

Stingy Basket-Bears defence ready for sharp-shooting Saskatchewan

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Despite opening Canada West play with four straight victories, the Bears basketball team will head into a pivotal weekend double-header against the Saskatchewan Huskies having dropped four consecutive games.

In their two losses against the lowly Regina Cougars last weekend, the Golden Bears were unable to take advantage of two early leads they built up. Against the Huskies, the Bears will need to step up their play as the clock ticks down.

“We've been up early in most games as a result of coming out with a plan and being focused. Right now, however, our team seems to lose focus a little bit as the game moves along,” head coach Greg Francis stated.

“It’s all about toughness. When you play good teams, it matters how you play late in the game and stick to fundamentals. We have to get back to that because if we do, we can beat Saskatchewan.”

The Bears are tied with the Calgary Dinos for first in the conference in scoring defence to this point in the season, surrendering an average of 66.8 points per game. Alberta will need two superior defensive efforts if they're going to slow down the high-flying Huskies offence, which is averaging 81.5 points per game — second best in Canada West.

Leading the offensive charge for the Huskies is Showron Glover. The star guard currently leads the country in scoring with 25.2 PPG and is knocking down over 40 per cent of his three-point attempts. Fellow guard Michael Linklater is also averaging 15.3 PPG for the Huskies.

“[Glover] has been their leading scorer in every game of the year so far, but I think we have guys that can match up and make it tough for him,” Francis noted. “Saskatchewan has other guys that can get you as well, so they're going to take everything we have defensively.”

The Bears sport the second-worst offence in the conference, yet they will need to take advantage of a Huskies team that has given up an average of 79.7 PPG if they want to head into the break with a couple of wins.

The expected return of fantastic freshman guard Kenneth Otieno will certainly help the Bears offence this weekend. Otieno has missed the last five games with a knee injury and his superhuman rebounding skills — 11.0 PPG average — will benefit the Bears.

“Having Ken back will help us tremendously because he brings another dimension to our rebounding. When he’s healthy, we can be one of the top rebounding teams in the country and he can score double-digits as well,” Francis explained.

Turnovers also played a significant role in last Saturday's loss to Regina, as the Bears committed a season-high 31 turnovers.

“If we can control the tempo and keep our turnovers down, I think we’ll be fine. We're going to need to play closer to 40 minutes than we’ve played all year if we are going to defeat Saskatchewan,” Francis said.

The last two Bears basketball games of '09 are slated to tip-off at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. The games can also be heard online at www.bears.ualberta.ca.