

VIEW From The Cheap Seats

By Mark Savoie

Over the past few years I have been a frequent critic of the Red Devils/Varsity Reds hockey team. I have never questioned their ability, but I have often questioned whether they had the heart to be a championship team. I have thought of them as being emotionless, of having no soul, of not having the spirit needed to answer a real gut check. Now, however, I find that I've got more faith in the team than I have had since the Don MacAdam years.

Mike Johnston is an excellent coach, but his absence this year may be the best thing to happen to the team since his hiring. Johnston is an excellent tactical coach and an excellent teaching coach. He has also done an excellent job of recruiting during his time here. All of this was necessary for the V-Reds to become the hockey power they are now, but he was not able to provide the final quality the team needed. That quality has somehow been provided by Danny Grant. I strongly doubt that Grant could ever have developed the disciplined, fundamentally sound team that are these year's V-Reds, but he has definitely lit a fire in their hearts.

Last Saturday I went to the V-Reds game against #1 Acadia expecting to see a blowout. After all, Rob Knesaurek, Alastair Still, and Frank LeBlanc were all out of the lineup, so I was thinking 10-2 Acadia. I was wrong, but after Acadia ran up a 4-0 lead I figured that I wouldn't be all that far from right. Then, the V-Reds answered the bell and kicked the living shit out of Acadia for most of the rest of the game. In fact, at times the V-Reds showed signs of turning the game into a rout of their own by storming back to take a 5-4 lead. Goalie Dennis Sproxtton was the only Acadia player playing well, having made several improbable saves on shots where I had already started into my celebratory scarf wave. Unfortunately, after taking their lead the V-Reds sagged noticeably, and shortly thereafter Acadia cranked in two quick goals to regain the lead. 'There,' I thought, 'the bubble is burst. Watch those bastards fold.' I don't think I was the only one for the rambunctious Aitken Centre crowd [there's something I thought I'd never write] had now quieted to a morgue-like silence. Even the Jones House boys could manage only a half-hearted 'House of Payne.' I was wrong again, for then the V-Reds came back and recommenced kicking Acadia's butt around the ice. The tying goal was inevitable, and the winning goal seemed so. But, time had run out, and the V-Reds were forced to settle for a 6-6 tie that announced their arrival as a serious threat to capture the CIAU crown. It was easily the most exciting V-Reds game I've seen in years, and also the biggest gut check I have ever seen the V-Reds answer.

The only black mark on the game was the officiating. It was brutal (!), costing us Todd Sparks midway through the first period on one of the chintziest checking from behind penalties ever called. But be honest, the referee was equally incompetent for both teams. Neither Acadia nor the V-Reds could have been happy with his job that night.

The next day the V-Reds got to face #3 Dalhousie. Again, they fell behind early to a very sound, disciplined hockey team, and again they came from behind, this time holding on for a 3-2 victory. Unfortunately, the no-minds at the Aitken Centre made it impossible for me to catch the end of the game. I had obligations early in the afternoon [read: studying] and so chose to show up at the Aitken Centre at around 4pm and catch what was left of the third period. Unbelievably, the Aitken Centre was locked! They lock the doors up there before the game is over! This is unbelievably stupid on a par with Gord Lebel's explanation last year that he ordered the bar shut down during the Sass Jordan concert because it would be rude to be ordering beer while she was performing. A few years back, a UNB game against U de M went into double or triple overtime. The game was being broadcast on U de M's student radio station, and as the overtimes went on, more and more fans showed up until a sparse crowd had turned into a packed house. This can't happen here at UNB so long as the Aitken Centre continues to follow this patently stupid policy of locking the doors. You wouldn't even have to hire extra staff. All you would have to do is leave one of the front doors unlocked so that the flow could be controlled, and then have one of the ushers check for ID's and sell tickets to non-students. Surely one of the ushers could be spared from the all-important job of keeping the spectators from putting their feet on the backs of those gorgeously pristine orange seats. The AUC's very design makes it a farce, but do we really have to be quite this stupid.

