

Tigers (10-7).

ELIMINATIONS

In the tournament opener, U.N.B. were the early favorite over X and they started out strongly, taking an early lead and holding it throughout most of the first half. However, St. FX caught fire thanks to their two top guns, A.U.A.A. Most Valuable Player Theresa MacCuish and Second Team All-Star Melita Belyea. The crowd of 800 watched the underdog Xaverians mount a comeback late in the first half and surpass U.N.B. after the buzzer had sounded.

The Xaverians carried their momentum into the second half and began to pull away from U.N.B., grabbing leads of up to 15 points throughout most of the second period. But U.N.B. would not quit and rallied to narrow the lead to six late in the game. With a minute and a half remaining St. FX, with an 80-74 lead, were on the verge of an upset. U.N.B. coach Claire Mitton called a timeout in hopes of plotting a plan that would carry her team to victory. U.N.B. fought furiously in the dying seconds of the game, but fell short in their come-back and finished their season on the wrong side of an 86-84 score. The upset was complete and the Red Bloomers' (who will also lose their name this year, "Red Bloomers" will be replaced by the very imaginative "Varsity Reds") three-year reign as A.U.A.A. champs was terminated.

With the defending champs gone, there would be a new champion this year and one finalist was already decided. The second finalist would be decided in game two.

With the Sports Centre crowd packed with well over 1,300 screaming fans, the second semi-final game between the U.P.E.I. Panthers and the Dalhousie Tigers began. These two teams were no strangers to each other. They had met four times previously with the Panthers winning each of the four games. But the Panthers were not overconfident, this was the playoffs- one bad game and you're out.

Heather Campbell started things off with a three point shot and quickly added another for an early 6-2 U.P.E.I. lead; however, the Tigers remained close throughout much of the first half, keeping their deficit to a minimum. In the second half, the Panthers' superior skills were too much for the Tigers and they began to pull away from the overwhelmed Dalhousie team. Soon, the Tigers were forced to make desperation shots, which were easily blocked, and the Panthers cruised their way to an easy 83-59 win and earned the right to appear with St. FX in the league final.

SHOWDOWN

With the Final Four now the Final Two, the finalists took to the court before a season-high crowd of over 1,500. The Panthers entered the final game full of confidence and also as the pre-game favorites. They came into the game

riding an eight-game winning streak and they were playing the game on their home court, a place where they had only lost once all year; however, that one loss had been handed to them by St. FX.

After a slow, cautious, beginning in which there was no scoring for the first two minutes, St. FX, much to the delight of the two dozen St. FX fans in attendance, sunk the game's first basket. U.P.E.I. quickly tied the score, arousing their own fans and the two teams battled evenly for awhile with both teams staying close to one another. But midway through the half X began gradually increasing their lead, thanks to several three point shots, perfect foul shooting and a stingy defence which the Lady Panthers could not seem to penetrate. The Panthers tried to keep as close as they could, they did not allow St. FX to get too far ahead at first, but the persistent St. FX offence was working well and the lead eventually swelled to 13 points. The Lady Panthers did manage to slow X down a bit and finished the half with some momentum. They narrowed the lead by the end of the half to 43-38, showing everyone that they were not dead yet.

COMEBACKS

The Panthers had mounted several come-backs all year, including a huge come-back against St. FX where they rebounded from a 21 point deficit to win the game. Since they had some momentum at the end of the game it was expected the Lady Panthers would come out flying and tear apart the X lead. But the second half began a lot like the first. It was slow with not much scoring. When the baskets started to go in, though, they were from X, not the Panthers, and things started to get tense. The Xaverians once again built their lead back to ten points and led 50-40 a few minutes into the period. Then, almost on cue, the Panthers came to life. They began to trade basket for basket with X and slowly started to force the Xaverians into turnovers which they capitalized on. The Panthers gradually whittled the lead back down to two points. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the Panthers tied the game. But X continued to play well and once again regained the lead. But the Panthers were on a roll and for the first time since the beginning of the game, they had the lead. Although X tied the game a few times, this lead was one they would not relinquish.

The Panthers managed to grab a four point lead- their biggest in the game so far and the teams seemed to trade baskets as the Panther lead fluctuated between 2-5 points. As the game wore on X seemed to get frustrated and distracted as the Panthers made good on most of their shots. X began to turn the ball over regularly and their shooting went cold. The Panthers, showing no mercy, continued with relentless pressure and built up a seven point lead with only a few minutes left in the game. The Pan-

thers, as the clock wound down, seemed to have things in control and the crowd was sensing a victory, but a huge three point shot by X's Amanda Wilcox put St. FX right back in the game. The struggle continued as the lead varied between 2-3 points. The minutes seemed to take an eternity to pass as the visitors brought the lead back down to two. But, with the score 89-87, a couple of foul shots by Lori Knickle with just seconds remaining brought the lead back up to four. As the Sports Centre filled with deafening noise the Xaverians tried in vain to move up the court and score and the Panthers, staging a huge come-back in the second half in which they scored a whopping 53 points, held on to win the A.U.A.A.'s top prize.

U.P.E.I. now moves on to the Nationals in Victoria, British Columbia as the Atlantic Canadian representative. As they leave for the Nationals for the second consecutive year (they were the host team last year when the Nationals were held at U.P.E.I.) they bring with them a nine game winning streak and a number nine ranking, which will undoubtedly improve when the rankings are released. The Lady Panthers will have their hands full as they tangle with some of the nation's best women's basketball teams, but the A.U.A.A. and the University of Prince Edward Island will be well represented.

Tournament

Notes:

--U.P.E.I.'s Lori Knickle, playing her last year at U.P.E.I., took MVP honors with 39 points in the tournament.

--U.P.E.I.'s Kelly Copeland and rookie Hilary Watson were named to the tournament all-star team.

--Rounding out the all-star team were Melita Belyea and Theresa MacCuish of St. FX, and Jill Jackson of U.N.B.

--U.P.E.I. coach Dave McNeil was named A.U.A.A. coach of the year.

--The Nationals begin next weekend in BC.

--Crowds at the Sports Centre during the tournament were outstanding. The first semi-final game between U.N.B. and St. FX drew 800. The second game with Dal and U.P.E.I. drew over 1,300. The Championship Game drew over 1,500 the largest crowd of the year for any U.P.E.I. sporting event.

--The crowd of over 1,500 is also believed to be the largest crowd for women's basketball this year in Canada.

--Victoria, BC can only dream of getting these kinds of crowds for the Nationals. The Nationals may return to U.P.E.I. sooner than some