

Palmer Grinds Out Win Over PAC

Written by Jackie Finlan
Saturday, 21 May 2011 19:28

Manassas, VA, was treated to a barn-burner of a match for the first game of DI Men's Club Championship. After 40 minutes, it was anyone's guess who'd come out on top between Palmer College and Potomac AC, as the two stood deadlocked at the half, but Palmer ran in one extra try for the 33-24 win and bid to the quarterfinals.

"PAC was our toughest opposition all season, and we were a little jittery coming in," Palmer player/coach Chad London said. "We've had a scattered spring to build up to this, but we were here last year and came out with all we had. This isn't a peak performance - it's a building phase - but we can only move up from here and still have a lot to learn."

PAC had solid possession in the first half, and eight minutes in took the first 7-0 lead. London did well to even it up when a turnover ball allowed the Canadian-born flyhalf to run it in under the post and convert his own score, 7-7.

PAC then took its last lead of the game, turning what should have been another Palmer score, thanks to a pretty box kick to the try line. PAC stole the subsequent scrum and mounted an attack in Palmer's end. Another scrum awarded PAC a penalty, which PAC tapped and dove over the line. After a quick conference with the line judge, PAC took was awarded the five-pointer and eventual conversion, 14-7.

"The forwards were a lot bigger and more experienced than us," London said. "They dropped down from the Super League, so they had some years on us in the front row. But we have a lot of grit and heart, so against that opposition, it eventually worked in our favor."

Palmer didn't waste any time evening the score up. From the kickoff, PAC was awarded a lineout in its own half but botched the throw-in. Palmer #8 advanced the ball up the belly, hit the outside center, who broke through the line. From there, a two-on-one allowed fullback Jarod Selby to dot down. London handled the extras for the 14-all tie into the half.

"We were optimistic going into the second half," London reflected on the midway chat with the team. "We knew we had the upper-hand even though it was tied. We told the boys it was 0-0, and that we had the wind in the second half. We're a younger squad, very fit, and we get around

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the field a lot more, so we used that to our advantage."

The teams traded two tries apiece to get the third quarter going, with Palmer's extra conversion giving the team a 26-24 lead. Palmer's cushion came from a scrum deep in PAC's end, with big inside center Mike Junk rumbling through the line and dragging defenders with him. Flanker James Fitzgerald picked up where Junker left off and crashed through the line for the try. With London's conversion, Palmer held onto the 33-24 to the whistle.

"I can't say there was a turning point since we were so evenly matched," London said. "We scored right in the second half, so that went in our favor, but then PAC got the intercept try and turned it around. We gradually built up momentum in the second half."

PAC's 24 points, however, is testament to the team's offensive aptitude, although London was relatively pleased with his side's defensive effort. "We can always do better," London said of the defense, "but the boys did well and put their bodies on the line. With 10 minutes left in the game, we were on our five meter line and the boys held up. We had a couple of good stands."

London was particularly pleased with the team's effort, but pointed out Junk and Fitzgerald as playmakers. London and Selby had two tries apiece, and embodied the excellent speed of the backs.

"We have a lot of great individuals," London said, "and we have a lot of weapons. As long as we use them well, we'll do fine."

With the win, Palmer College will face Mystic River in tomorrow's quarterfinal.