

Playoff Loss (5 - 7) vs Phoenix Country Day Eagles

Date: 5/12/2001 8:00p

Location: Gilbert HS

League Summary:

The 2001 AYLL High School State Finals gave fans everything they could handle and showed just how far the AYLL has come in just 5 years. This game featured the established Phoenix Country Day Eagles (10-1) and the relative newcomers, the Tucson Gamecocks (11-0). This game showcased 15 AYLL All-Stars who made it clear that the level of skill is rapidly increasing in the West.

The outcome? PCDS won a thriller, 7-5. And coach Dan May of Tucson was proven correct for his statement back in 2000 when he said....."you watch us next year. We'll be there". We didn't believe him, but he proved us all wrong.

"Retiring" PCDS coach Andy Wilkins could not have asked for a greater thrill to end his Phoenix coaching career than to cap it with a close, come-from-way behind win in the big game!

After the fine opening game ceremonies, the energy was high as 500+ lacrosse-hungry fans came to a roar for the opening face-off. The Gamecocks didn't take very long to get this game rockin', as attackman Greg Polheber showed why he is the league's top goal scorer. After putting a sweet fake on the PCDS defender, Polheber rolled to the right side of the goal and faked high before hitting the opposite corner with only 20 seconds gone in the game. The Gamecocks continued the scoring with Polheber sliding out front, face-dodging the defender, and hitting the opposite corner once again. Chris Irvin (1/0) soon followed, sticking one in the lower left corner from a feed from Polheber behind, capping off the 1st qtr with the Tucson club up 3-0.

Perhaps the PCDS squad had underrated the Gamecocks, as Tucson was clearly in command, showing excellent ball movement and fundamental lacrosse on the perimeter. The Eagles dropped their guard briefly again in the 2nd quarter as Polheber found David Sherman out front right and he hit the top pipe for a 4-0 Tucson lead.

Before the half, PCDS capitalized on a Tucson penalty. The Eagles worked the ball until Sab Fabricius let fly an underhand rocket that surprised the Tucson goalie. The half ended 4-1 in favor of the Gamecocks.

The key stat of the first half was ground balls where the Gamecocks held a 33 to 12 advantage.

The momentum started to swing back to PCDS at the start of the third quarter when Tucson was flagged for a 1-minute mouthpiece penalty. However, Tucson's man-down unit kept the Eagles off the board during the extra man-opportunity. Following two more Tucson penalties, PCDS extra-man offense netted two goals, both by attackman Ryan Gaston on feeds by Jeff Sand and Sab Fabricius. The first man-up drew the defenseman up high and found Gaston hiding down low. Gaston's second goal included some sweet finishing moves, including a "Canadian Crossover" on the second. Before the third quarter was over, Fabricius battled for a ground ball at midfield and set up a fast-break goal by Jeff Sand from the point. The game was now tied at 4-4 and the whole AYLL season was now down to the final 12 minutes.

As the 4th quarter progressed, the Eagles depth became apparant. With Tucson running only 2 midfield lines all night, the body language made it clear who had more wheels left. Eventually, midfielder Gabe Bruffy-Holmes (1/0) broke free out front, received a feed from Gaston and rattled the mesh giving the Eagles a 5-4 lead with about 5 minutes remaining in the game.

Tucson wasn't about to give up as they immediately pushed the play at the PCDS cage and drew a 30-second hold call for one final man-up situation. The Gamecocks moved the ball around the perimeter and got the slides they were looking for. Sherman dumped to Polheber down low, who dodged the sliding defender, and beat the PCDS goalie with a double high fake to the far corner, tying the game 5-5 with 3 minutes to go.

With the game on the line, Jeff Sand took a pass from Gaston from the endline and drove to the right side of the cage. With the Gamecock defender tight along side, Sand was able to pivot and shoot, putting the ball low and away for what would turn out to be the game winner. PCDS got an insurance goal late on a fabulous play by Sab Fabricius. After being knocked on his back with the ball still in his stick, Fabricius (1/3) managed to spot Ryan Gaston right by the net and put the pass right on stick. Gaston delivered the knockout blow and the Eagles had given coach Andy Wilkins the exact going away present he wanted.

The game also highlighted two of the league's top goaltenders. PCDS' net-minder, Greg Abdouch, saved 6 of the 11 on-goal shots---including a key point-blank save down the stretch. Tucson's Josh Fiskind was excellent as well, stopping 15 of 22 shots on goal by the Eagles (15 of which came in the 2nd half).

The battle at the midline for face-offs between PCDS's Orlando Martinez and Tucson's duo of Austin Baum and Kyle McNally was even, each team getting 50% (7-7-2). The Gamecocks finished the night sucking up 56 groundballs to the Eagles 30.

AYLL league administrators want one thing in all their league games, and that is a close competition. Tonight, we got it!

Congratulations to Dan May for proving to us all how good the Tucson Gamecocks really were. Last year's only undefeated regular season team was Highland HS. And the same fate befell them in the playoffs, so this just proves it's not over until the final whistle.

And congratulations to PCDS coach Andy Wilkins. Andy is "retiring" to northern California to take over as headmaster of a private boarding school. He will not coach for a year or so as he gets involved in his new job. But his new school has a lacrosse program, so you know he'll be out there, watching them, probably offering a few words of advice from a wise 'ol coach who won the "big one".....good luck, Andy.

Phoenix Country Day Eagles record: 9-1-0

Tucson Gamecocks record against Phoenix Country Day Eagles: 0-0-0

Sorry, no more games scheduled