



KATY ANDERSON (THE GAUNTLET)

STALKING HIS PREY Fourth-year Alberta guard Alex Steele moves in on the basket against UBC on Saturday night.

Win over Brandon sends hoops Bears to nationals

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

CALGARY—Midway through the third quarter of the Bears' must-win game against Brandon on Friday night, when Alberta was down 11 points after letting the Bobcats go on a 18-7 run, more than a few people in the filled-to-capacity Jack Simpson Gym were probably ruling Alberta out. The Bobcats, who finished the regular season with the best record in Canada West (20-2), had been the clear favourite going into the game against Alberta (16-6).

But with a spot at nationals on the line, the Bears—who were responsible for one of those Brandon losses, as well as another in the preseason—weren't ready to quit. After a layup and two successful foul shots back to back from fourth-year forward Justin VanLoo, the Bears regained momentum. With creative passing and several Brandon turnovers on their side, they were soon within a point of the Bobcats and finished the quarter down 61-56.

Alberta earned its first lead of the half a little more than two minutes into the fourth and slowly built on it to end the game with an 85-79 win. The upset earned the Bears a spot in the Canada West gold-medal game on Saturday night and—more importantly—a spot at nationals in Ottawa in two weeks.

"We were confident coming in; we just knew that we had to stick together, and everything would go right," said Alberta guard CG Morrison, who notched 15 points against Brandon.

"We'd beat them twice already, so we knew that we could beat them. It wasn't about that—it was about us coming out and playing intensely.

"The third quarter's huge for us, and we always come out flat," he added. "It happened again, and luckily, we just stuck together and didn't fall apart, and we came through."

"We were confident coming in; we just knew that we had to stick together, and everything would go alright."

CG MORRISON
BEARS GUARD

"That third quarter's the story of our life, so hopefully we can get over that one," fifth-year guard Alex Steele agreed. The Canada West MVP had 21 points on Friday. "I don't know what's happened with that, but we battled back, and that press really helped us. Everyone chipped in, and no one really had to do too much—and no one tried to do too much. It was a great team win."

The Bears tried to repeat their comeback success the next night in the Canada West final against UBC—who had beat host Calgary 77-69 on Friday—but to no avail. In another high-scoring matchup on Saturday, the Bears again found themselves behind

by double digits—this time trailing 77-66 early in the fourth. Alberta tried to catch up and managed to get within two points of the T-Birds, but lost 92-90.

Alberta's main problem was their inability to shut down UBC guard Chris Dyck, who scored 27 points.

"We knew what their game plan was, and we didn't end up executing our plans on defence," VanLoo said. "We know that Chris Dyck likes to curl a lot off the screens and look for the shot right away.

"Our heads weren't in it, and we weren't getting there in time. We paid the price with the two-point loss tonight. Any one of those shots that he hit that we should have been there for could have won us the game."

"I'm disappointed because I think we could have won that game," Bears head coach Don Horwood said. "I don't think we competed as hard as we did last night; I don't think we had the same sense of urgency. I think the guys wanted to win, but I don't think the same commitment was there, the same drive, that we had last night."

That disappointment was tempered by the knowledge that they now have the chance to play for an even bigger prize.

"I was really looking forward to taking home a banner, so I'm a little down about that, but hopefully, at nationals, we can take home a banner then and redeem ourselves," VanLoo said. "We just have to keep playing tough and see what we're made of for the rest of the year."

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