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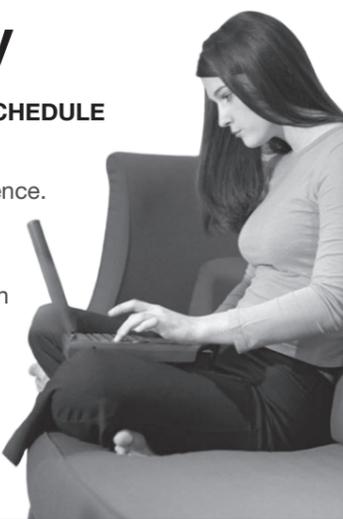
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Further future forecasting fun

More pure conjecture on what Alberta's teams can expect in the post-season



ROBIN COLLUM

Sports Commentary

Anyone can make good playoff predictions when they have all the information and know for sure which teams will be facing each other, but that's for yellow-bellied sissies. I'm so brave, I'm calling the post-season before the regular season is over. Continued from Tuesday, here's what I think is going to happen for the rest of Alberta's teams.

Pandas basketball

Of all the Alberta teams with playoff hopes this season, I'm most excited about the Pandas basketball squad. After a fairy-tale run to the national final last year—albeit without the fairy-tale ending—the Pandas returned this season with an almost identical roster and are well on their way to making a splash this post-season again.

Right now, Alberta (15-5) is tied for first in the Central Division with Calgary (15-5), so this weekend's games are extremely important because the results will determine the first round.

Alberta's hosting Lethbridge (5-15) this weekend, and I'm going to go on the record right now to say that they'll win by at least 15 points both nights. What's happening in Saskatoon this weekend will probably be more exciting, actually—Saskatchewan (8-12) is playing the Dinos—but as long as the Pandas beat Lethbridge, it's incidental. The Pandas have taken down the Dinos three times this year, so if they finish tied, Alberta will still come out on top.

The final will be a battle of Alberta. Saskatchewan's a threat, but Calgary will take them in a best-of-three semifinal and will head into the division final with some momentum. I'm putting my faith in the Pandas to win—which they'll need to, because they wouldn't be able to earn the wildcard spot.

The Final Four will—I guarantee—be hosted by defending national champions SFU (21-1), and I think Alberta, UBC, and Regina will be there. Canada West gets to send two teams to nationals this year, and it'll be tough going for the U of A, but I think they can beat both UBC and Regina, despite losing to both teams in the regular season.



PETE YEE

HIT AND A MISS Joel Schmuland (10) will help the Bears fulfill my predictions.

Bears basketball

I'm almost afraid to make predictions about what's going to go down in men's basketball. While the Bears (14-6) have a huge amount of potential, they've also had problems fully realizing it. Likewise, Alberta's main Canada West rivals—Calgary (17-3), Saskatchewan (11-9), UBC (16-5), and Brandon (18-2)—are having excellent seasons themselves, but the Bears have managed to beat them each at least once.

Though some would consider it a toss-up whether the Bears can go the distance, I'm putting my money on the side of optimism. The Bears have shown that they can play at a high level, and if guard Alex Steele can continue what has been a career season and players like CG Morrison, Andrew Parker, Neb Aleksic, and Justin Vanloo play at their potential, the prognosis is good.

Alberta will host Saskatchewan for the first round of the Central Division finals, and Huskies powerhouse Andrew Spagrud notwithstanding, they'll prevail. After that, it's the Dinos, and that's where things will really get interesting. The Dinos, who have Ross and Henry Bekkering, Robbie Sihota, and Jeff Price, are on fire this year, and I think they'll be able to take the Bears in three games.

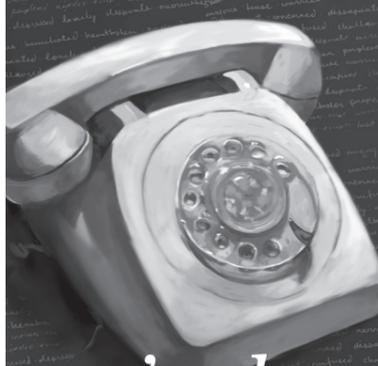
That said, if things go as I expect they will in the other divisions, the Bears should earn the wild card to the Final Four, where they'll likely meet Calgary, Brandon, and UBC. They've proven themselves up to the challenge of both the latter in the regular season,

so hopefully they'll wind up with at least second place in the conference and earn the second Canada West spot for nationals at Carleton.

Bears volleyball

Does anyone not think Alberta will win a national championship this year, let alone the conference title? If such a doubter exists, I'd like to meet them and give them a stern talking-to. Sure, the Bears (14-2)—tied for first in Canada West with defending CIS champions Winnipeg—aren't undefeated, and sure, they've dropped important games to Winnipeg and UBC, their main competition. But I agree with the CIS coaches' poll, which just put the Bears at the top of the heap for the eleventh straight week.

The Bears are an experienced, well-rounded, and powerful team stacked with talent, and they'll beat Trinity Western (8-8) this weekend. Unfortunately, Winnipeg will also beat Brandon, so the Bears will finish second in the conference, having lost to the Wesmen in fewer sets than it took to beat them. That means they'll play—and beat—either TWU or Calgary in the semis before going on to the Final Four in Winnipeg. There, the only teams they'll actually have to worry about are once again Winnipeg and UBC. But since Canada West gets to send four teams to nationals—the conference winner, plus another three because all of last year's medallists came from Canada West—they're going to get a trip to Laval. And then win.



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