



FILE PHOTO: MIKE OTTO

BEAR-STREET'S BACK The Bears predict a tough season ahead, as almost all the teams in Canada West—like U of L (black)—look like they're ready for a fight, but Alberta can rely on their tight defending.

Ice Bears set their sticks on successful season

The team hopes that it can get its season started right with a win against UBC and make up for last year's playoff disappointment

VICTOR VARGAS
Online Coordinator

Last season, the Golden Bear hockey team lost to the Saskatchewan Huskies at the conference final, meaning that for the first time in 11 seasons, Alberta didn't qualify for the University Cup. Now, head coach Eric Thurston has banked the team's hopes for returning to nationals on a strong defence.

"We probably have what I feel are the top two goalies in the league [Aaron Sorochan and Blake Grenier]. And when you're able to get that type of goaltending, it makes a big difference," Thurston explained.

"[We're making] a very conscious effort on playing team defence, but we also still have the gifted skill players to put the puck away when we need to."

To further strengthen the Bears' defensive capabilities, Thurston has brought defenseman Jason Fransoo to the team, whom he believes will be vital to the Bears in the early season.

"I felt we had to get better. He really stepped up and played well," he said. "He's going to be a key guy for us on the power play; he's going to play lots of minutes; he's going to play with our captain Harlan Anderson, so he's going to be a real workhorse for us."

Despite being one of the new guys,

Fransoo believes he has adjusted well during the pre-season and has formed bonds with his fellow teammates.

"Pre-season was awesome," Fransoo said. "We've been getting a lot of chemistry between me and my partner, Harlan Anderson. He's got a great one-timer shot: you go to put the puck in front of his face, and there's a good chance it will be in the back of the net."

In addition to Fransoo, the Bears have recruited centre Derrick Ryan from Spokane in the WHL. They've also added left wings Eric Hunter (who was drafted into the New York Rangers but didn't get a contract) and

the speedy Kyle Pess.

Even with the new additions, the Bears face heavy competition the likes of which they haven't seen in years. No team appears to have too large an advantage over the others: all of them appear to be evenly matched, making this year one of the tightest competitions in recent memory.

"It's going to be a very, very tough league," Thurston said. "All teams in Canada West have a shot [...] on any given night, [so] if you're not prepared to play your best game and come out and work the opposition, you are going to get beat. And that is a real treat in one aspect, but there are abso-

lutely no gimmies, and you cannot afford to take a night off."

Still, Anderson thinks that Alberta's combination of experience, defence, and rookies will make them a strong contender for nationals.

"We expect to be at the top every year," the fifth-year defenceman said. "I think that the other teams have definitely gone out and gotten the players to help them improve, but every year we are the team to beat, and everyone knows it."

The Bears play their first games of the season at the brand-new Winter Sports Centre in Vancouver on Saturday and Sunday at 7:30pm.



CHRIS PEDERSON, THE GAUNTLET

HUGSIES Alberta beat U of C last weekend and hope to do the same to U of M.

Gridiron Bears work to break even

BEN CARTER
Sports Staff

Over the past two weekends, the Bears football team has been gathering momentum, looking to put a difficult start behind them. Coming off of two encouraging victories, the Bears (2-3) are looking to make the jump to .500 and prove themselves playoff contenders. This Saturday, they couldn't be facing a more appropriate opponent for such a task, as they host the Canada West-leading Manitoba Bisons (4-0). The Bisons are coming off a bye week and a big win over Saskatchewan that solidified them in top spot in Canada West, and third in the country.

After three disappointing losses to start the season, Alberta has won two games in a row, defeating Simon Fraser and Calgary. The Bears defence was dominant in Calgary, forcing seven turnovers and allowing the Dinos into the red zone only three times all day.

Alberta head coach Jerry Friesen understands that for such a young team, the season is a constant learning process. That said, he's encouraged by the growth he's seen over the past two weeks.

"Our big focus is to make sure we've been improving, and that we're learning from experiences [...] that we can

make adjustments quickly based on what's happened out there," he said. "That's the key when you're young: you haven't had the experiences, so you've gotta learn from it real quick."

"Because their running backs are both very good, we just have to make sure we don't give them anything big."

JERRY FRIESEN
BEARS FOOTBALL HEAD COACH

Under head coach Brian Dobie, the Bisons have been a Canada West powerhouse for the past decade, and this year's edition appears no different.

"The program at Manitoba, they've always been competitive. They've always got teams that are in the top three or four in our conference," Friesen said. "[Dobie] always has a very big team. That's something we've always known them for."

Leading the Bisons attack will be running backs Karim Lowen and Matt Henry, currently fifth and sixth in Canada West with 369 and 355 yards rushing, respectively.

"They have a very balanced attack. They've got a very controlled, underneath passing game," Friesen said.

In addition to their offensive prowess, the Bisons also have the fewest turnovers in Canada West—only five in four games—a statistic that is almost certainly a byproduct of their experience. The team can boast eleven fifth-year players and 13 fourth-years.

"We just have to make sure we were patient with them, that we don't get beat with the deep one, [and] eliminate the big play—the 25-yard run, 40-yard pass—those type of things," Friesen said. "Because their running backs are both very good, we just have to make sure we don't give them anything big."

With only three games left in the season, Friesen understands the importance of the task facing his team this weekend.

"The Bisons right now are the best team in our conference. They've earned it. They are coming to our home park, and we just have to make sure we play our best football, crank it up a notch, and play like we're going to compete against the first team in Canada West."

The Bears and Bisons will kick off at 2pm on Saturday at Foote Field, and the game will also be broadcast on the Team 1260AM.