

SPORTS

# Peerless Pandas win sixth straight volleyball title

BY JOSEPH KUMPULA

SAINTE-FOY, QC (CUP) — "Team of destiny" has been the calling card for the University of Alberta's women's volleyball squad all year.

At no time has their slogan rang more true than during the Canadian Inter-university Athletic Union (CIAU) championships, held this past weekend at Laval University, where they brought an intensity and confidence that their opponents simply found overwhelming.

After spending the year living up to their number one ranking, they swept the regular season behind them and went for gold firing on all cylinders.

As expected, the Pandas kicked off day one of the three-day marathon by coasting to an easy victory over the hapless Regina Cougars in three straight sets.

Day two presented a bigger

challenge: a rerun of the Canada West final against the University of British Columbia Thunderbirds. With the gleam of gold already in their eyes, the Pandas team rolled by the T-Birds to enter the final unbroken in sets.

In the final the Pandas went up against Manitoba, which was no surprise, considering the Bisons and the Pandas have been swapping the number one and two rankings all season.

The Pandas had something to prove coming into the match, not only by going for a record of six consecutive titles, but by trying to do it in front of the Bisons' crowd.

Even before the game began, the pro-Bison crowd showed their determination to be a factor in the game. Thousands cheered as the Bisons took to the court.

Despite the loud Manitoba crowd, the Pandas had their own section of supporters, dedicated fans and relatives who had made the long

trek to the Investors Group Athletics Center.

"I've got to thank the supporters, parents, friends, the athletics department," said assistant coach Carrie Barrett. "It makes a big difference, not in the final but for the whole season."

Set number one set the tone for the match: mental and physical toughness.

Players had to be prepared to sacrifice the body for digs and play a one-upmanship game of power as both teams did whatever it took to get the ball over the net just one more time. An edge in skill gave the Pandas an edge in points to take the first set 25-18.

Set two changed the flow of the game into the emotional roller-coaster that both teams would have to ride to the end result.

After being down 11-1, unbelievably, the Pandas came back to take it 25-22. Much of the credit for the comeback belongs to Tashie

Macapagel, who stepped in when her team was down, and showed what championship experience can do for a player in a big game.

"We've had leaders all year," said Panda head coach Lorne Sawula. "But when it comes right down to it, someone has to come in and turn it around."

After the "hail mary" comeback in set two, it looked like nothing could stop the Pandas. As much excitement as the Pandas generated, Manitoba responded by playing even more methodically, piling up

points like clockwork to take the next two sets 25-20 and 25-22.

And so the gold medal came down to who could get to 15 points first. A combination of skill, luck, and desperation helped the Pandas take the final set 15-13, taking the gold, and leaving the Bisons, who stuck faithfully to their game plan all afternoon to wonder what went wrong.

"It was any team's game," said Sawula. "In the end, the girls felt it was their game, and there was no way they were going to lose it."

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ST. JOHN'S	—	18:30	—	18:40	—	—	—
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FT. LAUDERDALE	17:40 <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—
ORLANDO	—	06:00 <sup>3</sup> 15:50 <sup>1</sup>	—	18:05 <sup>3</sup>	—	—	—
ST. PETERSBURG	—	—	06:00	—	—	—	—

<sup>1</sup>Begins March 20 <sup>2</sup>Ends March 19 <sup>3</sup>Ends March 26 <sup>4</sup>Week of March 27 only

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