

SPORTS

Pandas take a running start at the regular season

What more can you expect from a team that has won 8 games in a row, 10 of their last twelve and two tournaments in a row?

More points, according to Debbie Shogan, coach of the recently unstoppable Pandas Basketball team. After winning successive tournaments here, December 28-30 and in Winnipeg, January 1-3, the Pandas won two exhibition games at Varsity Arena this weekend. Saturday they beat the University of Manitoba Lady Bisons 54-42 and Sunday they beat the Carleton Robins 52-40.

"We haven't been scoring as prolifically as we can," said Shogan, "but we've been able to hold our opponents to below 50 points with good team defense."

Despite the 12 point margins in their last two outings, the Pandas looked sluggish. They

were not the team that trounced their early round opponents the week before.

"They play their best basketball when there is something on the line," says Shogan. The regular season, which starts this weekend, hasn't come a bit too soon.

Conference play will likely prove more challenging for the Pandas, for while they have blown out some teams, they have had close, tough matches against conference opponents.

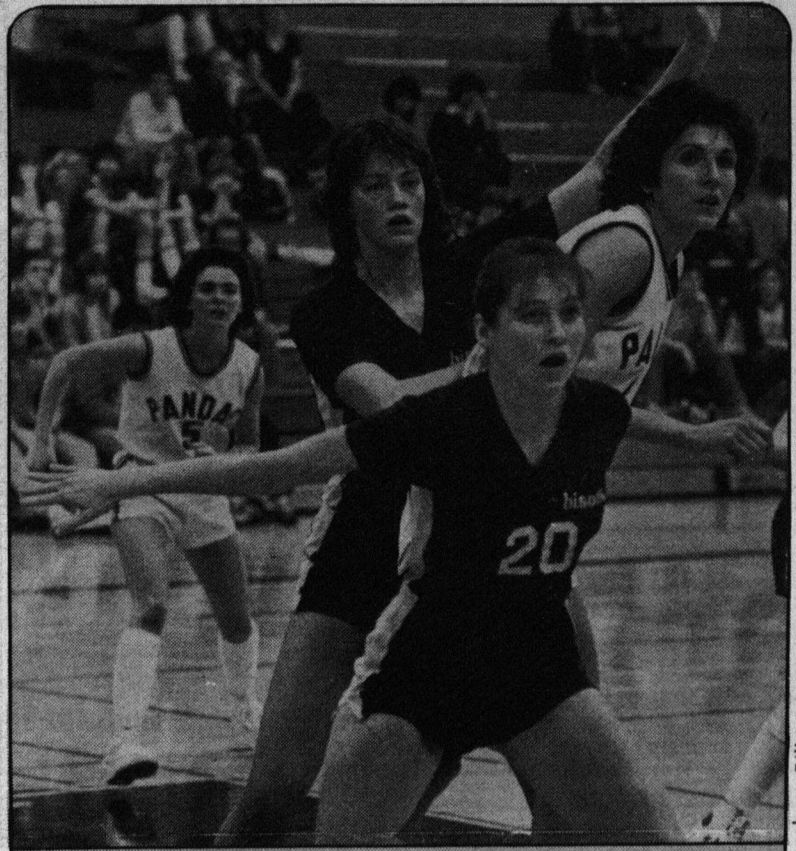
Compounding the problem is a tough schedule which sends the Pandas on the road for the first three weekends of play.

"It's a problem, especially

because the league is so close," said Shogan, "the home advantage does help in those close games. We'd like to win at least 3 of those 5 games. The conference is so close that 7 wins (in a ten game season) might be enough for first."

The Pandas start playing for keeps on Friday when they visit the Calgary Dinnies. Saturday, they move south to Lethbridge, to take on the Lady Pronghorns, one of the few teams to defeat the Pandas this year.

They do not play at home until February the third, when Lethbridge and Calgary return the visit. Whether the Pandas have improved their scoring enough to please coach Shogan should be known by then.



Two of the Lady Bisons guard Toni Kordic, while Shelaine Kozakovich moves into the key.

photo Bill Inglee

Bears getting better

Despite a rocky start, including a number of shellackings by American teams, coach Don

Horwood's enthusiasm for the Golden Bears basketball team remains undiminished.

