Bears dominate at swim meet

SWIMMING ROUNDPREP
Bears/Pandas @ Dinos Invitational
Friday, Nov. 4, 4 p.m.
University of Calgary
Rebecca Modell
SPORTS EDITOR

It was the battle of Alberta in the pool when the U of A hosted the University of Calgary Dinos at the first dual swim meet of the season last Friday.

Both men and women competed and the Bears are still able to seal a number of wins. The Bears beat the Dinos, who were last year’s CIS champions, with 15 points to Calgary’s 64.

First-year swimmer Joe Byram, who is younger than most of the other athletes at 17, won the 200-metre backstroke.

“The whole team’s been training really hard the past couple of weeks so I’m hearing pretty good,” Byram said. “But you know, it’s just stepping up and racing. It wasn’t anything special to do. We’ve done the work and had to push through any pain that we have.”

Byram said the team is very supportive of one another and swim for the team, not for themselves.

Other wins for the Bears were Jeremy Kubik in the 50-metre freestyle, Ian Leitch in the 100-metre freestyle, Josh An in the 50-metre and 200-metre fly, Scott Stewart in the 400-metre freestyle, Stephen Giannetto in the 50-metre breaststroke, and Robert Macklinston in 200-metre freestyle.

The Bears also finished first in the 400-metre freestyle relay team.

Final results for the women saw the Dinos finish with 100 points and the Pandas with 64. Bobbie Mielachuk nailed second-place finishes in the 50-meter and 100-meter freestyle for the Pandas.

Bill Humber, head coach for both Pandas and Bears, said the meet was a great start to the season.

“We talk about the world of possibilities and we just took a huge step forward in believing what we can do. To beat Calgary on the men’s side is a pretty big deal. I don’t have the stats, but I bet you’d have to go back 20, 30 years to see when we beat them before. It was good to see us rise and win some close races and even get some one-two finishes on the Dinos,” he said.

While the Pandas didn’t win, they were in the race in most events, just a turn or finish away from winning. We saw some technical things we can clean up this week and we’ll see what happens this weekend when we throw UBC into the mix,” he added.

The U of C hosts the Bears and Pandas this weekend, along with UBC and the University of Manitoba, before athletes head to the Canada Cup in Toronto on Nov. 24.

The top eight schools from 2010 will be attending. That includes 15 Bears and six Panda swimmers.

Losses don’t slow field hockey Pandas

FIELD HOCKEY PREVIEW
Pandas @ CIS Nationals
Thursday to Saturday, Nov. 3-5
University of Calgary
Andrew Jeffrey
SPORTS WRITER

Despite a four-game losing skid to end the season, the field hockey Pandas’ solid first half sustained them through the rest of the season and pushed them into this year’s nationals.

The Pandas finished in third place in the Canada West conference and head to Calgary this week for nationals after missing last year’s playoffs with a dismal 1-1-1-sec. They were able to bounce back this year and return to a level of play closer to when the team went to back-to-back CIS finals in 2008 and 2009, where they won outright twice.

The Pandas kept games close this season, even in losses, and head coach Stefanie Slloboda doesn’t see her team as underdogs against the other Canada West conference teams who finished ahead of the Pandas in the regular season.

Calgary is hosting nationals, and the Pandas are expected to qualify as conference champs this year.

“For the first time in awhile you don’t really know who’s going to be on top. The three Canada West teams are very evenly matched, and I think it’ll be pretty much anyone’s game,” Slloboda said. “The teams out east, we’ve played them in the past at nationals the last two times we’ve been there. It’ll be interesting to see what they have.”

Three Panda teams in 2008 and 2009 had problems in nationals that Slloboda hopes won’t happen again in Calgary this year. The Pandas get off to a slow start in the first two days both years and though they turned things around, they weren’t able to win gold either year.

2010 saw the Pandas only win once in the regular season.

“It’s one of those things where sometimes we tend to create more of a challenge than we need. I don’t know if it’s consciously or subconsciously, but we always try to do things just a little bit harder than they need to be. We’ve changed, though, because we won early on this season and we won our first game. We beat the two power houses in the conference (UBC and UVic) the first time we matched up against them, so I think we’re starting to change that wave of making it harder than it needs to be.”

The Pandas were able to get a win against the Thunderbirds and two ties against the University of Calgary Dinos earlier this year. However, they lost twice to both teams to finish the season. Slloboda is excited to get another chance to play them, but sees UBC as a more structured team to challenge, while games with Calgary have been more unpredictable.

“Calgary is always just a more physical game and there’s more pressure in it. It always seems to be a little more intense than all the other games,” Slloboda explained. “It’s just the rivalry and there’s a type of catfiness that’s created that sometimes gets under a few players’ skins. It’s harder for them to battle through that, it’s just another hill to climb basically in the game. But I think it’s always been like that for years.”

As for the teams coming out of the east, both the defending champions from the University of Toronto and last year’s third place team the University of Guelph are teams the Pandas have played in past Nationals.

The Pandas haven’t experienced the championship success that Toronto had last year since 2005, despite coming close in 2001 and 2009, but the team is eager to make up for those past losses.

“Be to that close and win two silver medals—I was also a part of that coaching staff as an assistant coach those two years and never winning a national championship myself as a player in the program, I’m hungry, I want gold and some of those players that played in the final, they want gold as well and obviously the players that have never played and experienced it, they want it.”