

## Pandas go the distance in Canada West hockey final

Alberta team fight back from three-goal deficit against Manitoba to win in third overtime and collect their tenth conference banner



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**PULLING AWAY FROM THE HERD** Alberta's 2-0 Friday night win against the Bisons, their main conference rivals, was a cakewalk compared to the penalty-heavy marathon on Saturday evening.

ROBIN COLLUM  
Sports Editor

For the fourth year in a row, the Pandas hockey team hosted the Manitoba Bisons in the Canada West hockey final, and for the fourth year in a row, Alberta won.

The Pandas secured their seventh straight conference banner and tenth overall. The highly-anticipated series between the two best teams in the conference—the Pandas finished the season in first place, with the Bisons a mere five points behind—went to Alberta in two games, but this year's battle was arguably the most tightly fought yet.

Friday's game was gritty, with neither team giving up many opportunities. The Pandas were able to prevail, earning a 2-0 win thanks to goals by forwards Jennifer Newton and Cami Wooster and Dana Vinge's goalkeeping.

But it was the Bisons who came out stronger initially on Saturday: with a 3-0 lead by the six minute mark in the third period, it looked like Manitoba would prevail and force a third game on Sunday. However, fourth-year Alberta forward Lindsay Robinson scored a short-handed goal to launch the Pandas back into the game.

"The short-handed goal was the turning point," Pandas head coach Howie Draper said. "Had we gotten a five-versus-five goal, I don't know if it would have been as much of a momentum-builder for us and a momentum-killer for them. It was a huge goal, it came at exactly the right time, and we were able to build off of it."

Robinson's goal was soon followed by one from Alanna Donahue, and Miranda Miller tied it up with mere seconds to go, launching the game into what would become a marathon overtime fight. It wasn't until the third overtime period—nearly 40 minutes of play later—that Wooster knocked one in on an Alberta power-play and the Pandas won 4-3. They will now advance to nationals, which will be in Ottawa in two weeks.

"We knew that as long as we kept on believ-

ing in ourselves and just got the puck on net that anything could happen," Wooster said. "We've come back in games before, and we're a team that knows how to win, so we knew that we could do it."

"It just showed that our team had a lot of courage. We believed from the beginning, and that's what allowed us to come back."

Draper was impressed by his team's third-period comeback and their endurance.

"They just really dug down deep, and when you get to playoff time, you've got to be able to find a little bit extra, and I think it says something about our team, given that they're as young as they are, it says a lot about their ability to do that. That feels good going into nationals."

The Pandas will be vying for their third straight CIS banner this season, but it's a considerably different team than last year's. Alberta lost the top four scorers in Canada West—Lindsay McAlpine, Tarin Podloski, Jenna Barber, and Taryn Barry—over the summer, and it wasn't a sure thing that Alberta would be able to continue to dominate the conference as much as they had.

But both the rookies and remaining veterans stepped up this season to continue the Pandas' legacy. Newton, in her fourth year, was named Canada West Player of the Year after leading the conference in points, goals, game-winning goals, hat tricks, and shot percentage. She and rookie forward Alana Cabana were named first-team Canada West all-stars. Second-years Leah Copeland and Rayanne Reeve made the second team.

"I always thought that we could be successful, but I guess my expectations weren't as high when we started as they are now," Draper said. "With every game and every weekend that we've played, it became more and more obvious that this team has the ability to accomplish anything that the teams have in the past."

"It's so exciting to know that we're so close," Wooster said. "I know that there's a lot of tradition—we know that as new players—and kind of just want to keep going and build off of it."

## Big hits and smart passing propel Bears to conference win

With all four teams guaranteed a spot at nationals, Alberta men used the weekend to fine-tune their game and refocus after a break

GOLDEN • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Bears had nine and a half team blocks on Friday night, made five service aces, and posted a .472 attack percentage. Against the T-Birds, Alberta put up six blocks, nine service aces, and were .412 attacking.

"We had a couple of little spurts, but our middle blockers did a good job of getting touches. Our hitters did a good job percentage-wise," Danyluk said. "I thought that the guys were quite focused, and they played pretty well both nights."

"We have a lot of guys that can hit the ball. [Saturday,] there were four guys with double figures, which means [setter] Brock [Pehar] is thinking and he's spreading the offence around. That's one of the things that makes us hard to play against, if everything is rolling."

Saturday night's game was a letdown for UBC after beating the defending national champions from Winnipeg in four tight sets on Friday night.

"To end on a sour note is kind of disappointing, but for the most part, [the weekend was] not too bad. For us to come out and play that solidly last night, and kind of respond when it came to crunch time, was nice," UBC head coach Richard Schick said

on Saturday.

The T-Birds came closest to beating the Bears in the second set, when they were able to come back from a six-point deficit to tie and even lead Alberta before losing by two.

"Tonight, we had the opportunities. Even though Alberta played extremely well, they sort of led us into it in the second set," Schick said Saturday. "When we have those opportunities, we have to capitalize every chance we have, and tonight, we didn't."

"We didn't put enough pressure on their serve receiving, and they pass the ball extremely well, and we didn't do that on our side of the net. When they pass the ball, they're a tough team to beat because they have talented hitters. It really makes it tough. Last night we had 18 blocks—tonight we had none. That's a telling tale."

Though all the teams in the Final Four were all hoping to take home the banner, the most important thing they were all looking for was more playoff experience. Because all three 2007 CIS medallists were from Canada West, all four of the teams in the Final Four will be headed to nationals in Laval next weekend—a fact that cut down on some of the tournament's suspense.



MIKEOTTO

**HOW SWEET IT IS** Fifth-year Alberta setter Brock Pehar and his teammates savour their latest Canada West victory.

For Alberta, who enjoyed a bye through the first round of playoffs, the tournament was especially vital.

"It was important to play well," Danyluk said. "We had a weekend off, so that was the main [aim], just to get

the wheels rolling again and to get the momentum going into next weekend."

Alberta right side Joel Schmuland, who had eleven kills on Friday and ten on Sunday, is optimistic about his team's chances at nationals after the

wins over TRU and UBC.

"It's a completely different weekend, but if we come out and play like this all weekend long, I think that, though the games will be closer, we'll have a really good chance of winning it."