

Panthers season preview

By Marc MacDonald

On Tuesday, September 12th the UPEI Sports Department hosted its annual press conference at the Field House. In attendance were the UPEI President Wade MacLauchlan, Sports Department Marketing and Public Relations Director Ron Annear, Athletic Director Barb Mullaly, Island sports media, and the Panther coaching staff.

With an introduction by Ron Annear, each speaker addressed the audience and gave their predictions or hopes for UPEI's teams this season.

First to speak was President MacLauchlan who reiterated the importance of the community's involvement in UPEI's sports programs and about the sports department's new initiative, Team UPEI.

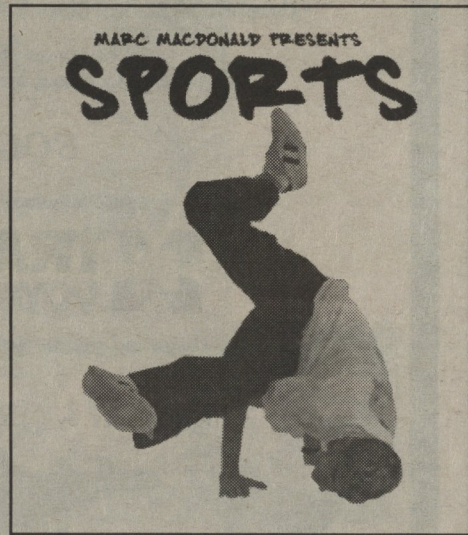
The first coach to step up to the mike was Paul Steele, head coach of the Women's Soccer team. Steele named Sherri Gallant and Lana Birch as captains of this year's team and noted that the team would need to play more of an attacking style this year and work on finishing around the net, as well as improving their mental preparation.

Steele also noted that every team in the AUS (Atlantic University Sport, formally the AUAA) would be a worthy opponent this season.

Lewis Page, new head coach for the Men's Soccer team followed. Page showed his excitement for this season for the Men's Panther team, both on and off the field, which will include a game against alumni.

This season's team is composed of veteran and rookie players which Page hopes will mean leadership from the seniors and quick learning by the new players.

Captains for the 2000 Men's Soccer team will be Carson Gill and John Sutton both members of the 1998 Panther Champions, Page pointed out. Two new players to the team are Sean and Andrew



McCurdy who scored two goals each in pre-season action.

Page stated that the goal for this season will be to win the division championship. This would allow the team to host the playoffs, in which they have an impressive record.

Speaking on behalf of the Field Hockey team was Tracy McGee and Jana Parker the newly appointed co-coaches of this year's squad.

The Field Hockey team had a large turn out at camp with 21 players attending. McGee and Parker noted that the team would be made up of a talented group of players this year. These include eight rookies on the team this year and two graduating players; Nancy Vessey and Karen MacLean.

The McGee and Parker set their two goals for the season: increasing the number of wins and getting alumni involved. The latter is planned for the team's final two games, during what is to be Alumni Weekend, where the 72-73

Championship team will be recognized.

Leading off winter sports was Jeff MacEachern, coach of the Volleyball team. He like the other winter sport coaches could only give limited insight regarding their respective teams because of a new AUS rule. This rule does not allow coaches to train with their teams on their sports' playing surface until the 24th of September.

MacEachern spoke of the team's 18 players at camp, 6 new players from around the Atlantic region, and 3 returning veterans. The primary focus this season for the volleyball team coach MacEachern said, would be defense.

The last of the new coaches, Mike Connolly, took to the podium to give a preview of the Men's Basketball team.

Connolly announced that Gordon McNeely (a former UNB basketball player) will be assistant coach this year. There will be five players returning to the Panthers this season and several promising players coming in, Connolly pointed out. Two of these new players are from Ontario, and a third is from Queens, New York. Four new players from the Island's high school program will also join the line-up.

Connolly explained that team defense would be the focal point this season and the their conference would be a tough one, as it produce the last two CIAU Champions.

Tracy Ellsworth, who is returning as head coach of the Women's Basketball team for an eighth season, gave a preview for her team's season. Assisting Ellsworth this season, will be Erin Rigby (now McNeely a graduate of

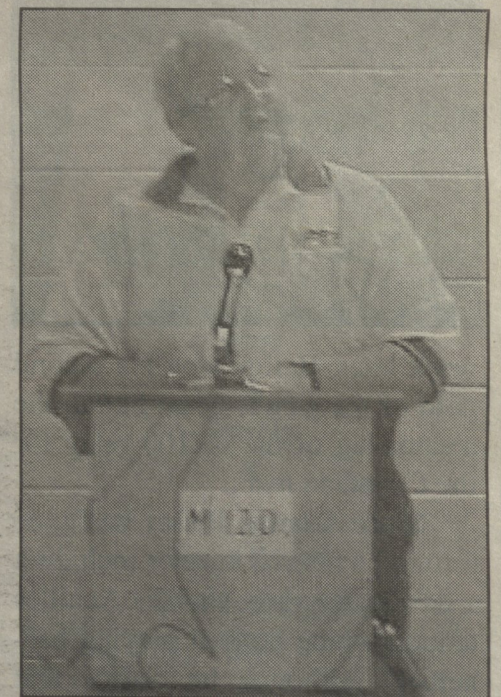
UPEI and wife of Men's Basketball assistant coach Gordon McNeely).

Ellsworth noted that they now have 15 players in camp, 9 of whom are returning players. Ellsworth stated the team would focus on two things this season: strengthening their defense and consistency on offense.

Last to speak for the coaching staff was Men's Hockey head coach Doug Curry.

Two new additions to the team this season are assistant coach Jeff Squire and new goaltender Jason Flick. Flick will have to help fill the void left by David Mitchell, the Panthers all-star goaltender who graduated last year.

Coach Curry said this year's team is more talented than last year's young team and that he will be looking to create offense with the defense. The Panthers will be in a tough division this year Curry noted, and will also have a difficult 28 game schedule.



Athletic Director Barb Mullaly speaks at the conference