

2004 CIS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG WESMEN OVERLOOK

Season Recap

It has been a different kind of year for the University of Winnipeg Wesmen women's basketball team. Having won silver (2003) and bronze medals in the last two CIS Women's Basketball Championships through the tough road of winning do-or-die playoff games, the Wesmen knew they were in it for the long haul in 2003-04 as hosts of nationals the next two seasons. But having a place already set for them at the championship table presented some other challenges.

"There is definitely a different mindset," says nine-year veteran Wesmen coach Tanya McKay. "We've had to prepare differently * and we wanted to qualify legitimately for nationals."

The Wesmen had that chance after disposing of the Saskatchewan Huskies in two straight games in the first round of the Canada West Conference playoffs. Winnipeg had hit the post season with a 13-7 record and were on the road in Saskatoon for their opening series after finishing fifth in the conference. After the two dominating victories over the Huskies, the No. 3-ranked Wesmen were that much closer to their goal of getting to the nationals through the front door. But Canada West is a highly competitive conference and the final four boasted the Top 4-ranked teams in the country. And perhaps looking a little too far ahead, the Wesmen finished fourth after dropping both the semifinal and bronze medal games.

"We just made too many fundamental mistakes," McKay says. "It is disappointing that we didn't qualify the way we wanted to, but we are still one of the top four five teams in the country. We deserve to be there."

The Wesmen went 28-10 on the season and were ranked in the CIS Top 10 for the entire year. Winnipeg won the Converse Shoot-out, Pepsi Invitational and Ryerson tournaments. Other highlights included 12 - and 13-game winning streaks and a dominant victory over the No. 1-ranked Regina Cougars in their final regular season home game. The Wesmen feature a balanced offensive attack, led by 2003-04 first team Canada West all-star JoAnne Wells. The fourth-year guard is one of the best scorers in the country and is relentless on the offensive glass. Fifth-year veteran guard and second team all-Canadian Sally Kaznica brings offence with her playmaking ability, and watch out when second-year guard Uzo Asagwara gets it going. Fourth-year post Heather Thompson, the Tracey MacLeod Award nominee for the Canada West Conference, has been solid since her return to the Wesmen line-up in late December. She's averaging a shade under a double-double (points and rebounds). Third-year guard Kate Daniels has come into her own in 2003-04 and adds both offensive and defensive ability. And finally, fifth-year forward Janet Wells will be front and centre for the Wesmen if any contest comes down to the wire.

CIS Championship History

The University of Winnipeg Wesmen women's basketball team has won three national championships, coming in three consecutive seasons from 1993 to 1995. During that

span, they also set a North American basketball record with 88 straight wins. Legendary guard Sandra Carroll won the Nan Copp Award as the most outstanding women's basketball player in the CIS in 1993, '94 and '95.

The Coach

Tanya McKay has guided the Wesmen to the nationals in each of the last three seasons. McKay, a former Wesmen star and three-time all-Canadian during her playing days in the late '80s and early '90s, was inducted into the Manitoba Basketball Hall of Fame in 2003. McKay would like nothing more than round out her medal collection with a gold.