

Red Sticks Coach: "Get the real picture"

Dear Mr. Peter Thompson:

I feel, as coach of the UNB Red Sticks field hockey team, a need to reply to your article in last week's Brunswickan on the CIAU Championships ("Sticks: Why they didn't win" - 6 Nov. 1987).

I realize you were there watching every game but I wonder if you saw the same field hockey I did.

The Red Sticks have one of the best records of any team at UNB for attending CIAU Championships. This is not a new exciting thing. UNB has gone to the CIAU's every year since a National Championship has been held and that has been 8 years. Contrary to your beliefs that UNB played against CIAU teams the same way as other AUAA teams played against them, pardon me for asking but how many other AUAA teams have you seen playing CIAU teams? Mr. Thompson, our CIAU track record is very good. Sixth is the lowest we have ever placed. Last year we were fourth with only have one goal scored on us. The year before we lost on penalty strokes in the final game. Does that appear to be intimidation?

Yes, we played differently in the CIAU's than we did in the AUAA's but that was very necessary. The AUAA League this year was particularly weak. Our defense was rarely challenged - the most shots on our goalkeeper was 4: how do you adjust when you are never pressed all year?

The desire to win was there. Do you realize the adversity this team had to face? Despite having the second best record in the country 11-0-1, the second best goals for average (30 for), the best goals against average (3 against) UNB was given a 5th place ranking at the CIAU's. One wild card and the host team were given a better ranking and a better seeding in the tournament. You noted we had the worst draw in the tournament but did you realize we had to be up at 5:30 a.m. to beat the

rush hour traffic to be at the field on time only to find no restaurants open so having to settle for muffins as a pregame meal. The building was supposed to be open at 7 a.m. but due to unforeseen circumstances did not open until 8:15. Players taped outside on a picnic bench; the pregame meeting was in a corner outside the building. Once inside

there were no lights on anywhere - a dilemma for contact wearers, etc. The game was delayed due to the problems but only by 15 minutes; therefore an improper warm-up. This was U of T's homefield (they practised there at least 3 times/week) and played all of their home games there.

A game on astroturf is much different than one on a field (as opposed to one on grass). Our fields constitute a much more defensively practiced and coached game as invariably the ball will hit a bump and jump over a stick - not so on turf. Players used to backing each other up now had to forget that and get in a forward support position in order to get on offense - not easily learned in one practice on astroturf prior to the game.

You've already noted the score of the U of T game but did you note the fact we had 12 penalty corners in the first half as opposed to their 4. We had our chances.

Our first game was late in starting but they tried to make up time on the next games to catch up in the schedule. There was not enough time to go back to the motel between games so the girls spent the next 2 hours at the field in those dingy, dirty, cold locker-rooms. Their next opponent, a fresh UBC team, had been in Toronto since Tuesday (practiced 3 times on the turf) as opposed to UNB who arrived the day before and practiced once. The keyword here is fresh. UNB played very well to tie UBC 0-0 and again had their chances. Now a very, very tired team who had been up since 5:30 a.m. (4:30 NB time) had to do a stroke off at 7:30 p.m. with UBC. How does one practice for such an event? - so much pressure on 6 people. The 6 chosen players did their best and represented UNB well but it was not to be - this year.

So the Red Sticks finished 6th out of 6 teams - in a down year - a weak league, not such a strong UNB team (speed being the largest void). How do you hide that on astroturf? Contrary to your thoughts, Mr. Thompson, this team did much better than expected by their coach. Despite coming 6th, with a bit of luck the team could have come 3rd very easily.

Perhaps you fail to realize the calibre of talent on these

teams facing UNB. York had 3 Senior National Canadian Team members on their team including the goalkeeper and the captain along with practicing on turf all the time. UBC and U of Victoria had all but about 3 players involved in one of the 3 Canadian National Teams. UBC, Vict and Calgary have just begun their seasons, they continue practicing until March and then have their championships. They practice seven months of the year as opposed to our two. U of T have the National Team second goalkeeper plus several Senior and Junior Team players. Our players (all but 4) have gained experience through their Provincial Teams.

