

Pandas head to net with U of S

BEN CARTER
Sports Staff

It was inevitable that the powerhouse Pandas volleyball team would eventually lose a game, and now that it's happened, the team is intent on regrouping. After experiencing their first taste of adversity last weekend, the Pandas (5-1) hope to come out with a pair of wins from their matches at home this weekend against the Saskatchewan Huskies (3-5).

Head coach Laurie Eisler saw the loss, which came from a road series against Trinity Western, more as an issue of execution and other technical matters.

"It wasn't so much what went wrong, but that we didn't play technically smart enough to limit their strengths," she said. "And they're a very good team. You have to give them credit; they played really well."

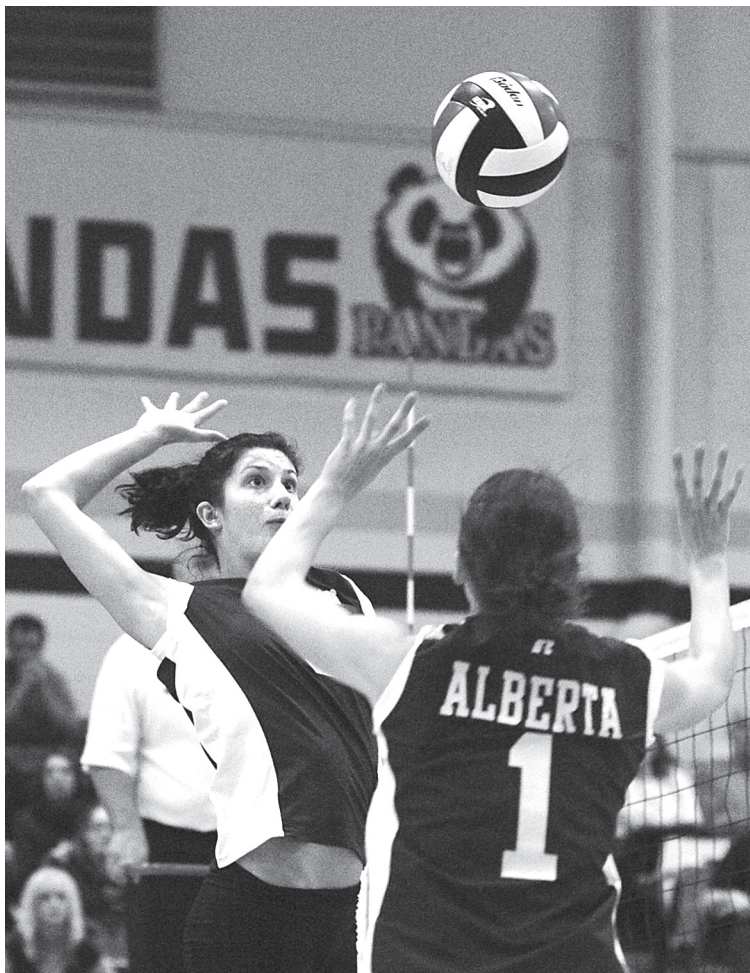
Despite the loss, Eisler feels the team played well enough to see the positives and negatives from the weekend.

"I think our defence let us down a bit; we were a little bit uncomfortable defensively, and we carried a bit of tension around. It came down to a couple of points in the first two sets—you win one of those, then the match goes longer, and I think we win it."

Like their head coach, Pandas players aren't dwelling on the loss but working on the aspects of their game that let them down in BC.

"We've been stressing variation in our play," fourth-year outside Jocelyn Blair said. "We've been trying new things offensively, and we're working on the fundamentals of defence. Those were the things that broke down for us."

Despite their losing record, the Huskies are an aggressive team and



FILE PHOTO: LAUREN STIEGLITZ

PADDYCAKE With only one loss, the Pandas are confident against the U of S.

are currently ranked just out of the national top 10.

"They're scrappy," Eisler said. "They've got a significant offensive player they rely on in Shannon Usher. They're nothing fancy; they just hit hard on the block and keep you honest."

Blair isn't taking the visitors lightly either. Whatever they see from the Huskies, Blair wants to see a more technically sound performance out

of her team.

"I really just want to see us executing the game plan," she said. "We weren't able to do that in Trinity Western because our fundamentals broke down, and I want to see us taking care of those aspects of the game so the rest of the game will be easier."

The Pandas play at 6:30pm on Friday in the Main Gym and at 8pm the following night.

Cash-for-medals idea not a winner

Canadian Olympic Committee should put money into development instead



ROBIN
COLLUM

Sports
Commentary

Imagine you're an Olympic champion—the very best in the world in your chosen sport. After four years of pushing your body to the limit, dealing with nagging injuries, and training for hours every day, you've won the biggest competition on earth. Standing on the podium with a gold medal around your neck as your national anthem plays in the background, what thought is going through your head? My guess is that it's not, "Now if only I had a big fat check to make this experience worthwhile."

