

# OFFSIDER

## Hockey Panther Wrap-up

Two seasons ago, the Panthers represented the AUAA in the CIAU finals. Last year, the team made it to the AUAA finals. This year, the Panthers struggled to qualify for the playoffs and lost the first round. The 1992-93 season was a hard one for the Panthers who have been around for three years or so and who expected the same action as the previous two seasons.

The Panthers had to try to generate offense from different people this season. They started the season without five of last year's top-ten team scorers; by the end of the season, many of the Panthers had not played for the team last year. Coach Billy MacMillan and assistants Dave Shellington and Scott Blanchard experimented with a number of options in the search for offence. One of the options was the power-play's first unit's being made of only forwards. By the end of the season, one defenseman would be on the power play because even if the five forwards contributed offensively, the team suffered defensively.

The position of defense was predicted to falter this year because of the loss of Wayne MacPhee and John Cople. Rookies Greg Webber and Glen Craig proved early in the

season that defense would not be as problematic as it was supposed to be. Craig and Webber were adequate replacements and will be the building blocks of potentially the best defense Panther fans have seen in awhile.

The most publicized of Panther issues this season was goaltending. The team started the season with three goaltenders: Jamie Blanchard, Scott Blanchard and rookie Kevin MacDougall.

Because both Blanchards were playing in their final year of AUAA eligibility, MacDougall needed some ice time so that he could prepare himself for next season. To facilitate the decision making, Scott Blanchard was cut and became an assistant coach, which left the team with a workable tandem as opposed to a confusing trio of goaltenders. MacDougall played a fine first year; Jamie Blanchard, a strong final year.

The use of MacDougall this year will make it easier next season because of MacDougall's experience.

This season's graduating Panthers are Paul Murnaghan, Peter Bernard, and the Blanchards. Murnaghan and Bernard will be missed because they were integral to the team concept rather than the position or role concept. Blanchard's absence will be significant because of all he has

done in the past five seasons.

The 1992-93 season can be remembered as the year of the rookie for UPEI hockey. The year of the rookie was, for not only the team but also the fans, a learning experience. The Panthers had to deal with many new faces and styles of play; they had to learn how to build a team around a group. And even though it may not be found in the statistics, it worked. The team

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really started to come together in the second half. The process of rebuilding takes a little bit of time; the Panthers used this season for rebuilding. Fans saw good hockey this season, but it is necessary to realize that winning is not always a part of good hockey. Good hockey usually comes from a team that has to play to win; it comes from a team like this year's Panthers.

Next season looks good for the team. Many of the '92-'93 rookies will be more accustomed to each other and to AUAA hockey. It looks as if goaltending may be the only major obstacle for the next season because a new goaltender will have to be used. But the team part looks great. If the Panthers are able to pick up the play from where they left it last season- (this can be taken almost literally because the last Panther game was an exciting demonstration of a quality team) next year ought to bring people back to the Civic Centre. look forward to it.

I want to take a minute and thank the Panthers for the season. Every game was a different game. The fact that there were never any guarantees made each game more enjoyable; there was something in each game that made it all worthwhile. I congratulate you all on a season that went uphill and did more than some thought it would. Best of luck to you in your exams and in the 1993-94 version of the UPEI hockey Panthers.

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