Banged up Bears look to beat down Bisons

TREVOR PHILLIPS
Sports Writer

The injury bug that preyed little insect that can infect a dressing room, slow down the momentum of a season, create new roles and, in the case of this past Friday, create history. Last weekend, an injury-plagued Bears hockey squad jumped into the Whistle Arena and dropped their first game to UBC in 27 years.

Though the Bears aren’t making any excuses for the defeat, the losses of Ryan Rempel and Tim Krymusa to long-term injuries have clearly put a few wrinkles into the plan for the season: more notably making a few freshmen into the roster a little earlier than expected.

“They’re worked hard, they’ve battled, they’ve batted in,” Thomson said of his promising rookies. “Also, the experience they are gaining from playing in so many crucial situations is going to be very valuable so as in the long run.”

Two of the more noticeable rookies to emerge so far have been defenders Kyle Becht and versatile forward Kieran Block. Becht has logged impressive minutes not only at even strength, but on both special teams units, while Block has stepped in to fill the gap left by Krymusa.

“I can’t say enough about Kyle Becht,” Thomson raved. “He’s been a tremendous guy on the blueline. He’s been a power play guy, he’s a solid player and we know he’s going to continue to play at the level for a while.”

There has been added pressure placed on veterans Scott Morphew and Harlan Anderson to take some of the tension off the younger. The two have been quiet about their business to provide a stabilizing influence on the raw rookies who’ve been thrust into important roles a little earlier than expected.

“Harlan Anderson has been huge back here for us,” second-year forward Dylan Stanley said while having what looked like a shirt of ice packs strapped to himself. “Especially playing with the young guys, he has been a really calm and steady influence on the back end.”

With so many penalties being called under the new OHL rules, a greater emphasis is being put on officiating hockey. This has forced coaches to rethink their bench in order to get the most effective players on the ice for crucial situations. When there aren’t enough bodies to go around, it can cause a problem, Thomson explained.

“Unfortunately there have been some guys that deserve more ice time, but because of the situation haven’t been able to get on,” he said. “It’s an adjustment for a coach because you have to go off your plan that’s laid out there, or your power play guys, and you don’t want people sitting for too long. Unfortunately, for periods lost game, this was the case.”

This weekend the top-ranked Bears will host a two-game set against the Manitoba Bisons, a team they’ve met in the dark about.

“They have a new coach, and we haven’t faced them all year, so it’ll be key for us to play our game at our tempo,” Thomson said. “It reminds me of Nationals, because there’s really little information to work with heading into the weekend.”

With such big challenges facing the Bears, the journey looks to get a little harder before it can get easier. Luckily for the Bears, a bye next weekend will help them recover a little.

The games go Friday and Saturday night at 7:30pm in Fort Garry Arena.

Impressive pre-season gives volley Bears momentum to open season

NICK FROST
Sports Staff

Bishops play ended on a high note for the Golden Bears volleyball team last weekend as they disagreed to four games in Manitoba; now, they look to carry that momentum into their regular season opener this weekend against the Brandon Bobcats.

If the pre-season revealed one thing about this team, it’s that the loss of several key veterans from last year’s silver medal team—including 2005/06 first-team All-Canadian Brock Davidsen and second-team All-Canadian Nicholas Candy, as well as Brandon—hasn’t broken their stride in the slightest. In fact, in their two exhibition matches, the Bears recorded only two losses—something that proves that the younger and less-seasoned players on this team are able to establish Alberta as a national power once again.

“We did lose some important players from last year, but, at this point, that’s water under the bridge,” said head coach Terry Daigle. “The good thing is that I have to look to the future, and we have some very good players on our team this year—guys that are ready to go and show what they can do. And, thus far, guys who have been in our program the last few years like Thomas James, Joel Schumacher and Brock Farah have stepped up and formed a really good core [of players] for this time of the year.”

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DEREK PROUDFOOT,
FIFTH-YEAR MIDDLE

On the court, one of the remaining members of the 2005/06 team, Derek Proudfoot, feels that they haven’t had a hard time adjusting to the loss of some of last year’s key players. Rather, there’s confidence that the younger guys can provide the skill and energy necessary to pull out the big wins that Alberta has retired in off the past few seasons, as they proved in winning the Canadian Collegiate Championships two weeks ago.

“It always hurts to lose some of these guys, like Soosnas, who can beat a team with his attacks alone because he’s such a powerful hitter,” the fifth-year middle from Sherwoodton explained. “But it just means that everything will have to be more spread out, everyone has to do their share, and we can’t just rely on guys like him to do it. We’ve got a good thing. The young guys are all doing a good job—they all bring a lot of energy to the table and everyone’s really fighting to get their floor time, so I think it’s looking very good.”

Though one of the nevers—they will be in their second season—and one of the weaker teams in the Canada West conference last season with a 4–16 record, everyone on the Bears’ volleyball team agrees on one thing: Brandon has to be taken lightly.

“Brandon has only been in the league for a couple of years, but I think they’re one of these teams that have a lot of potential,” Daigle said. “We knocked off Manitoba once last year, which means that they can beat anybody on any given day.”

“It should be good,” Proudfoot, an engineering student, added. “It should give us a chance to work through some of the things that we had in Manitoba. I’m not sure how good they are this year, but you can never underestimate them.”

The regular season commences against Brandon in the Main Gym on Saturday at 6:30pm, and continues on Sunday at 8pm.