

## San Diego Cruises to Semi Win

Written by Jackie Finlan

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It was a battle of playing styles during the San Diego v Keystone Women's Premier League bowl semifinal today. San Diego preferred to swing the ball wide, while Keystone liked to keep it in tight. In the end, the Surfers' expansive style prevailed, and San Diego ended with the biggest win of the day, across all three divisions, 47-0.



Outside center Emilie Bydwell and wing Ryan Carlyle each had hat tricks, while lock Lauren Daly and replacement wing Mollie Martin contributed five-pointers. Val Griffeth added five points on a conversion and penalty, and Kirstin Hartos added a two-pointer.

“We clicked today,” San Diego coach Richie Walker said. “I changed our game plan based on our last year in the WPL. I wanted to try some different, and it took us half a season to get used to it.”

The biggest adjustment was not having the forwards run to every ruck and instead having a three-pod system that preserved the team's energy more efficiently. It all came together against Keystone and showcased a set of superior athletes.

“All of the teams in the WPL are strong, which is a good competition to be in, and it really comes down to the day as to who's better,” Walker said. “Once we scored, Keystone came right back at us straightaway. They pressured us with their maul, and only a couple of mistakes, knock-ons, handed the ball back to us. Otherwise, it could have been extremely close.”

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Keystone's scrums were also strong, and the Pennsylvania side attacked well around the ruck area. But the pressure came in bursts, and San Diego controlled the majority of the match. Daly was particularly strong around the field, and she's been the most poignant addition to the Surfers this season. Leaders Julia Anderson and Marea Blue led the charge and provide great role models to which the team responds.

It was a nice win for San Diego, which made a very competitive conference even more heated during the league season. Unfortunately for the Surfers, they were on the losing end of several single-digit defeats and were relegated to the bottom tier of championship competition.

"For the girls, since the object at the beginning of the season was to win the WPL, it was a little tough to not play in the top tier," Walker added. "We just had to turn it around and have our goals revolve around the team and not about winning the league. So far, we've done that in the first game."

The best San Diego can do is finish fifth, but they're not taking their match against New York – a team they've beaten twice this season – lightly.

"They're very tough up front," Walker said. "We worry about their forwards, who love to work around the ruck, so we need to move the ball away from them."

"They're number 10 [Mary McCarthy], too," Walker added. "She's young, but looked very comfortable in her role this morning. Their inside backs strike well, too, and if we give their outside backs room, they can really finish."

So the Surfers might be slightly disappointed in where they're ending the season, but they'll settle for nothing less than 5<sup>th</sup> place on Sunday. New York, which defeated the D.C. Furies 22-17 in their bowl semifinal, are their only barrier to achieving that goal.