Pandas volleyball  
March 2016

CIS national titles: 7  
Canada West conference titles: 10

Class of 2016  
Libero Jessie Niles and outside hitter Kirsten Peters complete their fifth and final year of university eligibility.  
Niles, from Turner Valley, is studying science. She is a four-time academic All-Canadian.  
Peters, from Edmonton, is in the faculty of Physical Education and Recreation.

PLAY IT AGAIN

Season at a glance

Canadian colours  
Twelve athletes and three coaches with the Pandas program are named to Canadian national teams in 2015.

National youth team  
Marina Culo, Jenae Eisler, Kacey Jost, Emma Keftenbeld, Sara McCreary, coach Nicole Ban, coach Chantelle Lamotte

National junior team  
Tessa Hill, Vanessa Jarman, Mary Pless, coach Tiffany Dodds-Little

Universiade in Gwanju, China  
Canada 6th  
Meg Casault, Dione Lang, Jessie Niles, alternate Karly Janssen

Cheers for Benkie  
Jenny (Cartmell) Benkie is enshrined in the University of Alberta Sports Wall of Fame.  
Benkie packed power for the Pandas as they won five consecutive Canadian titles from 1995-96 to 1999-00.  
She was named rookie of the year in the CIAU in 1995, was twice an All-Canadian and was twice national player of the year.  
Benkie is the only female in the history of all Pandas sports to win the BLG award, presented annually since 1992-93 to the female athlete of the year in Canadian university sports.

Showing the way  
Nine students-athletes on the Pandas university team this season are also coaches with Pandas age-group clubs.

Pandas 18U  
Jessica Hoskins, Erin Orysiuk

Pandas 17U  
Kacey Otto, Courtney Yoo

Pandas 16U  
Jessie Niles

Pandas 15U  
Karly Janssen

Pandas 14U  
Erica Walsh, Mariah Walsh

Pandas 13U  
Shauny Hogg

Return engagement  
The Pandas reach the Final Four in the Canada West conference for the 12th time in the last 15 years.  
Alberta (20-4) posts the second most conference wins in team history — the 1999-00 Pandas were 21-1 — and leads the CIS in kills.  
In the playoffs, the Pandas defeat Mount Royal in quarter-finals, are defeated by Trinity Western in a semi-final and are defeated by UBC for third place.  
Conference champion Trinity Western, runner-up UBC Okanagan and third place UBC go to Brandon for the CIS championship. Toronto defeats Trinity Western in the final for the 2015-16 title.

Class of 2016  
Libero Jessie Niles and outside hitter Kirsten Peters complete their fifth and final year of university eligibility.  
Niles, from Turner Valley, is studying science. She is a four-time academic All-Canadian.  
Peters, from Edmonton, is in the faculty of Physical Education and Recreation.
I would say to high school players: Start early. Start researching schools and looking into teams as soon as possible if you are seriously considering university sport. Even if you aren’t sure which sport, it’s best to get your name out there and get on the coaches’ radar. It also helps to know what classes you need to take and what marks you need to get into potential programs. Student-athletes needs to understand that the choices and the decisions they make as early as high school can affect them in the future.

This also goes with first-year and even second-year athletes. A lot of young athletes get sucked into this mindset of perceived invincibility and that their actions have no consequences or future affects. The majority of after degree programs put a lot of emphasis on classes that are taken in the first year. It makes it way easier and less stressful if you have a routine and a strategy for school that you’ve started early.

My biggest regrets was waiting so long to start looking into schools. I didn’t show interest until the middle of Grade 12. I never played provincial or club sports till late either, so I wasn’t well known and it was harder for me to get noticed. As for school, I hadn’t done the research as to faculties or programs that I aspired to attend. I went with the flow and never went through my first couple years with a purpose.

Every decision you make should have a purpose. There’s no neutral ground, it’s either positive or negative. I know I’m putting a lot of emphasis on school instead of volleyball, but you can’t play the sport you love if you don’t take care of other priorities in your life. Without school there’s no university volleyball. And it’s once you’re done volleyball, there’s still school. So take care of school first.
A cut above

Meg Casault
Home: Edmonton
High school: Strathcona
Major: Physical Education & Recreation
Position: Outside hitter
Pandas: Four years
2012-13 to 2015-16
CAREER STATS
Regular season Post season Total
Kills 766 165 931
Digs 683 109 792
Blocks 103 21 124
Aces 71 5 76

In top three in CIS in kills each of the last two years

Jessie Niles
Home: Turner Valley
High school: Tweedsmuir
Major: Science
Position: Libero
Pandas: Five years
2011-12 to 2015-16
CAREER STATS
Regular season Post season Total
Digs 1,300 398 1,698

Canada West student-athlete of the year

Gallery of Greats: 20 Pandas have been All-Canadians

Jocelyn Blair  2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09
Meg Casault  2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16
Jenny Cartmell  1998-99, 1999-00
Larissa Cundy  2003-04, 2004-05
Tiffany Dodds  2005-06, 2006-07
Shandra Doran  1995-96
Jaki Ellis  2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13
Kelci French  2008-09
Dione Lang  2014-15
Cheri Lansdown  1997-98
Jossann Mackenzie  2002-03
Jessie Niles  2015-16
Alena Omelchenko  2011-12
Kacey Otto  2012-13 rookie team
Tiffany Proudfoot  2006-17 rookie team
Darryl Roper  2008-09
Christy Torgerson  1998-99, 1999-00
Katrina von Sass  1992-93
Tawana Wardlaw  2003-04, 2005-06