

Speaking on Sports

with RICHARD VIVONE

Christmas came on December 25 last year.
Christmas will come on December 25 this year.
But not for Ed Lepp.

Because, for Saskatchewan hockey coach Ed Lepp Christmas came on December 10.

On his Christmas Day, he got a nicely wrapped hockey game courtesy of the University of Alberta hockey coach.

But, persistent reader, let me just fill you in on just what happened last weekend at the University Ice Arena. Contrary to pre-game reports, the University of Saskatchewan Huskies showed up to play the Bears.

Friday night, the Bears scored three goals in the first period and went on to beat the Huskies 5-3. The Bears used their full complement of players including Hugh Twa and Jack Nicholl, two of their three good defencemen. Gary Ling is the third one.

It should have been apparent to all who witnessed the match that Saskatchewan has a pretty good club. The game was no pushover. In fact, goal wise, the Huskies won the last two periods.

Sometime between the end of Friday's game and the start of Saturday's, coach Drake decided to let Nicholl, Twa and a young guy by the name of Terry Cutler watch from the stands.

Nicholl, Twa top rearguards

Just what his reasons were, only he knows. But the following facts are obvious. Nicholl and Twa are two of the top blueliners in the circuit. They are certainly better than anyone Calgary and Manitoba can produce and only Wayne Statham of Saskatchewan rivals them in effectiveness.

Nicholl is big and tough. He's no ballerina on blades but you know when he is on the ice and he gets around. He can carry the puck and has a good shot.

Twa is not as big or as strong as Nicholl but he can move the puck. He has defensive deficiencies but this only proves that he is human.

But, above the piece-by-piece analysis of each, one factor ranks head and shoulders above all others.

Both have experience. Mark that in your little books, people. Tell them I said so. Experience is the deciding level of difference in countless species of competition. This is especially relevant when you are in the heat of battle with another club and first place is at stake. Only winners stay in first place and not too many teams win without their top talent.

Here is what happened when the Bears played without Nicholl and Twa.

The Huskies struck with dramatic suddenness. The Bears opening lineup had the Harper-Billings-Rippel unit up front with Seutter and Jorstad on the blueline. Huskies Paul Josephson wheeled down the right wing, delicately slipped the puck through Jorstad's legs and went in alone for goal number one exactly 33 seconds after the opening faceoff.

Drake immediately yanked the line and replaced them with the Cebryk-Braunberger-LeBlanc combination as the forward line. Kingston and Link backed them up.

Twenty-two seconds following the second faceoff, Murray Osborn flipped a loose puck behind Wolfe for a 2-0 Saskatchewan lead after 55 seconds of play.

The season of presents

But praise Allah for this is the season of presents because at 1:30 of that first period, a Saskatchewan goal was nullified. It could have been a 3-0 hockey game after only a minute and a half. But that doesn't matter since the Bears never caught the Huskies that afternoon.

Now you know what happened. We wish we knew why it had to be this way.

To be honestly blunt about the issue—the Bears lost because Twa and Nicholl didn't play. They should have played.

One nice thing about writing a column is that you can tell the coach who to play. He doesn't necessarily listen, which is good sometimes.

But I'd like to tell him to start playing Terry Cutler. He has played but two games for the Bears and has two goals to his credit. After watching painfully the performance of several Bears last weekend, it is rather obvious that Mr. Cutler wants to play a little more than they do.

However it's Christmas time and the season of good will. We didn't have to take that so literally.



NO JACK, NO HUGH

—Al Yackulic photo

... they needed you

Huskie head man, Ed Lepp, youngest coach in WCIAA

Ed Lepp, 26, is the youngest coach in the WCIAA. Ed took over the Saskatchewan Huskie reins this year after playing five seasons as goaltender with the club.

When he was in Edmonton for the Bears-Huskies series, Ed had a number of interesting comments to make on his club and hockey in general:

Question: Have you encountered many problems in your first year

as coach?

Lepp: Well it's quite an adjustment to make from being a player to a coach, having played for the last five years, but the fellows have been co-operating more than a hundred per cent and certainly make things a lot easier for me.

Q: You would have to say Jim Shaw (Huskies goaltender) played an outstanding series this weekend?

Lepp: Actually Jim didn't play that

well last night, but he played a fantastic game today, and he is without a doubt the best goaltender in the league. And he is probably one of the top amateur goaltenders in all Canada. He had a chance to play pro with Portland. However, he decided to come back to Saskatchewan to finish up his pharmacy.

