The Atlantic Coast Rugby League Championship between Maryland and North Carolina delivered everything a championship is supposed to with eight lead changes and great individual performances, and there was a healthy crowd on hand at Charlotte RFC's park to take it in.

Maryland opened the scoring with a converted David DeMoss Try, and UNC rebutted with an Evan Rose try and Philip Rouse penalty to claim an 8-7 lead.

Maryland opted to play a territorial game, and after a kick cleared the Terrapin lines, No. 8 Richard Hwang intercepted a pass from a UNC wing, intended for the Tar Heel fullback, and dove in for his first score of the day, pulling Maryland up 14-8, but a Harry Briffitt try just before the half gave UNC a 15-14 lead at intermission.

North Carolina continued to press right out of the break, and captain Alex Lee reeled off a 60-meter run that ended deep in Maryland's territory and set up a converted try to extend the Tar Heel lead to 22-14.

Hwang, later named the finals MVP, then sparked a 14-point Maryland spurt with a bulldozing run for a try, running over or past all comers. The second score in that sequence was a penalty try awarded after a UNC high tackle. North Carolina's propensity for penalties would become a theme in the games latter stages.

Maryland tried to slow down UNC's high-octane backs attack with some methodical possessions, and it worked for most of the second half, but Simon Wubben was able to dot down one try on the end of an impressive UNC backline movement to pull the Tar Heels back

ahead at 29-28.

Maryland flyhalf Matias Cima then slotted a penalty to give the Terps a 31-29 lead. Rouse retaliated, giving North Carolina a 34-31 advantage, but it was short-lived. Cima, ACRL co-player of the year, put the Terps ahead to stay with his second penalty of the night after UNC's Lee, the conference's other co-player of the year, was sin-binned for a dangerous tackle.

Maryland, whose scrum was powerfully superior all night, stole a UNC put-in and scored one last try at full time to take the 39-32 victory.

Maryland is not a traditional rugby power, and their conversion from also-ran to champion has been a quick one.

"It feels amazing," said MVP Hwang. "The fact that I went through that with all my classmates from freshman year, I think most of the guys are still here, and we went through three hard years, and to finally be competitive and win our league is awesome."

As ACRL champs, Maryland advances to the Bowling Green pool of the Sweet 16. They draw Florida, champions of the South, Saturday May 30.