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V-Ball Pandas climbing up standings

by Alan Small

Call it a small step for volleyball, a giant leap for the Panda volleyball squad.

With a pair of wins over top ten ranked Regina, the Pandas have gone where no U of A women's volleyball team has gone before. They have moved one step closer to the national finals when they were ranked seventh in the latest CIAU top ten rankings.

"We wanted to play a lot of teams outside the conference in these exhibition tournaments, because we knew it would be our last chance to play them," said Panda head coach Suzi Smith.

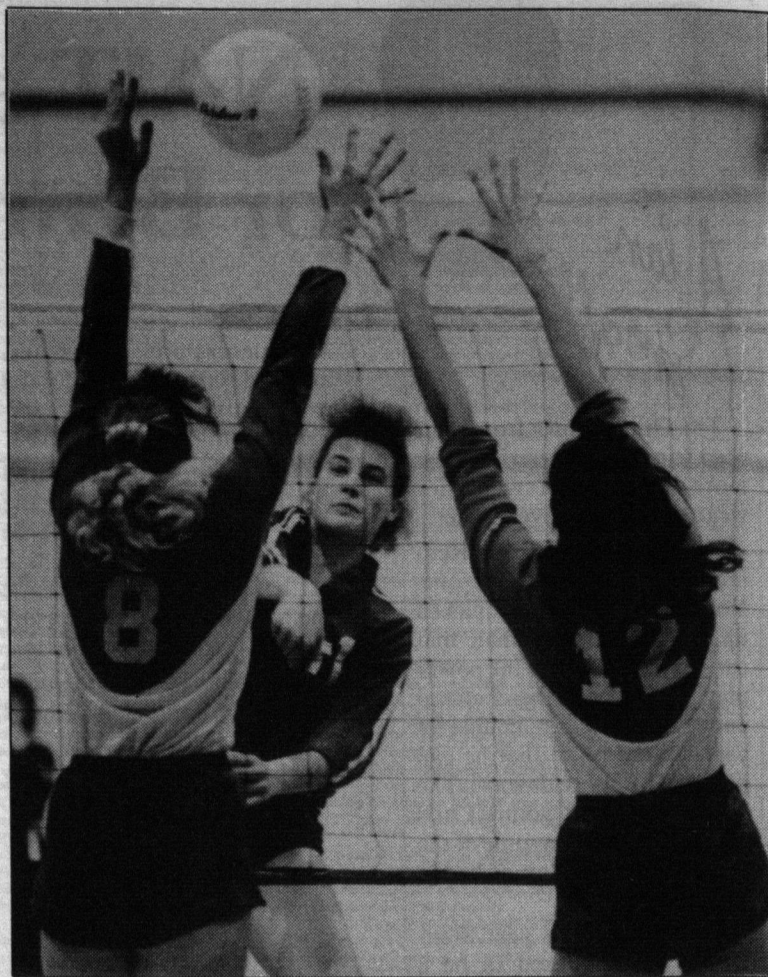
"This is the best position the Pandas have been in." — Smith

"Now we only have to play conference teams, and we don't have to depend on something outside our own control.

"This is the best position any Panda volleyball team has been in."

The good news, despite their 2-4 record, the Pandas still have 14 matches in to move up the Canada West standings, and presumably the CIAU top ten. The bad news is that the Pandas, despite being seventh ranked, are the fourth best team from Canada West in the CIAU top ten. Victoria is second in the country, while Calgary is fourth and UBC is sixth.

The Pandas get a shot at moving up that steep ladder this weekend, when the Calgary Dinos come to



Rob Galbraith

Pandas will try to spike the Dinos this weekend at Varsity Gym.

town for a pair of matches at Varsity Gym. Earlier this year, the Pandas went down to Cowtown, but were ambushed by the Dinosaurs. They didn't escape from Calgary without getting swept six games to nothing.

Smith says the Pandas fortunes will be better this weekend. "I guarantee a different match than the ones we had down there," Smith stated. "They're a team we can respect, but there's a fine line between respect and intimidation."

The Pandas also remember a match from last February, a 3-2 loss, which ended up being the difference between the national finals and sitting at home getting extra studying done. This year the Pandas goal is to reach the CIAU's, which will be held in Saskatoon in March. One of the teams they'll have to go through to get there is the Dinos.

"Calgary has some firepower. They are definitely one of the most stacked teams in Canada," Smith admitted. "but I think we have psychological strength on our side. We are as focussed as we ever have been.

"They're number four and we're number seven. We've got nothing to lose and everything to gain.

They may have the fear of losing a match and that could hurt them," Smith added.

On the men's side of the net, Bear head coach Pierre Baudin hopes a new setter can shrink the huge gap between the Dinos and the Golden Bears.

Baudin has brought back Brad Evans, who was a setter for the Bears two years ago, to take some of the pressure off of young Joel Kern, who had his share of difficulties adjusting to university volleyball and a new position at the same time.

Kern, a 6'5" freshman, had never played at setter before. He'll be kept in the Bears scheme of things. Baudin needs his blocking at the net.

"He's been our best blocker so far," said Baudin, who is not taking Kern out of the position completely. Since Kern is left-handed, he is perfect for the setting position, where lefties have a huge advantage.

It will be a tough debut for Evans this weekend, for the 0-4 Bears face the number one team in Canada, if not North America, in the Dinos.

Women's matches start at 6:30 pm. Friday and Saturday, with the men following at 8:15 pm.

Odds against the Bobcats

by Alan Small

The Golden Bears hockey club cannot let up for a minute.

If they want to keep up with the red hot Calgary Dinosaurs, they cannot take the Brandon Bobcats too lightly.

The Bears host a two-game series with the Bobcats this weekend at Varsity Arena. Game time is at 7 pm.

The Bears are two points behind the Dinos at this point, a similar position to where they were last season. A few key losses by the Bears sealed Calgary's first place

finish that year, and home-ice advantage throughout the Canada West playoffs. That ended up costing the Bears, as the Dinos won the Canada West final two games to one, over the U of A.

The Bears still have a shot at whittling down the lead, but to keep in position to do so, they must not lose games they are supposed to win, like the ones this weekend against Brandon.

Brandon is sixth in the Canada West standings — their 5-12-1 mark leaves them three points over the Regina Cougars — and

are in no position to make a run at the playoffs. They are ten points behind the UBC T-Birds, who hold down the fourth and last spot in the conference.

Unlike Alberta, the Bobcats aren't scoring demons or defensive wizards by any stretch of the imagination. Their 64 goals for and 116 goals against are both second worst in the league, behind the hapless Lethbridge Pronghorns. Kevin Mantell leads their team with 23 points, which is good enough to place him seven-

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