



Canada West Universities Athletic Association

2009-10 Media Release

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Canada West Women's Basketball Preview

Overview

Canada West basketball sees a big change in the league format, adopting a two-division system, with the Great Plains and Central Divisions merged and a Pacific Division that remains intact. The playoff format sees four Prairie teams make the post-season, three Pacific schools in and a wild card team between the Prairie fifth-place finisher and Pacific fourth-place squad.

This is the final CIS season for the **Simon Fraser Clan**, defending CIS champions and a team intent of repeating. The Clan are a close-knit bunch who had hoped for one more year together, but NCAA rules next year will prevent that, meaning All-Canadians Robyn Buna and Laurelle Weigl, along with Kate Hole Mattheke Hutzler and fifth-year seniors Lisa Tindle and Brea McLaughlin are all playing their final year of university basketball.

Saskatchewan Huskies head coach Lisa Thomaidis and her squad return most of a roster that went 18-4 in conference play last season, but wants to avenge post-season struggles that saw them finish seventh at Nationals. Guards Jill Humbert and All-Canadian Kim Tulloch, along with forwards Marci Kiselyk and Jana Spindler are all back in the starting lineup.

CIS Player of the Year Kayla Dykstra of the **Victoria Vikes** enters her fourth year of eligibility with a higher goal... a CIS championship. After accomplishing almost everything a player can individually in 2008-09, the 6'2" forward looks to benefit from a solid group of returning veterans around her to make the leap to a much more successful post-season. Back to join her are Vanessa Forstbauer, outside shooters Michelle Lee and Kristen Hughes, along with inside threats Jane Anholt and Debbie Yeboah.

Gone from the CIS silver medalist **Regina Cougars** are All-Stars Jessica Lynch and Chelsea Cassano, but the remainder of a solid lineup remains mostly intact and they expect to challenge for a division title. The biggest impact so far has been from second-year guard Joanna Zalesiak, who has led the team in points, assists and steals in non-conference play. Back in the fold are double-digit scorer Rebecca Schmidt, fifth-year Stacey Walker and fourth-year standout Gabrielle Gheysen.

All-Star Caitlin Gooch and a host of veterans return for the **Winnipeg Wesmen**, including Randie Gibson and Jessica Stromberg. Stromberg averaged 9.0 points and 8.5 rebounds, meaning a double-double average is well within reach. Fourth-year post players Alex MacIver and Sarah Reilly return, as does 2007-08 Canada West Rookie of the Year Amy Ogidan.

Continued turnover has made it difficult for the 2008 CIS champion **UBC Thunderbirds** to stay at the top of the Pacific Division. With All-Star and top scorer Leanne Evans using up eligibility, the return of a healthy Devan Lisson will be key to the T-Birds' success. As a top contributor offensively and tenacious defensive player, Lisson hopes to bolster a roster with returning veterans such as No. 2 scorer from a year ago, Zara Huntley, Candance Morisset, third-year Alex Vieweg

With several key players moving on, scoring will be more of a challenge this year for the **Alberta Pandas**. After winning a bronze medal at the 2009 CIS championship, many key players graduated from the program. Canada West Rookie of the Year Nicole Clarke and fellow sophomore Anneka Bakker are expected to contribute more, while fourth-years Emily Bolduc, Marisa Haylett and Alysia Rissling also need to stay healthy and have a solid season for Alberta to maintain its high level of play.

The **Lethbridge Pronghorns** may have a recipe for success. After four very difficult season, the Horns returns all five starters and can claim a very experienced roster overall. Back are Hannah Blanchette, Kenzie Sheen, Becky Heninger, Lauren Taal and Sam Hornquist. With just one freshman on the team and not a single fifth-year player, the team could be looking at a big rise in the standings, this year and next.

Fifth-year guards Michele Hynes and Kait Flett taking the leadership roles as team captains of the **Manitoba Bisons**. Third-year Mubo Ilelaboye, who had 9.5 points per game last year and was the team's top rebounder, has a chance to emerge as an offensive leader. Fourth-year guard Kayla Klassen will see more minutes and is one of just three team members with more than three years of post-secondary hoop experience.

Shawnee Harle's **Calgary Dinos** are a very young bunch, trying to make inroads in a tough conference. A new conference format may make things even tougher, along with the departure of Courtney Coyle and Whitney Haswell, who combined for an average of 20 points per game last year. Offensive leader, All-Star Ashley Hill, returns for her fourth year while Megan Lang is the only other member in her third year or better.

Injury or sickness have felled several members of the **Trinity Western Spartans**, leaving head coach Kerby Court to rely heavily on fifth-year forward Lauren Doubroff, who averaged 9.9 points and 6.6 rebounds per game, and veteran Amanda Knauff. Gone from the squad is top scorer Laura Craig, along with the injured Lindsay Gustafson. Forwards Corina Reimer and Tiffany Olsen have been ill and are not yet at 100 per cent.

Sophomores Diane Schuetze and Tracy Kocs, averaging a combined 17.4 points per game last season, are the big gunson a young **Thompson Rivers WolfPack** roster with a bright future. Kali Ellis is back after a missing a year due to injury, while Lindsay Dekoff and Kayla Forsyth also play pivotal roles on a roster with no fifth-years and just two fourth-year athletes.

