



Mustangs cheer way to fourth at the national championships

MD rebounds from shaky start with stellar round three effort

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

The Mustang cheerleaders refused to finish their national debut with anything less than their absolute best.

Rebounding from a couple of lacklustre performances at the inaugural Power Cheer Nationals at Toronto's International Centre, MD's 28-member team engineered a stellar showing to win the third and final round.

Saturday afternoon's dynamite routine - which was on par with the school's provincial championship effort two weeks earlier - allowed the local ladies to move up three spots in the all-around standings to place fourth in the large high school varsity division.

"Jumping up that much in one round is particularly unheard of in cheerleading. Overall, I'm very happy with our performance," said Stacey Farrell, a former cheerleader through the early '90s who now acts as the team's staff advisor alongside Wendy Beriault. "One judge came up to us afterwards and said 'I see why you won the provincials'. Saturday afternoon was the real Mustangs."

MD's hopes for placing among the top teams looked rather bleak Friday afternoon - when in opening-round competition a lack of cohesion and a few ill-timed crashes (though somewhat subtle to the untrained eye) met with a disappointing eighth.

Recalled Farrell, "I'm not sure if they were just tired from a long season and the provincials having been just two weeks earlier, but they didn't seem mentally focused enough."

However, rather than pointing fingers or packing in their proverbial tents, the Mustangs came back with a slightly-improved performance the following morning and then stepped things up considerably at crunch time to take round three and overall finish within two points of Oakville's T.A. Blakelock Tigers - their long-time rivals, who wound up claiming bronze.

Ashleigh McGuinness is lifted by MD cheerleading teammates during this past weekend's Power Cheer Nationals at Toronto's International Centre. MD placed fourth.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Oakridge captured gold, while silver went to Saunders.

"I'm so proud of the way they handled things after Friday. There was no blaming anybody and after a few minutes they just re-focused for Saturday," Farrell explained. "They really wanted to end the year on a high note and that's what they did."

MD was led by co-captains Tegan Miller and Jenny Smith — the only two graduating members of the team. Making up the rest of this year's squad were Tara Anderson, Heather Bray, Chrissy Chadwick, Kristen Deumer, Jen Drewlo, Cailin Drijber, Justyne Jeffrey, Laine MacDonald, Val Massel, Ashleigh McGuinness, Cheryl Merritt, Kristine Morrow, Sally Nicholls, Katie O'Reilly, Lyndsay Richardson, Alicia Robinson, Brittany Roskam, Alex Rundle, Brittany Russell, Katherine Russell, Rachelle Saevil, Ashley Samuelson, Sarah Samuelson and Amy Williams.

The Mustangs are coached by Andy Cecchini and assistants Meredith Craigie and Amy Newell.

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OFSAA qualifying bid falls a point short for EC Drury duo

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

One lousy point.

That's all that kept an E.C. Drury Spartan duo from reaching the innermost sanctum of high school badminton competition.

At GHAC championship play in Hamilton Wednesday, senior men's doubles partners Ron Massey and James Wellstead stood on the threshold of qualifying for OFSAA - leading a pair from Burlington's Assumption 20-18 in the battle for second place.

But Halton's silver medalists just couldn't deliver the knockout blow, surrendering three unanswered points and hitting into the net on a long match-ending rally which allowed their regional rivals to triumph 21-20.

The OFSAA qualifying clash served as payback for the Spartans' 21-19 come-from-behind win in the Halton Championship semifinals just one week earlier. "This (narrow defeat) is going to linger with us," said Massey.

Added Wellstead, "It's frustrating to get that close (and not win). They were just sharper than us at the end."

The loss was doubly disappointing since the local duo had battled back from an early 11-4 deficit to put themselves in a position to advance.

Overcoming slow starts has been a trend for the long-time partners - who've held court together since the ninth grade - and it's what helped them reach GHAC after two unsuccessful bids in 2000 and 2001.

But Drury's representatives deviated from their traditional course in round one Wednesday - striking early against a pair from Burlington's M.M. Robinson and hanging on for a 21-14 decision.

From there, they met Oakville's Loyola Hawks - provincial silver medalists last spring - and offered a much stiffer challenge compared to the regional finals.

In fact, the Spartans held a 12-8 advantage in game two and threatened to take the top-ranked duo to the limit. But the Hawks had other ideas and delivered a fierce finish to win 15-12 and capture gold.

"We definitely gained some ground on them (Loyola)," said Massey. "Not qualifying for OFSAA was disappointing, but overall we've got to be happy with our season."

Massey and Wellstead are the only Drury badminton players in recent memory to make it to GHAC.

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