



FILE PHOTO: ANDREW RURAK

**CAN HAS CAN-AM VICTORY?** The Bears are going to have to aim over the net if they want to help Canada win the Can-Am Challenge against teams like NCAA Division I champions UC Irvine.

## US schools clamouring for Can-Am Challenge

Eight of the best men's volleyball teams in North America are at the University this weekend in a head-to-head battle of countries

ROBIN COLLUM  
Sports Editor

The men's volleyball regular season is still two weeks away, but arguably the most highly anticipated event of the year is already here: the annual Husky Energy Can-Am Challenge. Four teams each from CIS and NCAA will gather in the Main Gym from Thursday to Saturday, battling it out for continental supremacy on the court.

Last year's CIS silver medallists, the Bears will host teams from McMaster University, the University of Calgary, and Trinity Western University, as well as NCAA Division I schools George Mason University, the University of Southern California, University of California at Irvine, and Pepperdine.

With such illustrious teams—UC Irvine were last year's Div I champions, Pepperdine went to the Final Four, and all but Calgary of the Canadian teams went to CIS championships—the Can-Am Challenge has become one of the most important events on the volleyball calendar in North America.

"It's one of the great landmark events in volleyball," Pepperdine head coach Marv Dunphy said. "People are probably more aware of this event than they are a lot of national team events. We just had our zone tournament down in Anaheim, California, and I could count as I was watching the game, 'Here's 100 people; here's 150.' At [this] event, the place is always rocking. It's exciting to be part of that."

The high level of competition is, according to those involved, crucial to the event's popularity to fans and teams alike.

"Now it's considered to be one of the best tournaments in North America, even though it's pre-season, just because of the format and the quality of the teams," Bears head coach Terry Danyluk said. "The quality of the competition is great."

"We expect a really high level of volleyball," agreed John Speraw, UC Irvine head coach. "The

Canadian teams we've played there in the past have all been excellent, and I've met many of the Canadian coaches, and they're great coaches. We're going to get a high level of play."

The timing of the event means that, though it's too early for teams to be at their peak—the NCAA regular season doesn't get going until January—the Challenge is still an important pre-season opportunity for those participating.

"You get four dates in the non-traditional play segment [of the season]—four opportunities to test your team—and this is great," Dunphy explained. "If we just scrimmaged somebody here, in our gym, the lights are on, but there's no people there. There's no whistle; there's no good guys / bad guys thing. It's not the same.

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TERRY DANYLUK  
BEARS VOLLEYBALL HEAD COACH

[Can-Am] is a great way to test tactics, systems, and personnel."

Danyluk and the U of A put in all the work to host the tournament because he feels it's such a good training tool for student-athletes.

"I've played a lot myself, and the thing I've always said is that the more international experiences you can have, the better you'll become," the former Team Canada athlete said. "Not only as a player, but as a person. The more opportunities I can give my guys to play teams from across the border, or European teams, or Japanese teams, those are all things that help a

volleyball player grow."

Of course, for the casual fan, the Can-Am Challenge is simply an opportunity to watch some of North America's best university athletes play in the Main Gym, not to mention cheer for their country. One of the more interesting aspects of the Can-Am Challenge is that there isn't a single team winner: each game is a Canada-US matchup, and at the end of the weekend, one country is declared the winner. In the twelve years since the current four-on-four format was established, Canada has won the tournament eight times.

"I think the Canada-US thing adds a nice little twist," said Dunphy. "It's not too often we would pull for USC."

The Bears are a traditional CIS powerhouse, and as such, have been a big part of Canada's strong Can-Am record, having not lost in four years. The team only graduated two players from last season, and Danyluk expects a quality performance from his squad again this weekend.

"[We have] the majority of the guys who played last year, plus we've added a couple of young high-school players who've never played at a high level but are really good athletes," Danyluk said. "Part of our strength will be our outside hitting, because all of our outside hitters are back."

He'll also be using the playing time as a pre-season training tool.

"It's a good opportunity for us to take another stride to starting league in two weeks. We're going to play hard and give everybody an opportunity at least somewhat against the opposing teams. I'm still using this as something of a gauge to see how good we're going to be."

But practical advantages aside, all the participating teams are in for the fun of playing each other. "It's a great event. The University of Alberta does it all; all we do is show up and play," Dunphy said. "I think maybe because we were the first to say, 'Yeah, we're coming,' that out of loyalty [Terry has] kept inviting us back, and I hope that never changes because really it's one of the highlights of our fall."

### CAN-AM SCHEDULE

#### Thursday, Main Gym

Alberta vs USC, 7pm

#### Friday, Main Gym

TWU vs George Mason, 10am  
McMaster vs UC Irvine, 12pm  
Calgary vs George Mason, 4pm  
TWU vs UC Irvine, 6:30pm  
Alberta vs Pepperdine, 8pm

#### Friday, Pavillion

Calgary vs Pepperdine, 10am  
McMaster vs UBC, 6:30pm

#### Saturday, Main Gym

McMaster vs Pepperdine, 10am  
Alberta vs George Mason, 12pm  
TWU vs Pepperdine, 4pm  
Calgary vs USC, 6:30pm  
Alberta vs UC Irvine, 8pm

#### Saturday, Pavilion

TWU vs USC, 10pm  
Calgary vs UC Irvine, 12pm

#### Admissions

Thursday: \$5 adults, \$3 students, \$2 youth  
Friday: \$10 adults, \$5 students, \$4 youth  
Saturday: \$10 adults, \$5 students, \$4 youth  
Weekend passes:  
\$20 adults, \$10 students, \$8 youth