The **Brandon Bobcats** managed to eke out a win on opening weekend last season, then failed to win another conference game. With the return and increased maturity of top players, the Bobcats will make progress in 2009-10, led by fourth-year post players Melanie Thompson and Jayla Bousquet. In fact, the 'Cats return their top five scorers from a year ago and expect to be more competitive every night.

With the top four in scoring gone, the **UFV Cascades** face a year of transition. Alyssa Gaukel averaged 8.3 points in 2008-09, but will be the clear leader on a roster with just nine total years of previous post-season eligibility used among the 11 student-athletes. Seven of 11 are freshman, while two are in their second year.

Alberta Pandas

2008-09 conference record: 16-6 (2nd, Central)

2009 CW playoffs: 5-2 (3rd)

2009 CIS tournament: 2-1 (3rd)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: 1998-99

Last year, under third-year head coach Scott Edwards, the team captured third place at the Canada West championship and advanced to its second national championship tournament in the span of three years, where they picked up the bronze medal.

Although the goal was always to win the Bronze Baby as Canada's top university women's basketball team, the record and medals tell the tale of a successful 2008-09 season.

The problem with any measure of success, is replicating it, and for Edwards, who is now in his fourth year on the team's sideline, that will be the challenge with the 2009-10 edition of the Pandas, a team that lost six players in the off-season.

Gone from last season's team are four fifth-year players, and a large portion of the leadership group. Ashley Wigg, Kristin Jarock, Katie Barrett and Melanie Schlichter have all moved on, after Wigg, Jarock and Barrett spent all five seasons in Evergreen and Gold, winning CIS silver and bronze during their time. Schlichter transferred to the Pandas after a four-year career with the Manitoba Bisons.

Also gone are fourth-year Meghan Knowles and sophomore Megan Vande Kraats, which leaves just nine players from last season's squad.

Those holes leave room for former bench players and new recruits to expand their roles and become impact players.

"We have two new players from B.C. in Kendra Asleson and Sarah Binns," said Edwards. "Asleson comes to us from Elgin Park Secondary School and will be a big boost to us in the front court. She has excellent hands and finishes really well around the rim. She will be expected to contribute right away and is ready for that challenge. Binns is from Gleneagle Secondary and is another B.C. Provincial team player who we expect will give us some depth at the guard spot. She is a tough defender and runs the floor well along with a good three point touch."

Another recruit expected to contribute is Georgia Popovici, who comes in from Grant MacEwan College (now a university).

"Anytime that there is major turnover it is always exciting to see what the younger kids can do. While we have some young kids we also have some kids who have played at the national championship twice in their careers and are ready for this challenge. I've loved working with this team, they are a hard-working, positive group which has worked hard to challenge and supported each other really well throughout the beginning of the season. I think that our fans will see a similar team as in the past. We'll still try to play an up-tempo transition game on offence, coupled with aggressive defence."

Brandon Bobcats

2008-2009 conference record: 1-21 (4th, Great Plains, missed playoffs)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: none

Coach Jaime Hickson, who is returning for her fourth year with Brandon, has a positive outlook for the 2009-10 season. Last year, the Bobcats finished 1-22 in conference play with their sole win happening against Manitoba. However, an influx of new transfers and recruits are expected to add skill and height to the program.

Returning assistant coaches Melissa Stoesz, Kirsten Davies and new assistant coach ex-Bobcat Jennalee Burch will help provide consistency and guidance for the program. The Bobcats also have several returning players. These advantages, along with extensive team-building, are expected to give the Bobcats an overall improved season.

Coach Hickson describes the situation: "We are very excited about our upcoming season. We've been working hard in the off-season and in the classroom since last spring. I am proud of the fact that four student-athletes on our team are Academic All-Canadians."

The fourth-year returning players include Jayla Bousquet, Melanie Thompson and Sarah Lopes. Bousquet and Thompson both led the team in scoring last year with just over 11 points per game in conference play. They are expected to lead the team with their determination and experience. Other returning players include Nicisha Johnson, Kelsey Solarchuk, Amanda Fortin and Stephanie Lacey-Avon.

Transfers to Brandon include Rosemary Mills from the University of Winnipeg, Hailey Toner from Seneca College, and Britney White from Chattahoochee Valley Community College.

First-year recruits to the program include Rebecca Funk and Chantel Gaslard.

"We are fortunate to have key returning players such as post Nicisha Johnson and Kelsey Solarchuk, who will dominate in the paint with their fancy footwork and solid finishes. Perimeter players Amanda Fortin and Stephanie Lacey-Avon add to our arsenal as aggressive attackers and shooters."

"We've brought in a lot of new players, who bring with them a fresh perspective and excitement about basketball. Talented transfers like Rosemary Mills and Hailey Toner add depth, experience and leadership on and off the court and have had an immediate impact on our team. Veterans Lopes, Bousquet and Thompson look to continue to push the squad to new levels as we re-define what it means to be a women's basketball Bobcat," said Hickson.

Looking to improve on last year's conference record, the Bobcats are concentrating on developing their team. Hickson admits, "The combination of new, returning and veteran players provide us with the deepest bench I have yet to establish in my time at BU. I am very fortunate and excited to be coaching this group."

