

CIAU Final-8 Men's Basketball National Championships

BY DAVID BROCK

Halifax Metro Centre —
March 17 — 19, 2000

Day #1

1:00pm Alberta (1) vs.
Brandon (8)

Last year, the Alberta Golden Bears found themselves surrounded by a roaring capacity crowd at the Halifax Metro Centre. Unfortunately for them, the Sunday night frenzy was the result of Cory Janes' clutch shooting and the St. Mary's Huskies national championship overtime victory. This year the Bears opened the tournament on St. Patrick's Day wearing green, and hoping for better luck. Again playing the number eight ranked team, they didn't find any shamrocks in their shoes. In a fast paced game that treated fans to plenty of above-the-rim action and the explosive talent of Brandon's Earnest Bell (31pts), again Alberta's long trip east ended in disappointment.

Brandon 73 — Alberta 57

3:00pm Western (4) vs.
Laurentian (5)

Both of these Ontario teams are regulars at the Palace on CIAU weekend. Both constantly make the trip to Halifax after impressive regular season records but fail to produce victory here. Maybe its the sea. Or maybe Alex J. Walling of TSN is right and the defending national champions, St. Mary's — who were 20 seconds short of beating the third ranked X-Men for the AUAA title — should have received the wild card instead of Western. From the tip-off to the final buzzer Western shot the ball extremely well, especially from beyond the arc. LU could not make up the 15 point deficit that the Mustangs established early on. Unfortunately, this game was the last for one-time Tiger and CIAU 1st team All-Canadian Ted Dongelmans.

Western 90 — Laurentian 78

7:00pm St. Francis Xavier
(3) vs. McMaster (5)

Both Coach Konchalski and Coach Raso commented that this game hosted the country's two best back courts. Mac's Steve Maga and X's Randy Nohr are both tough, smart players who know how to run an offence. Nohr need only look up to find one of the Halifax connection's Perry-Croucher-Oliver streaking to the hoop. As for his reported hip injury — good strategy Coach K — the B.C. native finished with 20 points. The X-Men built up a 45-34 lead at the half, but couldn't keep a lock on the lead any better than they did their locker room door. Mac climbed back within one point after Rodney Baptiste calmly dropped two free throws with 5.3 seconds remaining. An inbound to Jordan Croucher, and a quick foul resulted in two free throws at the other end, giving the X-Men and their 7,000 enthused fans an 82-79 lead with 4.0 left on the clock. After a time-out, Mac's Ostojic caught

the ball in the backcourt, dribbled to behind the three-point line and launched a one handed runner. Back of the rim - X to the semifinals.

St. FX 82 — McMaster 79

9:00pm Lethbridge (2)
vs. Concordia (7)

OK, so by this time your humble scribbler has eaten a "few" donuts and washed them down with a couple pops. It was getting late, and with all that nutrition in my system I was needing some further excitement to suppress my periodic yawns. My request was granted...by the Bridgewater Dynamo Dunkers, and their half-time dunk show off the trampoline. As for the CIAU's player-of-the-year Danny Balderson and his Lethbridge team, one young fan summed up the affair appropriately by yelling repeatedly, "Pronghorn! What's a Pronghorn?!" Balderson finished with 16pts and teammate Spencer Holt added 19pts, in the easy victory.

Lethbridge 90 — Concordia 77

Day #2 Semifinals

5:00pm Western (4)
vs. Brandon (8)

Before graduating from my high school's junior to senior basketball team, our home-town Gravenhurst Gryphons hosted the provincial finals. The championship game was the single most exciting basketball game I've ever witnessed, and our team lost. I was the scorekeeper and Cheto Ndur was the opposing team's starting power forward. Now I am faithfully taking notes on the score again, and Cheto Ndur is again on the court, this time for the Western Mustangs. Five minutes into this game, when Brandon's Greg Walker rose above the rim and dunked an alley-oop pass, fans knew that there was no need for the Middletown Highschool band or Brittany Spears on the speakers. This semifinal was all the excitement one heart could handle.

