

Severn River to Play in the D2 Final

Written by Jackie Finlan

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Best game of the day during the Women's D2 Club Championship belongs to Severn River and Beantown. It was an intense forward-heavy battle between two aggressive teams, but the Maryland side prevailed with a 19-5 victory and berth to the final.



Severn advanced to the semifinals with a 12-10 win over the Las Vegas Slots, and the main criticism in yesterday's quarterfinal was their timidity in the first half. That wasn't the case today.

"We respect Beantown," Severn River coach Pamela Gouws said. "We played them at Saranac and knew they were going to be tough. We came out on the attack today, fixed some of errors from yesterday and played our game plan."

From the kickoff, Severn River retained good possession in Beantown's half and battered a solid defense. But then No. 8 Candace Coston quick-tapped through a penalty and caught some slow-adjusting defenders off guard, making good ground close to the 22 meter. A sustained punch-and-go series allowed the team to inch closer to the tryline, and Jaclyn Meslopp finally dove over for the try, which flyhalf Meredith McAlister converted, 7-0.

Severn River relied on their offloads in contact to keep the ball in play, and Beantown attempted to adjust by putting two bodies on the ballcarrier. It worked to an extent but resulted in a lot of scrambling.

"It seemed like they didn't like to get involved in the ruck," Gouws said. "By having a lot of

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pick-and-goes and offloads around the point of contact, we got them engaged in the rucks. They weren't able to just set a flat line on defense and we took them out of their game plan."

That's not to say Beantown weren't good ruckers – they were. And they got good forward momentum from flanker Tara Roberts around the fringe. Beantown had a good scoring opportunity from a nice kick downfield, but an unfortunate turnover handed Severn a scrum. McCalister made a nice weakside break that continued with more offloads in traffic and some slipped tackles down the sideline. Wing Carmen Farmer found enough room down the line to dive over the try line for the first of her two tries. McCalister's conversion made it 14-0. Both point scorers had excellent games.

"This is Carmen's first season," Gouws said. "She's in her 30s and never played rugby before. She's a superb athlete and a great finishing wing. Meredith had a wonderful game as well. She did a great job controlling the backline and setting up plays."

Beantown got into Severn's end when flyhalf Anne Venner kicked downfield and her side turned over the subsequent ruck. A scrum soon followed, the ball shipped wide, but Beantown couldn't straighten their lines and were smothered on the far side of the field. But then a couple of punches later and Anne Paschke was over for the try, 14-5.

Severn River looked like they were going to score again early in the second half, camped on Beantown's line and running punch after punch at the defense. Beantown absorbed it very well, and Severn missed some opportunities to ship it to backs unguarded.

Beantown was eventually awarded a scrum, but Venner's clearing kick only went about 10 meters to the middle of the field and was returned quickly. The ball worked wide to Farmer, who got around the corner for the score, 19-5.

Both sides' backlines didn't get as much ball as they should have, but when Beantown had the opportunity to counter off a missed pass or loose ball, players knocked on or made some error that would hand possession back.

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Severn wasn't perfect either, and they received two yellow cards for entering through the sides.

"Beantown is a really good mauling team," Gouws said. "Players would get spun around, and when they came out, they didn't know where they were and just pounded back in. I told them to pause, take a minute, then come back in through the back foot. We panicked a little, and those were just a couple of the mistakes – along with ball placement, keeping our feet – that we won't make tomorrow."

Severn River played at nationals two years ago, but that was a different team then. That team traveled light, and this year, about 35 girls made the trip.

"We're all smiling that we're in the championship, and they're excited that we've gotten here," Gouws said. "It's been a step-by-step process, and it's taken everyone to get here. If you have a belief like that, where you include everyone on the team, you can win."

Severn River will play Pittsburgh in the final tomorrow. Pittsburgh held off a tenacious Ft. Miami side to a 3-0 win.