

CIAU must say goodbye to byes

Too bad that the Yeomen hockey season didn't end last Sunday night. I don't mean that they should have lost; on the contrary, their victory over Western was a tribute to the team and a source of inspiration for the entire school. It's just that now they head out to Edmonton to participate in the Mickey Mouse antics of the CIAU hockey championship.

I just can't figure the CIAU? How do they managed to continually make a mockery of the national hockey championship? One only has to look back to last March for a good example.

Last year was the first of three years that Edmonton's University of Alberta would host the CIAU hockey championship. The CIAU, in desperate need for someone to take this 'burdensome responsibility' off their hands, gave the tournament to the Alberta school for three years. Alberta said fine, "we'll take it boys, just as long as we git a bye into the first championship. Shucks, you know . . . we gotta develop some crowd support for these here games. Havin' the home boys in it, will help us git our darn arena filled up with them Prairie folks."

Okay. Fine. Sounded reasonable. But hey—those Albertans. Give them an inch, they'll grab a whole pipeline. Alberta received a bye into the final tournament of four teams, while the *actual* Western Canada champion University of Calgary Dinosaurs were eliminated in a strange regional playoff format that the CIAU did away with this year (they must have woken up momentarily from their stupor).

Then, in the national championship, the University of Alberta was 'fortunately' scheduled to play in one sudden death semi-final game *three* days before the final. The other semi-final, between York and Three Rivers, ended just 19 hours prior to the faceoff for the Sunday noon national championship game. The organizing committee made York and Three Rivers play on Saturday afternoon so as not to conflict with the Great Gretzky and Company who were in action Friday night down the road at the Northlands Coliseum.

Anyway, Alberta beat Moncton with the help of a highly controversial goal, and simply laid back till Sunday noon (to accommodate those Eastern TV moguls). In the championship finale, Alberta proceeded to mer-



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cilessly pound Three Rivers, who had barely enough time to get a good night sleep. I remember well how I squirmed in my seat at the Edmonton Agricom last spring when they crowned Alberta as national champions. The Albertans would never have even finished higher than fourth in the highly competitive OUAA.

Almost apologetically they (the CIAU) said this year there would be no automatic host team. No wild cards. No bullshit. *What happened?* We end up with an automatic host team, wild card entries, and bullshit.

Get this! The University of Alberta didn't just automatically receive a bye into the CIAU's again; *this* time they didn't even bother to compete in their own Western Canada playoffs. Those warriors of Gettyland travelled to the World University Games to uphold our hockey tradition against the mighty foes from South Korea and Japan.

Apparently the University of Alberta was crying again this year that it needed a host team to guarantee decent attendance. Thus we now have a six team tournament, including Alberta (of course), another wild card team (Western Ontario, a fine team—but losers should stay home) and another absurdly asinine tournament schedule.

The six teams are divided up into two pools of three, and will each play two games with goal differential likely to be the most important factor in the competition. What kind of national hockey championship would present a scenario where a team ahead in a game might still have to pull their goalie? That's what might happen on Saturday, as after playing all year to out and

out win, these teams will be playing games with the scoreboard and not each other.

And who is the idiot who drew up the tournament schedule? With two games on Saturday and the last one beginning at 8:30 p.m.—one team will be heavily disadvantaged again this year. The final is scheduled for Sunday at high noon, and only 13 hours after the last semi-final game. One finalist might just as well spend Saturday night in the dressing room. *Why couldn't they just start the tournament a day earlier?*

It's really a shame. Canadian university hockey keeps getting better and better. We here at York know this well. We've been watching great hockey for three years now. But this joke of a national championship stains everyone's credibility, not to mention screwing up potential growth in marketing the sport by changing the format on an annual basis.

Where the CIAU has shown good judgement is with the national championships in football and basketball. The designated sites of the Vanier Cup in Toronto and Basketball championship tournament in Halifax have built a following. In neither case do host teams get any unwarranted privileges.

Good marketing and promotion in Toronto and Halifax have clearly shown that the fans will come out and see the best of Canadian university sport. It doesn't matter anymore in the Vanier Cup as to the combatants. The game is an event in itself and receives excellent support from the community. This past weekend in Halifax, over 6,000 fans witnessed two Western teams tangle in the title game. You can't tell me that UBC and Brandon have *that* big a Maritime following.

It's time the CIAU straighten out the woes plaguing their hockey championship. Cut out this crap going on out West. If football and basketball can do it—then certainly so can hockey. After all, pucks and hockey sticks are part of our national heritage. All that's needed is a few good people to spread the word.

The OUAA final series between York and Western was a classic. For most of us that's how we'll remember this year. It's best for University hockey that it be our lasting impression. After that, the sublime becomes the ridiculous.

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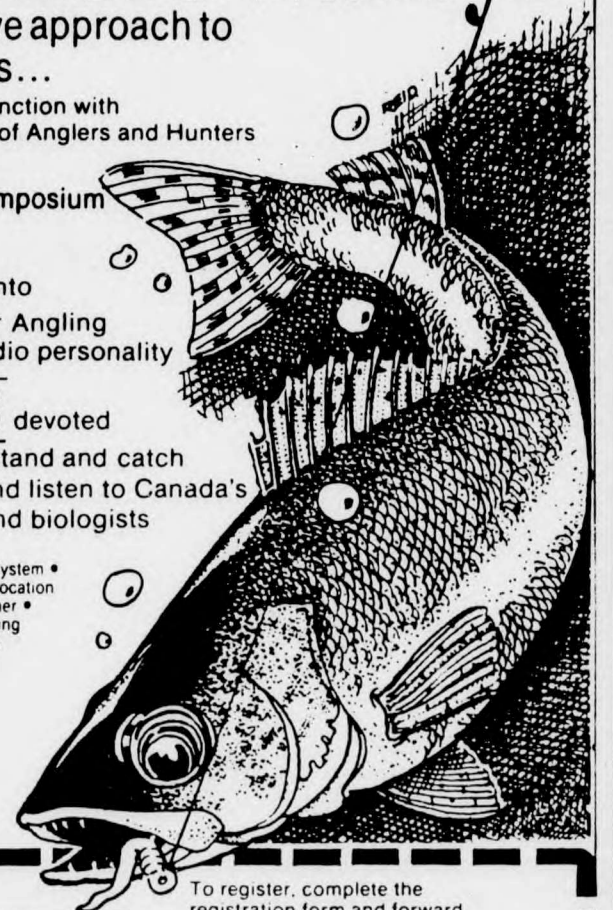
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