

Oliver Steward: wants pro career and education

There's nothing unusual about a boy from northern B.C. coming to the University of Alberta for an education. But Oliver Steward gave up a four-year athletic scholarship at St. Louis University to come here, and that's another story altogether.

Raised in Dawson Creek, Steward left home at the age of 16 to play hockey for the Junior "A" Rockets in Kamloops from 1969-71. In spite of the hectic schedule a junior player has to contend with, he managed to score high both in school and in hockey (44 goals and 52 assists over two years.)

"I liked junior hockey," he says. "I liked the schedule—we played lots of games, and it was good hockey. I would have stayed in junior last year, but I talked to different people about going to university and playing hockey, too. I began to think about the advantages of combining hockey and having an education."

Oliver admits that he wants to turn pro eventually and that was a major consideration in choosing a university. The other main factor was finances, as it is with most students.

"American colleges have a better reputation than Canadian

schools for producing the best hockey teams. Supposedly their players are a little better. The pro teams have also been drafting more out of U.S. colleges than out of the Canadian universities."

"I knew a person in Dawson Creek who had played for the St. Louis coach, Bill Selman, when he had coached at North Dakota. So I contacted St. Louis and they said, yes, they were definitely interested in having me."

So he went back home to Dawson Creek where he finished his grade 12 in December of 1971, then headed south in January. But at the end of the semester, he handed back his four-year scholarship (worth around \$16,000) and set his sights for Edmonton.

"St. Louis has really good facilities," he explained. "They have a fantastic arena (which the Bilikens share with the NHL St. Louis Blues), a good schedule, a good coach. But I realized I wanted to live and play in Canada."

"I decided I'd like to come to U of A because I pretty much wanted to play for this team, Clare Drake's Golden Bears win. I'm pleased with my gamble—over the Christmas

break, we played North Dakota, one of the two top college teams in the States, and lost 5-4 after having one of our goals disallowed. We aren't that far out of the running."

If Oliver is happy with his decision to try out for the Bears, coach Drake is equally pleased to have him with the organization.

"Not many first-year players are able to take a regular spot on the team the way he has. He's doing well in that respect. I'm also quite pleased with his offensive play; he's got an excellent shot—quick. He's a very willing worker, small but strong, just starting to realize his potential. I think he should have a good chance of getting drafted."

Oliver hopes to see a majority of pro hockey players eventually being recruited from college ranks. "The main disadvantage to the junior teams is their schedule. They usually travel by bus and it leaves them no time for school."

The top ranking junior teams in Canada are virtual factories feeding the pro clubs with new young players. The average schedule is roughly 70 games a season, and it's a rare player who can manage both school and

hockey. Occasionally, however, a team will pay a player's tuition. Generally speaking, a junior player can receive up to \$250 a month.

"You'll see kids dropping out of school in grade 10 to play junior, and they're making a real mistake to put all their eggs in one basket that way," he feels. "If they can't make it in the pros or if they get a serious injury, they could find themselves in the position of being 25 years old with nothing else to fall back on."

"With the NHL expansion and the formation of the new league, good hockey players are in big demand now. An education gives you better bargaining power and an alternative if you don't make it with the pro teams."

"Playing here (at university) gives you a better opportunity to look at yourself in relation to the rest of the world," he continues. "It also gives you a better mental approach to the game."

Oliver is quite enthusiastic about the proposed cross-Canada college hockey league, seeing in it a way to make more people aware of the high calibre of hockey played at the university level.

