

Bears struggle to 'side door' Olympiad berth

By DON MOREN

The hockey Bears blew their chance to enter Olympiad as genuine Western champions.

A superior goals-for-and-against average will let them in the side door, and unless they win the national championship there will be doubts as to whether they really were the best in the West.

Alberta split with the University of Manitoba Bisons over the weekend, losing 6-3 Friday night and squeezing out a 6-5 win Saturday afternoon.

Had the Bears swept the two-game series they would have edged two points past the University of Saskatchewan Huskies for the WCIAA hockey crown. With the present tie Alberta is expected to be awarded the title.

Friday night's game caught the inconsistent Bears at their worst.

BIG LEAD

Goals by Rod Linquist, Doug White and Gord Lindal put the Bisons ahead 3-0 after ten minutes of play in the first period.

Darrel LeBlanc got the lone Bear goal of the period at 17:48.

The Manitoba team outskated, outshot and outchecked the Bears. They took complete advantage of the team that bombed them 10-2 last week at the First Canadian Winter Games.

To add to the amazement of the 500 spectators at Varsity Arena, the gold medalists from Alberta did not burst forth with a sudden rage and tie up the game.

When the Bears did gain some semblance of an attack, they missed countless opportunities. Players fanned on shots. Instead of picking corners they shot at the goalie's pads. Rather than shoot high, they shot low when the Bison goalie sprawled out on the ice.

TIED IT UP

Alberta managed to tie it up in the second period on goals by Gord Jones and LeBlanc.

The Bison defence permitted Jones to skate across the goalmouth and slip the puck neatly past Gabriel's stickside.

LeBlanc, one of the few bright lights for the Bears that evening, got his second of the night at 17:03. Brian Harper set up the play by tipping it ahead to LeBlanc, who backhanded from about five feet out.

The Bisons gave the Bears the rudest shock of all in the third period when they fired three unanswered goals.

Ken Plews scored at 6:14. Lindquist fired the Bisons' fifth just under the crossbar of an almost completely open Golden Bear net.

SLOPPY CLEARING

Goalie Bob Wolfe had already made a couple of saves on the other side, but sloppy defensive clearing enabled Linquist to get the puck.

White got his second of the night, batting in a clearing pass from behind the net at 15:10. The upset was complete.

Sloppy defensive play by the Bears was a big factor in the loss. Wolfe was not at his best but most of the goals can be blamed on the defencemen, who went for the puck instead of playing it safe. Clearing in their own end was bad as well.

Saturday afternoon the Bears got off to a better start. Gord Jones scored on a pass from Dale Rippel at 1:02.

But Alberta soon settled down to

the lethargic pattern of the night before.

TRICKLER SCORES

Gord Lindal scored for Manitoba with a slow backhand swipe that somehow slipped past Wolfe and trickled just inside the post.

John Truscott and Lindal accounted for two more before the period was through. The Bisons were ahead 3-1 and at this point the Saskatchewan Huskies' chances for a free pass to the national finals here in Edmonton looked good.

But Brian Harper began his eleventh hour heroics, scoring on a breakaway at 7:23 of the second frame.

Terry Cutler put the Bears within reach when he knocked in a crazy, spinning shot during the face-off to the left of Bison goalie Clarence Gabriel.

Alberta's defence was still good for a few more mistakes however and Bob Turner scored for the Bisons at 14:48 to put them ahead 4-2.

BEARS BEST

The score started to lose its meaning. By this time the Bears were completely dominating play. The Bisons kept icing the puck to alleviate the pressure.

Harper got his second, slapping in a pass from Dale Rippel behind the net. For the second game in a row the Bears tied it up at the end of the second period.

Rod Lindquist put the Bisons ahead 5-4 at 1:30 of the third period, but nine seconds later Harper banged in his third of the afternoon.

