

# Soccer Bruins one of the favorites

by Dave McCurdy

Although only a few people are aware of the fact, the University of Alberta does have a varsity soccer team. Furthermore, the team is travelling to Saskatoon this weekend to participate in the WCIAA championships against seven other universities—but nobody seems to know or care.

The team, under coach Stuart Robbins and assistant Peter Usher, have played seven exhibition games this year, winning five, in preparation for the upcoming tournament. The winning team in the tournament will represent Western Canada in the national playoffs.

Eight teams will be entered in the two-division tournament: University of Calgary, University of Victoria, Lakehead University of Thunder Bay, Ont., and the University of Alberta in what Robbins calls "definitely the stronger of the two divisions"; and the University of Manitoba, the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon and Regina campuses) and the University of Winnipeg in the other division. In each division a round-robin series will be played; then the first-place team in each division will take on the second-place team in the other division. The winners of these two games will play off in the championship games. There will also be consolation games for the losers, so each team will play five games in about 21/2 days.

"I'm very optimistic about our chances," said Robbins. "I expect the tournament will be dominated by three teams—Manitoba, Victoria and us. Victoria have won it the last three years, but we play our first game against them this time, and if we can knock them off, we have an excellent chance of winning it all."

Both Robbins and Usher emphasized that injuries would play an important role in the tournament. "Last year we had three guys injured in the first game, and by the end of the tournament we were really hurting," said Usher. "Another problem this year is that we may not have a trainer along with us in Saskatoon, which, if it happens, will hurt us considerably."

The team, in preparation for the tournament, played a total of eight games of one sort and another this year and won five of them. They defeated Northwest United, a local team, 2-1 and 4-0; lost to Scottish, another local team, 2-1; defeated University of Saskatchewan (Regina) 10-0; split two games with University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon), winning 4-2 and losing 1-0; and edged the University of Calgary 3-2.

Usher and Robbins commented that the team didn't suffer from a shortage of games, but from a "shortage of games that really count."

Leagues games, if we had a league, would be played on a regular basis, and would mean much more to the boys than the games they play now,"

said Robbins. "For next year, a western Canada league has been agreed upon in principle, and the Golden Bears will be participating. Without a league, however, it's hard to get the team up for games."

The Bears play a "give and go" style of soccer, using a fluid 4-2-4 (4 forwards, 2 halfbacks and 4 fullbacks, plus the goalie) formation. The team's regulars include Neil Johnson in goal, Geoff Salmon in the "sweeper" position (in this position, he fills in for any of the other three fullbacks who moves up to join the attack, and at other times serves as a last line of defense behind the other fullbacks), Derek Wynne at right fullback, Dave Clayton at centre fullback, Terry Whitney at left fullback, Frank Tassone, a rookie, at right half, assistant Usher at left half, Guy Borthwick and John Devlin on right and left wings respectively, and Martin Stribrny and Tommy Varugheuse in the striker positions.

Under this system, the team has developed, according to Usher, "one of the strongest defenses in the WCIAA"; and the offense is pretty potent as well. Indeed, in the seven games they played this year, they scored 24 goals and allowed only eight. The top scorer was striker Varugheuse, who potted five goals against Regina and about a dozen over all.

Of the other two strong teams in the tournament this weekend, one, Manitoba, plays a similar style to that of the Bears; the other, Victoria,

plays the old 5-3-2 "slog and run" style which in many leagues has become outmoded. However, Victoria have some very strong kickers in their defense, and great speed overall, so they have used the system to great advantage, as their record of three straight WCIAA championships shows.

Usher had some general comments about the state of soccer in western Canada as well. He said the game is catching on fast in Alberta, with an extensive minor program having been set up. "However," he noted, "a real upswing in soccer interest will have to wait until the current crop of grade-schoolers reach the university and the local league age. Most adults in Alberta had very little exposure to soccer as kids, and as a result they are neither knowledgeable nor interested in the field of soccer."

Usher had some harsh words for the local media in trying to explain the lack of interest in soccer locally. "The media display surprising ignorance and indifference about soccer," he said. "Why, last summer they didn't even publicize the success of the Canadian soccer team at the Pan-American games. They justified their lack of coverage by saying that nobody here cared about soccer anyway. That's a pretty poor excuse."

However, Usher says that local interest in soccer is definitely on the upswing, and in a few years Alberta should be ready to reap the benefits of a comprehensive minor system.

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