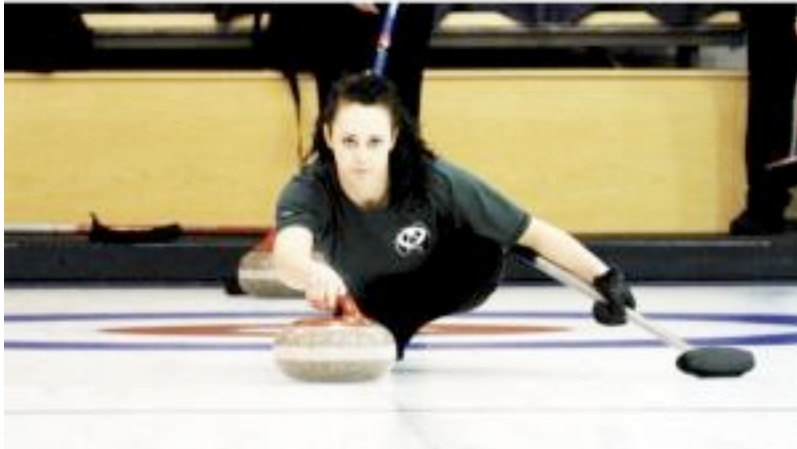


Saville Centre welcomes CIS curling elite for national championships

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PEBBLED PARADISE The Saville Sports Centre is ready to play host to CIS curling nationals this weekend where both the Bears and Pandas will be represented.

For the first time in its short history, the CIS/CCA Curling Championship will be played in western Canada, with the University of Alberta Golden Bears and Pandas teams hosting the event at the Saville Sports Centre.

Fourteen of the best men's teams and 12 of the best women's teams from across the country will converge on one of the world's finest curling facilities

over a five-day stretch, with each team looking to capture some championship hardware.

Unlike the OUA, where curling is as competitive as volleyball is in Canada West, the Bears and Pandas squads did not compete in any conference sanctioned events. However, they have stayed in game shape by playing in the extremely competitive Men's and Women's Super Leagues at Saville.

Despite the lack of university competition this season, head coach Rob Krepps, Bears coach Randy Olson, and Pandas coach Gary Coderre have high expectations for the host teams at nationals.

"There are no weak links on our Pandas or our Bears, and we feel that we've done everything we can do to get ready for this tournament," Krepps said referring to the extensive preparation his teams have put in.

"I would be disappointed if at least one of our two teams is not in the playoffs and I would think both will challenge for a playoff berth."

The Pandas are led by skip Jessica Mair. A sociology major, Mair has recently played on the World Curling Tour as the second for Heather Nedohin's team and that should infuse her with confidence heading into nationals. Dana Ferguson (third), JoAnne Taylor (second), and Rachel Pidherny (lead) round out the Pandas rink.

"Jessica had a solid junior career and has skipped two Alberta teams at the provincial playdowns. Her tactical and shot-making skills will make her able to rival any skip in the tournament," Krepps explained.

Eric Richard is the skip of the Bears and he, too, enjoyed a solid career in the junior ranks, but this weekend marks his debut at the CIS national tournament.

Karrick Martin, the grizzled veteran of the team, will be making his second appearance at nationals (2008). The son of Olympic gold medallist Kevin Martin, Karrick throws third stones for Richard.

“Karrick has been with the program for three years and is a great athlete. He was at every draw watching his dad at the Olympics, and hopefully that experience will rub off on him and he will have nothing but positive vibes during the competition,” Krepps noted.

Rounding out the Bears’ line up is Brett Hilker (second), Kody Moncrief (lead), and Parker Korschuh (alternate).

With the elder Martin certain to be in attendance to cheer on the host rinks the pressure might become magnified, but Krepps believes if the teams manage their expectations on the home ice then they should be able to play to their full potential.

End-to-end play at the Saville Sports Centre began Wednesday night, but the action will continue all day Thursday right through to Sunday morning’s women’s and men’s finals.