

Panthers goalie meets challenge head on

Josh Lewis
Sports Editor

Leslie Bradshaw is “from away.” But the UPEI Panthers fifth-year goalkeeper has become accustomed to Islanders and their strange qualities.

“Coming here everyone knows everyone else, and also what they had for supper the night before,” says Bradshaw, who was born in B.C. and grew up in St. John’s, Newfoundland. “I guess that was really hard, learning to deal with everyone wanting to know everything about you. I’ve heard a lot of people say that Newfoundland and PEI are pretty similar places to live. I totally disagree. (In St. John’s) you have more freedom, you can do things on your own and go out and not see someone you know.”

Bradshaw, who has played soccer since she was six or seven, came to UPEI from Memorial University when her father got a job on campus.

“I had spent my first and second year playing and attending Memorial and after that he convinced me that this was a great school.”

After a term on the Panthers basketball team, the radiography student was recruited by women’s soccer coach Mike Redmond.

The goalie admits to being a strange breed.

“I think you have to be. It’s not normal behaviour to beat your body up everyday throwing it to the ground and diving in front of point blank shots.”

Bradshaw makes no bones about her expectations for her final year as a Panther.

“I expect to win. We are good enough, strong enough and we have what we lacked last year, and that’s that we are a team now. We get along better and I think we are ready to fight every game for each other. I don’t think I would have come back if I wasn’t sure that we had a chance at winning it all this year.”

That success will come from a collective effort, says Bradshaw.

“All of our players need to step up, it’s that simple. No one person is going to win it for us this year. Our rookies need to realize they have a huge role on our team, and that they do belong

Name: Leslie Bradshaw
Year: 5th
Position: Goalkeeper
Jersey Number: 24

in this league. I think some were a little amazed at playing last game. But they will get to play and they all need to know they can bring something to our team, and that we are counting on them. Also, our senior players really need to pick it up and show our younger girls that this is our last shot at it, and we are going to go hard all the time, and we expect the same from them.”

As for herself, Bradshaw knows her teammates need her very best, every game.

“Soccer is so low scoring and I put pressure on myself because it takes one mistake from me and it could cost my team the game. But I think that’s part of being a goalie, you want the pressure and the responsibility. You get the chance to make up for other peoples mistakes. You can keep them in the game.”

Bradshaw credits coach Redmond for instilling the mindset of a champion.

“Mike has done some great things for this team,” she says. “He simply came in here and believed that we were a championship team. He said it on the first day, and that got us thinking, hey, maybe we are. He got some great players to come and play for him. Older players like Kim Swan, Meredith Cameron, Shelley Hollinger, even Amy Connolly came out of retirement. This group of players changed our team around, and all of a sudden UPEI was a team to be worried about in the AUS.”

She said Mike has turned the program around and continues to make it something for soccer fans and the university to be proud of.

“Now that I’m in my last year I’m counted on to be one of the leaders,” says Bradshaw. “Older players have a sense of urgency because their time to do something great is running out. I think most of my job is to try and bring that sense of urgency to our younger players.”

Redmond enters season with high expectations

Josh Lewis
Sports Editor

Mike Redmond doesn’t like losing.

Entering his third season as coach of the UPEI Panthers women’s soccer team, he is relying on a core of fifth-year players to make sure it doesn’t happen this year.

“I think only when you lose do you learn to win,” says Redmond, whose squad won the AUS championship in his first year. “Unfortunately for us it was the other way around. We won before we lost. So we know what it’s like to be on the top of the mountain and to be on the bottom of the mountain. We know what it’s like to win and what it’s like to lose, and I don’t like the losing feeling very much. I don’t think I’ve played anything in my life that I didn’t think I could win, or I wouldn’t play.”

The Panthers’ senior players – Shelley Hollinger, Liz McPhail, Leslie Bradshaw, Allison Frizzell, Rachael Murphy and Gillian MacLean – will be counted on to lead the charge. “This team will fail or succeed with its fifth-year players,” says Redmond. “It’s their team now. It’s their time to shine. All our fifth-years who will play their last game in the green and white, it’s now their time to take hold of the team. Our fortunes rest with them.”

Redmond will be looking particularly to McPhail, who takes over from 2005 CIS player of the year Amy Connolly as the quarterback of the midfield unit. “You’re never going to get someone to fill (Connolly’s) boots, that just doesn’t happen. But we feel that Liz McPhail, while she’s a different player than Amy, can dominate some areas that Amy couldn’t, and vice-versa.” Fourth-year Janelle Blanchard, who scored five goals in the Sept. 10 season opener, and Tessa Roche, last year’s AUS rookie of the year and the nation’s leading scorer, will be counted on to lead offensively.

With so much firepower available, Redmond fully intends to employ a run-and-gun strategy. “Our strength is our pace and our quickness. We’re not a big team, so I don’t want to get into physical matches with other teams. I want to run the score as high as we can and see if we can outscore teams. It’s a brand of soccer people enjoy watching, it’s very direct, and I

like our chances if we play that way.”

Some improvements are in order, however. “Our zone defending has to be better,” says Redmond. “We also have to work better as a team than we did last year. We have to get more from our bench, and I like our bench depth better this year.”

The Panthers coach admits that winning in the AUS often comes down to the breaks and says that any team that makes the playoffs has a legitimate shot. “I thought we could win last year and we got very good as the season went on, and we just ran into a tough Memorial team (in the AUS quarterfinals) and it didn’t go our way. That’s sports. Some days you rise to the occasion and other days you don’t. I wouldn’t trade any of our players for any other players in the AUS.”

Redmond believes he has changed as a coach since taking the helm in 2004. “I think you can never stop learning,” he says. “I think I’ve calmed, that’s a good thing. I have a great passion for the game and I think you’re only as good as the people around you. I’ve always tried to have a strong manager, strong assistant coaches. I think I’ve gotten a better feel for the league. Getting into the playoffs is the important thing. Whether you’re 6-5 going in or 10-1 is irrelevant. Just get in there and let the team do the job.”

Redmond is asked if he is a player’s coach. “Depends which player you are,” quips assistant Clarence Frizzell from the next room. “I would say I’d be known as a bit of a taskmaster,” the head coach replies. “I expect success. Players who do well by me usually do well by themselves. I am demanding. I like to think that by the end of the year I have the players’ respect, or they don’t play, or they move on. We ask an awful lot of our team, not only during the season but in the off-season we have a lot of community involvement. When you come to play soccer at UPEI it’s a 12-month excursion.”