

Challenge awaits Tigers in Toronto

BY SHANNON MORRISON

The Tigers are prepared for a challenge.

Dalhousie's women's volleyball team powered their way through the Atlantic Conference and have now set their sights on a strong showing at the national championships this weekend in Toronto.

Two weekends ago, the Tigers defeated the Université de Moncton three sets to one by scores of 15-4, 9-15, 15-2 and 15-6 to capture the AUSA crown. Dalhousie had an even easier time in the semi-finals as they swept by the University of New Brunswick 15-10, 15-5 and 15-6.

Veteran Tigers' player Christine Frail was named the AUSA's most valuable player while teammates Kim Hilchey and Michelle Aucoin were named first and second team all-stars, respectively.

The team travelled to Toronto on Tuesday with high hopes for the tournament. It will be a tough task as the Tigers have been ranked eighth — out of eight — resulting in a first round meeting with the top-ranked team from Québec. Despite this challenge, Dalhousie is entering the weekend with a positive attitude.

"I believe if we can go into the tournament, stay relaxed, and be competitive right away, then anything is possible," said coach Leslie Irie. "There are two ways to think about. One is 'Oh God, we're up against the number one seed' which is a pessimistic outlook. It doesn't matter who we play. We're looking forward to playing at the CIAUs."

"This is our final goal," she said. "We've wanted it all year and everyone has paid the price. If we play well, we can play with them."

Throughout the season, the Tigers have improved individually and as a team. Dalhousie has come together at just the right time.

"Mentally and emotionally, they peaked for AUAs especially

and they are still riding a high off that," said Irie. "They'll use it in a way that will fuel their playing level at the CIAUs."

Experience will be a major factor at the nationals and Dalhousie has two veterans to help with the team's focus both on and off the court. Hilchey and Frail both returned to the Tigers this year and have provided leadership and stability to the team.

Competing at a high level of volleyball during the season will also benefit the squad when they face Laval this weekend.

"Our experience actually playing against the Japanese team, our experience at the Wesman Invitational, and having a couple of players who played Junior Nationals [will help us]," said Irie. "We'll have to rely on that experience. They'll be looking to Chris (Frail) and Kim (Hilchey) for emo-

tional support."

Second-year setter, Aucoin, runs the offensive attack for the Tigers and has proven she can deal with the pressure of high-calibre competition. Irie is confident that CIAUs will be no different.

"It won't rattle her," said Irie. "It's like any other tournament. The net height is the same, the court dimensions are the same. Michelle's for sure excited about playing, maybe she'll be a little nervous but it won't faze her. She'll be fine."

The key to this weekend is to raise their level of play and not have any letdowns. If the Tigers can accomplish that, then anything is possible at the national championships.

"We need to be consistent and compete at a higher level," explained Irie. "We need to be rock steady."

Alberta bound

BY CARMEN TAM

Despite the loss of five starters from last year's CIAU bronze medal-winning team, it was the same old routine for the men's volleyball squad as they took their 17th AUSA title in the past 18 years.

Dal opened the best of three final last weekend by defeating the University of New Brunswick 16-17, 15-10, 15-7, 15-13 at Dalplex.

Top performances came from Jason Trepanier, who had 18 kills and 7 digs, while captain Jamie Mallon and rookie Matt Hartlen added 21 and 19 kills, respectively.

The Tigers beat the Varsity Reds the next day 15-10, 15-8, 9-15, and 15-3 to take the championship banner.

Dalhousie's starting lineup was exceptional as Trepanier once

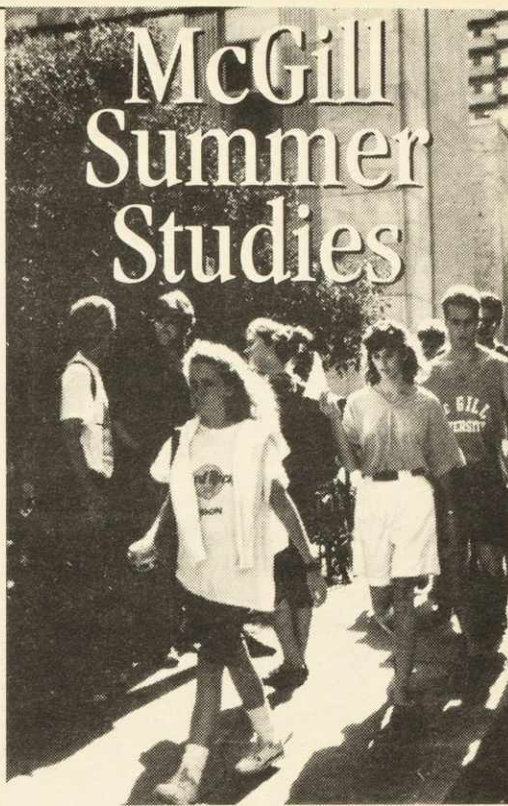
again led the Tigers with 18 kills, while teammate Terry Martin had 15 kills and 7 digs. Mallon chipped in with 14 kills. John Hobin and Matt Hartlen had 12 kills each.

It was the 10th straight conference title for the Tigers, who were 9-1 in the regular season.

Hobin, a third-year middle blocker, was named playoff MVP.

Dalhousie dominated the AUSA all-star team with four members, including Martin, Trepanier, Mallon, and veteran setter Scott Brake. UNB's Mark Coy and Darcy Harris rounded out the all-star squad. Former Tiger Deon Goulding, now with Memorial University, was voted AUSA MVP.

The Tigers are looking to earn their CIAU stripes this weekend as they head to the University of Alberta in Calgary.



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