



FILE PHOTO: KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

LOOK AT ME WHILE I BEAT YOU Alberta's roster is down many high-profile names, but those left want to keep winning.

Pandas lose players, keep focus

Alberta team forced to defend their national banner without some big stars

NICK FROST
Sports Staff

The Pandas hockey team will have a vastly different look from last year's national championship-winning squad when they take to the ice this weekend in the season opener against the UBC Thunderbirds. During the off-season, the Pandas lost some important faces from last year, including the goaltending tandem of Holly Tarleton and Danielle Bles, and, most notably, the top-four scorers in Canada West: Jenna Barber, Taryn Barry, Lindsay McAlpine and Tarin Podloski.

However, with this turnover comes 14 new faces to the lineup—including Alberta Female AAA-league standouts Katie Borbely and Alana Cabana—that already have head coach Howie Draper feeling confident that his team won't have as much trouble re-adjusting, and regaining that championship-winning form.

"The new players seem to have a good grasp of how to support each other offensively and defensively—they're picking up our systems very quickly," Draper said. "They seem to make good decisions both with the puck and away from the puck, and to be doing that at this stage of the year is very promising."

For those who have remained with the club from previous seasons, their roles will be of even more importance this year. Returnees like Leah Copeland, Jennifer Newton, and Rayanne Reeve will be looked to by the coaching staff to guide the newcomers comfortably into the fray,

while still initially carrying the brunt of the offensive and defensive duties.

"We need the returnees to step up into a leadership role, which we're seeing already," Draper explained. "It's so important, because we lost so many important leaders and mature players from last year, that they have fun and develop a good work ethic similar to those that have made our team successful over the last number of years."

"Everyone is tired of just practicing and playing games that are obviously useful, but don't really mean a heck of a lot."

HOWIE DRAPER
PANDAS HOCKEY HEAD COACH

"We also need a good scoring punch this year—we've lost our top four goal scorers from last year. We need them to be able to step up on the power play and in five-on-five situations and create a little more offensively than maybe they're used to."

Regardless of the turnover, though, the Pandas are looking forward to finally getting back into playing some meaningful games, along with having the opportunity to once again prove themselves worthy of being among the best in the country.

"Everyone seems to be chomping

at the bit," Draper said. "Everyone is tired of just practicing and playing games that are obviously useful, but don't really mean a heck of a lot. We're all looking forward to playing some games in conference play. I think, from a coaching standpoint, it brings a lot more out of the players: their focus is a little bit stronger, and they're just more plugged in and prepared to give everything they've got to try and get better."

Their first taste of conference action will come this weekend against UBC, a team that has also seen a lot of players from last year's squad make way for new faces this year. With that in mind, Draper has an inkling of what to expect from the Thunderbirds, but feels his team is up for the challenge no matter what kind of game UBC brings.

"It's hard to say [what to expect]—they're a very strong defensive team, and they've always been very good in that area," Draper said. "So, if history repeats itself, it'll be us trying to solve their defence. As well, they have a lot of new players on their team, so they've probably been trying to restock their offence—really, we should be prepared for anything. That first period will tell us a lot about what UBC has in store for us over not only this game, but the six games that we play against them."

The Pandas' season gets underway this Friday and Sunday at 7pm in Clare Drake Arena, though there will be a delayed puck-drop on Saturday night, as the team will be first raising last year's CIS championship banner.

performances from fourth-year midfielder Erin Mason and fifth-year forward Jennifer Zwicker, in particular. As for Vikes, fans should keep an eye out for fourth-year Ali Lee and first-year keeper Kaitlyn Williams, who let in her first goal of the entire season just this past weekend.

Students crossing

As the rest of us get ready to stuff ourselves with turkey (or perhaps a non-standard alternative) and mashed potatoes, 32 of Alberta's best long-distance runners will be showing their stuff in Saskatoon at their second Canada West cross-country tournament of the season.

Heading to the U of S race are 16 Bears and 16 Pandas, against the Huskies, Calgary, Manitoba, several small

American colleges, and a few elite individual cross-country runners.

Does whatever a spider can

It says a lot about the Gateway and the people who work here that the topic of underwear was a popular one this morning. Conal made sure to wear his favourite pair of Spider-man boxer-briefs (not his only pair, mind you, just his favourite), even though they sort of clashed with the rest of his outfit.

In an interesting twist, Natalie and I unwittingly almost wore matching undies—pink boy-shorts—but hers have stripes, while mine are a solid cotton-candy sort of colour.

Ryan is wearing blue striped boxers that he hopes make him look like a Calvin Klein model, but the actual result is more reminiscent of your grandfather's ginch.

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MAKE TEACHING MATTER
PROFESSOR OF THE WEEK

SPORTS SHORTS

By Robin Collum

Short sticks, high hopes

The Pandas field hockey team (1-3-2) have another home series this weekend, this time playing host to the conference-leading University of Victoria Vikes (4-0-2). The young Pandas have had a very tough season so far. They opened the season with a huge upset win against the UBC Thunderbirds, but it's been downhill ever since then. Though not at the bottom of the Canada West pile, it's not quite a must-win weekend for them, but a couple of victories would be nice.

Alberta will be looking for strong

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