

Hockey Pandas face off with weak T-Bird team

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With opposing numbers in the win-loss column, the Pandas hockey team (8-2-0) will face off this weekend in a two-game set against the struggling UBC Thunderbirds (2-8-0). Having split their last two weekend series against Manitoba, with whom the Pandas share top spot in the Canada West standings, and Saskatchewan, who currently sits below .500, Alberta has proven that while they're one of the dominant teams in the country, they certainly aren't immune to challenges.

Head coach Howie Draper believes that in order to prevent themselves from taking opposition such as UBC, too lightly, his team must centre their attention on the tasks that they need to accomplish rather than solely zoning in on what the other team is doing wrong.

"I think that if we focus too much on UBC as opposed to ourselves, then there will be a tendency to think things like, 'Oh, you know, their record isn't too good' and, 'Oh, it shouldn't be too hard for us,'" Draper said. "What we need to focus on, win or lose, is just getting better every game that we play. We're striving for 60 minutes of quality play, and I think we're getting closer to that. I felt that we probably played our most consistent game in Manitoba last weekend on the Saturday.

"We just want to continue to focus on the objectives that we set at the beginning of the year and the ones that we set at the beginning of each week; if we can achieve those objectives, hopefully the rest will come easy."

The feeling among in the locker room, he said, is that there's still room to grow, despite the strong start to this season. One of the biggest elements that Draper feels the team is lacking is consistency—specifically, making sure that offensive effort matches the defensive effort and vice-versa, coupled with his players putting in a regular effort from the first faceoff



FILEPHOTO: MIKEOTTO

WHO NEEDS TWO LEGS? The Pandas have been up and down lately, but they hope to tip the balance with two wins this weekend at home against UBC.

to the final buzzer.

"I think that we're definitely still a far way away from where we can be," Draper admitted. "I think we've got a great team here, but they're young though, and they need to be more consistent. So we need to continue to work really hard to elevate all areas of our play and try and put as much emphasis as possible on playing as close as we can to have an ideal game from start to finish."

Coming into this weekend's match-up,

Alberta appears to have a distinct edge over the Thunderbirds. Though they have two scorers—Emily McGrath-Agg and Alisha Choy—in the top ten in Canada West, UBC dropped its first six match-ups of the season before earning its first win.

The Pandas have already faced the UBC offence this season, and they know that playing a strong defensive game will be key in shutting them down.

"We've talked about how they might be

perceived as weak, but in all honesty, they gave us a great run when they were last here—they scored five goals on us, and I couldn't remember the last time we had been scored on five times in a game," Draper explained.

"They're a young, up-and-coming team; they're very potent offensively and defensively, and have great goaltending, so we just have to play the best that we can play in order to beat them."

The puck drops at Clare Drake Arena on Friday and Saturday night at 7pm.



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