

Francis era begins with sweep of 'Horns

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HOOP HITS Bears forward Harvey Bradford (right) drives hard against the Pronghorns' Rob Cooper (left). Bradford led the Bears with 20 points Friday.

The Golden Bears basketball team used a pair of steady defensive efforts to subdue the feisty Lethbridge Pronghorns and open the Greg Francis era with two wins this past weekend. In both victories — 65–55 on Friday and 77–66 on Saturday — the Bears limited the quick ball movement of the 'Horns and generally dictated the rhythm of the game.

“We couldn't really put [Lethbridge] away, but I thought our guys, especially in the second half, played with some composure in order to pull out both games,” Francis said.

The Bears repeatedly found themselves in foul trouble early in quarters, but managed to pull themselves out of those holes.

Furthermore, the Bears were fortunate that the ‘Horns didn't shoot particularly well from the floor — less than 40 per cent in each game.

On the other hand, the Bears remained patient on the offensive front and executed when open lay-ups and jump shots were made available.

They made nearly half of their shots from the field over the two game series, and on Saturday went 10-for-20 from behind the arc.

Ultimately, however, the Bears were just ready to get conference play underway after spending their entire preseason traveling across the country, and against Lethbridge, their hard work paid off.

“The guys have been waiting to get unleashed and it was great to see them in action. I think our preseason is so much about getting better and playing the best competition, but now that we are into league play we want to start putting some wins together,” Francis said.

A number of Bears stepped up against the ‘Horns during the Friday and Saturday night games. The heart and soul of the team — fifth-year forward Harvey Bradford — was one of those who led the charge on Friday night, but stepped aside to let some of the younger players have some court time on Saturday.

“Harvey was really encouraging the guys, especially when he saw opportunities for others to get into the game,” Francis noted. “Having a senior like Harvey,

who really wants our young guys to play well, is going to help our team this season.”

First-year shooting guard Kenneth Otieno also showed those in attendance his ability to jump up and grab rebounds. Otieno led the Bears on Saturday with 13 boards, of which seven of them were offensive rebounds.

“Kenneth is an exciting player. He’s had a tough learning curve coming right out of high school ball, but every week he adds something to his game. His rebounding is special and he could be a consistent double-digit rebounder from the shooting guard position,” Francis said.

The Bears will need to combine their timely offensive production with steady defence as they head to Winnipeg to take on the Redmen in their first road games of the young Canada West season next weekend.

“We are just thinking about the process of getting better, and continuing to improve on both sides of the ball.”