

Field hockey fans get one look



Panda Eileen Dirom gives the evil eye to the opposition.

by Todd Saelhof

The 1989-90 edition of the field hockey Pandas figures to possess a good mix of experience and youth, but according to Coach Dru Marshall, will be tough against opposition teams of the Canada West Conference.

"University of Victoria is easily the strongest on paper," claimed Coach Marshall, a member of Canada's national coaching staff. With seven Vikettes having played national field hockey over the summer, experience should definitely lead UVIC to the CIAU Nationals in Toronto beginning November 3rd.

The ninth year Panda coach also predicts UBC as a team to beat at the three Canada West tournaments, due to the fact that five Thunderbirds will enter the '89-90 season fielding national experience.

The two other teams of Canada West, the University of Calgary Dinnies and the Lady Bisons from the University of Manitoba, each participated nationally this summer as well, acting as representatives for their respective provinces. Joined by Panda stickhandlers Sian Davies and Heather Jones, the U of C-laced Alberta squad snatched up a bronze medal at this year's Canada Games.

With tough competition in mind, the Pandas must thrive on strong team defence and work ethic to obtain a berth in the Nationals.

"Our strength is always our teamwork," says Marshall, who also realizes certain individuals must contribute strong seasonal performances in order for U of A to be a legitimate contender.

The experience of last year's Panda captain Bev Wolfert, as well as Davies and Jones should help encourage exuberance from youth on the team. Exuberance in the form of players like Tara Croxford, who comes to play after competing in the Junior World Cup in Ottawa where Coach Marshall drew co-coaching responsibilities.

Even with strong teamwork, the Pandas will be in tough within the nation's strongest hockey conference. "I would be really happy with a third place finish in Canada West, and third place is realistic," claims the enthusiastic Panda coach.

Unfortunately the enthusiasm will have to be a factor on the road this year, with none of the three Canada West tournaments taking place in Edmonton. Tourney number one commences September 30th in Calgary, tourney number two in Winnipeg takes place the October 13th weekend, and UVIC hosts tourney number three beginning October 20th.

The Pandas will have the disadvantage of playing on three unfamiliar field surfaces with Marshall insisting "the team that practices on

their own surface has an advantage going into the tournament."

That's where this weekend's Alberta Invitational tournament comes into play.

Other than the Pandas' Alumni Game (Wednesday September 20th, 6:00 p.m., Pavilion), this weekend's Invitational will be your only chance to see the Pandas in action. With the University of Calgary invading town, and an Edmonton club chock full of Panda alumni (including three Canadian Olympians), the Alberta Invitational promises to be a classic.

For the Panda coaching staff, this tournament delivers a chance to try out new ideas as Marshall is "interested in seeing how people fit together" before fielding the squad at the CWUAA tournaments.

Saturday's contests pit the Pandas in a 9:00 a.m. matchup against the Edmonton club team and a 1:00 p.m. battle with the Dinnies. The following day, Sunday September 17th, promises an 11:00 a.m. game versus Edmonton followed by another classic U of A/U of C confrontation to finish the tourney at 1:00 p.m. The place to cheer on the Pandas against their southern nemesis will be on the new turf behind Lister Hall pending completion of the field. Otherwise the Butterdome will offer up Panda field hockey action beginning Saturday.

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