In fact, it seems to have grown, especially since the Bears 89-74 victory over Dalhousie, Friday at Varsity Stadium. The night before they lost a 71-70 squeaker to the same team.

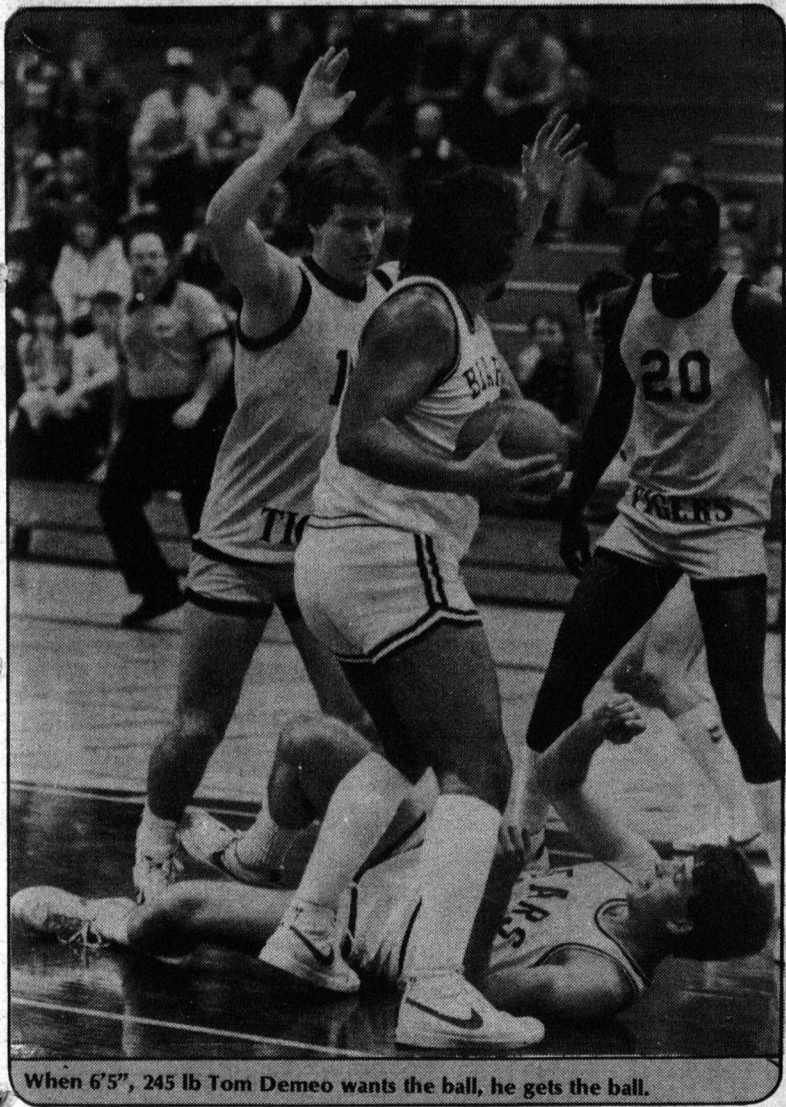
"We're very close to being in the top ten in Canada," said Horwood. Earlier last week, his team finished fourth in the University of Calgary Basketball Classic. They lost the consolation final to the sixth-ranked Lakehead Norwesters, 81 to 68. The ever awesom Victoria Vikings beat the Calgary Dinosaurs in the final 88-66.

Friday's win and some good, in inconsistent play in Calgary has the coaches convinced his team has a chance to succeed this year. Yet he does not underrate the competition in Canada West.

"We have a realistic shot at second place. We could also finish last." To avoid that fate, the Bears will have to control the turnovers. They gave the ball away 41 times in their loss to the Norwesters.

The Bears' shooting percentage, which was dismal at the start of the preseason, was up to an impressive 69 per cent in Friday's win. Horwood attributes the improvement to running the offense instead of trying to score off the fast break.

The Bears have one more exhibition tournament in which to hone their skills for the regular season. This weekend they will be in Saskatoon for the CWUAA Classic. On January 20 they start conference play at home against the University of Saskatchewan Huskies.



When 6'5", 245 lb Tom Demeo wants the ball, he gets the ball.

photo Bill Inglee

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