

Wolf Pack Edges Blues at Canadian Championships

Written by Patrick McCarry
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Prairie Wolf Pack avoided the heartbreak of a blown lead after they scored a late try to defeat Ontario Blues in the first round of the Canadian Rugby Championship. The Wolf Pack were looking comfortable at 24-10 before the Blues took advantage of their forwards' dominance to turn the tie on its head.

Andrew Cho, at hooker, and scrum-half James Buchanan put in outstanding performances, with captain Ryan Smith and Nick Blevins in fine, marauding form in the backline. Duncan Maguire and Kyle Gilmore were the try-scoring stars with two apiece and the clutch kicking of Christian Wolff saw the Wolf Pack home with six points to spare.

The first half suggested an easy win for the Wolf Pack at Calgary Rugby Park as they retained possession and forced errors from the Blues. The score was 17-10 at the break and another try for the home side led to a 14 point lead with 30 minutes left on the clock. However, with a slight wind in their favor and a pack that was imposing its sizeable presence, the Blues stormed back.

A 15-point scoring blitz, which included a well taken try from Seb Pearson, saw the game swing in the Blues' favor and the score was 25-24 with 10 minutes to go.

"We expected [the Blues] to kick to the channels in the second half but they held onto the ball and forced us back," said Wolf Pack Head Coach Col Jeffs. "They bashed us at the scrum."

Jeffs praised the scrambling qualities of a team that lost influential players such as Jeremy Kyne and Nanyak Dala through injury in the first half. The ability to scrap and fight for the ball saw the pressure build on the Blues in the closing stages. With eight minutes to go the Blues squandered possession after a sloppy lineout and the Wolf Pack struck with the clinching score.

Wolff added the extras and a converted try was the requirement if the Blues were to make a final comeback. Their forwards drove them up-field but errand passing was their downfall and the home side held out for a 31-25 win.

"The boys did well," said Jeffs. "I'm very pleased with the effort and it gives us something to build on."

Blues manager Mark Winokur said, "There were a number of positives to take from a day that was ultimately disappointing. Our forwards really pushed theirs around and dominated the scrum. We came away with two bonus points too, which may prove vital in a five-game competition. Conor McCann, who is only 18 years old and was in his first CRC game, did excellently at center and was the man of the match. Our biggest problem was turnovers through dropped ball and bad passes. Nonetheless, we go into the next game against BC with optimism."

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Prairie Wolf Pack: 31

Tries: Maguire 2, Gilmore 2, Blevins

Convs: Wolff 2, Marcoux

Ontario Blues: 25

Tries: Piatek, Marshall, Pearson, McCann

Convs: Piatek

Pens: Piatek