For the second straight year, Alberta come out flat on CIS volleyball’s biggest stage and are left disappointed at the colour of the medals around their necks

ANDREW KENFREE
Sports Staff

The Achille’s heel for the Golden Bears volleyball team in 2007 was Winnipeg’s Western. Eight days after beating Alberta in the bronze medal game of the Canada West play-offs, Winnipeg beat the Bears again in the gold medal game of the CIS Finals on Sunday to capture their first National Championship since 1998. It was the second year in a row that Alberta had to watch another team celebrate on the court at McMaster.

“The guys are still looking for, they’re a bit of a somber group now. They know they had an opportunity, and they’re going to be disappointed about this for a while,” Bears head coach Terry Danylik said. “I think in a few days they’ll reflect back and not be completely satisfied, but they can sure be proud of what they did.”

Alberta came out strong by winning the first set, but the momentum shifted towards Winnipeg who went on to win the second and third sets easily, sealing elimination, Alberta rebounded in the fourth set to tie the match. But, in the fifth and deciding set, Winnipeg led throughout and won 15-10 to claim their third National Championship for Alberta, who beat Saskatchewan and Trinity Western to make the final, this weekend brought redemption after being upset twice on their home court in the Canada West Final Four.

“I thought this weekend we responded really well based on what happened [in the Final Four], and I told them that we showed a lot of heart to come back, and we played some good volleyball,” Danylik said of his team. “Winnipeg did some things practically that worked for them, and they were similar to last weekend, we just didn’t adjust well enough through the whole match.”

Danylik explained. “At times like this, you have to allow the energy and adrenaline to carry you. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn’t.”

The one consolation, of such a loss exists in a loss to end the season, is that no one expected them to be in the gold medal game after losing seven players last season, five of whom were a victory, but perhaps with such a young team, it produces optimism for the future of this club.

“If we were to ask me at the start of the year, I guess we thought we would be able to compete, but I don’t think I would have went out on a limb and told you that we would make it out of the first set. It was special,” Bears’ libero Justin Wong said. “No matter how crappy this feeling is, we do have to be proud of, we can take some positives out of this situation.”

Winnipeg was especially tough on Wong, who won gold with Alberta two years ago, but suffered defeat in the final last year’s season. Sunday’s game was Wong’s last as a Golden Bear, as he and middle Creek Providence have exhausted their eligibility.

“I don’t know if it’s really a big one, but it will sometimes, and I’ll definitely make sure I take it all in,” Wong said. “I’ll miss being able to compete. It’s a privilege to play in this league, and I’ll miss the guys on the team. You spend so much time with them every day, they became like family, so it’s definitely going to miss that.”

Danylik said his team was chaired by the tough, five-set battle against TWU Saturday night, which might have given them a disadvantage in the gold medal game. Alberta finished their game against TWU at 11pm the previous night, while the Winnipeg finished at 7:11pm, giving them an extra time to prepare.

“Going five sets against Trinity was a hammersmith, and there were signs [Sunday] of guys being a little bit tired because they weren’t executing some of the things that they normally do,” Danylik explained.

TERRY DANYLIK,
Bears volleyball coach

Pandas rewarded for faith in Dodds

ANDREW KENFREE
Sports Staff

CALGARY—It’s only fitting that third-year outside hitter Tiffany Dodds has been named the title match of CIS Championships on Saturday with a kill. One night earlier Dodds’ straight set against Dakota, Southwestern product looked up the name of the Calgary Kinanexo building, her muscles a deep from the DII, seven blocks and seven digs she had in leading the Pandas to victory over the Calgary Bears in the semifinal. Her thanks, she has to her on the second block she made in the game, was wrapped in ice pack, but she says the pain didn’t set in until after the final whistle. Yet, there’s no way those who played could keep her from the National Final, where she had 12 more kills on the way to gold.

Last week, Dodds was presented with the Mary Lyons Award, given to the CIS Female Player of the Year. Her ability to score and earn her coach, and there was plenty of competition for the award from Marcielle Lualam from Laval and Joanna Nieszczykowka from Calgary, both of whom had been chosen as player of the year twice before. Dodds was definitely surprised when she heard the announcement.

“It was a shock, I was speechless and shaking it was an amazing feeling,” the 21-year-old says. True to her character, though, she’s quick to share credit with her teammates. “It’s my mums that helped me get them, it’s great to be recognized, but I would not be there without my team.”

“She just never fails to amaze me, and she has just gone to a whole new level this year,” Pandas coach Lauren Riddler adds. “It’s a nice honour for her, but she’s got tons of upward left in her, she’s just scratching the surface.”

What makes her award even more impressive is that this has been a transition year for Dodds, she moved from her role as setter last year to that of an outside hitter this year—a switch that shows her versatility and ability to refine her game.

“If she is capable of going from setting to attacking, and not many kids have the ability to set and kill, but [Tiffany] is a real universal-style player,” Riddler says. “She hasn’t played middle, although she probably would be able to do it and she could probably play libero. Maybe part of it was playing the game really young in the role, but she skill set was there. We probably had more on a player that could have done anything, and that was [member of the lane] Bla [Pandals’ dynamic] Miranda Pribylova.”

“I know my role both years, and it’s not so much that I like one or the other better, it’s whatever each individual team needs, and I’ll do what I need to do,” Dodds says.

Dodds’ humility about her many accomplishments is unswerving, so it might be left up to her family to brag about what she’s accomplished in CIS volleyball. But the award-collecting in the Dodds’ basement is getting a little full as Tiffany’s brother Mark has been one of the best men’s volleyball players in the country over the past five years.

“Our parents have a little wall downstairs—a ‘Mark’ wall and a ‘Tiffany’ wall,” she laughs. “At home with other games we’re competitive but don’t compare myself to him [in volleyball] It’s not like we compare statistics or anything. He’s my big brother and I look up to him because he’s done so well with volleyball.”

Mark and Tiffany’s parents both played volleyball and get their children involved in the sport at a very young age. It also helped that they both saw coaches, and the volleyball league leaves early.

“Since we were babies they’ve been bringing us to games and teaching us in the car parks in the corner. Once Mark and I got old enough, we started playing off to the side,” Dodds says.

After a dominant weekend performance Dodds was also selected as tournament MVP. Despite the personal hardware she’s going to add to her parents’ award wall, it’s the National Championship she cherishes.

“These [personal] awards don’t matter as much as this gold medal around the neck,” she says.