

# Bears hoopsters split series against Bobcats to keep playoff hopes alive

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*SCRAPPY 'CATS* Fifth-year senior Harvey Bradford (right) takes on Brandon's dynamic scorer and fellow fifth-year Dany Charlery, as the Bears fell Friday night in double-overtime to the Bobcats 88–85.

Down by 16 points, the Golden Bears basketball squad roared back for a 71–67 win on Senior Night to salvage a series split with the Brandon Bobcats, keeping their faint playoff hopes alive.

As the first half of Saturday's game came to a close, it didn't look like the Bears had enough in the tank to overcome the 'Cats and their dynamic duo of Dany

Charlery and Kyle Vince, especially after fifth-year senior Harvey Bradford left the game less than two minutes in with an upper body injury.

“When Harvey went down we seemed to lose our step. He told me he couldn’t lift his arm and I told the guys they had to make up the deficit to make the night special for Harvey,” head coach Greg Francis explained. “I’m just glad he had a monster game Friday, but he has really taken the young guys under his wing.”

Even though Bradford suffered an injury, fellow fifth-year senior Jeff Stork came off the bench and made a big impact for the Bears. Stork made turnaround jumpers on consecutive offensive possessions late in the fourth quarter to draw Alberta even with the Bobcats.

“We needed Jeff’s two clutch buckets, but he was also dominant inside. He snared a couple of key rebounds and played huge for us, and I’m just so happy for him,” Francis said.

A significant factor in the Bears’ improved play Saturday night was their limited number of turnovers. They committed 28 turnovers in Friday’s demoralizing 88–85 double-overtime loss, but only gave the ball away 11 times on Saturday. In addition, they out-rebounded the Brandon both nights, edging out the ‘Cats by 10 on Saturday.

A change in offensive tactics during Saturday’s second half was also a key for the Bears. They shot less than 30 per cent from the floor in the first half, including going only 2-of-14 from three-point land, but started to pound the ball inside in the second half, which generated easy shots and opportunities at the free-throw line.

Nonetheless, the Bears wouldn’t have had a shot at winning Saturday’s game if not for the impressive play of Francis’ fantastic freshmen pair, Jordan Baker and Kenny Otieno. Baker tallied 19 points and 13 rebounds, while Otieno led the

Bears with 14 boards and chipped in with 18 points. Both players also recorded double-doubles in Friday night's loss.

"Kenny and Jordan are unbelievable players and they're going to be the backbone of our program for years to come," Francis said.

Another big difference between Friday and Saturday's games was the Bears' ability to contain Charlery, one of Canada West's most prolific offensive talents. He blitzed the Bears for 34 points in Friday's captivating double-OT game, but was held to 19 points on Saturday, including going 0-of-8 from downtown.

"I was very proud of our man defense on Saturday and very I'm proud that my guys came out to fighting against Brandon," Francis asserted.

The Bears close out their regular season schedule next week at the University of Manitoba needing a sweep to have any shot at their 24th consecutive playoff appearance.