UBC Thunderbirds

2008-09 conference record: 13-10 (3rd, Pacific)

2009 CW playoffs: 2-2 (t-5th)

Last CW title: 2007-08

Last CIS title: 2007-08

Although they were fresh off a CIS championship, last year's UBC Thunderbirds had to deal with the loss of three key starters, including their top two scorers. The loss of important personnel combined with injury troubles led to a difficult first half of the season for the 'Birds, but they managed to turn things around after the break going 10-2 down the stretch with an upset of the Victoria Vikes in the first round of the playoffs.

The T-Birds lose one more key player this year in Leanne Evans, the 2009 CIS Defensive Player of the Year, who averaged a double-double last season and was second in Canada West in rebounding, however, there are plenty of healthy veterans that can step up this season.

Devan Lisson averaged 8.5 points and was second on the team in steals in 2007-08 before an ACL injury cut short her season. It also slowed her down last season, as her numbers fell in almost every category. Lisson, however, enters the year healthy and leads a long list of talented guards into the season.

Other key returnees to the UBC backcourt include fifth-year Candance Morisset, one of the top defensive guards in the Canada West, third-year Alex Vieweg, a do-it-all wing who averaged 9.7 points, 3.5 rebounds and 1.4 steals per game last year, while shooting a team-best 47.2% from the field, and Lia St. Pierre, a second-year on the rise, who led the team in assists last year and averaged almost 15 points per game in the post-season. Arianne Duchesne and Chloe St-Amour are also back with both players having CEGEP experience before joining UBC for the 2008-09 season.

The T-Bird with the biggest shoes to fill will likely be Zara Huntley, who is coming off a summer that saw her suit up for Canada at the 2009 FISU Games. She was second on the T-Birds with 10 points, 1.4 blocks and 5.8 rebounds per game in 2008-09, but with the departed Evans leading all those categories, Huntley will have to be ready to take the reins full-time in the post this season. Fortifying the UBC post alongside Huntley are fourth-year Montanna Dunmore and second-year Leigh Stansfield.

Joining the 'Birds this year will be high school standouts Erika Vieweg and Tori Spanghel, as well as former Langara College player and BCCAA First Team All-Star Virginia Watson.

With a more experienced bunch and only three new faces as opposed to six last year, the Thunderbirds appear ready to reclaim their title as one of the best teams in the west.

Calgary Dinos

2008-09 conference record: 8-14 (3rd, Central)

2009 CW playoff record: 0-2 (t-7th)

Last CW title: 2000-01

Last CIS title: 1988-89

After three straight first-round playoff exits, the Dinos will rely on young talent in the new-look Canada West schedule this season.

No fewer than 10 of the 12 players on the roster are in their first or second year, making it the youngest team in Shawnee Harle's 16 seasons at the helm in Calgary. Adding to the challenge, two of last season's starters will sit out much of the season after Esther Graff tore her ACL in early September, forcing her to the sidelines for the entire year, while Ashley Ashman recently underwent knee surgery for the third time and will miss much of the early season. Alex Cole is scheduled for meniscus surgery in December.

Despite the injury trouble, however, the Dinos posted a respectable 6-3 record in non-conference play, highlighted by an 80-78 overtime win over UQAM last weekend.

"I realize you don't win anything in October, but I haven't felt this way about a team in a long time," said Harle. "We definitely have lots of youth that will give me grey hairs at times, but they also have a fighting spirit and a togetherness that you can't give a team as a coach.

"To go 6-3 in the pre-season was definitely unexpected. In at least three of those wins we overachieved," she went on. "We're ahead of schedule, especially considering our injury situation, but I know it's a long haul and you have to be good in February. We've exited the playoffs early too many years now, but if we can get healthy and stay healthy, I think we'll be right there."

Just two players on the squad are in their third year or higher, with fourth-year forward Ashley Hill, a returning second-team conference all-star, and second year guard Megan Lang, who moves from the point to her more natural shooting guard position this season. As the only veterans on the team, Harle expects both to take on significant leadership roles.

"It's not realistic to expect a group of first- and second-year players to put a team on their shoulders, especially in Canada West," she said. "Megan has really embraced this group and brings a defensive presence that changes games for us and doesn't always show up on the stats sheet.

"I also think Ashley Hill is going to have her best season yet. The rookies call her 'Grandma' and she loves it. She's finding there's something special going on with this team and that she only has two years left. Everybody knows she can score, but she's started to find other ways to contribute as well."

Rookie Tamara Jarrett out of Diefenbaker High School is a force on both ends of the court and will compete for a starting spot, while sophomore Megan Schaufele showed dramatic improvement over the off-season. Add to that the arrival of Tilly Ettinger, who was named the Calgary Division I Player of the Year after leading her St. Mary's Saints to the city championship, and the youngsters seem set to provide a spark to this team.

"Tamara and Tilly are two kids that I've known and watched for a long time, and both are more ready to play than I thought they'd be," said Harle. "We're going to rely on them, which is a surprise to me. I didn't expect them to be contributing as much this early, and there's still lots of room for growth and improvement."

UFV Cascades

2008-09 conference record: 4-19 (5th, Pacific, missed playoffs)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: none

Fraser Valley will count on the enthusiasm of its talented youth to move up the Pacific Division standings and into a playoff position this season.

