Puck Pandas open season at home

EMERSON GORDIA
Sports Staff

After a super 22-2 regular season in 2009/10, the Pandas hockey squad appears to have little room for improvement. A trip to the final in the Manitoba Bowl in the 2009 Canada West finals was a tough pill to swallow, however, the Pandas are anxious to average that heartbreak ending. Head coach House Draper and company are excited to recap

ture the CIS Championships which they last claimed in 2007. “We want to get to the Canada West finals and go to nationals. Our ultimate goal is to win the national championship,” coach Draper said, who’s captured six CIS Championships at the helm of the program.

In 2009/10, the Pandas should be among the favourites to contend for not only the Canada West crown, but also a national championship.

“We've had more mature teams, but the majority of girls are in their third year, so that's a pretty good mix,” Draper said. “We've got some older players that are more mature and some younger players that are just coming in, so I think we've got maturity, experience, youth, and energy. I'm definitely happy with the size of the team this year.”

Among the outstanding puck-handlers on the ice for the Pandas are Stephanie Ramsay, Andina Bonar, and Leah Canepa. Each participated in the National Women's Under-21 team selection camp this past summer. Ramsay, the 2009 Canada West Rookie of the Year, showed well enough to secure a spot with the U-21 team, and will don the Maple leaf this spring.

In terms of training, the Pandas will be fit to endure the rigours of a five-month campaign. “We've been doing off-ice training to get the conditioning levels topped up. We spent the first few weeks working specifically on local skills and are now doing technical training so that we have some semblance of conditioning when we actually get into games,” Draper promised. Already, the Pandas have flourished on the ice, having emerged victorious in five exhibition matches versus Alberta and B.C. opponents.

The Pandas hope to extend their flawless record Friday night within the confines of Clare Drake Arena, where they battle the Regina Cougars. In 2008/09, the Pandas throttled Regina, outscoring their Green and Gold counterparts 34-6 over four games.

NHL headed towards more labour unrest

BRENN CARROLL
Sports Commentary

September 16, 2009 is a day that will live in infamy in the hearts of hockey fans across North America. This was the day when NHL players were locked out by the 30 owners, and the 2009/10 season, while not officially wiped out, was well on its way to being scrapped by the commissioner’s office.

However, the league came out on the other end of it with a better product on the ice due to the new rules. The salary cap, along with reverse slugging, was supposed to even things out between the so-called “haves” and “have-nots” in the NHL. Along with that, a seemingly ever-increasing salary cap (as long as league revenue keeps going up) was supposed to keep everyone from the owners to the players to the fans happy.

Also, these happy days appear to be coming to an end as both the National Hockey League Players’ Association and the league’s owners appear to be once again baling up their war chests in anticipation of yet another prolonged lockout in two year’s time. On one side of this looming confrontation, you have the NHLPA, which is currently in a great deal of turmoil after the coup of former director Paul Kelly. Kelly was removed from power in a move by the old guard, which included Ian Penny (current interim head of the NHLPA). Penny was criticized by many fans and players for his performance during the CBA negotiations with the owners in the mid-90s.

The world around the facility is that these men were seen as Kelly’s good working relationship with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman was not sufficient for the league. With Penny and they’re new leader of the Canadian Auto Workers association, who has a reputation for taking his union into battle and having the will to get what he wants — sealing the deal, there’s no doubt that the mindset of the higher-ups of within the NHLPA is to take on the NHL with a hard-line stance. Many feel that there’s a need for a fresh approach against the NHL for the way that the last labour battle ended. And with the economy tanking and the cap ceiling probably headed in the same direction this coming summer, which in turn will lead to lower salaries for the players, the feelings of resentment are starting to crop up once again.

And with that is the last thing that the league needs, considering other issues that are currently being dealt with at the present time. For example, there’s the problem of the NHL players wanting to continue to participate in the Olympics past 2010, including two of the league’s top stars — Alex Ovechkin and Evgeni Malkin — saying that they’ll leave in the middle of the season, even if under contract, to play in 2014 in their home country of Russia. This issue is further emboldened by the fact that they could just go play in the KHL in Russia and still make good money, which has the league’s unions already beating the drums.

On the other side, you’ve got Gary Bettman and the NHL owners, who think that after the last lockout, they could not only survive another one, but that they will “win” again. Not only that, but there are some owners and general managers who are starting to have some problems with the current Collective Bargaining Agreement, such as reverse slugging with the southern markets, no-trade clauses in contracts, and the fact that all NHL contracts are guaranteed, so they can’t just dump a player if he’s not performing, like in the NHL.

With the NHLPA bringing in a confrontational hierarchy and Gary Bettman’s tendency of using conflict as a first resort, I suggest you enjoy as much hockey as you can now, because odds are we’re going to be going through another lockout without NHL hockey in 2011/12.