At half-time the Mustangs lead 30-26. The game was very physical, as the two teams' 250 and 280lbs centre's had already established their dislikes of one another.

Western's four point lead held for most of the game, as the back court of Grozelle-Tweedie-and all-Canadian Michah Bourdeau continued to shoot with deadly accuracy. But that's why they play the whole game. Finally with 1:20 remaining, Greg Walker's jump shot tied the game at 56-56. After two trips down the floor, Western's Ndur tied the game again at 58-58, prompting Brandon's Jerry Hemming to call a time-out. The play was executed as drafted. Earnest Bell drove the lane, and dished to centre Jermaine Harden for a thunderous dunk with only 1.8 seconds remaining — ohh, by the way, shot clock violation — no basket. After a time-out, with the game still tied at 58-58, Western centre Chris Brown lobbed a pass from his own base line looking for Bourdeau. Instead, he found

Brandon's Josh Masters dashing across the middle of the court. Masters stole the ball, took one dribble, stepped one foot over the centre line and launched a prairie prayer. Again, Cheto Ndur was on the court and I was taking notes of the score, during the most exciting finish I've ever witnessed.

Western 58 — Brandon 61

8:00pm Lethbridge (2) vs.
St. FX (3)

When you're named player of the year in any league, there is a certain pressure to perform well and lead your team to victory. It was the task of Jordan Croucher and his X-Men teammates to shadow the 6'4" shooting guard. Lethbridge centre Chris Wilde scored six points in the opening minutes of play, including a post-up dunk, and looked to take the crowd out of it early. But with Croucher shooting the ball well from behind the arc, and defending Balderson to a 6 for 38 night of shooting, the X-Men lead 46-39 at the half and never trailed again. The crowd was clearly the sixth man in this one. With 2:28 left in the game and Lethbridge surging, a charge was called on AUAA MVP Fred Perry. The call was a clear jump ball, and fans responded with a chorus of boos. Our Milk sponsors turned this into a symphony of Moos. The Pronghorns, who were ranked #1 in Canada for seven straight weeks this season, had their opportunities, but on this night Balderson's shots would not drop. With 30 seconds remaining, Randy Nohr iced the game with a 12 foot jump shot and finished the game with 28 pts and player-of-the-game honours.

St. FX 80 — Lethbridge 75

Consolation Champs: Alberta Golden Bears

Tournament MVP: Randy Nohr St. FX X-Men

All-Stars:

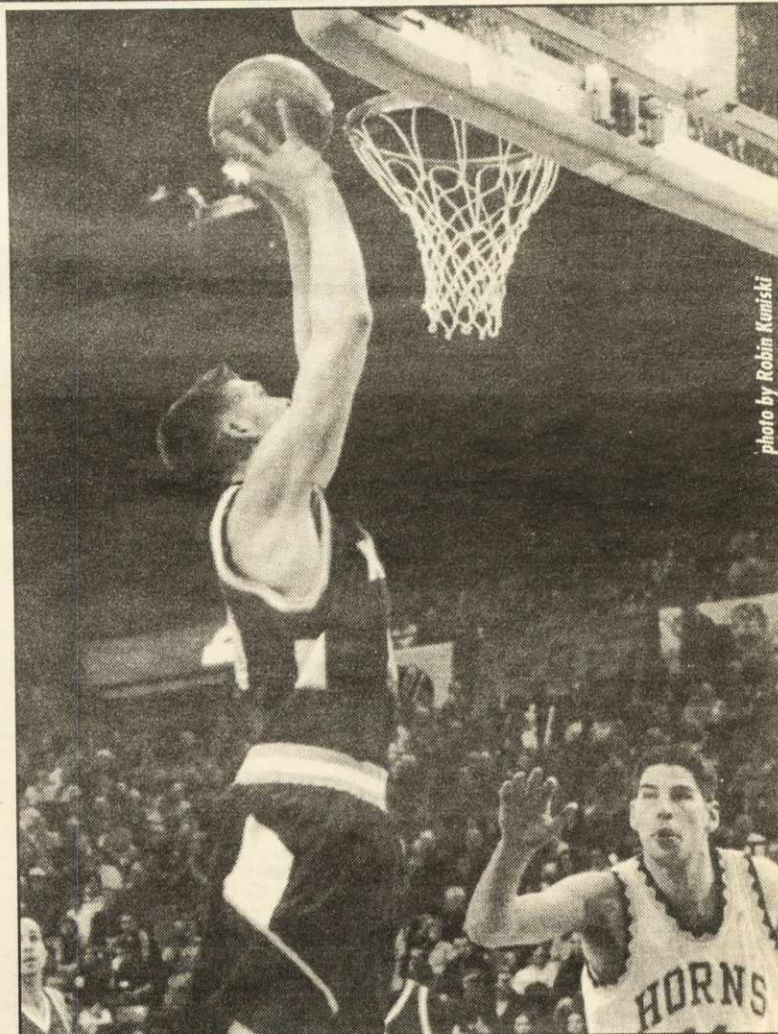
Steve Maga
McMaster Marauders
Nick Maglisceau
Alberta Golden Bears
Michah Bourdeau
Western Mustangs
Earnest Bell
Brandon Bobcats
Fred Perry
St. FX X-Men