For the Cascades, entering their fourth season of CIS competition, it will be a year of transition, considering the lineup has been completely revamped.

Gone are fifth-year graduating players Megan McAlister and Carmella Silvestri, along with Heather Boer, who was third in Canada West in rebounding last season. McAlister will be tough to replace. The feisty 5'5" guard averaged over 34 minutes per game, tops in Canada West, was third in the league with 4.2 assists per game and led the Cascades with 10.1 points per game. She was also the team leader on the floor, and returning head coach Al Tuchscherer will need to find a replacement to take over those leadership skills.

"We have two players with more than a single season of Canada West experience," says Tuchscherer, back for his eighth season. "Of those two, Alyssa Gaukel (Chilliwack, B.C., 4th, forward) is our only team member with more than a year as a Cascade. We will be looking for her and University of Calgary transfer Jane Meadwell (Chilliwack, 5th, guard) to teach and guide our youngsters through the rigors of Canada West basketball."

A duo of forwards, Lauren Rieu (Port Coquitlam, B.C., 5'10") and Naomi Dueck (Abbotsford, B.C., 5'10"), are back for year two in Canada West.

To form the future of the Cascades, Tuchscherer has recruited what he believes are six of the top 2009 high school graduating players in the Fraser Valley.

New additions include Courtney Bartel (Chilliwack, 5'9", guard); Nicole Wierks (Chilliwack, 5'10", forward); Aieisha Luyken (Mission, B.C., 5'8", guard); Tessa Hart (Mission, 5'9", guard); Sam Kurath (Abbotsford, B.C., 6'2", forward); Ashley Smith (Pitt Meadows, B.C., 6'4", forward) and Olivia Vardabasso (Vernon, B.C., 6'0", forward). Of the group, Luyken was considered a blue-chip prospect coming out of high school and could take over some of the load left by the departure of McAlister.

"We will be calling on our newcomers to contribute immediately, learn together and mature faster than most," insists Tuchscherer. "We look forward to watching this year's squad develop and form the core of our program for years to come."

Considering the depth of the teams in Canada West, Tuchscherer needs to have his young players develop fast to challenge for a playoff spot.

"As always Canada West is comprised of outstanding teams top to bottom and the Pacific Division has arguably the three premier programs in the country. It is the perfect environment to immerse our team in elite-level basketball and we are going to see tremendous growth as the season goes on," believes Tuchscherer. "If we can overcome some of our early preseason injury challenges, we are excited about pushing for a CW playoff spot. From there, anything can happen."

Lethbridge Pronghorns

2008-09 conference record: 5-17 (4th, Central, missed playoffs)

Last CW title: 1992-93

Last CIS title: none

After a solid finish to the 2008-09 season, the Lethbridge Pronghorns look to be poised to challenge for a post-season berth in 2010. Down the stretch last season the Horns defeated three nationally ranked teams in the final four weeks of the season.

The Horns return all five starters and will have an experienced team that really found its stride last season in the always-tough Canada West conference. Hannah Blanchette, Kenzie Sheen, Becky Heninger, Lauren Taal and Sam Hornquist will all be counted on heavily to score and share in the leadership responsibilities. They all can play and shoot from the perimeter, as well as take the ball to the rim. They are a group of players learning to play together, show great athleticism and nice cohesion.

Also returning are point guard Courtney Heinrichs, post player Morgan Cross and, after missing most of last season due to injury, Kara Henry. The trio will be great supporting players who have the ability to score and contribute with versatility. Cross and Henry have the ability to take the ball to the rim or to play from the arc, while Heinrichs is as quick as anyone in the conference and will be counted on to spark the Horns defensively.

A familiar face returns to the team and will make the Horns instantly better, as Stephanie Price (nee Elford) returns from taking last season off. Price, a dynamic point guard, was exceptional in her first two seasons with the Horns and was dearly missed last season. She led the Horns in scoring two seasons ago, averaging over 13 points a night, in addition to more than four rebounds and three assists. Her return will open up the floor for Taal to be more of a shooter.

Finishing off the roster are two new faces for the Horns: Devon Kendall out of Calgary E.P. Scarlett and Stephanie Inman coming in from Mount Royal College. Both bring height to the program as well as versatility of being able to shoot the three, rebound and take the ball inside.

With no fifth year seniors and only three players in their fourth year of eligibility, the Horns have a chance to keep the corps group together for the next three seasons and really build a contender.

The Horns have had a solid preseason, going 6-2 against some tough competition. They won BDO Dunwoody Tournament in Kamloops, B.C. and lost two close games to Victoria and Regina in Regina. To finish their non-conference schedule, the Horns had convincing wins over the University of Montana Western of the NAIA.

Manitoba Bisons

2008-09 conference record: 8-14 (3rd, Great Plains)

2009 CW playoffs: 1-2 (t-7th)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: 1996-97

With a change in the Canada West playoff structure for the 2009-10 season, the Manitoba Bisons may play someone other than the Winnipeg Wesmen in the post-season. In playoffs history, last season's playoff match was the fourth consecutive season that the Bisons and Wesmen have met and Winnipeg was victorious in all four encounters.

