

Playoff heartbreaker for basketball Pandas

U of A places fourth in Final Four, misses nationals

CHAD KLASSEN
The Peak

BURNABY, BC—For the second year in a row, the Pandas' basketball team's final game of the season was a loss to the Simon Fraser Clan. Playing Alberta in the Canada West bronze medal game rather than the national final this time, SFU won 72-55 and earned both the medal and the final Canada West to the CIS championships on Saturday night.

Both teams had lost the night before—the Clan to Regina, and the Pandas 76-66 to UBC.

The Pandas last met SFU in early January at home, and SFU won 75-73 in a come-from-behind overtime win. It was different story this time around, as the Clan showed their resilience, bouncing back to put together an all-around dominant performance for the bronze.

"We had two goals tonight heading into the game: stay out of foul trouble and make certain we didn't let our mismatches hurt us because they are a fast team," SFU head coach Bruce Langford said. "We did alright at handling the mismatches, but we weren't that good at staying out of foul trouble. It's nice to be going back to nationals—we handled some adversity this weekend, and that was nice to see."

The contest was a defensive battle in the opening quarter, with a combination of tough defense and missed opportunities on both sides—the Clan

turned it over 11 times to the Pandas' 14 in the first half.

But it was the home team that took charge early and often, going on several runs and never letting go of the lead.

Much of SFU's dominance came from forward Kate Hole, who had 18 first-half points. Though Hole caused the Pandas problems in the paint all game, they were able to keep her to seven points in the second half.

Shutting Hole down wasn't enough to let the Pandas to recover, however. SFU blew the game wide open and took no time building on their lead in the second half.

In the fourth, the Pandas just couldn't dig their way out of their own hole, and the Clan won 72-55 to crush Alberta's hopes for another visit to nationals.

"Our approach was the same as always against SFU, and early in the game, we played at a high tempo but weren't able to make shots and fell behind," Alberta head coach Scott Edwards said. "In the third quarter, SFU really came out and demonstrated their toughness at home and played hard, and we weren't able to match, and you can't play basketball in the Canada West if you can't make shots."

The UBC Thunderbirds, who entered the tournament as a wildcard, captured the Canada West crown to earn their spot in the nationals. They'll join the silver medallist Regina Cougars and bronze medallist SFU in Saskatoon next weekend.

Pandas fail to defend title

Volleyball women lose two close games, settle for fourth at national tourney

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

They climbed from fifth place in Canada West all the way to top seed going into the national championships, but the defending CIS champion Pandas volleyball team was unable to keep their streak alive and came in fourth at the tournament, held in Fredericton, NB on the weekend.

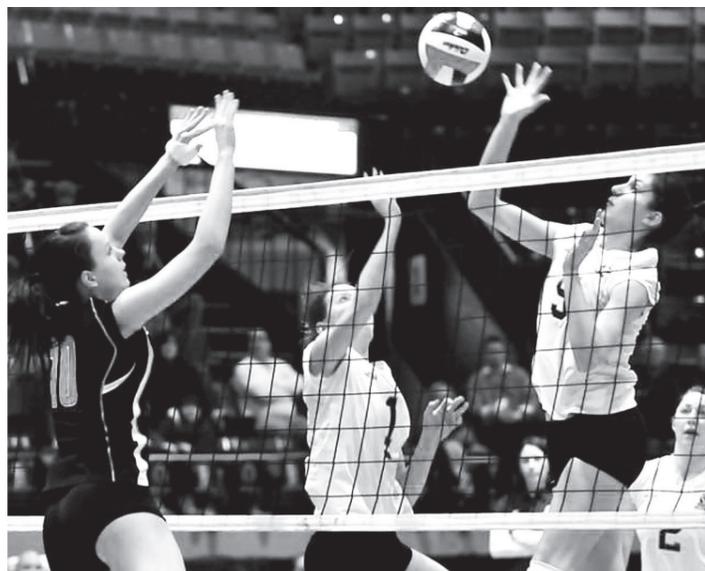
After beating eighth-seeded Saint Mary's University in straight sets in the first round—a repeat of last year's first round match-up—the Pandas lined up on Friday against the UBC Thunderbirds, a team that had beaten them twice in the regular season.

Though the Pandas won the first two sets, the T-Birds were able to mount an impressive comeback. After a close 25-23 win in the third set, UBC dominated the Pandas 25-11 in the fourth. In the deciding set, the Pandas let go of a 6-1 lead. The T-Birds went on a 14-1 run and beat Alberta 15-7.

"You couldn't have asked for more from the team right up until the point where things got away from us," Pandas head coach Laurie Eisler said. "We did exactly what we needed to do though the first two sets and right up to about that point, [which was] about [point] 18 or 20 on the third set."

"I think it was a combination of factors: BC was desperate to turn it around, and we got away from the things that had gotten us to that point. Once that tide turned, it was really tough for us to stop them and get us back on track."

The loss against UBC sent Alberta



SUPPLIED

HOT POTATO Daryll Roper (centre) and Sam Wojtkiw (right) try to defend against a lofting ball from Calgary middle hitter Willemina Stikker-breemhaar.

to the bronze-medal game, where they lost another close one. Alberta won the first set 26-24, and the teams alternated wins all the way to the fifth set, when Calgary squeaked by to win 17-15.

"It was two good teams, and it came all the way down to the wire," Eisler said. "Again, either team could have won that."

"It's definitely tough coming back, there's no doubt about that, but I was really proud of the team's ability to put things aside and come back and battle."

The Pandas were a favourite to win going into the tournament, and Eisler

admitted that the fourth-place finish was disappointing.

"It's devastating; after the semifinal, there was a little bit of shock," she said. "It's one of those things that kind of hits you in waves. It hits you like a hammer, and it goes away and then hits you again."

But Eisler is happy with the season that her team had, banner or not.

"The Canada West championship is something that no one can take away from us," she said. "Those are the things that we have to go back to and make sure that we're not forgetting those accomplishments because those were considerable."

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