

Basketball Pandas welcome UBC for Can West playoffs

FEBRUARY 25, 2010 - 7:56AM

[Nathan Liewicki](#), Sports Staff



[PETE YEE](#)

After a three-week break, the Pandas basketball team will return to the hardwood of the Main Gym this weekend for their best-of-three Canada West quarterfinal series with the UBC Thunderbirds.

A season-ending nine-game win streak propelled the Pandas to second position in the Prairie Division, and thus the right to play at home in the quarterfinal round. The T-Birds finished regular season play with an 11–7 record, but enter the playoffs having dropped four of their last five ball games.

The Pandas and T-Birds met in West Vancouver in mid-November with the Pandas coming away with a sloppy 57–53 victory. Both teams put on horrible shooting displays in that game, but a season-high 37 trips to the charity stripe helped Pandas overcome their poor shooting performance.

“Both teams are so different from the first term and so we aren't putting much stock into the first game, but it gives us a confidence of knowing that we can beat UBC,” Pandas head coach Scott Edwards asserted.

Pushing the ball inside toward the rim and creating secondary scoring opportunities with strong offensive rebounding has been a staple in the Alberta offensive attack all season long, and against the T-Birds it will be no different.

“It's the mentality of our team every night to pound the ball inside. We try to use our speed and athleticism to get to the glass as much as we can, and our forwards finish well in the paint,” Edwards explained.

Defensively, the Pandas will need to step up and defend the three-point line against UBC. The T-Birds generate most of their offence from beyond the arc, shooting a conference leading 35.9 per cent from downtown during the regular season.

The Pandas three-point defense, however, was the best in Canada West — opponents made only 25 per cent of all three-point attempts. Moreover, Edwards' squad finished the regular season with the conference's second-best defence in Canada West.

“UBC shoots the three very well, and against them our focus is to try and take that away from them. Our goal defensively is to get all of our opponents to pull

up on the dribble, especially against a strong three-point shooting team like UBC,” Edwards noted.

Six Pandas will be making their Canada West playoff debuts this weekend, but inexperience will not be a factor in the playoffs. Emily Bolduc, Marisa Haylett, and Alysia Rissling boast a plethora of conference and CIS playoff experience and wisdom which they can pass down to the postseason rookies.

One player whose playoff experience will be sorely missed is Nicole Clarke. She has missed the last ten games with a broken bone in her left foot and has been ruled out for the remainder of the season.

Edwards hopes the factors of comfort and familiarity playing at home will help minimize the nerves of his players, but knows defeating UBC will be difficult.

“In a best-of-three series, the team that is more mentally tough and is quicker to overcome mistakes has the best shot of winning,” Edwards said.

Action between the Pandas and T-Birds takes place Friday and Saturday night at 7 p.m. Game 3, if necessary, is scheduled for 2 p.m., with the winner headed to the conference final four.