Head coach Pam Danis likes the makeup of her group as they are young, dynamic with a positive attitude and striving to always improve throughout the preseason heading into conference play. She feels this has been the most energetic unit she has coached in Manitoba over her nine years and they hold tremendous amount of potential to get stronger, play hard and smart while surprising teams this season.

The Bisons still have a young team that wants to find ways to win as a collective. There are only two seniors on this year's squad, with three new team members part of this season's 11-person squad. The team also boasts one fourth-year player, three players in their junior season and two in their sophomore campaign.

Manitoba will continue to play a very aggressive game to utilize its strength in running and shooting from the outside. The team is still fairly young, with returning veterans fifth-year guards Michele Hynes and Kait Flett taking the leadership roles as team captains. Last season, Hynes led the team in assists and tied for 15th in Canada West with 2.9 per game; averaged 6.1 points per game plus started and played in all games while averaging over 29 minutes. Flett was second on the team and 18th in Canada West with 10.5 points per game, second in conference free throw percentage at 86.3 and eight in Canada West at 30.9 minutes per game.

Along with the two captains, returning players are fourth-year Kayla Klassen (20.8 minutes per game; 5.7 ppg last season); third-year forwards Mubo Ilelaboye (25.9 mpg; 9.5 ppg), Maria Pawlyshyn (15.3 mpg; 3.2 ppg), Lauren Mortier (16.2 mpg; 4.8 ppg), second-year forward Colleen Dorrian (7.0 mpg, 0.7 ppg) and second-year guard Whitney Lodge-Zaparnick (7.3 mpg, 3.4 ppg). All players will gain more playing time with the departure of guard Tessa Klassen, 2008-09 fifth-leading conference scorer in points and minutes at 13.5 ppg and 31.1) and forward Jenna Ralston (25.5 mpg; 7.3 ppg).

Three newcomers in the Bison lineup this year are 6'0" forwards Nicole Vestby and Vanessa De Vries plus 5'5" guard Deanna Hiebert, who will all provide high energy and have a passion to want to learn and get better.

With the change in the Canada West conference playoff system, four of eight teams in the Prairie Division will earn a post-season berth. Manitoba will compete for a top spot in the Division as they have been in the post-season for the last seven seasons.

Danis sees a team with a tremendous amount of work ethic who will be competing hard every night and use their speed, athleticism and depth to win games this season.

Regina Cougars

2008-09 conference season: 18-4 (1st, Great Plains)

2009 CW playoffs: 3-1 (2nd)

2009 CIS tournament: 2-1 (2nd)

Last CW title: 2003-04

Last CIS title: 2000-01

After returning eight players from last year's team that won the CIS silver medal on its home court, Regina is off to a strong start, with a 9-2 non-conference record so far this season.

Currently riding a seven-game winning streak, the Cougars are using a mix of veteran players and a pair of transfers and will be gunning for a high finish in the new Prairie Division this season.

"I've been happy with the amount of improvement we've shown so far this season," Cougars head coach Dave Taylor said. "We had a very competitive non-conference schedule which has really spurred the development of our team. With our graduated players and a change in our style of play, it has been a work in progress so far."

The most notable addition for the Cougars is guard Joanna Zalesiak, who has led the team in points, assists, and steals in non-conference play. Zalesiak, described by Taylor as the most athletic player he's seen at the U of R since he began as an assistant coach with the Cougars in 1993-94, played professionally last season in Poland following a season with the University of Texas at El Paso.

Zalesiak, along with fifth-year guards Rebecca Schmidt and Stacey Walker, will chew up the majority of minutes in the backcourt for the Cougars. Walker has played starter's minutes for almost her entire career with the team, while Schmidt has been successful on 34.2% of her three-point attempts over her first four seasons.

At the three position, fourth-year forward Gabrielle Gheysen will return to a starting role after coming off the bench last season. Gheysen, a member of the 2007 CIS All-Rookie Team, has never missed a Canada West game over her first three years as a Cougar. She will be backed up by Vanessa Wesolowski, who transferred to the U of R following a standout season at ACAC's Mount Royal College.

Carmen Stewart, one of three fifth-year players on the team, will start for Taylor at the four position. Stewart, a tenacious defender, averaged 7.5 points and 5.9 rebounds per game for the Cougars last season. Lindsay Ledingham, a second-year forward who has shown vast improvement since stepping onto campus last season, will provide quality minutes behind Stewart.

Brittany Read will step in as a starter last season after spending the last two seasons as part of a one-two punch down low with Chelsea Cassano. Read has averaged a double-double this season, scoring 15.1 points and pulling down 10.0 rebounds per game so far in the non-conference schedule.

Taylor has also started second-year guard/forward Danielle Schmidt in three non-conference games this year and third-year guard Ashley Wishira recently returned from an injury. The Cougars have three first-year players on the squad, including guard/forward Rayna Belyk, guard Kelsey Lothian and forward Megan Chamberlin.

Saskatchewan Huskies

2008-09 conference record: 18-4, (1st, Central)

2009 CW playoffs: 1-4 (4th)

2008-09 CIS tournament: 0-2 (7th)

Last CW title: 2005-06

Last CIS title: none

The Saskatchewan Huskies look to build upon its stellar Canada West conference record of 2008-09.

