

# Basketball Pandas open with pair of wins at home

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**SEEING DOUBLE** The Pandas opened their regular season with wins over Lethbridge, thanks in large part to strong second-half performances as they outscored the 'Horns 102–64 combined in the second half.

The Pandas basketball squad opened their 2009/10 Canada West season this Halloween weekend with a pair of offensively explosive wins over the Lethbridge Pronghorns.

An 81–64 Friday evening victory was followed up with a 91–68 pasting of the 'Horns, and head coach Scott Edwards was overjoyed with his young team's ability to put up so many points on the board.

“If you followed us at Hoopfest where we struggled to score 50 points, I don't think this is the same team three weeks later,”

Edwards chuckled. “The girls have been excited and waiting for this series for a couple of weeks and they were just able to execute very well.”

Both contests proved to be tight battles through three quarters of play, with the Pandas holding slim leads each night. In the fourth quarters, however, the Pandas ran away from the 'Horns, especially on Saturday when they outplayed and outscored the visitors 34–12 in the final frame.

“That’s a good Lethbridge team and they're going to be in the hunt for playoffs all season long. I just thought that by the fourth quarter, our fitness level and our team concept really shone through, and the team was able to really get going,” Edwards said.

The Pandas offence sparkled thanks in large part to the Pandas ability to shoot over 50 per cent from the floor both nights, including 41.6 per cent from downtown. They also managed to get to the free throw line a remarkable 59 times, due in partially to their ability to corral so many offensive rebounds and thus having second chance opportunities to score.

Among the players that stepped up for the Pandas were last season’s Canada West Rookie of the Year Nicole Clarke, along with Marisa Haylett, and MacEwan transfer Georgia Popovici. On Friday, Clarke led all players with 20 points and nine rebounds, while also collecting a trio of blocks on the defensive end. Haylett was the go-to player for the Pandas on Saturday as she racked up 24 points. However, the surprise of the weekend was Popovici who came off the bench to notch a combined 27 points, including going 7-for-7 from three-point land.

“We have enough players that know how to score and compete at this level and don't have to rely on [one player] to score 20 points for us every night,” Edwards noted.

Despite two big wins to open conference play, there are still areas of concern that the Pandas will look to address this week in practice as they prepare to head to Winnipeg this weekend.

“Turnovers are definitely a concern. It is something we have been working on for a while and will continue to work on,” Edwards asserted.

Two dominating victories to open the season are exactly what the Pandas basketball team was looking for amid the buzz of opening weekend.

“We had to try to bring playoff intensity to the first weekend of the year, and seeing the kids dressed up and everyone chanting for us was special. Hopefully the fans can continue to come out in November when we return home.”