



FILEPHOTO: LAUREN STIEGLITZ

**WRAPAROUND CITY** After a busy break and a weekend series in Saskatoon, the Pandas will face Regina this weekend.

## Ice Pandas look to stop Cougars

ROBIN COLLUM  
Sports Editor

The Pandas hockey team has one of the most feared offences in Canada West: almost all of their lines can pose a scoring threat on a good night, they routinely put up four or five goals in a game, and they've helped propel U of A to second in the CIS rankings.

But according to head coach Howie Draper, they're trying to beef up their defence as they head into a weekend series at home against Regina and making sure that they're always at the top of their game.

"We're still working on improving our consistency as a team," he said. "I think in particular we want to be better defensively, and we know that Regina is going to be challenging us in our own end, so that's something that we want to pay attention to.

"Regina's got a fast team, and they definitely do have some offensive talent. It's all about going back to defence. We have to make sure that we're up to the

task in terms of making sure that we're controlling the middle of the ice and in front of our of the net."

Central to neutralizing Regina's threat will be goalie Dana Vinge. The second-year netminder has played Alberta's last four games, and Draper is extremely pleased with her performances.

"Our goaltending has been outstanding," he said. "She's been stellar, in my opinion. I think she's doing exactly what she knows that she can do."

Alberta is coming off a two-game series against the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. They beat the Huskies 3-2 on Friday night and 4-1 the next one. The week before, the Pandas were in Guelph for the Gryphons Invitational Tournament, where they beat the top team in the country, McGill, as well as the host team, but lost to Wilfred Laurier, who are ranked third in CIS.

Draper is glad his team has those recent games under their belts going into this weekend.

"We feel that those two weekends

were necessary to just get back to where we were in the first half," he said. "Everyone's feeling relatively healthy, and they've managed to work the turkey out of their legs, so now it's just a matter of getting back to business.

"Saskatchewan has been playing really well, but maybe the thing that Regina has is that they've got a few players that are a little more capable of putting the puck away, so we've just got to be that much more diligent in defense."

For her part, Regina head coach Sarah Howald said her team relishes the chance to take on the top team in Canada West.

"We're a fairly skilled team—we've got some skilled forwards and good goaltending—and we enjoy playing the U of A because they are as well," she said. "As always, they should be good games. They are a good team, and I think our players enjoy the challenge of playing them."

The Pandas play Cougars at 7pm in Clare Drake on Friday and Saturday.

## Young wrestling team has room to grow

Though inexperienced, Alberta's grapplers are ambitious and hard-working

ROBIN COLLUM  
Sports Editor

Most coaches shy away from the term "rebuilding," afraid that it will imply weakness or lack of talent on their team. But when U of A wrestling coach Vang Ioannides says it about his Pandas team, he means it: after losing most of his athletes at once a few years ago, Ioannides has a roster full of gifted rookies, and he's slowly building them up to dominate Canada West in a few years.

"We're still attempting to rebound from the very strong teams that we graduated out in about 2005," he said, expressing faith that this crop of rookies could soon be a real threat. "We now have a core of people who I think can start to do that, but we won't be able to do it at the drop of a hat."

The Bears don't have much more than the Pandas in terms of veteran athletes, either. They only have one fifth-year, captain Bram Ratay.

Consequently, Ioannides is pragmatic in his expectations for the year

in terms of tournament results. He expects the men to be among the better Canada West teams, but that breaking into the lead pack nationally will be a difficult feat.

"We'll qualify guys for CIS [championships] as we always do; our men are perennially in the top ten," he said. "It might be harder to do that this year. Any other year, no problem, but in our conference this year, it'll be harder. We'll be looking for some of our men to break out early."

Ioannides' goal for the Pandas' season is more modest because he has his sights set more on their long-term progress than short-term success.

"A top-ten [CIS] finish would be a pie-in-the-sky goal," he said. "It's feasible eventually, but this is not the year we set the world on fire."

The Pandas and Bears have just returned from San Diego, where they conducted their winter training camp.

"We worked on new techniques and ways to wrestle," first-year Meaghan Young said. "We worked on our

physical conditioning, but also our mental preparedness, to get tougher both physically and mentally."

Alberta will get their first chance to test out what they practiced in California this weekend, when they host the Golden Bear Open tournament. A combined varsity and open meet, it will give the U of A's athletes plenty of competition. Over the course of the weekend, each wrestler could get up to nine matches.

Ratay is looking forward to the chance to show what he and his teammates can do.

"This is my last year, and I hope to shine a bit," he said. "We've got some younger guys and people who don't have much experience all coming together.

"We don't have much veteran leadership, but we have lots of ambition, and we're excited about the rest of the season."

The varsity matches take place in the Pavilion on Friday starting at 5pm. Open events begin at 10am on Saturday morning.

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