Although disappointed in their seventh-place finish at the 2009 CIS championship, the Huskies have a lot to smile about from one year ago. The Huskies finished the season at 18-4, had a 13-game winning streak during the season and finished first place in the conference's Central Division. They were also ranked in the top four among CIS teams all season.

"Despite our disappointment at Nationals, we had a remarkable season," said Huskie head coach Lisa Thomaidis. "With our success last year, we won't be taking any team by surprise this year. Every team will be prepared to face us and will be familiar with our personnel. We only graduated two players, so with our existing depth and new additions to our team we will look to build upon the accomplishments that we were fortunate to have last season."

Thomaidis, who was named the Canada West and CIS Coach of the Year, as well as a YWCA Woman of Distinction, will return four of five starting players. The team will head into 2009-10 without point guard Amy Prokop. Prokop, captain of the team for the last two seasons, finished her five seasons with the Huskies averaging 29.8 minutes and sits second in Huskie career assists with 371.

Returning to the starting lineup will be guards Jill Humbert and All-Canadian and Canada West First Team All-Star Kim Tulloch, and forwards Marci Kiselyk and Jana Spindler. Tulloch finished sixth in the conference averaging 13.1 points per game and first in free throw percentage at .880. Spindler finished 10th in Canada West in scoring, averaging 11.7 points per game and eighth in rebounds with 6.9 per game. She led the team in blocked shots percentage with .800 and in field goals made with 4.9 per game. Humbert, who moved to the point guard position in some games, finished eighth in the conference with 3.5 assists per game. The four starters are all in their fourth year of eligibility this season.

The Huskies also return Amy Lackie, Mary Hipperson and Lindsay Copeland, who will enter just their third year of eligibility, as well as Lauren Whyte, in her fourth, and Alicia Wilson, who will be in fifth-year after transferring from Mount Royal College two seasons ago. Brittany Bodnar, who red-shirted last year, will move to the active roster this season.

Adding to the strong base will be two-time All-Canadian and two-time OUA West Player of the Year Lindsay DeGroot. The 5'10" guard played four seasons with the McMaster Marauders. DeGroot averaged 18.9 points per game in 2007-08 for the Marauders. Prince Albert, Sask., product Erica Gavel will also see time for the Huskies this season. Gavel, a 5'11" guard who was also a highly sought-after recruit for volleyball, played her high school career with Prince Albert's Carlton Comprehensive High School.

Simon Fraser Clan

2008-09 conference record: 22-1 (1st, Pacific)

2009 CW playoffs: 6-0 (1st)

2009 CIS tournament: 3-0 (1st)

Last CW title: 2008-09

Last CIS title: 2008-09

After winning their fourth CIS national championship in eight seasons under head coach Bruce Langford, the Simon Fraser Clan are poised to enter the 2009-10 season as the No. 1-ranked team in the CIS, in what will be their final season as a member of CIS.

“I try not to focus on the end result because that is something that is not entirely in our control,” said Langford when asked if his goal was to repeat last year’s CIS championship performance. “We’re trying to focus on what we can control, which is the effort we put into being the very best we can be every time we step onto the court. If we can do that, everything else will fall into place.”

This season the Clan will be without three players from last year’s squad as senior Courtney Gerwing (Port Coquitlam, B.C.) completed her eligibility last year, while Rakel Helboe (Duncan, B.C.) opted to pursue academic opportunities in Prague this fall and will rejoin the team in January. Team captain from 2008-09, Brittany Fraser, has moved into a different role with the team for her senior season, and will serve as one of four assistant coaches on Langford’s staff, alongside Dan Nayebezhadeh, Frank Chan and Dani Langford.

Gerwing also has elected to move into the coaching realm and will be an assistant coach on Tyler Slipp’s staff at the University of Waterloo. The three-time national champion guard, who received last year’s CIS Sylvia Sweeney award recognizing her excellence in basketball, academics and community involvement, averaged 11.2 points per game and played a huge role on the 2009 championship team.

Due to the recent announcement of SFU’s acceptance into the NCAA, the Clan find themselves with six seniors who are expected to step into those leadership roles this year. Fifth-year point guard Lisa Tindle (Vancouver), who led the Clan from the point last season, is expected to be a huge force for the team again this year, while Brea McLaughlin (Toronto), the Clan’s second fifth-year senior, is also expected to lead the team both on and off the court.

Tindle and McLaughlin will be joined by four fourth-year seniors, who, due to NCAA rules that only allow athletes to compete for four years, will be playing in their final seasons with the Clan.

Laurelle Weigl (Stony Plain, AB), who recently competed with the Canadian Senior Women’s National Team at the FIBA Americas Championship, is expected to be a threat inside at post, while Matteke Hutzler (Napanee, Ont.) and Kate Hole (St. Albert, AB) will also lead the team at forward. Rounding off the Clan’s seniors is the 2008-09 SFU Female Athlete of the Year, Robyn Buna (Kelowna, B.C.), who was the Player of the Game in the Clan’s championship win over Regina and led the SFU in overall scoring, averaging 14.9 points per game. Both Buna and Weigl were also selected CIS Second Team All-Canadians in 2008-09, while Hutzler was the 2009 CIS Tournament MVP.

“This is the most mature and energetic team we’ve had since I started coaching here,” said Langford. “Since we brought this class in four years ago, we’ve been a young team, always looking to develop and build for the future. Now that they are seniors, I’m excited to see what we can do this year.”

