

Pandas soccer plays to pair of draws

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HEATED AFFAIR The Pandas played two hard-fought games over the weekend.

In a pair of tightly contested defensive matches, the Pandas soccer team stretched its unbeaten streak to six games with a 1–1 draw versus the Fraser Valley Cascades on Saturday afternoon and a scoreless draw with the fifth-ranked Victoria Vikes on Sunday.

Weather conditions for both matches were not spectacular, with the high below five degrees for both games. Even with the mercury nearly hitting the freezing mark, Pandas head coach Liz Jepsen felt that the chill didn't affect the Pandas' hot streak.

“Weather is a bit of an excuse, and so I don’t think the external factor of ‘man vs. the environment’ comes into play in soccer. For [our] group of players, the weather has nothing to do with their successes or lack thereof,” Jepsen noted. “They have to make sure they are focused so as to provide the resistance that is needed against the opposition and to provide us with chances offensively.”

Against UFV, the Pandas controlled the play for the majority of the first half, but didn’t manage to generate many quality scoring chances. When the second half began, however, the Cascades were the ones who controlled the ball. Consequently, this led to Cascade defender Emma Broadfoot heading home the opening goal off a free kick from teammate Angela French at the 59-minute mark.

Nevertheless, the Pandas were quick to answer the Cascades’ goal when, in the 65th minute, midfielder Heather Lund deposited Amanda Black’s pass past the outstretched UFV goalkeeper and defender to even the score at 1–1.

Despite the cool, damp weather for Sunday’s tilt versus Victoria, the match was played with fervent energy and a quick-paced tempo.

This was evident just seven minutes in when Alberta goalkeeper Sabina Bullard dove to her left to rob U.Vic defender Jackie Snell of a goal from point-blank range.

“Today was a game of defensive stops and that saved changed the game,” Jepsen remarked after Sunday’s game.

The Victoria forwards continually put pressure on the Pandas defenders, which led to a number of quality scoring chances. Despite the best efforts of Canada West’s leading goal scorer Kendra Flock and her U.Vic teammates, they failed to score a goal for the first time in a match this season.

“Overall defensively, we really battled and that is where we have a lot of our experience,” Jepsen said. “In the attack we are pushing forward, but when we

come up against teams like UFV and U.Vic, who are both very good defensively, we are struggling to score. We have to have to find more diverse ways of creating offensive chances.”

Alberta's best scoring chance against the Vikes came at the 27-minute mark when defender Mickel Yuzdepski fired a shot from just outside the penalty area that went off U.Vic keeper Stephanie Parker and off the outside of the post.

Despite a pair of ties against two very talented west coast teams, the Pandas soccer team will need to find ways to manufacture wins if they're going to make the playoffs.

“Not having taken [more] points will make our run for playoffs a little more challenging,” Jepsen commented. “We could have gained some separation from the teams chasing us.”