

SPORTS

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Bears make it a baker's dozen in Moncton

Alberta comes back from a first-round loss to Moncton to defeat the Varsity Reds in the final and earn their 13th national banner

PAUL OWEN
Managing Editor

MONCTON—McGill unlocked the back door for the Golden Bears, and Alberta walked away with the goods.

Aaron Sorochan had 40 saves and Ian McDonald scored a power-play goal with 11:33 left in the third period to give the Bears—who were a longshot to make the title game after an opening-game overtime loss to l'Université de Moncton Aigles Bleus—their 13th national championship with a 3–2 victory over the University of New Brunswick Varsity Reds.

72 hours earlier, Alberta's championship hopes appeared to have died on the stick of Moncton defenceman Louis Mandeville as he rocketed a slapshot past Sorochan only 1:19 into overtime to upset Alberta in the opening game of the tournament for both teams.

"I just positioned myself and said that if the puck comes by, I'm going to whack it," Mandeville said.

"I didn't pick it up right off the stick, but I saw it about six feet in front of me and watched it go right past my glove," Sorochan admitted. "I'll give him credit: it was a howitzer, and he blew it by me."

Since the tournament returned to a six-team format in 1997/98, no 1–1 team had made the final. However, Alberta did their part to reverse that, recovering their offensive game and beating McGill 7–3 the next night—all but assuring that, should it come down to a tiebreaker, they would hold the best goal differential at plus-3.

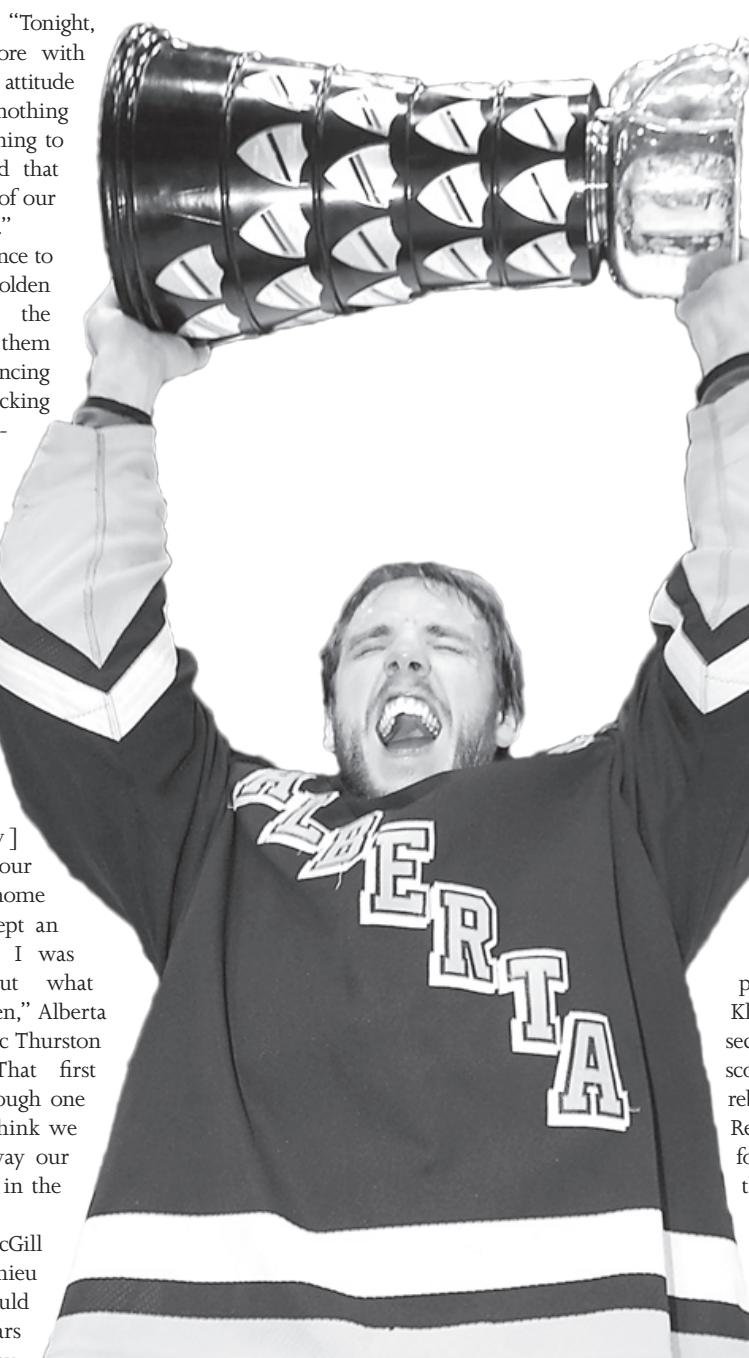
"I think we were gripping our sticks a little tight yesterday, and we didn't play as good as we could moving the puck and getting in on the forecheck: the things we need to do to be successful," McDonald said after

Friday's game. "Tonight, we played more with the kind of attitude that we have nothing to lose, everything to gain now, and that was a big part of our success tonight."

Still, to advance to the final, the Golden Bears needed the Redmen to do them a favour by bouncing back and knocking off the home-town team in Saturday's semifinal, giving Alberta a second chance after their disappointing performance against Moncton.

