

Bears on the rebound from weekend loss

Coming off a tough loss and tie, Alberta's mens' soccer team is looking to secure a couple of wins as they close in on the playoffs

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

In a game like soccer, things don't always go as planned. All you can do is try to prepare as much as possible, which is the approach the Bears soccer team (4-3-3) is taking going into this weekend's home games against the Calgary Dinos (3-6-1) and the Lethbridge Pronghorns (4-4-2).

"We're going to put two strong performances on the field," Bears head coach Len Vickery said. "You never know how the ball is going to roll after that; if you take care of your own business, your own performance, oftentimes the results follow."

"We've got to get our players up to speed with winning their aerial challenges and defending."

LEN VICKERY
BEARS HEAD COACH

Vickery has taken that pragmatic attitude in response to his team's high number of draws, like this past Sunday's against the University College of the Fraser Valley, when Alberta was up 2-1 at the end of regulation time, but let in a goal during injury time to end up with a tie.

"As we saw, we did put a strong performance together, but with the unfortunate goal scored in overtime, these things sometimes happen," Vickery said. "The least you can work towards is ensuring that you do get that strong performance."

In particular, the Bears have been working on improving their defence. The Dinos sit at the bottom of Canada West, but Lethbridge is third in the conference—only one point behind the Bears.

"We've got to get our players up

to speed with winning their aerial challenges and defending," Vickery said. "It's been our goal for a number of weeks now that we've got to be stronger in that regard because we've conceded goals in every single game. We're still working to ensure we limit the opposition's goal-scoring opportunities and goals against."

Back-end problems notwithstanding, the Bears have plenty to be happy with at this point in the year. With only four games to go in the regular season, the Bears sit second in Canada West and are ranked ninth nationwide. Considering that the team—2006 national champions—lost five starting seniors at the end of last season, Vickery considers those statistics especially impressive, and attributes their competitiveness to his athletes' commitment.

"Our strengths as a team are the attitude of the players and the work ethic," he said. "Everyone is working hard to elevate their game because that's what it's going to require not just through the last four games of the season, but hopefully through the playoffs and toward nationals."

The biggest learning curve, Vickery explained, was for the new players to get accustomed to the realities of varsity soccer.

"The progress has been tremendous. The first weekend, a number of players were caught unawares of the kind of demands and rigours of the game played at the Canada West level," he said.

"That was kind of an eye-opener, but the players have picked up on what is required. Because we're a young team, we can't take anything for granted, we can't take a day off, we can't take it easy in practice; we've got to be working on all aspects of our game on a consistent basis, and that's what the players have committed to and work towards."

Games are Friday and Sunday at 2:15pm at Foote Field.



MINISTRY OF SILLY WALKS The Bears will have to stay on their toes against Calgary and Lethbridge this weekend.

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