Ashton goal sends hockey Bears to CW final

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The Alberta Golden Bears are off to their ninth-consecutive Canada West final, while the UBC Thunderbirds are heading home believing they should have been able to come out on top.

The T-Birds did everything they possibly could to delay a speedy Bears attack on Friday night and lasted until five minutes into the second period, when Alberta scored three goals in an astounding four seconds to gain a 5-1 victory. Saturday, UBC had more jump in their step, but with 6:17 left to play, Bears rookie defenceman Mark Ashton scored the go-ahead goal with a slap-shot that beat Thunderbirds goalie Gerry Festa high on the glove-side and ended UBC's season.

“I thought our guys battled and competed this weekend, and I gave them a lot of credit,” T-Birds head coach Milan Dtragovic said while focusing back on the. “But penalties killed us all year, and they ended up biting us in the end.”

On Friday night, it was speedskaters Dale Melnykov and Dylan Stanely working havoc, as the duo combined for four points. The T-Birds couldn't contain the Alberta forwards and wound up surrendering 41 shots on Festa and drawing nine penalties.

“We really brought our level up when it mattered,” Bears head coach Eric Theriault said. “That’s a lot to do with experience and veteran players who really want to win.”

“The swagger [of a winning team] should always be there and be present in all the decisions we make,” Bears assistant coach Serge Lajoie added.

On Saturday night, UBC checked the Bears much tighter and was able to neutralize some of the quicker Alberta forwards; however, the Thunderbirds still found themselves short-handed eleven times, though they didn’t allow a goal in ten of them. Still, the game went to overtime, and the Thunderbirds were down UBC defencemen, which led to Ashton’s game winner. Rookie forward Jesse Gimbler was in the pack in the UBC end and fed it to Ashton, who pouched it past Festa.

“We are a well-conditioned team, and it just wears a team down when you can establish an up-tempo fore-check,” Lajoie said. “I call it the ‘White Wave’, and we had it going for the last 14 minutes of tonight’s game.”

[UBC] was coming off three games last week and the game [Friday], so we wanted to make them work and make them claw,” Bears goalkeeper Aaron Sorochan explained. “We don’t want to play hockey on a Sunday here, so we worked hard for the win.”

The close result of Saturday’s contest left the Thunderbirds, who felt they played well enough to force a third game, disappointed in the early end to their season.

“We are not happy or content with the second round,” Dragovic said. “They played well back and we didn’t. I thought we played well and deserved to win.”

“We did deserve to win, we wanted it more than them,” UBC captain Brad Sorochan said.

Zanon concurred. “[Alberta] just capitalized on their chances.”

The Bears will now move on to the Canada West Final for the eleventh consecutive season, where they’ll face the Saskatchewan Huskies for the sixth straight time. Also, the Bears pushed their post-season winning streak to 16 games and barely lost at home to UBC since 21 November, 1998.

The giraffe is the natural prey of the Golden Bear.

Sure, they occasionally will feed on hares, deer or Thunderbirds, but there’s nothing they like to sink their teeth into more than giraffes. While the Gateway can’t put you in the hunt with the Golden Bears, we can put you in the hunt with the hoodie you wear. In the humblest that follows them around and then becomes, then all. We’ve even let you interview them afterwards. All you need to do is stop by a Sports meeting-Tuesday, at 5pm in 3 04. Still to pick up your driver’s license. And yes, I am talking in metaphors.

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STANDING TALL Aaron Sorochan (30) allowed only two goals this weekend.

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