Q: Looking back at the series, you would have to say that the first period was the only real bad point for the hockey club all weekend?
Lepp: This is true; we fell behind three goals and it's pretty tough coming back against a team like the Golden Bears. The fellows were probably a little too nervous, and as a result, we made some mistakes we didn't make today or we didn't make in the last two periods yesterday.

But Alberta deserves full credit for the first period lead they held yesterday. We just weren't skating with them.

Q: Which of your players would you like to single out as stars for the Huskies this weekend?

Lepp: Well, certainly there was Shaw. On defence Ed Kulyk played real well. A kid I just got out of juvenile ranks Dave Dunn, a big red-headed fella, he played a heckuva series for us, for someone who hasn't any intercollegiate or junior experience whatsoever.

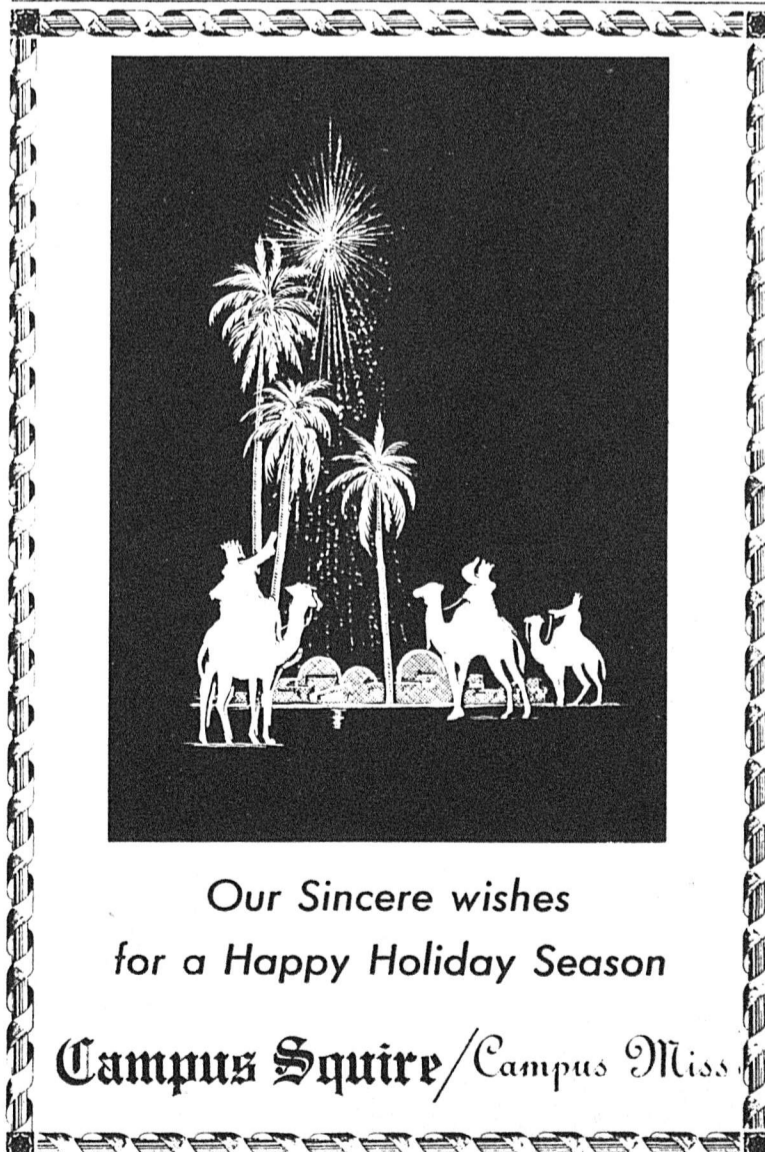
Up front Wally Kozak did a tremendous job containing Harper, who has certainly been a scoring sensation up to this point. Also Paul Josephson is starting to play real good hockey for us as is linemate Doug Wass.

Q: What about Steve Kozicki? He wasn't in the line-up. Did he come to play this weekend?

Lepp: Unfortunately it was found that Steve failed two and one-half courses last year, which would make him ineligible for intercollegiate play. We had him down in Winnipeg, where we received the phone call that he was ineligible.

Q: Which players on the Golden Bear club would you like to have on your team?

Lepp: I think everyone would like to have Harper on his team. He's a tremendous hockey player. Billings is a real good center—he played well. And then there's LeBlanc.



Our Sincere wishes
for a Happy Holiday Season

Campus Squire/Campus Miss