

Pandas split top-10 showdown with Manitoba

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PANDAS BLOCKADE The Pandas' Jennifer Restall (right) gives up for the block on Manitoba's Ashley Voth (left) Friday night at the Main Gym.

In a pair of weekend matchups between top-five CIS teams, the fourth-ranked volleyball Pandas earned a split with the second-ranked Manitoba Bisons, and were unable to leapfrog the Bisons for second spot in Canada West.

During Friday night's match, the Pandas steadily improved in all facets of their game, but it wasn't until early in the third set when they made a significant move.

Down 10–5 with Manitoba grabbing hold of the momentum, head coach Laurie Eisler called a timeout. The Pandas responded by going on a 16–6 run in which they exhibited stellar blocking, greatly improving their attack efficiency by almost 23 per cent, and thus captured the critical third set.

“We just realized it was time to get out there and turn up the heat, because Manitoba was starting to feel good and establish fluidity in their game,” Eisler said. “That run showed the ability that we were not going to go away.”

In the fourth set, Alberta continued to wear down the Bisons with their attacking and strong service game. The Pandas had a decided 8–1 edge in service aces over the visitors, securing a big 3–1 win over Manitoba.

Left-side extraordinaire Tiffany Proudfoot led all players with 14 kills while Mississauga native Jaki Ellis chipped in with 33 assists.

On the other hand, Saturday's performance by the Herd proved why they're deserving of their high national ranking, as they dominated the Pandas in all facets of the game en route to a straight-sets win.

Manitoba had a significant edge in attack efficiency over the Pandas in each of the three sets and finished the three-set sweep with at an outstanding 45.6 per cent. They tallied 43 kills compared with only seven errors.

The Pandas, conversely, committed 10 errors in the third set alone.

Not being able to subdue the superb attacking of Kate Wasyliw and former Ohio State Buckeye Kristi Hunter was one thing for the Pandas, but they were simply unable to mount any form of offensive charge in the Saturday night affair.

“We never managed to make them uncomfortable and we couldn't bring enough pressure with our attack or serve to score enough points. They were in a set system throughout [Saturday's] match and we were unable to handle it,” Eisler explained.

Despite the overall poor play of the Pandas on Saturday, second-year Native Studies major Camille Wallace had a stellar game. The Burnaby product had a team high 53.8 per cent attack efficiency, in which she recorded eight kills countered against only one error, one assist, and one solo block.

Ultimately, however, the Pandas couldn't find their comfort zone in the rematch against Manitoba and watched helplessly as the Bisons served, attacked, and blocked Alberta into submission.

“The margin of error in Canada West is small and we saw that [Saturday] as Manitoba took it to us right from the start,” Eisler noted.

The Pandas will try to return to their winning ways next weekend when they head east to take on the Brandon Bobcats in another pivotal two-game set with major playoff ramifications.