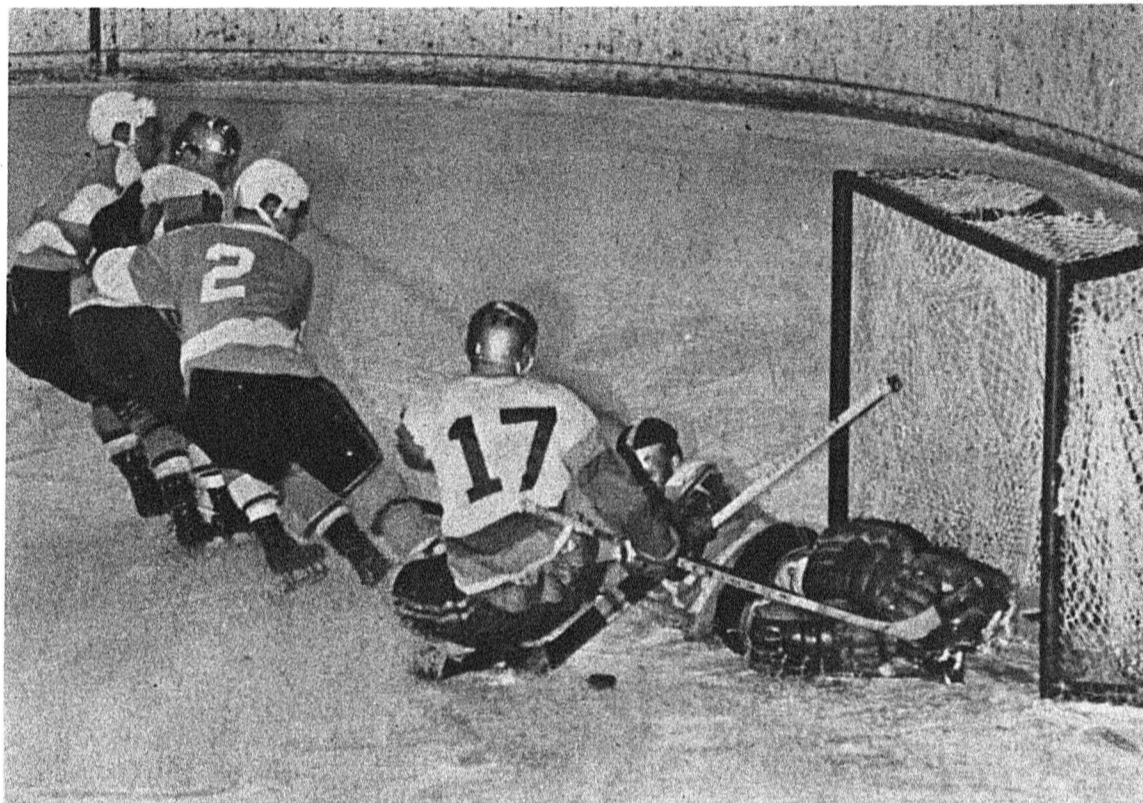
Rippel scored the winner at 2:31.

The Bears continued to control the game until the end. Alberta outshot the Bisons 41-20. Clarence Gabriel was outstanding in the Bisons' net.

Goals-for-and-against has turned out to be the deciding issue in settling the first-place tie. The Bears and the Huskies split the two-game series they played

against each other.

The Golden Bears scored 76 goals in conference play, while allowing 39. Saskatchewan has a 76-61 record.



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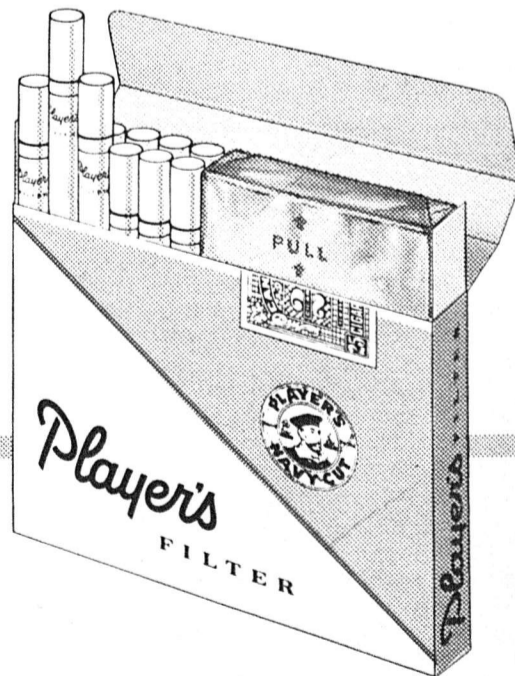
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