

A golden occasion for bears of Alberta

Jules Xavier

For volleyball junkies, the Third Annual Excalibur Volleyball Classic, a Wally Dyba production featuring universities from Toronto, Waterloo, Western, Alberta, Pittsburgh and the host York Yeomen, provided an ample fix to those who witnessed the CIAU's 5th ranked Yeomen battle the defending CIAU champions, the University of Alberta Golden Bears in the gold match final.

The Yeomen were denied the gold they sought as the Golden Bears rebounded from a two-game deficit to capture the Excalibur Classic 3-2 (11-15, 14-16, 15-3, and 15-11).

Yeomen coach Wally Dyba was more than disappointed about his team's loss and it showed in his face.

Dyba attributed the loss to "the little things" in the match. It seemed the ball bounced in Alberta's favour more than once in the match.

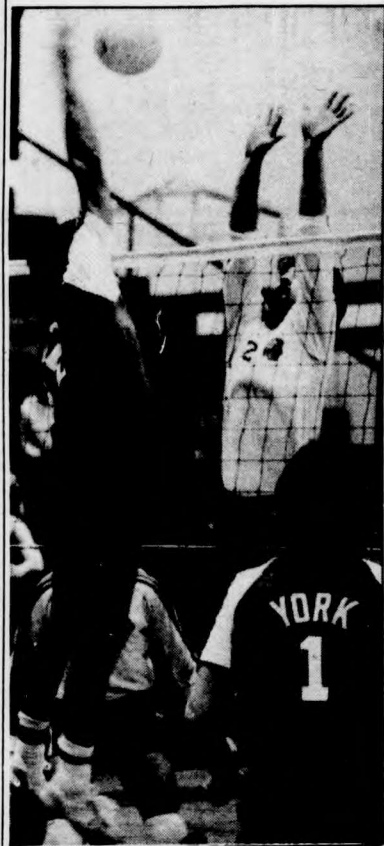
Yeomen's unforced errors

In the fourth game, the turning point in the match, the Yeomen's unforced errors allowed the Golden Bears to battle back to even the score at 13-13 and eventually take the lead and game 15-13. This set up the entertaining deciding fifth game.

York jumped into a quick 6-1 lead in the deciding fifth game but the stubborn Golden Bears fought back to even the score and then take the lead 11-9. The Yeomen closed to within two points (13-11) but their own rally fell short in the end.

"Alberta won the battle before the match started," said an exhausted Dyba. "We aren't used to this type of competition. Teams in Ontario have a tendency to ease up after the first two games. The western teams have developed a mental toughness from playing good teams all the time."

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Take that - York power hitter John May spikes the ball while Golden Bear Gord Bocock (2) tries in vain to block it.



Dig it - Yeomen John May's face shows the strain from digging the ball up before it hit the floor in a game against Pitt.



Yeomen veteran Larry Simpson puts on a display of his volleyball skills at the Third Annual Excalibur Volleyball Classic.

"Alberta is experienced. They play the CIAU's top-ranked Calgary Dinosaurs, Manitoba and Winnipeg (top ten teams) all the time. We have to work within the limitations of what our players have.

"With the exception of Waterloo we dominate Ontario teams and this hurts us when we play outside of Ontario. York doesn't get the competition in Ontario. This makes it hard to adjust."

In all but one match the Golden Bears played to the limit of five games. Against Waterloo they won their match in four games.

"Alberta look at five games to win while we look at taking the match in three. They play to win, they don't play to perform."



A dejected Wally Dyba

May figures the team's semi-final victory over the Waterloo Warriors (13-15, 15-6, 15-7, 11-15 and 15-13) was an important stepping stone. "We had to get over them," he said.

Veteran Yeomen power hitter John May felt his contribution, or lack of, was a factor in York's loss.



John May

"I'm a little disappointed in myself because I felt this was our tournament to win. I did not play well and in fact I did not do the job that I'm there to do," May admitted.

Waterloo (ranked 5th also in Canada) were undefeated after three previous matches with York and Dyba looked at the victory over the Warriors as a positive step for his team. It was also the most important part of the tournament to him.

"We had to break our mental block against Waterloo. A victory over Alberta would have only been gravy to us."

The University of Pittsburgh Panthers' victory (15-7, 6-15, 17-15, 16-14 and 15-11) over Waterloo gave them the bronze medal while Western won the consolation final 3-2 over the CIAU's 10th ranked University of Toronto.

The tournament all-star list included: Ed Drakich (Toronto), Bill Knuth (Pittsburgh), John Kervin (Waterloo), Gord Bocock (Alberta), Bruce Burt and Mark Ainsworth (York). Golden Bear Dave Wilson was selected as the tournament MVP.



Reach way up- Rookie Dave Samek reaches high in his attempt to block the ball.

Volleyball photos by Jules Xavier