



FILE PHOTO: PETE YEE

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS On top of their regularly scheduled games against the Cougars this weekend, the Bears will face off against the Dinos to make up for one of the games that was delayed due to the mumps outbreak before Christmas.

Ice Bears prepare for Regina and Calgary in triple-header

NICK FROST
Sports Staff

The Golden Bears hockey team faces a tall order as they prepare to take on not one but two opponents—the University of Regina Cougars (15-3-4) and the University of Calgary Dinos (10-6-4)—in an uncharacteristic three-game set this upcoming weekend. Because of a mumps outbreak in the Dinos' locker room earlier this season, which forced the postponement of a weekend set between Alberta and Calgary, a make-up game has been added to the Sunday following what was originally supposed to be a two-game set against the Cougars.

"We'll have to put in more effort this week to prepare, in the sense that we'll have to move through things a little bit quicker than we normally like to, just because we're facing two teams rather than one," said Bears head coach Eric Thurston said, whose team (15-3-2) is in second place in Canada West—two points behind Saskatchewan—after a two-game sweep by the Dinos this past weekend.

"Usually, you can plan for the whole week, so we'll have to mix things up a little bit," he said. "With that, though, we're coming off of the series with Calgary, so we're pretty familiar with what they're going to bring to the table—it's fresh in our minds."

The challenge for the Golden Bears is not only the amount of hockey being played in such a short space of time, but also the fact that they will have to adapt to facing two different styles of hockey

in the same weekend. With the Dinos more offence-driven and the Cougars mostly focused on defence, Thurston acknowledges the small window that his team will have to adapt their style between opponents.

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"[In this situation], we'll have to fine-tune our game from team to team—specifically, knowing what we're going to have to do be successful and even a little bit of anticipating what they're going to do," Thurston explained.

Starting off the weekend will be the originally scheduled two-game set against the Regina Cougars on Friday and Saturday night. Having already defeated the Cougars earlier this year, the Golden Bears know that they will need to push past Regina's strong defensive efforts—particularly, on the part of goaltender Brant

Hilton, who currently boasts the lowest goals-against-average (1.96) and highest save percentage (.916) in Canada West.

"Regina plays their defence really well, and their goaltending plays very well—they're both particularly stingy," Thurston said. "You have to be patient with them; sometimes, I think our guys want to press things a little when we feel that we should be scoring right away."

"We have to play a patient game, understanding that the game is 60 minutes and is not likely going to be won in the first five or ten minutes; it's going to be over a full three periods."

On Sunday the Bears will face Calgary—who swept Alberta this weekend for the first time in over eleven years. Coach Thurston attributes the losses to "mental laziness" and possible complacency, acknowledging that his team will need to be stronger in that area in order to shut down Calgary's high-powered offence.

"With their offensive guys, we need to eliminate their time and space," Thurston said. "We made some crucial turnovers in bad zones that just come back to haunt you. So, I think that being mentally prepared is part of it, but also taking away their offensive guys ability to create chances. Because when you give their offensive guys those opportunities, you're going to pay, and that's something that I think we were guilty of last weekend on both nights."

The Bears play Regina at 7:30pm on Friday and Saturday night, and Calgary at 7pm on Sunday.

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