

## 2nd Half Pays Dividends for Glendale

Written by Jackie Finlan  
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A fantastic game evolved between Glendale and Beantown during the Women's Premier League semifinals today. It took the better part of the first half for the Raptors to find their groove, but once they did, they pulled out a 21-15 victory and berth to the final against reigning champ Berkeley.



The majority of the first half belonged to Beantown. When the forwards weren't pummeling through the fringes or flyers like Ashley Clancy and Katie O'Malley weren't slipping down the sideline, Kelly Seary's boot ate up territory, or the scrum was turning over ball.

"They played way better in the first half," Glendale coach Mark Bullock said. "They were the aggressive team; we were not. They kept the ball in hand, and we hardly had it. They stamped their game plan on us, and we didn't respond until the last eight minutes. Fortunately, halftime came without any undue damage."

Beantown put the first points on the board 22 minutes in after a long series attacking within the 22. Glendale defended valiantly, while Seary waited for play to work back to the center of the field. Then a nicely set ruck allowed Seary to drop back and nail a nice dropgoal, amidst crowd cheers, for the 3-0 lead.

Five minutes later, outside center Evan Hoese made a nice break from Beantown's end and hit Ashley Clancy at the perfect moment for the sprint to the try zone, 8-0 lead.

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But with the half winding down, Glendale started getting their hands on the ball but the line was frequently flat. Glendale got on the board after Seary cleared and fullback Tonya Ansel fielded the kick cleanly. She made some nice ground getting past the sideline defense and some quick ball followed. Stolba hit wing Kandis Ruiz back inside and just as she was brought down, Stolba got the offload and took off for the try line. Clancy did a great job in the chase, preventing Stolba from centering the ball, but the flyhalf still nailed the kick for the 8-7 scoreline into half.

Bullock let his team know that they weren't playing to their potential during the halftime talk.

"It wasn't about our effort, but about how we launched our defense, how we played the ball in contact," Bullock said. "We got our hands on the ball and were able to maintain possession, which gave us opportunities downfield, whether penalty kicks or dropkicks. That was the change – we got the ball."

Bullock saw a change in attitude almost immediately in the second half. The Raptors had a good series of phases that finally produced a Stolba penalty and 10-8 lead.

"That provided a mental boost," Bullock said. "To be fair, these teams have been in the WPL before, played at this championship; we haven't. There may have been some nerves, unsure whether we belong here. I don't know if that was going on, but it's a possibility."

Stolba's boot was absolutely key in the second half. The ultimate difference-maker for Glendale, she continued to test the backfield, and the mistakes started to occur – dropped balls, knock-ons – that kept Glendale in Beantown's end. Although Glendale had issue getting the ball wide, a tribute to Beantown's tireless defense, they got some good go-forward from forwards like flanker Joanna Kitlinski, No. 8 Taryn Brenna and prop Sarah Chobot in the second 40.

Hooker Kitt Wagner was always good for a hard line up the middle and she helped set up the next score. After breaking through the line, she chipped over Clancy. The ball was misplayed near the tryline, worked wide and was eventually dotted down by Brennan, 15-8.

At that moment, Beantown subbed in Amy Daniels at inside center. She amped up the physical

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element, and Glendale no longer had that striking lane through the middle. Shortly after the Eagle's introduction, Beantown found themselves scrumming on Glendale's line, but a turnover and clearing kick ended what was their most promising attack thus far.

Instead, Glendale marched the ball to Beantown's end and after a couple attempts at punching over the line, Stolba recreated Seary's first-half dropgoal to go up 18-8. And then with 10 minutes to go, Stolba slotted Glendale's final points for the 21-8 lead.

Beantown kept up the pressure, however, and replacement wing Ali Pappas intercepted a flat pass in her own end. A series of penalties allowed Beantown to continue downfield and prop Mari Wallace dotted down. Emily Jones' conversion made it 21-15. With minutes remaining, Stolba kept kicking and Beantown ended on a couple of knock-ons.

One more game to go – Berkeley in the final.

“It's the rubber match,” Bullock said. “We've split our matches – really hotly contested, not decided until the end of the game. We have the opportunity to say who deserves to be champion, and I expect that it will be a challenging game for us.”

Bullock indicated that Berkeley brings a game that showcases their really athletic players, who can play a more expansive game than Glendale. To combat, Glendale will simply be efficient in their strengths.

“All we're doing right now is laying groundwork for our first season in the WPL – how we play, operate in the league,” Bullock said. “Within our team, we're finding the right players who can play the way we want to play.”

The strategy has been working thus far, and now Glendale has the opportunity to make history: Win the WPL championship in their debut year.