

Mumps outbreak puts hockey game on ice

With six Dinos in quarantine and eight more probably sick, this weekend's series between Calgary and the Bears has been put off

PAUL OWEN
Managing Editor

The home-and-home series between the Calgary Dinos and Alberta Golden Bears hockey teams scheduled for this weekend has been postponed after a mumps outbreak at the University of Calgary.

Six Dinos have been diagnosed with the disease—which is transmitted through saliva, and causes vomiting, swollen glands, and potentially inflamed testicles—and eight more are showing symptoms, prompting health officials recommend that this weekend's games be rescheduled to prevent the spread of the disease.

"It came from the regional health board," Calgary head coach Scott Atkinson said. "One of our players got the mumps from his girlfriend about a month ago. As soon as we knew that, we became a priority group to be inoculated. By the time we identified we were at risk, it was too late. So the issue of us being able to field a team is one part of it, but probably the most important part is that we would then put other teams at risk. Right now, the feeling of the medical people is that we pose a risk to the U of A players."

In addition to the postponement of this weekend's games, the Dinos were forced to cancel their exhibition match against the Canadian World Junior Championships team on 13 December.

Golden Bears head coach Eric Thurston expressed regret over not playing this weekend, as he felt his team was performing strongly, and was looking forward to the match-up against Calgary.

"I'm very disappointed," he said. "I like the way our team was playing; I like that we were going to have a good challenge ahead of us. [Injured defenceman Kyle] Fecho was going to come back Friday and play, and there was just a lot of excitement."

Make-up dates have not yet been announced, but both Atkinson and Thurston brought up the potential for mid-week rematches—perhaps on each team's bye week in the second half—or the potential to play three games when the Bears visit Calgary in mid-January, though Thurston wasn't in favour of that plan.

"Three games in three days is just tough," he said.

Rescheduling will be a joint venture from both athletic departments in the coming weeks.



FILEPHOTO:SHAUNMOTT

THAT'S SOME MANLY ICE DANCING The mumps outbreak on Calgary's team means that it'll be a while before the Bears play the Dinos again.

Vigilant trainers keep athletes' bugs at bay

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

Participating in varsity sports is a two-sided coin when it comes to health. On one hand, university athletes are usually stronger and in better shape than the general student population; on the other, they're a group that spends a lot of time in close proximity, sharing water bottles and germs.

This means—as Calgary's men's hockey team now knows first-hand—that if one person on a team is sick, it's incredibly easy for everyone else to catch the same bug.

"This is a group that breathes and sweats and spits on each other fairly closely; we know it's a breeding ground," Joan Matthews-White, the U of A's head athletic therapist, said.

Team therapists and trainers are in charge of trying to make sure that Alberta athletes stay as healthy as possible. Something on the scale of the mumps outbreak that sidelined the Dinos is out of the usual scope of their duties, and the Athletics Department

deferred to Capital Health's contagious disease protocols.

But in the normal course of the year, therapists have to deal with colds, the flu, and other more typical illnesses. For this, they don't have specific guidelines as how to react.

"Is there a policy? Nope," Matthews-White said. "We do have processes and protocols in place, but there's not a written recipe that says, 'Here's how to stay healthy.'"

Matthews-White said that trainers generally approach disease-prevention as an educational issue.

"Basically, athlete health is promoted in that idea of self-management," she said. "You have to be vulnerable to get the flu or a cold, so we talk to athletes about making good decisions, making good choices, [and] getting lots of sleep. You know the environment: we have people who are working, up hours late studying, and at practice. It's a population that's at high risk."

Trainers make it a priority to do what Matthews-White calls the "small

things" that reduce the risk of illness transmission, such as encouraging athletes to use separate water bottles and towels, wash their hands frequently, and cover their mouths.

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JOAN MATTHEWS-WHITE
U OF A HEAD ATHLETIC THERAPIST

"They're just everyday, common-sense things, but now we have a coach or trainer telling them," she said.

Matthews-White believes in the U of A's approach, crediting it with protecting athletes from last year's

Norovirus outbreak in Lister Hall.

"I think we've been really great at it. We never got Norwalk. We had a couple of athletes who lived in Lister who got it, but it never went through our varsity athletes—that's pretty cool," she said.

The challenge with the process is that student-athletes don't always pay attention, an issue Bears basketball head coach Don Horwood acknowledged.

"Of course, we do end up getting players who do dumb things, like drinking from another player's water bottle and that sort of thing, and we try to avoid that and we remind them of it, but they're still kids," he said. "I don't think you could say that athletes are any different than anybody else in the student body."

That's why having someone looking out for their health is so important, he said.

"The difference is that they're in contact daily with trainers, so they're reminded daily how important various things are. I give credit to them for the health of our athletes."

SPORTS STOCKINGS

Compiled by Robin Collum

Highway to the infection zone

The Pandas basketball team (6-2) were in Calgary last weekend, and beat the Dinos (4-4) both nights. The lead went back and forth throughout Friday's game, but the Pandas locked it up in the last few minutes and finished with a 65-58 win. On Saturday, they overcame a 15-point deficit at the half to win 84-77.

This weekend they'll be in Lethbridge, trying to avoid any mumps-y spit while playing the Pronghorns (1-7).

Don't let the basketballs catch fire

The Bears basketball team (5-3) will be in Lethbridge this weekend, and they'll be trying to make up for last weekend's disappointments in Calgary (7-1). Alberta lost 95-74 on Friday and went down 98-73 Saturday.

They'll be hoping to redeem themselves and maintain their tenth-place CIS ranking against the Pronghorns (0-8).