

SPORTS & LEISURE

Bulldogs claim Founders Cup crown

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

After easily rolling through the opposition leading up to Sunday's final of the Founders Cup championship last week, the Halton Hills Bulldogs were expecting a tough test from their rivals from Mimico.

And the 1,800-or-so spectators at the MasterCard Centre in Etobicoke were treated to a cliff-hanger as the host Mountaineers took on the favoured Bulldogs with the Canadian Jr. B lacrosse title at stake.

In a tense contest that featured stingy defences, superb goaltending and just four penalty minutes (two to each team), the Ontario-champion 'Dogs secured their first-ever Founders Trophy with a 4-3 victory when late-season acquisition Dylan Gilbert scored at the 7:35 mark of the sudden-death second overtime period to end the three-hour thriller.

"The whole season wasn't easy, so to win it this way just makes it all feel so much better," said Bulldogs' captain Nik Matwijszyn, who along with teammates Shane Scott, Nic Grasby, Kevin Jenkins and Clark De Geer played their final game of junior eligibility.

"The intensity was just killer the last couple of periods. Going into sudden death, you don't know what's going to happen. It could be a fluky goal or something and thankfully it worked out for us.

Growing up in Brampton, we always had a rivalry with Mimico and when I came to Halton Hills it just got worse. There's no better way to win the national championship than to do it in Mimico."

Both clubs steam-rolled through the preliminary round and semifinals with 6-0 records, as Halton Hills outscored its opponents 84-17, crushing the Kamloops Venom 11-2 Saturday evening in Long Branch to earn a spot in the final.

The Bulldogs again took the early lead Sunday against Mimico, with Brendan MacDonald and Kody Lyons scoring



Halton Hills Bulldogs goalkeeper Ryan Kelly foils a scoring attempt by Mimico's Josh Barrick in overtime Sunday during the Founders Cup championship game at the MasterCard Centre in Etobicoke as defender Justin Reid (66) looks on. The Bulldogs earned their first-ever national Jr. B lacrosse championship with a suspenseful 4-3 double-overtime victory.

Photos by Eamonn Maher

first-period goals to take a 2-1 lead into the intermission. Scott's marker early in the second stanza would be the last Halton Hills' goal for the next 50 minutes of action, and the Mounties forced overtime by scoring with 4:45 remaining in regulation.

Mounties' netminder Eric Penney faced 65 shots in total, while Bulldog counterpart Ryan Kelly made 35 saves, including a couple of sensational breakaway stops in overtime.

The drama intensified after the first 10-minute overtime period went scoreless and sudden death then came into play, with Grasby ringing a shot off the Mimico post.

Soon after, with the shot clock close to expiring, Gilbert came out from behind the net and got a clear look on goal, wiring the ball between Penney's legs to send the hundreds of Halton Hills supporters into a frenzy.

"It was a broken play. I came around looking for someone in the middle and there hadn't been a lot of room in the middle all day, but they gave me a little space to roll it in and I took it," said Gilbert.

"There wasn't much time left and all I heard was 'shot, shot,' and that's why I let it go. Luckily it went in, and after that, it's all a blur."

It's not the first national championship title for many of the Bulldogs, who've won at the youth levels, but the

magnitude of the Founders Cup triumph was obviously much bigger, judging from the emotional scenes on the floor during the post-game celebrations.

Having come back from a 2-0 series deficit against the Clarington Green Gaels in the OLA Eastern Conference to win in five games, followed by another roller-coaster matchup with the Elora Mohawks for the provincial championship, the 'Dogs were dealt some terrible off-the-floor news during the Founders Cup.

Their longtime trainer, Andrew Groombridge, who will be inducted into the Lambton Sarnia Sports Hall of Fame next month, learned of the passing of his mother. He returned home to Sarnia for a couple of days but was back at his post for the weekend games to collect his fifth Canadian championship and the team members wore a G on their helmets as a show of support.

"After our first game over Onondaga, we were on the bus, happy with our win, and then (coach) Blaine (McCaulley) told us that Andrew's mother had died. It hit the team hard," said O'Connor, who was named to the tournament all-star team.

"So to see him come back to the team two days after that, it really inspired us. The G on our helmets showed that we're not here for us as individuals. We're here as a family."



Overtime hero Dylan Gilbert (right) celebrates the Founders Trophy-clinching goal Sunday with teammates Michael Licata and Mike MacDonald (17) just over seven minutes into the second overtime period in their 4-3 win over the host Mimico Mountaineers.

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