

Pandas defeat Huskies with last-quarter surge

Win over Saskatchewan in best-of-three Central Division series sends Alberta team to Canada West women's basketball Final Four

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

For the Pandas, the pivotal moment of Sunday's game was the beginning of the fourth quarter: with a fragile five-point lead against Saskatchewan, Alberta knew that if they played the end of the game as they had the previous two nights, their season would be over.

In the first two games of the team's best-of-three Central Division final, the Pandas had been up on the Huskies, only to fall apart in the last ten minutes. Alberta's 20-point lead at the half on Friday cushioned the blow, and they won 64-58, but on Saturday, they struggled to a 66-60 loss.

"[Head coach] Scott [Edwards] said in the intermission between the third and fourth that the fourth quarters in the last two games have been all about them, [...] and we wanted to go out with a bang," Alberta forward Trish Ariss said.

The pep talk made a difference: the Alberta team that took the floor in the fourth on Sunday was completely different than the one that played Friday and Saturday. Aggressive and energetic but relaxed, the Pandas held Saskatchewan to only seven points in the quarter and won the game 72-57.

"It was nice to score in the first minute of the fourth quarter," Edwards said. "It kind of relaxed everyone on the bench, so we knew, 'Okay, it's not going to happen again.'"

Edwards was much happier with his team's play in general on Sunday

compared to the first two games.

"They really toughened up. They rebounded hard; they battled for everything; they scrapped the loose balls, which we need to do. We don't shoot the ball well enough as a team to rely on any one person to knock the shots down for us, so we've got to play team basketball, and I was really proud of them," he said.

"We finally came out with playoff-style basketball."

ASHLEY WIGG
PANDAS GUARD

Huskies head coach Lisa Thomaidis gave the Pandas' physical play a lot of the credit for the win.

"I thought we got the crap beat out of us, actually," she said. "I thought it was way too physical [for us], and we missed ten free throws and didn't make some easy ones.

"We didn't have enough stuff going to the hoop tonight."

Fourth-year Pandas guard Ashley Wigg, who led the game with 17 points on Sunday, said that Alberta's second-half surge was a combination of an improved mental and physical game.

"We had the energy and the adrenaline rushing today; we came together just at the right time," she said. "We had the energy the whole game, but there were a couple things we changed, getting some more stops on

defence. Our offence was pretty solid the whole game, but we really stepped up our defence in the second half and secured the win."

Alberta had much more riding on the weekend series than Saskatchewan. The Huskies will be hosting nationals, so they have an automatic berth in the tournament. The Pandas had to win this weekend to continue their playoff run. Now, it will take just one victory next weekend at the Canada West championships to get them to nationals.

Thomaidis, whose team finished the regular season 9-13, considers this weekend—and last weekend's victory against Calgary—both a learning experience and vindication for her team.

"We felt good about [beating Calgary], and that was obviously an upset in everyone's eyes, and to come in against another good opponent is just another opportunity for us to get better and better before nationals," she said. "They can go beat the crap out of each other for two more games.

"I think we definitely deserve not to be the eighth seed."

The Pandas aren't worried about the toll that next week's games will take; instead, they're focusing on channeling the drive from this weekend's win into the rest of the post-season.

"We finally came out with playoff-style basketball. We came out with adrenaline, we came out with energy, and we're ready," Wigg said.

"That's how it should feel—that energy—it was awesome," fourth-year guard Katie Barrett agreed. "That's how playoff basketball should be played."



PETEYEE

FAR AWAY FROM ME Marissa Haylett struggled to keep control of the ball on Saturday. The Pandas couldn't keep hold of their lead, either, and lost 66-60.

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