West Shore United is heading back to U19 Nationals for the third time in four seasons after winning the Mid-Atlantic Championship 25-24 over the Maryland Exiles in dramatic fashion Sunday.

Recent history lulled West Shore, '08 and '09 MARFU champs, into a bad start. “The EPRU has won by a large margin over the Potomac in the past three seasons, so I think we were anticipating winning and we came in a little bit flat,” said United coach Sean Robinson.

The Exiles scored first and would never trail in the opening half. Tied 12-12, West Shore had arisen from their slumber started playing better. United was threatening to jump ahead near intermission when a pass deep in Exiles territory was picked off and raced the other direction to give Maryland a 19-12 lead and all the momentum going into the break.

“We had to make some adjustments at halftime, just reminded them of our discipline around the fringes and tackling low and we came out in the second half and really poured it on,” said Robinson. “We had a lot more intensity.”

West Shore scored back-to-back unanswered tries to take a 22-19 lead, but due in part to their regular kicker, Aaron Skonecki, having a bum ankle, both conversions were missed.

The Exiles, down a single score, were threatening deep in West Shore’s end with time quickly winding down, but committed a penalty, giving United a chance to clear its lines and take a lineout in safety. The throw-in was secured by West Shore.

“All we had to do was keep possession and kick it out,“ said Robinson. “Instead of driving it and trying to eke the clock out with our forwards and do what we had to do, we throw it out to our backline and it goes from our flyhalf to our inside center to our outside center, and he tries to go to the wing, and sure enough, he throws a lazy pass and their guys intercept it again and take it under the post.”

West Shore trailed 24-22 with what Robinson estimates was about a minute left on the clock.

The Exiles fielded a well-taken restart, but a determined West Shore defense shoved the receiver out of bounds to earn a lineout. It was taken cleanly taken and West Shore charged forward. Maryland’s defense repelled them, but was called for offsides on the setpiece. Skonecki, with his bum ankle, elected to take a shot at goal and victory.

“He said, ‘I want the kick‘,” recalled Robinson. “He said he didn’t want to think about, he took two quick steps back and kicked it, and he kicked it right down the middle, and somehow we won. It was crazy.”

Robinson said the Exiles acted as classy in defeat as he can only hope his team would have, giving United words of encouragement.

Awaiting West Shore in Salt Lake City will be vaunted Highland.