

Oilers have only two friends left — (below)

Sports

Is the Alberta Panda close to death? — p. 14

Sather right to be worried about Oilers

by Mark Spector

You know folks, I for one am really happy that there are leagues out there like the **National Hockey League** and **Major League Baseball**.

Like, what else would a sports writer write about once the **Canadian University** sports scene has ground to a halt? Thank the **Big Guy** for those fringe sports.

Ladies and gentlemen, the **Edmonton Oilers**.

★

Remember at the start of this season when the talk around the Oiler camp was about the new system that **Glen Sather** was going to employ with his troops?

Although nobody in the Edmonton room was talking much, didn't it have something to do with a more **defensive style** of play; more like "Let's win 4-1 instead of 8-5" kind of thing?

Where did it go? The fact that Edmonton has surrendered less goals against this year than last says that something is/was working. But why are **Andy Moog** and **Grant Fuhr** still 10th in the NHL in GAA? Why does **New Jersey** get six goals and **Buffalo** 47 shots?

★

A month ago the problem was that only the top two lines were showing up consistently. With **Craig MacTavish**, **Mike Krushelnyski**, **Kevin McClelland**, and newcomer **Mike Moller** all playing well, the situation is reversed.

Gretzky is slumping. Minor. He'll end up with **190 points** and we all know that what **number 99** doesn't produce over any five games he'll notch in spades in the next four. Hopefully, **Kent Nilsson** is exactly that: **Kent Nilsson**. Look where **Calgary** and **Minnesota** wound up when they counted on him to lead their clubs.

Mark Messier has been hurt, and has played adequately between and during injuries, while linemate **Glenn Anderson** has shouldered much of the load down the stretch. Which leaves only the two countrymen to **Finnish** the last two units.

★

Jari Kurri's got to be driving Sather crazy. Here's a guy that goes out of his way to prove **Don Cherry's** theory that all **Europeans** are wimps, meanwhile, his linemate **Esa Tikkanen** is doing exactly the opposite, and their coach agrees that his game is suffering because of it.

Sather's trademark as a player was to show up when things got rough. As the year goes on, Kurri grows more and more afraid of contact. Perhaps that's a sign of **Sheehy fever** — kind of like hay fever, you know. Comes every spring.

But trading **Gretzky's straightman** (especially one that scores 50 goals) would be dumb, and Sather knows it. So you live with it.

★

The Edmonton Oilers have two things going for them right now: The **L.A. Kings** and the **Winnipeg Jets**.

L.A. couldn't beat Edmonton in a seven game series with **Rogie Vachon** in the pipes, and Winnipeg plays it tough against Calgary. If the **Flames** and the Oilers meet in the **Smythe final** Edmonton is going to need a physical edge to offset the mental points they're giving away.

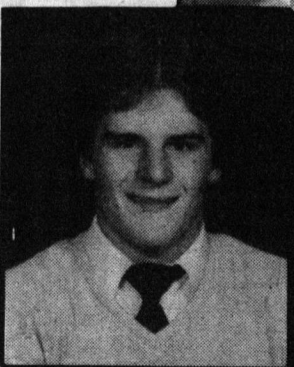
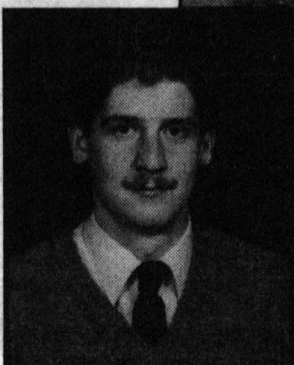
A couple of extra days off may be what they have to count on. Kind of sad, isn't it?

In 26 years, he's seen better

Drake will be back to erase memory of 47 penalty Finals fiasco



Alberta's leading sniper for the last two seasons, **Craig Dill** (above) will be missed. Other graduates include **Bill Ansell**, **Denis Leclair**, **Steve Cousins**, and **Darren Turner** (top to bottom).



by Mark Spector

One week later, the taste in the mouth of 26 year Golden Bear coach **Clare Drake** is, well, pretty sour.

A coach's coach, Drake's trademark is the way his team emulates his personality. Not flashy, not cocky, and never reactionary. Just 20 guys, all smaller than the team itself, pulling their weight — six times all the way to a national championship.

But it wasn't that way last Thursday night in Alberta's opening game of the CIAU's against their rivals from Trois-Rivieres. Drake's team was manipulated by a take-the-first-shot team from Quebec.

And what hurt the old master most was that the Golden Bears took all of the patience and discipline that he had nurtured for five years in some, and threw it out the window.

They were duped, and les Patriotes controlled the hockey game. Drawn in by their tempers, Alberta didn't play Golden Bear hockey.

And they lost.

"We kind of lost our poise a bit," admits Drake. "I think we slid back

down to where they were at. But more importantly we got taken out of our focus on the gameplan," he continues.

"If we get off track it hurts us more than the other team, I think."

Was he disappointed somewhat? "That is disappointing. Hopefully at least there was a lesson learned there somewhere."

The funny thing was that one of his five-year veterans, **Bill Ansell**, led the team in penalties in that game. And most were retaliatory.

But just as in the rest of life, hockey hindsight is 20/20. Drake must now look ahead to next year, a time when he will have to fill at least five holes. And we're not just talking just ordinary bodies.

Alberta will lose their number one netminder probably, as **Darren Turner** graduates with his **Phys Ed** degree this April. The other loss that hurts is pointman **Steve Cousins**, who has a nice job lined up for his **B.Comm.** degree. It's unlikely that he'll return for his fifth year.

Drake must feel a little like his friend **Perry Pearn**, who coaches **NAIT** across the river. He only had these guys for two years, as **Turner** came from **McGill** to start right away last year and lead the Bears to the CIAU title. This year he posted a G.A. average of 3.45.

Cousins, a 6'3", 205-lbs transfer from **Red Deer College**, fit in well last year as a stay-at-home enforcer, and this season showed some good legs in lugging the puck up-ice. With **Jeff Lawson** (same size) maybe heading home to Ontario next year, that leaves Drake without that **Randy Gregg-Rick Carrier-Colin Chisholm**-type defenseman that he has enjoyed in the past.

Up front he loses three to graduation, but at least he got five full years out of them. **Denis Leclair**, **Craig Dill**, and **Ansell** all played out their options last season.

Dill led the club in scoring this season with 26-42-68 in 41 games. He led them in scoring last year too, on the left side of the Bears' most consistent line over the last two seasons with **Dave Otto** and **Jack (Buzz) Patrick**.

Leclair had his best year as a Golden Bear in '86-'87 with 41 points in only 36 games, and he'll be missed along with the feisty **Ansell** as two leaders on this team.

But as he has done for the last 25 seasons, **Clare Drake** prepares for another year. If you can believe it, the winningest coach in North American university hockey seems still to have something to prove. The way they lost that last one just doesn't sit right with him.

He lists the reasons: "It was partly the loss and partly that it wasn't good for university hockey. It was not very well played, and it was terribly officiated. If there was a saving grace, it was that the game wasn't on national television.

"A lot of things that are wrong with hockey today took place out there," he said of the 47 penalty, 94 minute fiasco.

He says that it's unfortunate that the **World Universiade Games** were their highlight of the season, not that they weren't great, but losing at home in the CIAU's sticks in your mind.

Especially the way they lost. And **Clare Drake** doesn't want to be remembered that way. Looks like we're stuck with him for another season.