Day #3 Championship

5:30pm St. FX (3) vs.
Brandon (8)

When 8,200 people gather in Halifax on a Sunday night to sing O'Canada, you know it is going to be a special evening. This past weekend's CIAU Final-8 men's national basketball championship was just that — special.

The previous evening, the Brandon Bobcats — ranked eighth coming into this tournament — Josh Masters sunk a half-court buzzer beater to send the prairie team in to the national finals. Meanwhile, the



Xmen erase Brandon at Final-8.

home crowd favourite St. Francis Xavier X-Men had advanced to the championship game by beating Lethbridge. Arguably, Canada's two most exciting teams were scheduled to compete for 40 minutes, the winner taking home the W.P. McPhee Trophy.

It didn't take long for these two teams to demonstrate their athleticism and competitiveness. On the first play of the game, Halifax's Fred Perry dunked an alley-oop pass from fellow Haligonian and former Brandon player Dennie Oliver. Only seconds later Brandon's star Earnest Bell was swinging on the other rim, a play identical to the previous. So, Perry answered with a three-pointer, raising the chant of MVP, MVP! Brandon quickly quieted that with a three of their own. And so the evening went, dunk after ferocious dunk, three after three, the only thing disappointing about this game was that it had to end.

The X-Men continued to hold the lead until 10:16 in the second half, when the self-motivating Bell, who finished with 14pts, hit a jump shot, to give Brandon a 48-47 lead. The Bobcats roared out of a time-out, after Bell growled, "I'm sick of this shit, lets take this!" They extended the lead to 60-53 with only 3:16 remaining.

Former QEJ guard Jordan Croucher, who shot well for the weekend, then missed two consecutive three pointers, and with only

2:41 left on the clock the X-Men appeared finished.

It was at that critical moment when every player from the X-Men made an impact. Guard E.L. Adams — who stands at 5' 10" on paper only — drew a charge, reigning the Halifax crowd and his teammates. After two quick X-Men lay-ups, Brandon inbounded the ball to guard Charlton Weasel-Head, who lost his footing for only a second, enough time for Adams to dive, steal the ball and call time-out.

After failing to score, X's Randy Nohr, who entered the game averaging 24pts per game for the weekend, pressed Brandon's Masters, forcing him out of bounds. Nohr then delivered a lay-up at the other end, and again the X-Men pressed. This time forcing the Bobcats into a ten second violation. Still trailing 60-59, Nohr drove the length of the court, dribbled right off a screen and nailed a hanging jump shot with 18.9 seconds left on the clock.

After a brief scuffle in front of the TSN control booth, Brandon went into a time-out and drafted the play for Bell one last time. But this time there would be no Brandon miracles, as two shots hit the rim and rolled out. For the second time in as many years, Nova Scotia's fans piled onto the floor of the Metro Centre to celebrate a national championship.

