

Win sends Bears to Canada West final

With their top-scoring defenceman back in their lineup, Alberta comes from behind to beat Manitoba in conference semi-final

ANDREW RENFREE
Sports Staff

With his team trailing 3-0 to the Manitoba Bisons only 15 minutes into Saturday night's Canada West semi-final game, Bears head coach Eric Thurston took a key timeout to rally the troops.

"I thought, 'This is going to be a real test of our will.' I called a timeout, and sometimes when you get down, players want to start doing things individually. I said, 'We don't stray; we just keep with the team. Don't do it individually; keep working at it; keep chipping away.'"

Thurston's speech must have resonated with his players because Alberta clawed their way back to tie the game at 3-3 at the end of regulation on goals from Derek Ryan, captain Harlan Anderson, and forward Jesse Gimblett. The first overtime was scoreless, but at 7:55 of the second overtime period, Alberta winger Brian Woolger skated in and fired a shot past Bisons goalie Krister Toews to propel the Bears to a 4-3 comeback win.

The victory, coupled with a 4-2 Alberta win on Friday night, earned the Bears a berth in the national finals and ended the Bisons' season.

Perhaps the biggest factor in Alberta's sweep was their excellent special-teams play. Of the eight Bears goals this weekend, five came with the man-advantage. Manitoba, on the other hand, was unable to score on the power play in eleven chances.

"Thank goodness for special teams," Thurston said. "We got a couple of big goals on the power play, and our penalty killing on the weekend was 100 per cent. With a perfect penalty kill and if your power play can go over 20 per cent, you should win most games."

Alberta's power play was bolstered by the return of Anderson to the lineup on Friday night. The fifth-year defenceman, who had missed six games with a knee injury, made an immediate impact on the scoresheet this weekend, notching a goal and an assist.



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

LOOK WHO'S AHEAD NOW Rookie Bears forward Derek Ryan (dark) chases down the ice on Saturday night. Ryan had a goal and an assist that night.

"It was huge to have Anderson back in the lineup. He is great at getting the puck out of the zone by making tape-to-tape passes," Thurston said. "He's a great leader for our team who leads by example."

The trip back to Manitoba for the Bisons meant reflection on a season that was strong enough to

have head coach Don MacGillivray named the Canada West Coach of the Year, but came up short in the run for a CIS finals berth. The upside for them is that they have no players graduating this year and should still be a contender next season.

"I thought we were playing good this weekend, and we had a chance to win both hockey games,

but Alberta's a good team," MacGillivray said. "We played as hard as we could, but it's tough for our program because it's easier to recruit when we win. For now, we'll look towards next year."

Alberta will play perennial playoff rival Saskatchewan next weekend for the Canada West final.

Young wrestlers settle for fourth-place spots at nationals

Bronze-medal matches for three rookies—and a top ten-finish for the Pandas—bodes well for the future success of U of A's program

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

CALGARY—For Alberta's wrestlers, the teams' results at nationals in Calgary this past weekend were emblematic of the way the rest of the year has gone.

Alberta had three athletes make it to the medal rounds—all of them rookies—who, after close matches, settled for fourth place in all of them. It was an apt ending to a season that saw the very young Bears and Pandas make progress towards regaining their former glory, but not succeed all the way.

With only one fifth-year athlete and two fourth-years, the Alberta teams consider themselves to be in the process of rebuilding. Head coach Vang Ioannides sees this weekend's results as an important step.

"We're much stronger than we were last year and much stronger than we were two years ago, which was the worst year after coming off a long string of medallists and medals for the team even," he said. "We're disappointed that we didn't come away with medals because I think we were certainly capable of winning medals here, but very excited about the fact that the three people who wrestled for medals today are all rookies, so

we should have them for a good long time. I'm excited about their future."

