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Blue-liner Caillin MacDonald is tied for the Bison scoring lead with three goals and six assists.

Bison rookie on a roll

Too young to drink, old enough to drive power play

CAITLIN MACDONALD was a little uncomfortable Tuesday morning at the University of Manitoba Bisons press conference at Smitty's restaurant and bar in Fort Richmond.

"I really shouldn't be in here," said the 17-year-old rookie blue-liner with women's hockey team.

Age-wise, she was right, but judging by the Balmoral Hall Blazer graduate's stats, her presence was definitely in order.

The fourth-ranked 8-2-0 Bisons are preparing for their final homestand before the Christmas break against the 6-2-2 Saskatchewan Huskies Friday and Saturday at the Max Bell Centre, and MacDonald has been a valuable spoke in their wheel of success. The Herd has won eight in a row and the last five of those were in extra time (four by shootout). The team's only losses were to the Alberta Pandas on Oct. 16 and 17.

MacDonald leads all rookies in Canada West (tied for 10th) with nine points on three goals and six assists.

That also ties her for the team lead with forward Addie Miles (3G, 6A).

"She is kind of a special talent," said Bisons coach Jon Rempel. "She has the physical tools to match up with girls five or six years ahead of her. She loves to play the game and it clearly shows, just the way she has been able to come out of the gate here. Caitlin is everything I thought she would be."

Early success

Her early success surprises her, though. "I didn't know what to expect coming in," said MacDonald. "I just worked my hardest and hoped things would go well. I didn't expect to be such a big offensive part of the team. I love the power play.

"It's like my favourite part of hockey, and Jon has given me the opportunity to play power play."

MacDonald credits Balmoral Hall's prep team with much of her success. "Balmoral Hall gave me the opportunity to play against an amazing amount of good players and good teams," she said. "I was playing against univer-

sity teams in Grade 10 when I was 14 years old, so I've been exposed to this level of hockey since a really young age. That has helped me to step into this level and accomplish some things already."

Rempel says that both 7 p.m., games this weekend are crucial. "Probably they (Saskatchewan) should be ranked higher than they are right now," he said. "They are ninth right now, but they can score goals and they're pretty solid. We'll have our hands full for sure."

Looking back over the first half of the schedule, MacDonald likes what she's seen.

"We've had some amazing success so far, and it is a young group. I think there is still some stuff we can work on. It is exciting to think of how much we have already accomplished and where we could be in the next few years."

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