Pittsburgh returns to the Women's DII Club Championship final, but it hasn't been a pretty road thus far. Last year's finalist won their quarterfinal 21-12 over Norfolk, and then outlasted Ft. Miami 3-0 in today's semifinal for the berth.

The story of this semifinal was penalties and unforced errors. It was an incredibly frustrating match, with neither side able to retain good, quality possession. The forwards were pretty even, both mobile enough to truck through the open field. Both sides' backlines could not turn their attack upfield or connect with supporters with consistency.

For Pittsburgh, their offense relies on players inserting through the line at pace, but the referee repeatedly called forward passes on what looked like standard flat passes.

"It was definitely frustrating," Pittsburgh captain Jaime Filipek said. "The ref made a lot of calls on either side, a lot of questionable forward passes, but we adjusted well. The biggest difference, however, was in the breakdown. We were able to cycle through better."

Much of the action stayed between the 22s, but Pittsburgh was able to get within striking distance when Ft. Miami's Maureen Arcila was sent off for a repeated infringement. The call was made within flyhalf Patricia DiBasilio's range, and she slotted a penalty at the 22-minute mark for the 3-0 lead and only score of the game.

Pittsburgh ran into penalty trouble as well and saw flanker Aoibheann Cline and fullback Donita

Thomas sin binned within 10 minutes of each other. Down a player for 20 minutes, Pittsburgh was still able to get downfield and threaten another score.

“Just keep fighting,” is what Filipek told her team when they were down. “Before the game, we said you just need desire and determination. You don’t know what’s going to happen with the wind or the ref, so control what you can: Get to that next play faster, make a difference, want the ball more than the other team.”

While the attitude was there, the execution was not.

“We got stuffed in a lot of ways in the first game,” Filipek said. “We wanted to get our bangers better, get the ball wider, and we didn’t do that in either of these games. But in both games, our defense really showed through. We made some good tackles, and when we had overloads, we supported out wide and stopped that attack. That was definitely a highlight.”

If Pittsburgh wants to take home the trophy tomorrow, they’re going to have to clean up their game.

“We need to get over our nerves,” Filipek said. “This is our third championship final, having lost two to Raleigh. We need to play loose and with confidence. We definitely have the talent but sometimes not the mentality.”

Pittsburgh watched Severn River – and vice versa – this afternoon, and knows they have a physical match ahead. Tomorrow will determine if three time’s a charm.