Puck Pandas look to continue solid start to new year

FOOTBALL ROUNDPUP

Pandas @ Pronghorns

Friday, Jan. 18 and Saturday, Jan. 19 at 7 p.m.
ERMAX Centre, Lethbridge, AB

Andrew Jeffrey
SPORTS EDITOR • ANDREW JEFFREY

After leaving behind their week-
end series against the University
of Saskatchewan with a win and an
 overtime loss, the Pandas hockey
team has turned their luck around
in 2013, having yet to lose in regu-
an
tion time.

Throughout an up and down sea-
son that’s seen a seven-game win-
ning streak and a four-game losing
streak, the Pandas begin 2013 with
respectable 3-0-1 record.

In two games against the U of S
last weekend, the U of A gave their
opponents 19 power play opportu-
nities, but were able to kill all but
one of those penalties.

Besides their penalty killing per-
formance, head coach Howie Drap-
er was impressed with the team’s
improvement thus far both offen-
vively and defensively.

“We’re scoring on power plays.
We got a power play goal in the first
game against Saskatchewan and I
think we got a couple in Manitoba,
and that was something that we
were struggling with a little bit pri-
er to the Christmas break,” Draper
said.

“Our goaltending has been very
good. I think goalie Madison goal-
te Michala Jeffrey is playing her
best hockey right now so she’s back
to where I felt she was at the start of
the first semester.”

Now with an improved record of
13-6-4, the Pandas are sitting in sec-
ond place in the Canada West con-
ference. As the season winds down
with just eight games remaining,
the Pandas will be focusing more on
attaining a strong playoff position.

“You can’t worry too much about
the outcome (against Lethbridge)
or worry too much about what we
have to do to beat Lethbridge, we just
have to become a better team in our
own right.”

The team is currently just ahead
of the third-place 13-7-0 Regina
Cougar, who were defeated by the
first-place Calgary Flames by scores
of 5-1 and 6-1 last weekend.

This coming weekend, the Pan-
das will be going up against their
provinceal rivals from the Universi-
ty of Lethbridge. While Lethbridge
has a lackluster record of 6-14-3,
they forced the Pandas to have to
win in overtime earlier this season
before defeating them 3-2 in the next
game.

As Draper has often stated, any
team can compete with any other
team in the C.West this year, and
Lethbridge’s past success against
the Pandas this season has proven
that.

“Lethbridge is very much like
that they’ve got one very potent
line and they’ve got a few players
where if you give them the chance
they can score goals — and they’ve
got a goaltender that I think is
fourth-highest in save percentage
in the league,” Draper said about
Lethbridge’s Crystal Patterson.

But as the Pandas prepare for
playoffs, Draper is more focused
on improving his own team’s play
than thinking about what needs to
be done each week to defeat every
individual team.

The steady development of the
Pandas’ play on both sides of the
ice will take precedence as they pre-
pare to battle with Regina and Cal-
gary late in the season for the top
spots in the C.West conference.

“First and foremost we have
to stay the course and continue
to work on every area and try to
continue to refine the tactics and
systems that we have in place al-
ready,” Draper said. “Know that we
can create a lot of chances if we’re
mobile offensively, moving our
feet, attacking lanes when we’re
there and then taking chances to
get to the net when we have those
chances. Against a good goalie, ul-
timately the more rubber we can
come to the net the more chances
we have to score goals.

“That’s it, we just have to con-
tinue working towards becoming
a better team defensively and offensively as a whole, and then
good things can happen. You can’t
worry too much about the outcome
or worry too much about what we
have to do to beat Lethbridge, we just
have to become a better team in
our own right.”