weekend than her coach.

"I think we're going in expecting two wins," she said. "We sure know that we're capable of beating Regina; [and] Manitoba is doing well, but we do have the team to beat [them] too."

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LINDSAY STEWART
PANDAS MIDFIELDER

Stewart has confidence in her team, and she feels that there is talent there despite their lack of experience.

"We're not as experienced as our past teams have been, but I think that we have a lot more potential than people think we have right now, just because we have a lot of new players," she said. "We're young, fast, and fit, and that's what we're going to get our wins on."

Games are at 12pm at Foote Field West.

The Bears are in a good position—fourth in Canada West—but they'll need to keep it up this weekend if they don't want to drop

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

The Bears soccer team may be young, but they're determined—that's how head coach Len Vickery explains the success his team has been having. Though they launched their season with a pair of losses, they're now ranked third in Canada West, and made the jump into the national top ten this week at number nine.

"Whatever they lack in familiarity with one another and good possession-play, they more than make up for in determination and desire."

LEN VICKERY
BEARS SOCCER HEAD COACH

Alberta (3-2-1) be trying to extend that success by beating the Saskatchewan Huskies (2-3-1) at home this weekend. Though they're hardly in dire straits, Canada West competition is such that Vickery feels that these two games are a must-win.

"So that we can stay on the hunt and keep progressing, we've got to look to win both games," Vickery said.

The Bears, defending national champions, lost a number of their key starters over the off-season, and have struggled for consistency and togetherness. Their youth has shown in a few recent games, most notably in last Sunday's match against the University of Victoria.

They scored twice in the first ten minutes, but were outplayed for most of the rest of the game and escaped with a tie. It's these weaknesses that Vickery has his team working on.

"We're a team fighting for an identity," he said. "It's a relatively new team; we've got new players to the squad; we've got a number of first-year players starting in key positions, and they're still finding their way."

But though they may not have much experience playing together, Vickery thinks that their strength comes from an extraordinary drive to succeed.

"Whatever they lack in familiarity with one another and good possession-play, they more than make up for in determination and desire," he said.

Vickery added that the Bears have been practicing hard and are working to improve their cohesiveness and offence—particularly to become more efficient with the ball.

"We've just got to become a bit more sophisticated in our possession-play," he said. "Rather than fight through the opposition, we've got to play through them—and there is an essential difference there—and it's got to come from a more possession-type game."

Though they have a slightly better record than the Huskies, the Bears won't be taking anything for granted this weekend. All of Saskatchewan's three losses have been to teams in the conference top-four, including second-place Victoria and the as-yet-undefeated Trinity Western Spartans. In addition, they've beat the UCFV Cascades, who vanquished the Bears 3-1 the first weekend of the season.

All told, though, Vickery thinks the Bears will be able to take them on.

"If we come with the same determination as we did last weekend and the week before, [and] if we safeguard against any defensive frailties and continue to score the goals that we're scoring, we hope to get two positive results," the coach said.

The Bears will take on the Dogs at Foote Field West on Saturday and Sunday at 2:15pm.