

Hockey Pandas miss podium at nationals

With a loss to the Manitoba Bisons in the bronze-medal game on Monday, Alberta failed to earn a medal for the first time in six years

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For the first time in three years, the Pandas aren't the best women's hockey team in the country. Alberta lost two out of their three games at the national championship this past weekend and ended up in fourth place.

The Pandas had been hoping to continue their gold-medal streak for a third straight season, but a 4-2 loss to Wilfrid Laurier on Sunday night ruled that out. They then lost the bronze medal to conference rivals Manitoba on Monday. That defeat brought another Alberta streak to an end: this is the first time since the 2000/01 season that the Pandas haven't made it to the podium at all.

"Obviously, we're disappointed that we didn't achieve our goal, which was winning a national championship, and we adjusted that goal and did our best to win bronze, but that didn't happen either," Alberta head coach Howie Draper said after Monday's game. "I felt that we could have beat Manitoba today, and then maybe we should have won the bronze, but unfortunately, the bounces just didn't go our way, and we found ourselves where we are."

The Pandas started the tournament with a 3-0 win against the host Ottawa Gee-Gees on Friday, which set them up for the game against Laurier. This is the fourth straight year those two teams have met each other in the playoffs, and they've built up a significant rivalry: WLU beat the Pandas for gold in 2004/05, but Alberta returned the favour the next season and beat them again in a semifinal last year. Laurier defeated Alberta in an exhibition game over Christmas break this year.

"We wanted to prove that we were the better team. I certainly feel in



FILEPHOTO: MIKE OTTO

FACE-TO-FACE FOES Alberta beat Manitoba to claim the Canada West title, but the Bisons got more than even at nationals, taking bronze from the Pandas.

some ways that we are, but I think that Laurier's an older team and a little bit more experienced and, as a result, perhaps a little bit more consistent," Draper said.

In the bronze-medal game, the Pandas were up against another familiar lineup. Monday's game was a rematch of this year's Canada West final, which Alberta won in a three-overtime battle in Edmonton, and the Bisons were gunning for revenge.

"I don't think either of our teams want to end up on the short end of the competitive stick, so to speak, and they came out hard," Draper said.

Manitoba's best weapon against the Pandas on Monday was second-string goalie Dana Hoogsteen, who was in for injured starter Stacey Corfield.

"She played great, and I don't think any of us would have expected that. She was in her last year, and obviously, she wanted to prove a point, and I think she did that," Draper said. "She played fantastic; we had a lot of opportunities on net, opportunities that we wish we would have been able to capitalize on, that she withstood."

It's their youth that most distinguishes this batch of Pandas from the championship-winning Alberta teams

of the past, and Draper thinks his team's inexperience showed this weekend.

"My own personal philosophy is that when you're a little bit younger and you don't have that experience, consistency is something that's hard to come by. I think maybe that was a little bit of a factor that came into play this particular weekend and, in all honesty, I think all year," he said. "The good news is that all of our players have had the opportunity to experience it, and this is going to benefit them in the long run. I'm quite confident that we have the skill and talent there to come back to nationals next year, and we'll

be in a better place hopefully to win a championship at that time."

Before this season, Alberta had participated in all but one championship game since 1998/99, but this year's results could signify the beginning of a new era for women's hockey in Canada as the Pandas loosen their grip on national dominance.

"I think every year has been a little bit closer to parity across the board, and this year was one more step in that direction," Draper explained. "I really do feel that every game we saw this weekend was a close, competitive battle."

Bears capitalize on aggressive Huskies' penalty trouble



RYAN SHIPPELT

BUT HE STARTED IT Three Huskies and two Bears, including Eric Hunter (15) were given penalties for this brawl on Friday; that game also had two ten-minute misconducts and a game misconduct.

BEARS • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"It's tough to win in any league when you're shorthanded the whole night. That's the bottom line," Adolph said.

But while Adolph was frustrated by the officiating, saying "I'm being polite here; it's against our rules to say anything about the situation," Alberta head coach Eric Thurston praised it, saying the penalties were due to Saskatchewan's lack of discipline.

"I think that's their MO," he said. "I respect Dave Adolph, but if you haven't learned now, disciplined hockey is winning hockey."

"Mark MacIsaac, the referee tonight, was not intimidated. I thought that was truly one of the best jobs," he continued. "He didn't put up with [...] the bullshit; he called a good game. If you think you're being short-changed by the official, I think that's a cop out. If you continually go to the penalty box, you play Russian roulette, and if our guys take undisciplined penalties, there's consequences, and I don't know on that side if there's consequences. Regardless of what officiating is, you have no control over that. I can rant and rave and lose even more hair, but I can't control that."

Tension between the two teams ran high throughout the weekend, and many after-the-whistle scuffles saw multiple penalties handed out. Thurston credited his team for avoiding retaliatory penalties when the Huskies got rough.

"I said, 'No trade-off from any of their guys for us losing somebody is worth it.' And I was

frank about that," he explained.

"Whenever games get blown out like this, tempers are going to flare, and we knew that, so we knew we had to stay out of the stuff after the whistle," added fifth-year forward Tim Krymusa, who notched a goal and two assists over the weekend. "We did a good job of just focusing on our main goal of winning the series."

Still, the Bears were unhappy with how far Saskatchewan went at the end of the blowouts. Three Huskies received ten-minute misconduct penalties for scuffling after the whistle, and each game saw a Husky thrown out for a dangerous hit to the head of a Golden Bear.

"I don't like it because you don't want to get your players hurt—that's the biggest thing—but Mark MacIsaac did a good job of protecting the players. That's his job, and he truly did that tonight," Thurston said.

"In the game of hockey, when you get down seven points, obviously the tempers are going to [flare], and you got to have guys that care and want to battle back," Adolph countered, explaining his team's play. "It's not like you're going to lay down and let it be 15-1, so it's not negative; it's just guys trying to compete to get back in it."

For the Bears, however, Saskatchewan's play was simply par for the course.

"That's just their style," fifth-year defender Harlan Anderson explained. "They always do that; they've done that ever since I got here. We get up on them, and they turn retarded."