

Bears maul Bisons in Canada West series opener

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Alberta Golden Bears' Derek Ryan takes a shot on Manitoba Bisons goaltender Steve Christie in Game 1 of their Canada West semifinal series at Clare Drake Arena on Friday.

Photograph by: Greg Southam , The Journal

The University of Alberta Golden Bears are one game away from winning their 10th Canada West crown in 11 years after a 4-0 victory over the visiting Manitoba Bisons in Game 1 of their best-of-three semifinal series.

Eleven minutes into the game, however, the third-ranked Bears appeared to still be looking to find their legs against a Manitoba team intent on dominating the physical side of play.

In that stretch the Bears generated a number of early chances, but only mustered three shots on Bisons goalie Steve Christie. Like the Bears, the Bisons also only

managed three shots on Bears goalie and first-year science student Kurtis Mucha through the first 11 minutes.

Although failing to blitz Christie with a barrage of pucks early on, the Bears opened the scoring at 13:01 when former Prince George Cougar Greg Gardner jumped on a juicy rebound left by Christie after defenceman Jarrett Toll fired a rocket from the point. Gardner flipped the loose puck over Christie's blocker to give the Bears a 1-0 lead.

The Bisons, not afraid to challenge the conference's power house, continued to play the body early, but their aggressiveness led to a trio of first-period penalties, the second of which saw forward Troy Crowley head to the penalty box for elbowing just 35 seconds after Gardner's goal.

With the man advantage, Alberta made Manitoba pay when Jesse Craige took a nifty cross-ice feed from second-year defenceman Ian Barteaux. Craige fired a howitzer which hit Christie up high, bounced over his shoulder and trickled past the goal-line to put the Bears up 2-0 after 20 minutes.

The Bears continued to apply pressure on Christie in the second period and did so primarily thanks to great execution of the cycle.

At the 9:38 mark of the second stanza, the Bears upped their lead to three goals when Spokane, Wash., native Derek Ryan took a pass from behind the net from Sean Ringrose and roofed it on Christie.

That was all the offence the Bears needed as Mucha stopped all 23 Manitoba shots to record a shutout in his first career playoff game. He was not called upon often, but stepped up to make critical saves when his team needed him.

With 2:03 remaining and the Bisons net empty J.P. Szaszkievicz rushed down the right side and potted an empty-netter to finish up the scoring: 4-0 Bears.

The Bears went 1-for-5 with the man advantage while the Bisons finished the night 0-for-5. Alberta also outshot the Bisons 24-23.

The two teams meet again Saturday night at Clare Drake Arena for Game 2 of their semifinal series.

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