This season’s squad has an incredible amount of depth as four additional returning players and three freshmen join the Clan seniors. Third-year guards Katie Miyazaki (Richmond, B.C.) and Carly Graham (Surrey, B.C.), and second-year guard Kelsey Horsting (Langley, B.C.) are expected to contribute from outside the arc, while second-year forward Anna Carolsfeld (Victoria) adds depth in the post. The Clan also welcomes freshmen Nayo Raincock-Ekunwe (Vernon, B.C.), Kristina Collins (Port Coquitlam, B.C.) and Carla Wyman (North Vancouver), who have already shown a great deal of potential.

Thompson Rivers WolfPack

2008-09 conference record: 3-20 (6th, Pacific, missed playoffs)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: none

If there is one team at Thompson Rivers which should burst onto the CIS scene in 2009-10, it should be Scott Reeves and his women’s basketball team. After recruiting hard the last three years and taking baby steps in growth, the WolfPack should be ready to explode.

Outstanding rookies Diane Schuetze (post, Vernon, B.C.), Tracy Kocs (forward, Port Moody, B.C.) and Lindsay Dekoff (forward, Chilliwack, B.C.) should see increased playing time.

The WolfPack have lost only one player to graduation (guard Sarah Cameron of Langley, B.C.). That will put the leadership responsibility squarely on the shoulders of fourth-year forward Kayla Forsyth (Vernon) and third-year guard Kaitlyn Widsten (Tswassen, B.C.). Michelle Dimond (3rd, forward, Port Moody) was one of the team's leading rebounders on most nights. Kailey Calonna (3rd, forward, Invermere, B.C.) emerged as a solid player off the bench. Jessica Mulock (3rd, forward, North Vancouver) is a dangerous three-point shooter when given the opportunity.

The WolfPack's chances of success increased dramatically when Kali Ellis (4th, forward, Duncan, B.C.) decided to return after missing a year with injuries. Reeves has brought in only one recruit for this season: forward Karalyn Forsyth (Vernon), the younger sister of Kayla. Two other highly regarded recruits are second-year guards Alexander Allen (Calgary) and Jen Ju (Vancouver). Allen played in the ACAC last season with the SAIT Trojans. Ju fills a hole at point guard. She played U.S. junior college basketball at Santa Barbara City College.

Trinity Western Spartans

2008-09 conference record: 11-12 (4th, Pacific)

2009 CW playoffs: 0-2 (t-7th)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: none

When Trinity Western coach Kerby Court opened training camp this summer he was optimistic with what he had in front of him. Two months later and the entire scenario and expectations for the 2009-10 Spartans has been radically changed because of illness, injury and early graduation.

"We will have a very young team that will rely heavily on a couple veteran players to lead and play a ton of high quality minutes throughout the year. We will also need our second and third year players to play beyond their years to have success in the Pacific Division of the conference," said Court.

Of the starting 10 at training camp, Court has lost six for the season or a significant part of the season.

"Our team looks quite different than we imagined it would only a couple months ago. With the injury bug already have bitten us seriously this early in the year we are hoping our injury adversity is already behind us and we are excited to see how our players who have maintained their health will take advantage of opportunities that were not available for them even a month ago."

Changes in the team include: fifth-year guard Laura Craig (Delta, B.C.), who was to have returned near Christmas from last year's knee injury, third-year guard Lindsay Gustafson, who has sustained a knee injury that will likely end her season, second-year guard Emily Knauff (5'9" Maple Ridge, B.C.), who suffered a severe ankle injury which will likely put her out until Christmas, fourth-year forward Corina Reimer (6'2", Abbotsford, B.C.) and third-year forward Tiffany Olsen (6'2", Fanny Bay, B.C.), who have been ill and are not yet up to game condition.

What remains are a couple of veterans and group of mostly young and inexperienced players who will be required to do more than what would have been normally expected from them during this stage of their career. The Spartans will now return two starters from last season forwards Lauren Doubroff (5th year, 6'1", Surrey, B.C.) who averaged 9.9 points and 6.6 rebounds per game and Amanda Knauff (5th, 5'11", Maple Ridge), who averaged six points and 4.5 rebounds per game. "We are stronger in the post as both Lauren and Amanda are fifth-year players with a good understanding of what we are trying to accomplish. They complement each other very well and bring different skill sets to the table for us. I expect both to have very good seasons as they wrap up their playing careers here," commented Court on his remaining front court starters.

Young players that the Spartans will need to rely on include forward Holly Strom (5'11", Calgary, Centennial High), Karla Josefson (5'8", Port Coquitlam, B.C., Riverside).

In addition to Doubroff and Amanda Knauff the Spartans will rely heavily on returning guards Stephanie Carkner (2nd, 5'4", Port Coquitlam, B.C.) who averaged 8.6 min per game, Keely Goertzen (2nd, 6'1", Nanaimo, B.C.) with 2.9 points and 2.1 rebounds in 13 minutes per game and forward Jordan Verhoeff (4th, 5'9", Calgary) who averaged 6.8 points and 4.3 rebounds in 25.5 minutes per game.

How quickly the young player adapted and how much of the load the experienced Spartans can carry during the process will go a long way in determining where the team will set come January.

