

Bears ready to open regular season

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[Nathan Liewicki](#), Sports Writer



[PETE YEE](#)

OFF THE GROUND The hockey season will be in full flight after the weekend, as the Bears open against a Regina team that pushed them in last year's playoffs.

The Bears hockey team will get their 2009/10 Canada West campaign underway with a pair of games against the Regina Cougars this weekend at Clare Drake Arena.

The Bears concluded their exhibition schedule last weekend in Saskatoon at the Huskie Invitational, registering a 3–2 overtime victory over the host Saskatchewan Huskies on Friday, as well as a disappointing 6–5 shootout loss to the Lethbridge Pronghorns on Saturday afternoon.

“When you get up in a game, you have to have good game management and continue to work hard,” explained Bears head coach Eric Thurston. “We didn’t have the juice required to back check and Lethbridge took full advantage of that with a number of odd-man rushes that are, at this time, unacceptable.”

The hockey Bears can’t look back at their 5–1 win over the Cougars at the Brick Invitational and expect that it's going to be an easy game this time around. As a unit, the team has to focus on the little things it takes to be successful.

“Regina plays tight defence and their players always work hard. If we do not match their work ethic, they might get up one or two goals on us and it will be tough to fight through it,” Thurston said.

An aspect of the game that will be a big key for the Bears will be their transitions through the neutral zone. As a speed and puck possession team, Alberta relies on their defencemen to move the puck quickly up the ice to the forwards in order to generate scoring chances.

“We need to move pucks quickly through the neutral zone because we want to be attacking with speed. Guys cannot hold on to the puck too long otherwise our attacking momentum will be halted,” Thurston pointed out.

In addition, the Green and Gold have a large contingent of offensively gifted players, including Ian McDonald, Sean Ringrose, Tyler Metcalfe, Chad Klassen, Eric Hunter, Reade Wolansky, and Derek Ryan. These are just a few of the players who caused opposing teams headaches in the preseason.

Nonetheless, a powerful offence alone won't result in a string of wins. Alberta's defensive play and goaltending must be superb if the Bears are going to pick up a pair of wins against Regina. They will also have to find a way to get the Cougars out of their comfort zone.

“Playing our upbeat style with passion and imposing that style on Regina is a must,” Thurston commented. “We cannot win either game in the first 20 or 40 minutes of play; it is going to take a full 60 or 65 minute effort to win.”

The games against the Cougars will be an indicator of what level the Bears find themselves at as they transition from the preseason to conference play.

“The regular season is a jump up ten-fold from what I call Grapefruit League action,” Thurston noted. “The intensity and commitment level of everybody needs to jump up when the puck drops and points are on the line.”

Alberta and Regina will take to the ice at Clare Drake Arena on Friday and Saturday night with puck drop at 7:30 p.m. with the games also available online at www.bears.ualberta.ca