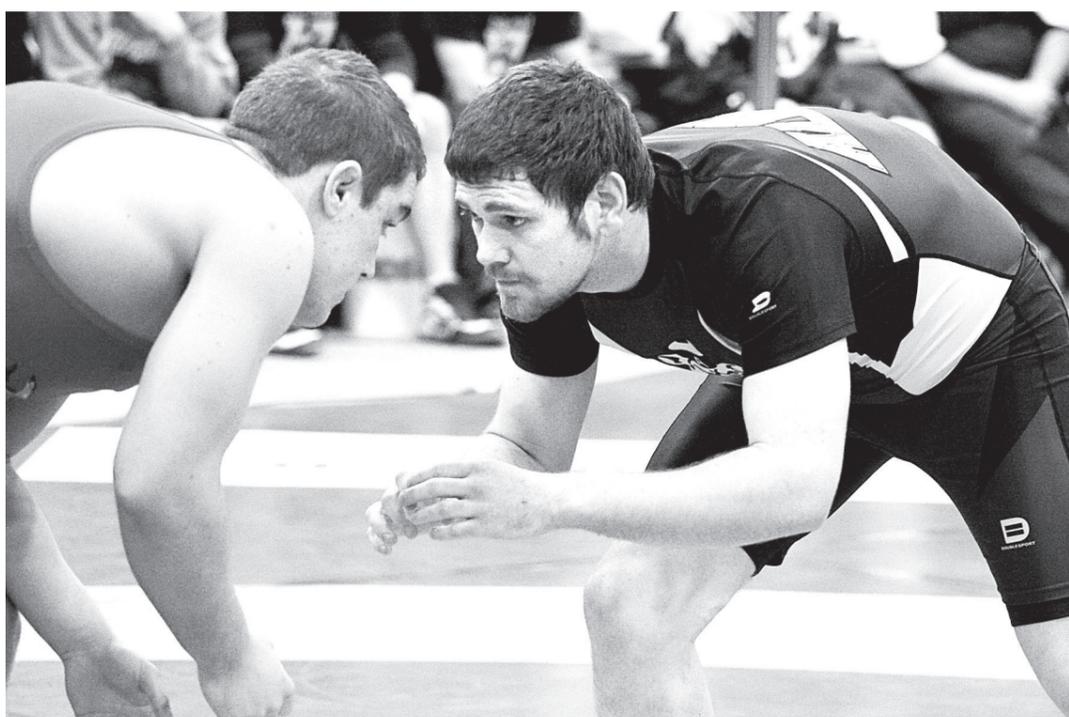
Of the six U of A wrestlers to qualify for nationals—double the number from last year—four were in their first year of CIS competition. In addition to fifth-year Bram Ratay and fourth-year Mike Hulbert, the Bears sent Canada West Rookie of the Year Mike Asselstine and fellow first-year Steven Thacher. Both Pandas that went to Calgary, Marielle TerHart and Katherine Martin, are rookies as well.

Asselstine, TerHart, and Martin each made it to the bronze round in their respective weight classes, and each lost in close matches.

"For about 95 per cent of it, I'm really happy with the way I wrestled, but for the five per cent where I let my hips get in the air, I'm not so pleased," TerHart said after losing in a tie-breaking round. "I think the biggest thing is that my whole goal this year was to even make it to this tournament, so to make it to a medal round was so much more than I wanted, especially because I'm a first-year."

"I lost in the third round, in the last 30 seconds, and I want to be more upset, but I'm just so happy I was here."

Asselstine shared her sentiment. "I feel good because I placed in every single tournament [this year], which was one of my goals," he said.



DANIEL PAGAN (THE GAUNTLET)

THIS IS GOING TO HURT Mike Hulbert, who wrestles in the 90 kg category, faces off against an opponent at nationals.

"Another one was to win one tournament and then qualify for [nationals]. I was able to do both, so I feel good. I could have done better, but this is my first year. I can always improve."

As a team, the Pandas finished in

tenth place, while the Bears weren't quite able to break the top ten and walked away in eleventh spot.

"I do think it looks encouraging, and I think our recruiting year so far has gone relatively well, so I do feel

that we'll be more competitive next year, and within two years, I think we can compete with the best teams in the country," Ioannides said. "I hope to be back on the medal podium with our team."