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HIGGINS/DAL PHOTO

John Kibyuk and the other Dalhousie hockey Tigers were able to escape from the clutches of the UPEI Panthers last Friday, scoring a 5-2 win at the Forum. Another win Sunday, this time over Mount Allison, moved the Tigers on to the best two of three games AUA final which start tomorrow in Moncton against the Blue Eagles.

Hockey Tigers off to finals

by Sandy Smith

A pair of sudden death playoff wins this past weekend have moved the Dalhousie hockey Tigers on to a showdown few people thought they could make. The Tigers begin play tomorrow night in the AUA hockey finals against the Université de Moncton Blue Eagles.

This past season has been one full of doubts for Tiger fans. People doubted whether the team would do well even before they had taken to the ice as eight players who were expected to return to the team decided against playing. The doubts continued as the team suffered from periodic shaky goaltending and an inability to win close games. Yet the doubts were justified. The Tigers were a team that could do no better than compile a two win seven loss record. Why even the players began to wonder if they could win the close ones after a heartbreaking 4-3 loss to the Blue Eagles in the last contest before Christmas.

The second half of the season, however, has been nothing short of phenomenal. Eleven wins and one tie in fourteen games since the beginning of the second half of the season sprung the Tigers out of fifth and into second place of the Kelly Division and also into the CIAU top ten. Yet the doubts remain. Why? Well, there is one team that the Tigers managed to beat only once all year, despite having six games with the team. The Moncton Blue Eagles have displayed, at times, a team that is every bit as strong as last year's team that won the AUA championship. But while the rest of us have our doubts, the Tigers display a quiet confidence that they will beat the Blue Eagles.

Adrian Facca, a native of Toronto in his fourth, and

most likely last, year with the team, explains a bit of the Tigers strategy for the championship series. "We're going to force their defence to make mistakes. We have been playing man to man, but it hasn't been working. Their forwards are fast and playing man to man gives them time to set up in their own end. With the 2-1-2 forechecking system we're going to use, we just dump the puck in and get on top of their defence right away", he said.

Shawn MacDonald, a medicine student also in his fourth year with the Tigers, agreed with Facca. He said, "If they have a weakness, it's their defence. We've got to work them really hard; forecheck hard so they can't send their forwards off." MacDonald added that because of the speed of the Moncton team, "Part of the game plan is to take the man and slow them down as much as possible."

Although the Tigers did manage only the one win over the Blue Eagles, that coming in a 4-3 victory at the Forum the Friday before the study break, there is, as noted, confidence that the Tigers can win. "They can be beat. We proved it here two weeks ago," Facca said. "If we work our butts off, we can do it." One obstacle that one might think is a major one in the way of a Tiger victory is the fact that all three games will be played in Moncton. This fact does not, however, seem to perturb the Tigers greatly. "We're a good road team", MacDonald says. "We've played well on the road all season and I don't see any reason for that not continuing."

As far as the Moncton fans go, Facca says that "If we're on the winning side, their fans are pretty quiet. But once they start scoring, the fans get pretty vocal. It doesn't really bother you though because

once you're on the ice you can shut things out."

The job they have to do is clear in the minds of the Tigers. What remains to be seen, as always, is how well the Tigers can carry out their plans.

Tiger Tales

TIGER TALES—DON WOODWORTH has been lost to the team for the remainder of the year because of injury. Woodworth broke his collarbone shortly before the start of the playoffs . . . JOHN READY and WALTER KONTAK have been filling in for Woodworth as the fourth defenceman . . . Ready played well enough against UPEI last Friday to lead one to wonder why he didn't receive more ice time in the regular season . . .

Congratulations are in order for PETER ESDALE, KEN JOHNSTON, JOHN KIBYUK, and RICK McCALLUM. Esdale was deservedly named AUA Coach of the Year and the others were all named all-stars . . .

McCallum finished the season as the second leading scorer in the Kelley Division, and Kibyuk provided the Tigers with the kind of steady play and leadership most players only wish they could offer a team. Johnston, a steady defenceman who has fine rushing abilities, boasted the Tigers top plus-minus figure on the Tigers . . .

SHAWN MacDONALD, ADRIAN FACCA, and RICK McCALLUM may very well be playing their last games with Dalhousie in the near future. They would all, like the rest of the squad, undoubtedly prefer to finish the season in Calgary at the CIAU championships rather than in Moncton.

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