



FILE PHOTOS: PETE YEE (LEFT) & CHRIS ROUSSAKIS (THE CHARLATAN, RIGHT)

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Guards Harvey Bradford (dark, left), who his coach says “rebounds like crazy,” and Carleton’s Ryan Bell (11), will be fighting for the same ball on Friday, when their teams tip off in Ottawa.

Eighth-seeded basketball Bears to tip off against league-leading Ravens in championship opener

Alberta will have to face the undefeated Carleton in their first game at nationals on Friday—and they wouldn’t have it any other way

ROBIN COLLUM
Sports Editor

The Bears basketball team has a shot at the national title for the first time since the 2004/05 season, but before they can even start thinking about a banner, they’ll have to get through the number-one team in the country.

The Bears, who hold the eighth seed going into this weekend’s championship, play their first game on Friday against the undefeated host team, the Carleton Ravens.

The Ravens, 22–0 in the regular season, have also won the last five national championships. The Bears on the other hand, are 16–6 in the regular season, and never made it higher than fifth on the national top ten—they finished the regular season unranked. And though they’re last team to win a CIS banner before Carleton began its streak, Alberta hasn’t even earned a spot in the tournament in two years.

But despite the teams’ lopsided pedigrees, Alberta head coach Don Horwood is pleased with the opponent his team has drawn for the first game. He thinks his squad has a good shot at taking down the home team, and is glad to face them sooner rather than later.

“These aren’t rankings—they’re seedings, and probably for us, there was a toss-up whether we should be ranked fifth or Acadia because one of us had to be in that fifth spot. And that’s fine, as far as I’m concerned,” he said. “I’m happy we’re playing Carleton in the first game. I’ve felt for a number of years that I’d like us to be the team to beat them.

“To be brutally honest with you, it wouldn’t be any easier playing Acadia or playing UBC, or playing Western or any of those teams. They’re

all very good. So we might as well play Carleton right away so we have a chance to focus on it and get ready to play it. And, hey, if we get by them, then we’ve got a chance, and if we don’t get by them, then, well, we couldn’t have won the nationals anyway.”

Bears forward Justin VanLoo agrees with Horwood, but said he thinks that an even stronger reason for the Bears to be happy with their schedule is that they won’t have expended any of their energy before meeting the top team.

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JUSTIN VANLOO
BEARS FORWARD

“All year long, we’ve been going into tournaments and playing our best game on the first night, so the fact that we’re playing them on our first night gives us our chance to [be] playing with all that anticipation and excitement,” he said. “We’re letting it out in the first game, as opposed to playing them in game two on the second night, when we would have played our hearts out in the first game, and then to have to come out with that same back-to-back excitement to play a team like Carleton would be even harder.”

The Bears have met Carleton once already this year in the pre-season. Carleton won that game 61–56, a score that the Alberta players say proves that they can compete at Carleton’s level.

“We’ve played them once before, and we lost

by five, so we know they’re human. They’re not super-beings, so they can be beat,” VanLoo said. “We almost got there, and that was the second game of the year, when we were nowhere near the level of competition we’re at now and the level of skill that we’ve grown as a team.”

“We’ve played them before, and we’ve seen them, so we just need to go out there and be ready,” Alberta guard CG Morrison agreed.

How ready the Bears will be will probably all come down to their mental preparation and how

have the capacity to overcome any nerves they might have and step up when it counts.

“[The] thing I like about it is that there have been about three or four times this year where we have basically had to win a game—UBC was a game, and Vic because of wildcard implications. Then we had to beat Saskatchewan on that third game on Sunday afternoon [to win our division], and we had to beat Brandon in that Friday game down in Calgary [to qualify for nationals]. The games we’ve had to win, we’ve won,” he said.

“The underdog thing, we could play into it, but at the same time, we know we’re there for a reason,” Alberta guard Andrew Parker agreed. “We didn’t lose an incredible amount of games and then just somehow wind up here; we didn’t have an automatic bid. We worked hard to get there, so we’re going to take it as it is: just eight teams. I don’t think we’re really too concerned about the rankings, either. We’re just out there to play ball and have fun.”

The Bears are also counting on the Ravens being under as much, if not more, pressure as they are. As the perceived little guy in the tournament, Alberta will be under much less scrutiny and face fewer distractions than Carleton, who will be trying to maintain their undefeated streak as well as win the game in front of their home crowd.

“It would be stupid for us not to think about [their record]—of course we think about it—but we’re also going in with the mentality that they’re the New England Patriots, and we’re the New York Giants,” VanLoo said. “They’re going for that perfect, undefeated record; all the pressure’s on them to go undefeated, to finish perfect. There’s no pressure on us to be perfect. The only pressure on us is to win.”

well they handle the pressure and the hype. Only one player on the team, fifth-year centre Richard Bates, has ever experienced a national tournament. He was on the team in 2004/05 when the Bears failed to win either of their games in Halifax.

Horwood acknowledged that the team’s inexperience at this level, and the added intimidation of playing an undefeated team, will be a factor in the game.

“It’s going to depend on how our guys deal with the pressure of playing in a national championship. That, I don’t know yet,” he said. “We’ve got some guys that haven’t dealt with that kind of pressure, but I know that, physically, we match up with them quite well.”

Nonetheless, Horwood thinks that the Bears