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Pee Wee Mustangs forge silver at hockey championships

By [freelancer](#) on March 20, 2009



Photo submitted

Josh Harlow of the Whitehorse Mustangs is right on the doorstep of the New Westminster Royals' goal as he tries to backhand a shot past netminder Dom von Schoenberg. The New Westminster goaltender was up to the challenge as he helped the Royals defeat the Mustangs 5-2 for the B.C. Pee Wee Tier 3 championship Thursday in Trail, B.C. (top) Whitehorse's Dominic Korn tries to get off a shot against New Westminster Royals goaltender Dom von Schoenberg in Thursday's championship game at the B.C. Pee Wee Tier 3 championships in Trail, B.C. The Royals rallied from an early 2-0 deficit to defeat the Mustangs 5-2. Photos by GUY BERTRAND/TRAIL DAILY TIMES

TRAIL - The Whitehorse Pee Wee Mustangs lost a heartbreaker in Trail, B.C. Thursday. But they're still heading home with silver medals from the B.C. Tier 3 provincial hockey championships.

The Mustangs were in the gold medal final against the New Westminster Royals with a tournament record of 4 wins and one loss.

It looked promising early for the Whitehorse club, though it was not to be.

New Westminster is usually lost amid its towering Lower Mainland neighbours like Burnaby, Langley, Surrey and Vancouver.

But on Thursday afternoon, the community was standing tall after the Royals claimed the Tier 3 championship with a 5-2 win over the Mustangs at the Cominco Arena.

Brandon Delgrosso, who led the tournament with 13 goals, fired a hat trick for New Westminster, which overcame an early 2-0 deficit to post its fifth straight win of the tournament.

Ryan Wilkinson and Josh Lauener had the other Royal goals while Wyatt Gale and Riley Pettitt scored for the Mustangs.

It was a perfect ending for the Royals who had to knock off the defending B.C. double-A champion Seafair in regional playoffs just to get to the provincials in Trail.

Despite making the long trek back to Whitehorse with a silver medal instead of gold, Mustang head coach Kerry Pettitt said the team came a long way from an 0-4 appearance at the 2008 B.C. Pee Wee provincials in Dawson Creek.

"If you had asked us at the beginning of the tournament, yes we believed we could compete, but we weren't sure if we had enough heart and depth," he said in an interview after earning the silver. "The team performed beyond what we expected."

Nearby in Creston, B.C., the Whitehorse Bantam Mustangs just missed with the playoff round, despite winning three of their five round-robin games.

In Squamish, the Mustang Midgets finished the Tier three championships with one win, three losses and one tie.

And the Whitehorse Avalanche Bantam girls team finished their championship with no wins and three losses.

The road to the final for the Bantam Mustangs began with a 7-2 win over the host Rossland-Trail Pee Wee Smoke Eaters, as the Mustangs went on to post a 3-1 round-robin record, followed by a 4-2 win over Triport in Wednesday's semifinal.

"It surprised us how big a start we had," said Pettitt, referring to his team's win over the host Smokies on the first day. "I think it was their worst game and our best.

"I don't think there was a team here that didn't play solid every game. But they all had one game off and when they did they lost."

The New Westminster Royals, on the other hand, lost their opening game of the tournament but went on a winning streak, which included a 5-3 win over previously undefeated Terrace in Wednesday's semifinal.

The Royals were once again behind the eight-ball in Thursday's final as Whitehorse jumped out to a 2-0 lead by the 10-minute mark of the first period.

"We've come back from two goals down numerous times," said Royals head coach Mike Twaites, a graduate of the Kootenay International Hockey League's Summerland Sting.

"I knew it was just a matter of time until we got our feet moving and we would be fine."

It was that same approach that got the team back on track after losing 6-4 to Vancouver Island's Triport in the opening game of the provincials on Sunday.

"We got off to a slow start," agreed Twaites. "But we had a team meeting when we got back to the hotel and right from there I knew the guys were focused."

That focus came to the forefront in the final as the Royals got on the board a minute after the Mustangs' goal thanks to a long shot from outside the blueline by Wilkinson.

On the ensuing faceoff, Delgrosso took the puck and raced in to score New Westminster's second goal in a span of six seconds.

It was yet another indication that Delgrosso was arguably the most valuable player of the tournament.

"Brandon's a great hockey player," said Twaites. "He does whatever you ask him to and he'll do it to the best of his ability. He's a perfect captain and leads the team by example."

While New Westminster was on its way to its first provincial pee wee title, their win stole the spotlight on Whitehorse's bid to claim its first provincial title.

Delgrosso scored early in the second period to make it 4-2 then the Mustangs suffered a big blow when Pettitt, one of the team's top scorers in the tournament, was ejected for a hit from behind.

"Everybody was let down a bit when Riley got that penalty," agreed the Mustangs' head coach. "He's a valuable part of that line (with Gale and Jared Steinbach) that's played together for three years. They work the puck so well and generate shots and that's what was missing."

The Mustangs held the edge territorially but failed to generate many quality scoring chances the rest of the way.

"It took us a bit to get that fire back up again," explained Pettitt. "But we dug deep. We got the puck down low and tried to get some shots but they protected the front of the net very well."

Twaites said that was the strategy heading into the third with a two-goal lead.

"We tightened at the start of the third. We knew we had to watch in front of our net. We did a great job converting down and stopping their passes into the middle for scoring opportunities."

Delgrosso wristed in his third goal of the game six minutes into the final frame to make it 5-2.

All that was left was for Royals goaltender Dom von Schoenberg to hold his ground, which he did with some solid saves.

In a testament to the parity of the tournament, both teams that finished first in the divisions lost in Wednesday's semifinals.

The Mustangs jumped out to a 3-0 first-period lead on Triport and added a goal by Gale in the final seconds of the middle frame to book their spot in the final.

Meanwhile, the Royals held off Terrace to earn its date in the championship game. Delgrosso had two goals and two assists to help hand Terrace its first loss of the tournament.

Triport and Terrace squared off in a thrilling match to decide third place in the tournament. Triport's Curtis McCarrick scored three goals including the eventual winner with one minute and 58 seconds to play for a 5-4 victory.

The host Rossland-Trail team didn't leave the provincials empty handed. The Smokies were awarded B.C. Hockey's Sportsmanship Award. Star staff contributed to this article.

By GUY BERTRAND

Trail Times Sports Editor