

Pandas class of Panda Classic

by Kristan McLeod

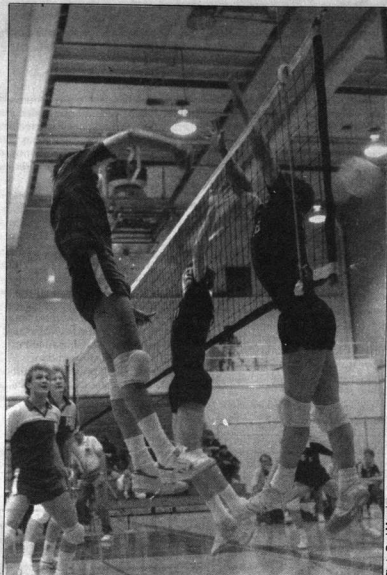
The Panda Volleyball Club had very little trouble beating the Edmonton Redwings in the women's final of the Golden Bear and Panda Classic, held this weekend at the Varsity Gym. After losing the first game 16-14 to the older, more experienced team, the Pandas came back to win the next three games, 15-6, 15-4 and 15-12. Coach Suzi Smith attributes the victory primarily to the intense conditioning and mental preparation of the Pandas.

"Every day I expect 100 per cent from them, so that when we get to a day like today, they can go the full distance."

The Pandas are setting their sights for a third place finish in Canada West, an improvement over last year's fifth place standing. With the return of top player Shelley Brewster to the greatly improved starting line-up, this goal should prove to be attainable. Brewster has been out of the line-up for the past two months with tendonitis in her shoulder. The absence of her influence has resulted in a generally strong, defensive team, despite its youth.

The tournament's female MVP is Panda Terry Wildeman, a first year student originally from Saskatchewan. "Terry's been through some tough times this year," says Coach Smith, "in terms of me forcing her to change some things." After coming close to leaving the team, Wildeman says, "Team support really helped me, as well as Suzi's support" in sticking with it and emerging as a dominant force on the court.

The All-Star Panda, rookie Barb Donadt, was also a valuable asset to the team, praised by her coach for



Bear powerhitter beats a double block in volleyball battle.

her newly developed control. "I still have a long way to go," says Donadt, "but I feel more confident in hitting now."

The men's half of the draw was considerably tougher than the women's. Instead of provincial junior teams, the men's side was filled out with top-flight senior squads. Calgary's Mount Royal College took the finals from Edmonton Volleyball Club. Since the national team relocated there, Calgary has become the top city for men's v-ball in the nation. Calgary Older and Wisner, in particular, has several players with top level international experience.

The Golden Bears suffered a

disappointing loss in the quarter finals to Mount Royal College.

"I don't think we played particularly well. They're a better team than us right now, they're certainly more experienced and they're a very big team," says Coach Baudin. "Our mental preparation was obviously lacking."

The Bears went on to lose to Calgary Older and Wisner in the consolation final and finished fourth in the tournament. They sandwiched an impressive 3-0 (15-4, 15-11, 16-14) win over U of Regina between their losses to the Calgary teams. Baudin was especially happy with the third game, which saw the team recover from a 14-9 deficit after Baudin had done some line-up juggling at the start of the game.

Suzi Smith pushing Pandas

by Randal Smathers

Ask ten different people what Suzi Smith is like and you'll get fifteen different answers.

"Suzi's a good coach, lots of technique and discipline," says Tracy Mills, former and current teammate of Smith's (the national team and Edmonton Redwings, respectively). As a player, Mills described Smith as "very good physically and very tough." Mills also looks for Smith to turn around a poor tradition at the U of A. "They had trouble getting a women's coach here to stay. They'd bring in somebody new and then let them go so they had a hard time establishing a program. But Suzi, she'll work really hard."

A couple things that Mills said were carefully working around the "other" side of Suzi Smith. She has a rep as the toughest coach on campus in any sport for either sex. Her three hour practices every other day (interspersed with weight training in "off days") have grown in legend to daily four hour workouts with players dropping from exhaustion every fifteen minutes. "I was

consecutive basement years. Currently her team is fourth, with a "realistic" goal of third, and a "real dream goal" of making the top two teams and the playoffs.

Smith talks openly about problems on her team and in Athletics as a result of her image. The MVP in the Panda-Golden Bear Classic was Panda Terry Wildeman. According to Smith, Wildeman almost quit the team two and a half weeks ago after a dispute over demands placed on her by her coach. Comparisons were also made last year with other coaches (something Smith dislikes), as to the workload in practices. The result this weekend — first place, albeit against a less-than-awesome field — is a sign of vindication for the coach. "Yes I am demanding, yes I do train my players hard, and yes I do sometimes put them through things that they aren't sure are necessary. But all I can tell you is that my background, playing in the CIAU myself and playing in the Olympics and some of these kinds of things, I feel I know at least some of the things that I need to do as a coach to help us win."

"I was called Hitler (last year)," — Suzi Smith

Donadt is a player who has visibly improved under Smith's eye. A first year player, she has been given extra playing time with a case of tendonitis in Brewer's shoulder.

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"She isn't six-foot-four and she couldn't jump a 45-inch vertical"

called Hitler (last year)," said Smith.

There is no doubt that Smith works her team hard, and that her players have respect for, bordering on fear of, their coach. Interviews with Pandas are by coaches' permission, a rarity in the publicity-starved atmosphere of University Athletics, and talking with Smith's players about their coach is futile. Barb Donadt and Shelley Brewster, two of the top players this year, were somewhere between non-committal and extremely polite when asked about beating Smith's second team this weekend. Besides



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