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Navy, Md. Exiles Win Rugby Festival

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Navy and the Maryland Exiles, a local club team, emerged victorious yesterday as the 31st National Cherry Blossom Festival Rugby Tournament came to a close on a sun-filled day on the Mall.

Navy won its second consecutive Cherry Blossom title, 13-5, over Penn State, by overcoming the resilient Nittany Lions' defense, namely inside center Brendan Duval. Duval, an exchange student from Sydney, frustrated Navy's back line with consistent tackling and proper pursuit angles. Although Penn State did not win the title, Duval was chosen unanimously by the referees as the tournament most valuable player.

"It's too bad we didn't win, but we did well as a team," Duval said. "We played Navy a month ago and lost badly, so this was important for us to come out and have a good showing."

The booster for Navy, according to Coach Mike Flanagan, could be found in outside center Donnie Faul.

"Donnie turned it on at the end of the match with his intensity and pursuit," said Flanagan. His boost was needed as all-American pack captain

Jerrod Allen went down in the second half with a knee injury. Allen had scored the game's only try in the first half, but Faul stepped up and provided the leadership in his absence.

After sailing through previous rounds of the tournament by a combined score of 208-8, the Midshipmen started the second half yesterday ahead by only 7-5. With a dearth of late scoring opportunities, the Midshipmen had to depend upon kicker Oishin Courtney to provide the final margin. His two second-half penalty kicks gave Navy a small cushion with which to close out the match.

Penn State Coach Fraser Grigor thought his team missed out on several key opportunities to score tries.

"We had one opportunity in the first half where one of our players had the ball inches from the try line but couldn't convert. This was a very evenly contested match, going back and forth. Both teams had chances to control the game. The difference was missed opportunities."

The teams now will prepare for the eastern regional of the national championships in State College, Pa., next weekend.

In the Club Division, the Maryland

Exiles claimed the tournament title, defeating the Potomac Athletic Club's (PAC) B-side, 31-7. Winger and tournament MVP Kevin Gittings scored three speedy tries in the first 15 minutes to hoist the Exiles to a 17-0 lead, and PAC never recovered.

But PAC's A-side did emerge victorious from Saturday's Harp Rugby Super League match against arch rival Washington Rugby Club, 30-14. The loss denied Washington a first-place spot in the Eastern Conference.

"To PAC's credit, they worked their game plan," said Washington hooker Jason Kallivokas. "We're a fast track team while they have a lot of size and are physical. The rain on Saturday slowed us down, and they were able to capitalize."

Washington still can capture the Eastern Conference berth to the league championship game next month, but is looking to PAC for help. If PAC beats Old Blue (New York) and the Dallas Harlequins lose a game, Washington has the inside track to be the East representative in the final.

In the high school division yesterday, Xavier (N.Y.) defeated Doyles town (Pa.), 20-10.