The Red Sticks definitely had the will to win but where there is a will there isn't always a way. "The mark of a really good team is that they overcome difficulties such as these." I ask you, when do the difficulties become insurmountable? I assure you the Red Sticks come to play and to win. CIAU's is old hat and that fear of failure is not there. I am proud to be coach of such a fine group of young women. They come so close with so much going against them, how can you dare say the desire wasn't there? There is really no need to justify the players but I felt they deserved better.

The Red Sticks have done UNB proud and will continue to do so. Until the AUAA becomes stronger to allow UNB to practice defence and the goalkeeper to work on stopping 3 shots in a row in one

spurt as opposed to 3 in a whole 70 minute game; until UNB gets astroturf so penalty corner specialty plays can be done instead of playing for the lucky bounce on the bumps, until the UNB program goes 7 months a year with some outside AUAA competition, you can forget a CIAU champion. The athletes are there, the desire is there or how would they ever come so close year after year. But until some things chance, close is all there will be.

Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for relaying the stats but get the real picture next time. These are a fine group of student athletes who deserve better said for them.

Sincerely,
Joyce Slipp

In response

In last week's article, the sentence "They played the same way against CIAU teams as other AUAA teams played against them," should have made clear that UNB played

against CIAU teams the same way as AUAA teams played against UNB, and I must apologize for my grammatical error.

I didn't wish to be overly critical of what is obviously a good team, but they did lose. Certainly there were many factors which worked against the team, some of which could easily be termed as unfair, but when it comes right down to it, all that matters is how you play in the game.

It's not that the Sticks didn't desire to win, it's as if they did not expect to win, and if this was caused totally by off-field conditions, then this is tragic. However, Jeremy Earl, who wrote last week's story "Redsticks Lose in Heartbreaker" and I both believe that the Redsticks could have done better without ever having to go to a shootout.

I don't really know when a team's difficulties become insurmountable, but it would seem to be when a team is overcome by them.

Peter Thompson

BLUE OVER BLUE

Sometimes, even when you think everything is all right with the world, you find out that it's not. Life seemed perfect until Don Cherry announced that Blue, his faithful hound died last year during the NHL playoffs. Cherry held off announcing Blue's death at the time, because he didn't want to upset the NHL players. How kind.

What if there was foul play involved? What if Blue didn't really die? We have no way of finding out now. Blue could be

living some secret life, or rotting at the bottom of some river with a cement leash.

And what about Cherry's new dog, Baby Blue? Is it, as Cherry claims, no relation to the original Blue? Perhaps Baby Blue is the illegitimate offspring of Blue, conceived as Cherry 0 Blue crisscrossed North America following hockey teams.

Perhaps Baby Blue is a clone of Blue. Perhaps the two are the same dog, with Blue having to hide from the I.R.S.

Then again, perhaps not.

Bloomers fall in final

The Red Bloomers defeated St. FX X-ettes in last weekend's UNB Women's Basketball Invitational, but dropped the final 70-53 to the UPEI Panthers.

Bahadursingh and Nichols each scored 14 for the Panthers while MacEachern hooped 12. For the Bloomers, Sue McMaster and Pauline Lordon both had 14, and their play throughout both games earned them a spot on the tournament all-star team.

The Bloomers were extremely successful at foul shooting in the final, gaining an impressive 15 of 16.

The consolation final saw the UNB alumni team defeat St. FX 60-54. Joyce Slipp led the way with 15 points while Alison Kent scored a dozen, and Bloomer coach Claire Mitton went up for ten more.

The Bloomers travel to

Dalhousie this weekend for a shot at the Dal Centennial Tourney. The team is tuning up for the regular AUAA schedule which will begin here on Nov. 20 when the Bloomers face the X-ettes, and continue

on the 21st when UNB will play Dalhousie.

Coach Mitton knows both teams to be tough and expects a good performance from her team, hopefully backed up by the support of Bloomers fans.



UNB Alumni in action against St. F.X. in last week's consolation final. The Bloomers home opener is on the weekend of Nov. 20, 21.
Photo Eric Drummie