

Longwood in NSCRO Final Four

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Virginia Rugby Union Champion Longwood University and USA Rugby South Champion University of West Florida clashed in Knoxville under grey skies to determine who the final team would be in the upcoming NSCRO Men's Division 3 Championship semifinals, which is scheduled for April 30 in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Longwood University came out of the gate on fire and flanker Jeff Connelly scored a try in the first minute on a strong 25-meter run. Flyhalf Preston Leep converted the try. Then, just seven minutes later, power runner Ben Smith broke through the West Florida defense to put Longwood up by 12-0. UWF finally got it going on the front foot, but more often than not tried using tactical kicking by their skilled flyhalf, Nate Swartz, to open up the Longwood defense. However, most of the time the Longwood back three of wingers Jesse Kelly, Dan Waite and Eric Minor were up to the challenge and handled the high kicks very well. Swartz did notch a penalty goal midway through the first half, which ended 12-3 in favor of Longwood.

UWF's scrappy style of play began to pay off in the second half. An early try and conversion brought them within two points of Longwood. However, Longwood's defense and their back three continuing to handle the tactical UWF kicks kept UWF from scoring. At the 16th minute, Ben Smith again broke away from a tackle attempt and scored a try. The conversion made it 19-10. Seven minutes later, Longwood's outside center, Jon Kennedy, found the goal line and dotted down a try to give Longwood a 24-10 lead.

UWF was not going anywhere, and their pressure finally paid off with a try by speedster wing Chris Scott. Swartz's difficult conversion attempt was good, and all of a sudden UWF was back in the hunt at 24-17. But Longwood did not sit back on their heels, and with the kickoff went on attack, which culminated in a try three minutes later. Final score: Longwood 31, West Florida 17.

Longwood, coached by John Graham, went undefeated in Virginia Rugby Union league play and playoffs last fall, and this spring won the MARFU Division 3 Championship.

Longwood now moves on to the NSCRO Championship on April 30-May 1 in Virginia Beach, Virginia and will face Salve Regina University (New England) in the semifinals. For Venue, Schedule, and other details go to: <http://www.bluesrugby.org/ncbrfc/nscro/index.html>