Victoria Vikes

2008-09 conference record: 17-6 (2nd, Pacific)

CW playoffs: 0-2 (t-7th)

Last CW title: 1999-00

Last CIS title: 2002-03

Last season may not have ended the way they wanted, but for the UVic Vikes it's one step at a time as the nine-time CIS champs rebuild themselves into contenders.

The 2008-09 season was a milestone year for the Vikes. The Vikes won 15 of 16 games down the stretch and cracked the national rankings. They had their highest win total since 2000-01, which also led to their first home playoff series since 2004. Of greatest national significance, Kayla Dykstra became the first UVic player in nearly three decades to win CIS player of the year. However, the season ended abruptly with another first round playoff exit.

“It’s hard to lose in the first round of the playoffs, but we have a better team and we’re ready to move past that,” said Dykstra. “We are a much more balanced team and our shooting has gotten a lot better.”

Dykstra put together as dominating a season as one could imagine. The fourth-year post from Calgary led the Canada West in scoring (18.6 p/g), rebounds (11.2 p/g) and shooting percentage (61.4%). Her boards per game average broke a 36-year old UVic school record and, after a summer with Team Canada’s FISU entry, it is conceivable she has got even better after testing herself versus international competition.

While Dykstra is assured of double, if not triple teams in every gym, it will be up to the Vikes outside shooters to make their opponents pay. The Vikes’ back court returns a quartet of players who can score in a variety of ways. Michelle Lee and Kristen Hughes are established outside shooters, while Jane Anholt and Debbie Yeboah perform their best when attacking the basket. They all played a significant role in the Vikes league-best defensive corps, with Lee and Anholt combining for over 100 steals.

The Vikes also have a talented front court, with the do-it-all Vanessa Forstbauer and newcomer Carmen Laphorne. Forstbauer was second on the team in scoring (8.2 p/g) and rebounds (7.0 p/g), and the leader in assists (3.6 p/g), while Laphorne was the 2008 B.C. College Player of the Year at Camosun College.

In the post the Vikes also rely on back-ups Natalie Janssens and rookie Sarah Semeniuk. The two six-foot-plus players have seen drastic improvement in their games, the benefit of going up against the CIS MVP every day in practice.

“We’ve been working hard all off-season, focusing on the details and stepping up the intensity of our practices,” said head coach Brian Cheng, who is entering his ninth season. “We have a great group moving forward and I think you will see improvements from every one of our players this season.”

If Dykstra and the Vikes were to script the perfect ending to the 2009-10 season, the story would end in early March with a trip to Hamilton, Ont., host city of the CIS tournament, but of course, the journey there would be one step at a time.

Winnipeg Wesmen

2008-09 conference record: 13-9 (2nd, Great Plains)

2009 CW Playoffs: 2-3 (t-5th)

Last CW title: none

Last CIS title: 1994-95

The 2009-10 edition of the Wesmen will also feature a veteran-filled roster with nine returning players coming back from last season.

Head coach Tanya McKay will begin her 14th season with two fifth-year players in Randie Gibson and Jessica Stromberg. Gibson placed second on the team in three pointers (29) last season and can score from anywhere on the floor. Stromberg is a relentless rebounder who finished fourth in the Canada West conference with an average of 8.5 rebounds per game. Fourth-year point guard and 2008-2009 Wesmen Athlete of the Year Catie Gooch, who led the Wesmen in several categories (scoring, assists, steals and minutes played), will once again set up the attack and be counted on to provide scoring for the team.

The post position will be filled by a pair of fourth-year players in Alex MacIver and Sarah Reilly. Both showed great improvement last season and will be called upon to do even more this season. Kaitlin Rempel rounds out the fourth-year players and her all around skills at both ends of the floor will go a long way in determining the team’s success. Amy Ogidan, Canada West Rookie of the Year and member of the CIS All-Rookie team of two years ago, returns for her third season. Ogidan is a dynamic player who has the potential to become one of the best players in the country. Look for her to have a stellar season. Mackenzie Prasek and Kaitlin Frison both saw increased playing time in their second years and will be looking to make an impact in their third year with the team.

The team will feature four first-year Wesmen. Identical twins Danielle and Adele Baril join the Wesmen fresh off leading the Vincent Massey Trojans to a provincial championship. Alyssa Grant, a prolific scorer from Oak Park, will provide the team as yet another scoring threat. Keiko Kobayakawa, a veteran club team player from Japan, joins the team this season and will provide added depth at the guard position.

“Our team returns nine veterans, led by two Stromberg and Gibson. Using last year’s playoff experience, the squad is hoping to have a successful experience through the new league format to prepare for playoffs.

Offensively, we will be looking to Ogidan and Gooch to put numbers on the board. Fourth-year post MacIver will be someone the Wesmen will depend on in the paint to defend and control the boards. Our team is a hard-working determined team”, commented McKay.

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CWUAA Athletics

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About CWUAA

“Canada West is consistently the most decorated of the four conferences in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), winning at least 10 CIS national titles every year since 1997-98. Comprised of 14 schools, from the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, the CWUAA produces numerous major award winners and Academic All-Canadian student-athletes each year, with many going on to athletic success around the globe in pro leagues and events such as the Olympics, Paralympics or Universiade Games.”