Blaine Martin's second-half hat trick fueled Brown's comeback against Michigan. (Thom Mitchell photo)

Bowling Green, OH - The Women's DI College Championship has already seen a couple of nail biters during round one, and the Brown v Michigan game has to be the most dramatic. With minutes on the clock, a Blaine Martin hat trick helped Brown rally back to win 32-29 and take the berth to the quarterfinals against UVA.

At different points in the game, each team had a 12-point lead on the other. Brown established the first double-digit point differential, relying on its stronger backs to take a 17-5 lead during the half. Michigan's first try came from a penalty play, and its second came from a second-attempt maul from the five meter (the first was held up), to pull the score to 17-12 at the break.

"The Michigan forwards are very big, very strong, and they owned us in the scrum," Brown coach Kerri Heffernan said. "The story of this match was we couldn't get possession. They were tenaciously strong, and we have a relatively small pack, and we paid the price."

In the second half, Michigan continued to threaten the try line, and the Brown defense did well to hold up a couple of scores. In the backs, Michelle Vander Ploeg did a great job of stifling the attack on defense.

Brown was weakened with a yellow card, and that slight advantage allowed Michigan to tie the game after a stolen lineout, then surge ahead to a 24-17 lead with a try in the corner. UM continued its assault in the forwards, spun a Brown scrum at midfield, and used the opportunity to work down the field for a corner try, 29-17.

"With 10 minutes to go, I thought we were goners," Heffernan said.

But the Brown forwards won some key ball for the team and some misdirection work in the lineout caught Michigan off guard. Blaine Martin finished off a Shakeela Faulkner breakaway for a try (29-22), then the All American center repeated the effort off a beautiful pass from flyhalf Chelsea Garber, 29-27.

With time winding down, Faulkner and Marissa Reitsma got the ball to midfield. Plagued by messy work around the breakdown all game, the penalties started to go Brown's way, and the opportunities allowed Martin to create some space on attack and score the winning try to complete her hat trick, 32-29.

True to Michigan's never-say-die attitude, UM ended the game on Brown's try line. Michigan was one of the strongest Midwest teams the tournament has seen in recent years, and definitely played better than its #13 seed. Michigan could have very easily advanced today had a couple of those held-up tries found their way to the ground. But to Brown's credit, the team showed that when the pressure's on, all-stars like Martin and Faulkner can make some magic happen.

Brown will now play Virginia, which defeated UC Davis 37-17 today, in tomorrow's quarterfinal. "We started our top 15 today, and gave away at least 50 lbs in the pack," Heffernan said after the punishing game against UM. "The biggest thing I'm worried about right now is my front row."

Brown retired to the ice baths and recovered in the pool knowing that tomorrow's game against UVA would be just as difficult. As the competition continues to intensify, Brown must become more tenacious in the contact area and clean up its work around the breakdown. UVA is familiar with Brown's strengths and weaknesses, having beat the Final Four team during spring break one month ago, and tomorrow's game promises to be an exciting rematch.