"[Friday] night after our game, I came home and maybe slept an hour—maybe. I was worried about what could have been," Alberta head coach Eric Thurston explained. "That first game was a tough one for us, but I think we showed the way our team can play in the second game."

Senior McGill goalie Mathieu Poitras would lend the Bears the hand they



needed, making 39 saves in a 3–0 victory over les Aigles that propelled Alberta into the finals against the Reds.

For the first time since the tournament changed formats, the first- and second-ranked teams faced off in the final. UNB grabbed one-goal leads early in the first and second periods with tallies from Justin DaCosta and Player of the Year Rob Hennigar, but Brian Woogler and Tim Krymusa were quick to even things up for the Bears.

With UNB pressing in a 2–2 game in the third, Reds defenceman David Bowman was whistled for an interference penalty as Alberta's Chad Klassen drove to the net. 26 seconds later, McDonald was scooping up a Tim Krymusa rebound and wiring it past Reds tender Michael Ouzas for what would stand up as the game winner.

"Tim Krymusa got a pass down low, and he took it to the net real hard; it hit their goalie's stick or his blocker or something, and it's just a case of

right place at the right time," explained McDonald, who finished the tournament with four goals and two assists to lead it in scoring and be named MVP.

UNB appeared to have a last chance on the power-play when McDonald took a checking-from-behind penalty with 1:45 left, but Bowman took a penalty of the same variety with a late hit that negated the potential man advantage. Ouzas headed to the bench instead, and Alberta scrambled to keep the Reds from tying the game with the extra attacker.

"We had to pay the price," Thurston explained. "If we had to have ice bags on us at the end because we blocked shots, we'll have to do that because we had to find a way, or make one, to win."

Sorochan stole the game for the Bears, who were outshot 42–25, most notably robbing Nathan O'Nabigon on a breakaway in the second period to keep it from going 3–2 in favour of the Reds. He was also able to get a piece of a Hunter Tremblay slapshot that ringed off the post in the dying minutes.

"I don't think we got as many shots as we'd like to [...] and if it wasn't for Aaron Sorochan ...," head coach Eric Thurston said.

"The guy comes to play in big games, and he's got ice running through his veins because a couple of those plays, man, were [...] unbelievable," fifth-year captain Harlan Anderson agreed. "Huge saves—impressive. He's a champion; we definitely owe him one."

"It was special," Sorochan said. "That's probably one of the best games I've played in my career. The puck was as big as a beach ball, and on a couple of plays—the blocker save in the first; off the post and my glove in the third—time just seemed to slow down for me."

Playing the waiting game, Bears sweat it out off the ice

PAUL OWEN
Managing Editor

MONCTON—For Alberta, the waiting really was the hardest part.

Forced to put their hopes on the McGill Redmen in Saturday night's semifinal against les Aigles Bleus of Moncton—Alberta needed a McGill win by seven or less to advance to Sunday's final—the Golden Bears went through what head coach Eric Thurston called "the most difficult game ever that I've had to sit and endure watching."

"I love watching hockey—at any level, anything—and this was root-canal work," he said.

"If I'm coaching it, I guess I have a little bit of control [...] . It's nerve-wracking, but I like that—that's in a fun way—because you don't ever get those highs and those lows from anything else," he continued. "But here, you're simply a spectator [...] and you're at the mercy, basically, of those two teams."

While Thurston, assistant Ted Poplawski, athletic director Dale Schulha, and a handful of players and trainers attended the game, most of the team stayed at their hotel, trying to keep their minds off what was happening at the rink.

"We were trying to keep ourselves distracted playing cards and stuff,"

captain Harlan Anderson said.

"It was pretty horrible; it's a pretty helpless feeling," second-year forward Ian McDonald admitted. "We had a few guys in our hotel room—we didn't want to watch it live because we thought it'd be too nerve-wracking. We're all pretty superstitious guys, so we were making sure we had to do different things at different times just to make sure we kept the status quo of the game going."

Luckily for Alberta, McGill weren't deflated by their 7–3 loss to the Bears the night before and came out playing like they had something to prove. McGill coach Martin Raymond claimed after Friday's loss that "the tournament isn't over," and his team played like one trying to get into the finals, even though the odds were stacked against it.

"You really have to give McGill credit for [...] coming back and showing the intestinal fortitude and the pride you have as an individual and the pride you have in your institution," Thurston said after McGill's victory.

It wasn't until McGill's Yan Turcotte potted an empty-netter with a minute to go to give the Redmen a 3–0 lead that the Bears were able to breathe a sigh of relief.

"The second one was nice, but I



ONE OF MANY Ian McDonald's goal against McGill helped the Bears increase their goal differential and make it to the final.

wanted that third," Poplawski admitted after the game.

For Alberta, McGill's victory represented a second chance to atone for their poor performance in Thursday's opener against les Aigles, one they would take advantage of to win their 13th national championship.

"It doesn't matter which way you

make it here [...] you don't worry about that; it's a one-game series [in the final]," Thurston said.

The Redmen's strong performance in the semifinal also caused Thurston to question the setup of the tournament because it didn't allow McGill a chance to recover from their bad game on Friday.

"It almost makes you want to talk about the format of the tournament; maybe they have to look at more of a round-robin—almost a Memorial Cup style. You let teams have one bad game, and they're not out of it because McGill didn't have a great game, and they're out of it, and then they come and play like [that]."