But that seems to be what the Canadian Olympic Committee expects. On Monday, they announced that starting at the 2008 Beijing Games, Canadian athletes who make it to the podium will be given a large cash bonus. Bronze medallists will be given \$10 000, silver medallists \$15 000, and those who make it the very top of the podium will earn a whopping \$20 000 per medal, with the money will coming out of something called the "Athlete Excellence Fund."

Though I would normally support anything that recognizes and compensates Canada's amateur athletes for their incredibly hard work and dedication, this is a terrible plan. Giving out lump sums as a reward for one

particular standard of success—at the precise time when it's least needed—is a waste of already scarce resources. The COC is sending the message that they're not really dedicated to supporting high-calibre amateur athletes—just the ones who make the evening news.

Amateur athletes in Canada already receive scant limited funding. In addition to the rigours of training, many work part-time jobs—and take out loans from banks and family members—to get by. Not everyone agrees on how much aid full-time athletes should receive, but it's the COC's job to support them, and in this case, they're going about it all wrong.

Handing money to an athlete after they've achieved success won't make them—or their peers—any better.

Some athletes have already spoken up in praise of the new program, including two-time gold medallist Adam van Koeverden, who won in the sprint kayak in Athens, and rower Silken Laumann, who has won two bronze medals and one silver. They argue that medal bonuses will serve as a welcome gesture of appreciation and recognition of their hard work. Laumann was most vocal in her approval, saying it was a sign that the federal government is willing to give athletes "more than a handshake."

But athletes wouldn't be so desperate

for recognition if they were properly supported in the first place. The main problem with the Athlete Excellence Fund program is that it's putting the money in the wrong place. Handing money to an athlete after they've achieved success won't make them—or their peers—any better. They certainly aren't in sports for the money, so creating the Fund as an incentive is useless. Anyone who is willing to go through the effort and hardship it takes to make it to the Olympics already wants that gold medal more than almost anything in the world; putting a dollar sign on its value won't change anything. What it does is take money away from supporting developing athletes, the ones who need it the most.

When Lori-Ann Muenzer went to the 2004 Olympics, she couldn't afford to send her coach with her. He watched her win cycling gold on a TV screen here in Edmonton. Though I'm sure she would've appreciated the \$20 000 for her medal had it been available at the time, her coach would still have been in Edmonton. What would actually have helped her is if the COC had helped her out financially in the months and years before she went to Athens.

The COC would do well to remember that gold medals are won in training, not in competition. If they're serious about their medal goal for Beijing, Vancouver, and future Games, they need to put their money back into development programs, not publicity grabs like the Athlete Excellence Fund.

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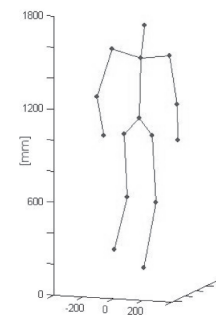


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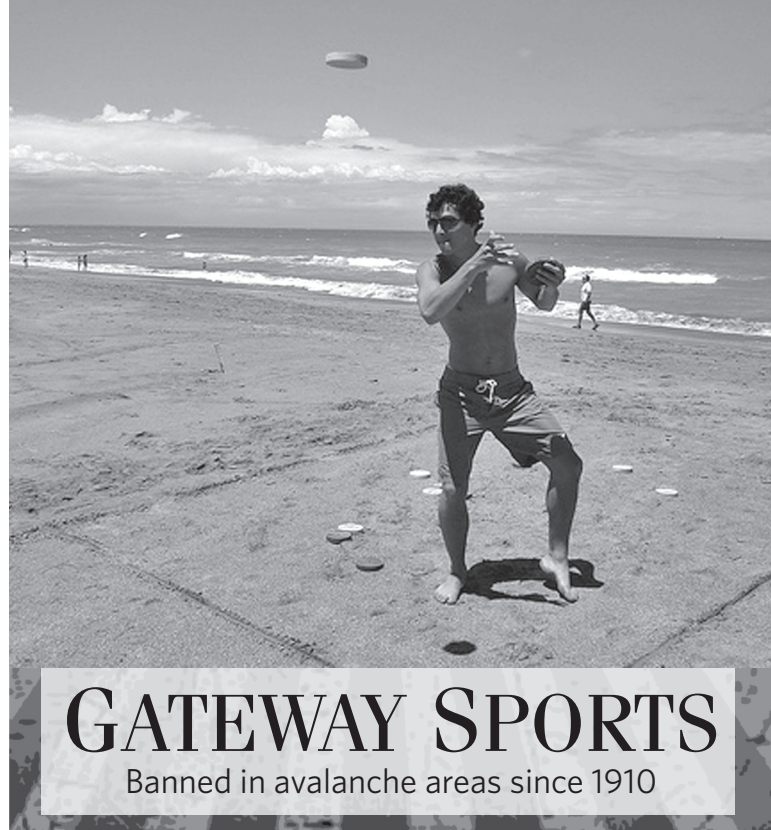
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