Written by Jackie Finlan
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Manassas, VA - The Boston Irish certainly had their work cut out for them during the Men's DI Club Championship quarterfinals, battling a tough Norfolk side looking to better its Elite 8 finish in 2010. But a sustained second-half effort allowed the Wolfhounds to take and retain the lead, and earn a trip to Glendale, Colo., in two weeks time.

Expert kicking helped Boston Irish to win over Norfolk. (Declan Prenty)

With rain trickling on the field, Norfolk's forwards dominated the first half on both territory and possession. The Wolfhounds did well to corral the hefty center attack, as did Cincinnati on Saturday, but Norfolk was quicker to adjust its attack on Sunday, sending the ball through the backline to keep Boston moving around the field.

It rained during the first half, which meant a lot of handling errors and shifting the play into the forwards. The scrums were pretty even, with Boston having a slight edge in weight, but both were very technical in the front row. Thanks to the direction of assistant coach Jeremy Frayne, Norfolk's scrum provided the best attacking platform for the squad. Boston did well to disrupt Norfolk's lineout in the first half, getting up quickly and getting a hand on the throw-in.

Boston took the first lead when flyhalf Mark Tutton slotted the first of his two penalties from about 45 meters out. Norfolk rallied back with the first half's lone try, when Steven Terjesen barreled over the line for the five-pointer and two-point lead.

"We had a chat at halftime and we said we needed to start playing some rugby," Boston Irish coach Dave Gonzales said. "We needed to advance the ball up field through the forwards and backs, and give it a go."

In the first 20 minutes of the second half, Boston got some nice linebreaks but were unable to finish or convert the drives into points. Norfolk's backline attack, which is typically rooted in their

hefty centers, found little success – similar to its game against Cincinnati – as Boston's defense was well aware of Norfolk's game plan.

Tutton's expert placement kept Norfolk on its back foot, continually having to recover deep kicks into their own territory.

"He's probably the best player on their team," Norfolk No. 8 Fred Wintermantell said. "He'd see the space and push the ball there.

"In the second half, the ball seemed to bounce their way," Wintermantell continued. "We ended up playing a lot more defense in our half. Some of our guys didn't know how much time was left and started doing individual stuff, which led to some stupid penalties."

That's when Tutton added another penalty kicks for its first lead, 6-5. The halfback did miss three attempts at goal, which kept the game close but continually frustrated Norfolk. A great day from the Wolfhound forwards, led by captain Peter Lennon, was capped off with a try from flanker Jesse Borle, giving Boston the 11-5 lead and a little room to breathe in the third quarter.

But Norfolk, eager to better to get out of its end, pressured Boston's line in the last quarter.

"We were pounded by the Norfolk forwards and backs, but withstood the onslaught for a very anxious 20 minutes," Gonzales said. "I was very happy that we absorbed wave after wave of attack."

"With five minutes to go, we were five meters out banging on the door," Wintermantell recalled. "We were so close to scoring and then would turn the ball over. It was a bad let-down."

Gonzales credited the work of his pack, who were phenomenal in the lineout and held their own in the scrum. He also tipped his hat to outside center Treeve Currie and of course Tutton.

“There’s a lot of disappointment,” Wintermantell said. “We left everything on the field, but we wanted to make the Final Four. We got here last year, but just couldn’t get over the edge.”

Boston Irish is happy to be returning to its winning ways, especially after dropping down from the Super League last year, and Gonzales was confident in his squad’s building performance toward nationals. The Wolfhounds will face Glendale in the semifinals. The Raptors beat Belmont Shore 28-8 in its quarterfinal match.