Lastly, plaudits to the Jones House boys who enlivened the crowd last Saturday night. I noticed no other residences present, but the Jones House boys managed to make up for their absence. I happened to be sitting behind them, and their chants of 'House of Payne' and 'U N B' brought an immediacy and emotion to the game which is all too rare in the mausoleum-like Aitken Centre. The impressive thing about this is that they managed to do all of this without being overly offensive. Even their loud comments on the parentage of the referee were more humorous than they were obnoxious. If the Aitken Centre had more fans like them, opposing teams would mail in their two points rather than face the volume of the crowd. I know that O'Reilly (#44 of Acadia) must have been thinking about the Jones House boys on the bus ride home.

Volleyball

Women suffer first AUAU loss

by Mark Savoie
Bruns Sports

Last weekend the UNB Varsity Reds women's volleyball team traveled to Halifax for an opportunity to compete against competition from outside of the AUAU. The occasion was the Dal Classic, and the V-Reds came home with a fourth place finish in the eight team tournament.

The V-Reds performed well in the round robin portion of the tournament, easily handling both Dalhousie and U de M by 3-0 match scores (15-12, 15-13, 15-11 and 15-5, 15-11, 15-8 respectively). The stumbling block in the round robin was the very tough University of Winnipeg squad. Winnipeg lost the first game of the match, 13-15, but then went on to win the next three by scores of 15-10, 15-9, and 15-12.

This loss forced the V-Reds to encounter #1 ranked University of Manitoba in the semi-finals. Manitoba lived up to their advanced billing by handling UNB 3-0 (15-6, 15-11, 15-8). They then went on to lose the gold medal to cross-town rival Winnipeg.

Before that, however, the V-Reds contested against York in the bronze medal clash. The team came out flat and was quickly defeated in the first game en route to a 3-0 (15-3, 15-13, 15-5) match loss.

Individual awards were dominated by the two teams playing out of either Winnipeg or Manitoba. The tournament MVP and four of the six all-stars came from one of these two schools, along with one from York. The only player from an AUAU school to be so honoured was UNB's own Carla Marla, adding to her growing list of awards.

This weekend the V-Reds will play their first league matches since splitting a pair of contests in Halifax against S MU. The loss to S MU was UNB's first to an AUAU school in two seasons. Their opponent this weekend will be the second place St. FX-ettes. St. FX has lost just one league match this season, and has 16 points to UNB's 18 with a game in hand. The game times are tomorrow night at 8pm and Sunday afternoon at 2pm. Both games will be played at the LB Gym.

Men vye for playoff spot

by Amber McCulley
Bruns Sports

The UNB Men's Volleyball team are currently tied for second place in their league. Coach Mark Thibault claims that at this point they would need a major upset to defeat the #1 ranked team from Dalhousie.

However, he has good hopes for defeating the other #2 placed team, Memorial, at the UNB AUAU tourney to be held January 27th and 28th. The Reds already managed to defeat MUN at the Dal Classic held last weekend, and this time, coach Thibault points out that they will have home court advantage. Despite this, MUN was the only team the Reds managed to defeat at the tournament, losing their game against Dal and losing the bronze to Queen's. Thibault pointed out that "Dal has a lot of fourth and fifth year players and that some matches were

very close". He also added that players Doug Eagle and Chad Renny particularly "excelled in their games". He went on to say that "the rest of the season looks good but is dependent on the match against MUN." If UNB wins, they will progress to the AUAU championships to be held in February at Dalhousie where Thibault says they "wish to be competitive".

What's in store for the team? There has been some talk that Moncton might come back to play in the league (which now consists of three teams), as well as two teams from Quebec. This will be determined at the end of the season. The future appears hazy for the UNB team. They are recruiting for next year, however, rumour has it that the team could be dropped due to money cut backs. When questioned, coach Thibault had no comment regarding this matter.

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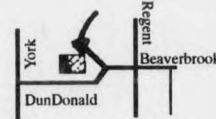
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