Along these lines, he would

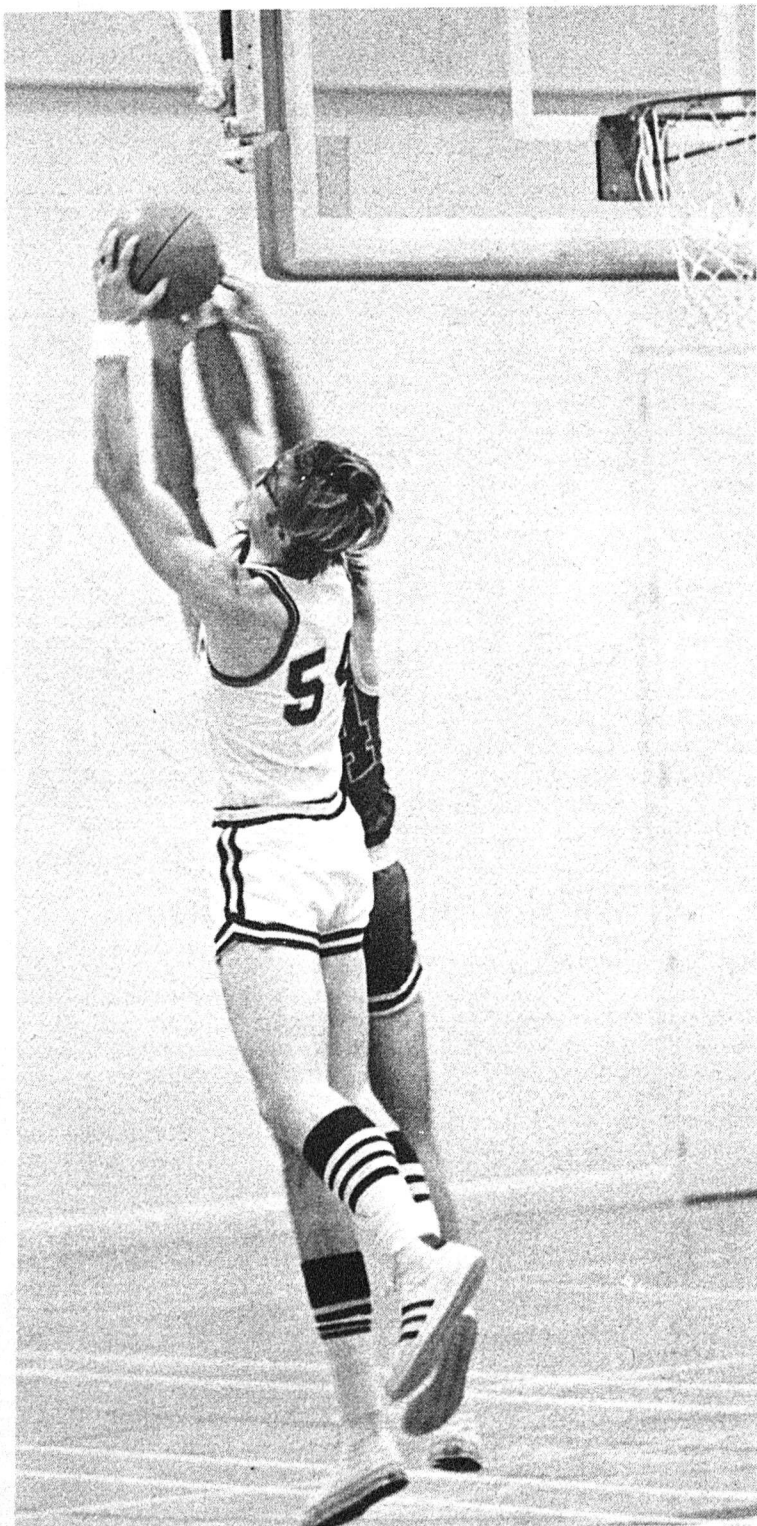
like to see university hockey promoted to the community at large to a much greater degree than it is now. "Res supports us and this is great," he says, "but the quality of hockey we have to offer is easily as good as tier 1 junior so why can't we promote it and get more paying customers, too? I'd like to see the people in Edmonton become aware of the fact that there is another team here as good as the Oil Kings."

"I've seen what it's like in the States with athletic scholarships, and they're producing good hockey players. They attract Canadians to the American colleges. Why can't we find a way to promote Canadian players at the universities here? The calibre would improve that much more if we could keep Canadians here."

"The main reason a hockey player comes to university is to give himself an alternative. With an education, if he can't make it in the big leagues, he's not forced to stay in the minors just because he can't do anything else."

"The pride in playing hockey is to be the best. Your pride will be hurt if you can't make it, but an educated player will have a second career to turn to."

Bears' Panteluk : This rookie plays like a veteran



Steve Panteluk (54) hauls in another rebound

On a team that has almost as many rookies as veterans, it would seem unlikely Steve Panteluk wouldn't feel at home.

But few people ever expected the six-foot-three, 190 pound forward to move into a starting role directly from high school and perform with so much poise. Steve has probably been the most consistent cager on the Golden Bears.

Panteluk would seem a shoo-in for the conference's rookie of the year award. Few players patrol the boards as aggressively as Steve and average 11 points a game.

