

WATER POLO



GORD WALDNER/The StarPhoenix

Saskatchewan water polo team assistant coach Ellen Rafferty, front, with players, right to left, Sydney Huebner, Kaylyn Jensen and Claudia Lenferna at the announcement of a major tournament coming to Saskatoon.

Major tourney in Saskatoon

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THE STARPHOENIX

Water polo will soon be making a big splash in Saskatoon.

In an announcement Friday, the under-22 women's national club championship will be played at the Shaw Centre from May 25 to 27.

It marks the first major water polo competition for the city.

"It's nice to bring in to Saskatchewan," said Team Saskatchewan member Sydney Huebner, 18, of Weyburn. "Usually the big tournaments are held in Calgary or over in Montreal. It's really

a big step forward and it's great."

The event will feature athletes that won gold medals at the 2011 Junior Pan-American Games as well as those hoping to compete for Canada at the 2016 Olympics.

"It's a way to showcase their talents and skills," said tournament director Evan Andrews. "It's a way to get noticed by the water polo community in Canada. And it's a way to participate in high-level play, which will, in the end, improve their play internationally."

Andrews said the Water Polo Saskatchewan Association won the right to host the competition after a successful

bid through Water Polo Canada. He added that a key factor in the bid was the Shaw Centre, which opened in 2010.

Saskatoon Mayor Don Atchison agrees.

"The fact is that this is the No. 1 aquatic centre in North America," he said. "We built it right the first time and it's great to have (the championship) here.

"It's just an exciting event and we look forward to having many people come to our community."

Saskatoon Sports Tourism is expecting the event to have a \$400,000 economic output for the city.

In addition to the women's championship, the Shaw

Centre will also begin hosting games from Water Polo Canada's National Development Premier League.

The men's 18-and-under six-team league launched earlier this month featuring teams in Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, Toronto and two in Montreal.

The Saskatoon squad, Team Saskatchewan, is facing the Vancouver Pacific Storm in two games scheduled today and Sunday. The next regular season series in Saskatoon will be played March 3 and 4 against Calgary.

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