

# Thunder rugby set for playoffs

## Women's team keep rolling, have bye week before hosting semi-final game

ANDREW DIRIENZO

Algonquin's women's rugby team capped a perfect regular season in which they shut out every team and outscored their opponents 387-0.

On top of that the Thunder beat S.S. Fleming Oct. 28 at home, winning 68-0. Leading the way for the team in the victory was centre Maya Williams.

"I was just determined because the last couple of games I wasn't at my top so I've been practicing really hard and I just wanted to improve," she said. "I had a mentality to do better than before."

Head coach Jen Boyd, who wasn't surprised by Williams' effort, says she "gets better every game and there's lots of room to improve."

With the win the Thunder finished 6-0 and scored the most points of any team in the OCAA.

Now the attention turns to the playoffs where the Thunder will look to improve on their second place finish in the East last year.

"I have no idea what the west is like," said director of athletic operations Ron Port on the Thunder's chances in the playoffs. "Last year Humber handled us pretty easily and it was our first year, but hopefully it's going to be a different story this year."

With the Thunder rugby program in just its second year it's a huge accomplishment to have this kind of success. Port isn't surprised though, saying Boyd and assistant coach Duncan McNaughton are a big part of the success.

Another part of the success was the Thunder not allowing a point all season long, something Boyd said the team was very deserving of.

"I think it's a real indication of how hard they've worked this year and it's just really well deserved," she said. "They really deserved having shut out the entire East all year. They've worked really, really hard so I'm happy for them that they were able to check that box off."

The team has enjoyed success throughout the season which has been attributed to the team's communication and team play. Williams once again re-iterated this after the game.

"We communicate a lot better than we used to," she said. "We have a team mentality, it's not just a single player's game."

Williams, who already received player of the week honours for the East earlier in the season, will most likely be the target of attention by many teams. She has scored numerous tries and is a physical force on the pitch. Williams, however, isn't concerned about being the centre of attention.

"I don't think [I'll be targeted] because everyone holds their weight," Williams said. "It's not just me or a single person that does everything so I think they should target everyone because it's not just me that holds the team out."

Boyd, too, said she isn't concerned with other teams targeting Williams adding she thinks they will know who she is and what position she plays.

"It's going to be hard to hide her," she said.

## Thunder men focus on post-season after loss to Trent in final regular season game

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The Trent Excalibur took advantage of a less than stellar effort by the Thunder men's rugby team, finishing with a 43-12 victory in what was the last game before the playoffs for both teams.

The Thunder came out flat and paid for it as Trent scored three tries by the 20-minute mark and took a 26-0 lead into the half. Despite the deficit, coach Geoff Tomlinson still found a positive to take from their play.

"They basically owned the second half of the first half," he said. "They played a more structured game, they kept the ball tight and they were able to pound it on them and make metres off the game."

Tomlinson and the Thunder weren't too happy with the officiating throughout during the game, even voicing their displeasure at times.

Tomlinson pointed to a few instances where penalties were called which he said he thought were questionable but said it didn't really matter whether or not they were penalties. He added he thought the players were mentally distracted early in the match due to the officiating.

Flanker Chass Maracle, who scored a try, didn't make any excuses for the loss.

"We weren't executing anything," he said. "We fell back, we should have kept going but we made too many mistakes."

Tomlinson didn't mince words when it came to evaluating his team's performance.

"They missed tackles, when it comes down to it," he said. "The problem was, no matter

what, we didn't communicate a couple of times and [we] had an overlap."

The majority of the game was played in close to freezing temperatures along with some powerful winds, making things very difficult on the players.

"In a game with the weather like this, with the wind and the wet and everything, it's got to come from a forward usually and you want your backs to make every tackle," Tomlinson said. "That back's hands get cold so it's harder for them to hold on to the ball."

"The wind really affects where they're going to stand. Our guys were better on kick returns than they were, but our kick chase was weak and we should have put more pressure on them but we didn't."

The Thunder, who finished third in the East with a 4-2 record, are now faced with a must-win game Nov. 3. Despite the team's loss, flanker Jim Nelles said he is confident in the team heading into the playoffs.

"If we have a strong week at practice I believe we should do well in the playoffs," he said.

According to Tomlinson, in games such as this where the team falls behind early, the team looks to number eight Dan Burley. He said this is because Burley, who is one of the captains, is "very fit, very fast and very tough."

Tomlinson said he knows what the team has to do in order to be successful in their next game.

"They need to cut down on errors. We have to play better in the first 20."