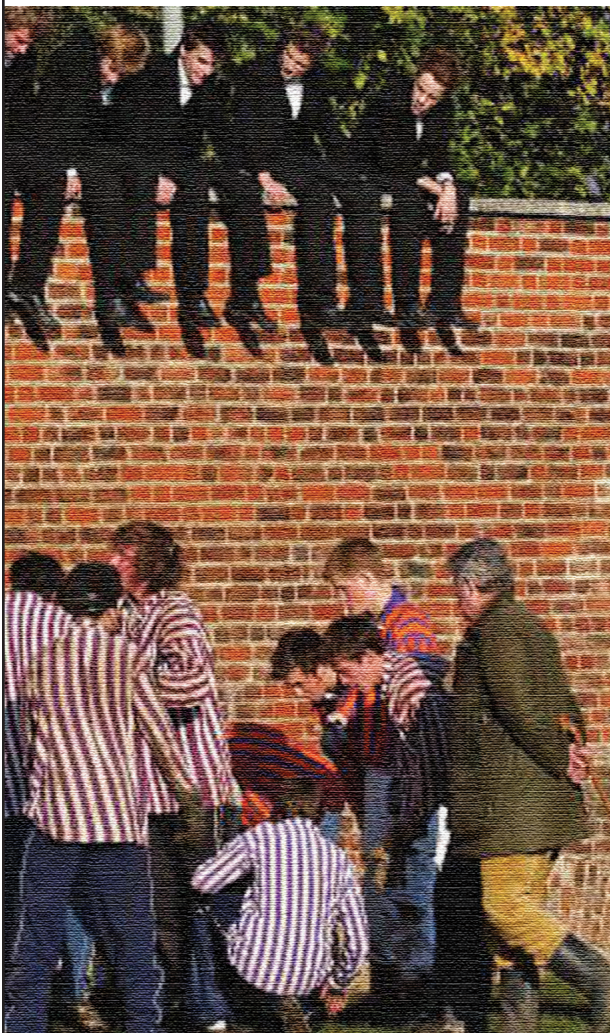


The **"Eton Wall game"** has been played at the prestigious English public school between the "Collegers" and "Oppidans" since 1717. Players form a scrum, pressed tightly against a slightly curved brick wall. They try to advance the ball down the wall to the goal—a cottage door at one end of the field, and a particular tree at the other. If the ball leaves the scrum and goes away from the wall, it's out of play. Those players closest to the wall generally suffer scrapes to their knees, elbows, and hips. The last goal was scored in 1915.



Famous alumni of the game include Eric Blair (aka George Orwell), former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, and Jack the Ripper suspect James Kenneth Stephen.

MEETINGS TUESDAYS AT 5:30

GATEWAY SPORTS

Balls to the wall since 1910

CAN AM

WRITTEN BY ROBIN COLLUM ■ PHOTOS BY NADIYA BALUKH, SHAUN MOTT, STU TREBELCO, AND TARA STIEGLITZ

The hundreds of fans who packed into the Main Gym for the last game of the Can-Am Challenge on Saturday knew they were in for some of the highest-quality volleyball available in North America, but most of them didn't know that the game, between the U of A Golden Bears and the University of California at Irvine, would also be the down-to-the-wire decider for the whole tournament.

The NCAA squads were ahead 8-7 in the tournament, which is between CIS and NCAA rather than individual teams, and the scores were such that if the Bears wanted to keep Canada's four-year Can-Am winning streak alive, they needed to win in straight sets. But the precariousness of the situation wasn't announced before the match, and most of the people in attendance likely didn't do the math for themselves. In fact, neither did the players.

"I didn't even know it was so close, but it turns out that if we had lost one set, we would have lost the whole tournament," Alberta middle Adam Kaminski said.

Lucky for their fellow Canadians, the Bears were well able to deliver, and Canada claimed the Can-Am challenge for the ninth time in its twelve-year history. The Challenge featured competition between four CIS teams—McMaster, Calgary, Trinity Western, and the U of A—and four from the NCAA: UC Irvine, Pepperdine, the University of Southern California, and George Mason. The Bears, who went undefeated for the fifth-straight year, kicked off the tournament on Thursday night by beating USC, but the tally swung in favour of the US on the second day of competition; the NCAA teams were up 5-3 at the end of Friday, as only McMaster and Alberta were able to log any victories. The rest of the Canadian teams stepped up on Saturday, however, nearly evening the score to set up the showdown between the Bears and the UC Irvine Anteaters.

The cross-border rivalry is part of the tournament's appeal, according to participants. In addition to the fact that they're bumping, set-

ting, and spiking for the Maple Leaf as well as their school, Canadian players like Kaminski felt that it showcases their ability to compete on the same level as their American counterparts, something that few Canadian sports can boast.

"It's always good to show that Canadian schools are just as good as the Americans because Division I teams get so much more funding and everything," he said.

"I don't know why, but it seems to be one of the only sports where we're really comparable," said Alberta setter Brock Pehar, who was named tournament MVP. "I'm really glad it is for our sake and for everyone's sake because it's always really good volleyball when we play against them."

While the players were concerned with the patriotic boost that victory brought, their coaches were concentrating on the more concrete benefits of the high-quality pre-season tournament. It was a chance to gauge their teams' progress and try out different rosters, not to mention the opportunity for national and conference rivals to scope each other out without having to face off.

Bears head coach Terry Danyluk used the weekend to figure out who's going to be on his starting line-up when conference play starts in two weeks.

"We have a lot of players that I think could start for us right now; it's not a certainty for them, so I played all of those guys the most," he said. "I played all but one guy this weekend, and for a 15-man roster, that's pretty good."

Irvine head coach John Speraw also used the tournament to his advantage.

"There were matches where I started three freshmen, and I got the opportunity to look at a lot of new guys in a lot of different positions, new lineups," Speraw said. "The best part about this tournament is we play USC and Pepperdine all the time. By the end of the year, we'll probably have played those guys at least three or four times, maybe even five, so it's nice to see them but not have to play them an additional time."

FACE OFF