"Steve's only a rookie in name only," said his coach Bob Bain. "He's one of our more valuable players. We knew he would see a lot of action. But he's exceeded all expectations as far as his poise and rebounding strength are concerned."

"He's a big difference between a 1-7 record and what we are now."

One problem a newcomer faces is earning the respect and confidence of his teammates. Panteluk is not only praised by his fellow Bears but also by numerous opponents around the league.

"We never have to worry about Steve," related Bears' Mike Frisby. "He's there when we really need him so he takes so much pressure off of us."

"I was at John Mills (UBC's veteran all-star centre) home after a game in Vancouver," recalls Frisby. "He said he was glad to be getting out of the league so he wouldn't have to play against Steve."

Ironically, Panteluk almost decided to give up Edmonton for the more moderate, if wetter climate on the west coast.

"I had planned to go to UBC," said Panteluk. "When I heard that first year players had to play junior varsity ball, I changed my mind. Now that things have turned out okay, I'll stay with the Bears."

An all-round athlete at Ross Shephard, Steve was equally at home on court and on the track. It is hardly surprising that Panteluk can outleap taller opposing players who have a three-or-four-inch height advantage, since he is one of the best long-jumpers in Canada.

In fact, he finished second in the Canadian junior track and field finals in Montreal with a jump of 23 feet two inches. He

had earlier leapt 24 feet seven inches, five inches off Bob Beaman's amazing world record in the 1968 Olympics.

Panteluk consistently displays the poise of a veteran; he doesn't falter in pressure-cooker situations. His confidence was nurtured during the summers he spent practicing with Golden Bear players.

"I knew that if I could stick with these guys I could play against anyone in the western conference. Also, there isn't that much pressure on a rookie. You are allowed some mistakes."

Steve's physical attributes compensate for any inexperience. As well as being abundantly strong, Steve is quick and mobile.

"He's got great balance in the air," noted Bain. "People just bounce off of him."

Besides his strength he also possessed the mental toughness necessary to risk life and limb going after rebounds.

"Mental preparation is very important," says Panteluk. "You have to be psyched up to want to get a rebound. You have to be aggressive, not chicken."

"Sometimes it can get downright dirty under the boards. Moderate contact is okay, submarining is the worst. You have to be aggressive but not dirty." "I guess I like the rough going," he added.

Bain claims a minor flaw in Panteluk's play is that he doesn't shoot enough. That is unfortunate because Steve is a deadly accurate shooter, particularly from the outside.

Already, he's the Bears' leading foul shooter.

Like many Canadian basketball players, Steve's ultimate athletic goal is to compete for Canada in the 1976 Olympics. Despite his great potential, the cards are stacked against Steve. It appears Canada's national basketball coach, Jack Donohue will formulate his 1976 team this summer and work exclusively with them for the next three years.

"But I'm still going to try out for the experience," said Panteluk.

If he doesn't make the national squad, Steve may try out for the Canadian track and field team which will compete in Spain this summer.

"But I have about ten of 15

other long-jumpers to beat in my age group. It'll be tough."

Bear Notes: Bears' entire season hinges on this weekend's series with second-place Lethbridge Pronghorns. Lethbridge has to win both games to gain the Canada West University Athletic Association title.

The focal point of the series will be the matchup between the Tollestrup brothers. Phil is considered by many the best basketball player in Canada, while Wallace has the paramount chore of guarding him. Wallace has held Phil to 19 points in Lethbridge.

Everyone

in the pool!

The Canada West University Athletic Association Swimming and Diving Championships will be held tonight and Saturday in the Hamilton Memorial Pool.

The University of Alberta plays host to teams from the University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, and the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon campus).

Pandas have high hopes for the meet as all their team will be competing. Although, they placed first in their last weekend meet, they took second on Feb. 3 against the Edmonton Y Torpedoes 69 to 66 points.

In their previous meet they were second to University of British Columbia. However, Pandas were missing five swimmers: Sue Smith, Heather Morrison, Maria McCracken, Christine Wright and Keltie Parslow.

Coach Sandy Drever will be looking to Smith and Wright for strong performances. Brenda Martin should be a contender in both the Swimming and Diving events.

The meet is a warm-up for the Canada West Intercollegiate Athletic Union Championships to be held in Calgary March 1-3.

Also, the Panda Synchronized Swim troupe journey to Calgary this weekend for their C.W.U.A.A. Championships.

bb