

# Lafayette Field Hockey Wins Patriot League Championship

By Benjamin White, Assistant Sports Editor

Washington, D.C. - The field hockey team faced American University in Saturday's Patriot League final with a history of 10 straight losses to the Eagles. Dating back to 2018, three of those matchups were in a Patriot League final.

After falling in the final last year and in double overtime during the regular season this year, the Maroon and White looked to flip the script and take down the top-ranked Eagles. It turned out that the 11th time was the charm.

The Leopards (5-1 Patriot League, 14-6 overall) took down the Eagles (6-0 Patriot League, 12-8 overall), storming back from a late fourth quarter 1-0 deficit to force the game to overtime, where sophomore forward Lea Good's golden goal clinched the conference for the first time since 2012.

"American's always an incredibly hard opponent," head coach Jennifer Stone said. "They're incredibly well-coached and disciplined and a really tough team. We've been knocking on the door for a couple years now, so it's really nice to be able to get the win."

The Leopards got off to a slow start against their kryptonite at the Jacobs Recreational Complex in Washington, D.C.

American drew a corner just 17 seconds into the game but failed to convert. For much of the first quarter, the Maroon and White were backed up in their own territory playing defense.

The Leopards had a flurry of three penalty corner chances with less than four minutes to play in the half, but were unable to capitalize. The teams went into halftime scoreless.

"We have lost to them from APCs in the tournament from years past, so I think that was a huge aspect for us," junior goalkeeper Raffi Fragomeni said.

Coming out of the half, the Leopards flipped the script and put some offensive pressure on the Eagles, but continued to struggle in converting corner opportunities.

The Eagles found two shot attempts to close the third quarter. One shot flew over the crossbar, while Fragomeni saved the other. Fragomeni notched six saves on the day to keep the Leopards in the game.

Senior forward Alex Darrah drew another corner opportunity for the Leopards, but sophomore defender Lena Thedrian was stonewalled in back-to-back attempts, and the teams entered the fourth period deadlocked at 0-0.

Early in the fourth quarter, an American green card gave the Leopards a woman-up advantage. But opportunity turned to tragedy for the Maroon and White, as the Eagles finally converted on their third penalty corner of the game, making it a 1-0 affair with just over nine minutes remaining.

"When that happened, we just kept the belief and the confidence that we still have nine minutes," senior midfielder Lineke Spaans said. "That's a very long time, and we knew we had the skill to come back."

Just a few minutes later, Spaans burst through the defense but was tripped by an American player in the circle, drawing a penalty stroke for the Maroon and White. Spaans, down on the field in pain, was helped to her feet and off the field.

"I know the outcome of that was a little unfortunate with the tackle and hard pressure that they put on, but it ended up getting us a stroke," Fragomeni said.

Down 1-0, sophomore midfielder Stella Malinowski's penalty stroke proved to be the equalizer, finding the bottom left of the back of the net to even the score with just five and a half minutes remaining.

It was déjà vu for the opponents, as neither team could find a goal in the closing minutes of regulation, and the two Patriot League heavyweights again took to overtime.

"We're starting kind of tired into overtime because obviously you just played a full game, and you already left everything on the field, and now you have to do even more," Thedrian said.

The Leopards faced season-ending danger in the opening minute of overtime, as an Eagles' breakaway saw Fragomeni kick away a potential walk-off goal. Just seconds later, American ripped another shot just wide of the goal.

However, Thedrian drew a crucial corner opportunity in the fourth minute. "I had a really good feeling after I got that corner," Thedrian said. "I was like, 'I think that could be the moment where we win this game.'" Ralph again inserted the ball, this time for junior defender Makenzie Switzer. Switzer found an open Good, who scored the championship-winning goal for the Leopards.

"I have never beaten them before in my time, so that's just so special to do it my senior year, and in the last game of the Patriot League, and in a final," Spaans said.

The win propelled the Leopards into the NCAA Tournament, where they will face off against No. 4 St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

"We really believe that we have a good chance," Spaans said. "We're gonna put up a great fight and just gonna go in with a lot of confidence and enjoy it."



Sophomore midfielder Stella Malinowski's late fourth quarter goal pushed the field hockey team into overtime against American University on Saturday. (Photo by Rick Smith for GoLeopards)

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