

Bears and Pandas fall in tie-breakers at CIS national curling championships

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THROWING ROCKS AT HOUSES Both Alberta rinks at the CIS curling championships dropped their respective tie-breakers Saturday, ending their seasons.

Promising starts for the host Golden Bears and Pandas curling rinks soon turned into disappointment, as both teams were defeated in tie-breakers at this past weekend's CIS Curling Championships at the Saville Sports Centre.

Fuelled by a score of four in the tenth end of their 9–6 opening-draw victory over 2009 World Junior Championship silver-medallist and UPEI skip Brett Gallant, the Bears obtained early confidence in the tournament.

Led by skip Eric Richard, the Bears went on to win their next three round-robin games — 9–5 over Victoria, 7–2 over McGill, and 7–4 over Saint Mary's — and, in the process, improved to a perfect 4–0.

Looking to continue their unbeaten run and clinch an automatic berth in the semifinals, the Bears looked in control and on top of their game early in their draw against the pre-championship favourites from Western Ontario. The turning point in the match occurred in the fifth end when, up 3–2 and lying one, Richard was heavy on a draw which would've scored a deuce and given the Bears a 5–2 lead.

The Mustangs took advantage of Richard's fifth-end miss, and subsequent missed opportunities by the Bears, and outscored them 6–2 over the final five ends, en route to winning the matchup 8–6.

"That was just a mental lapse," said Richard referring to his missed draw in the fifth end against Western. "It would have given us a three-point lead and we would have gone to a defensive strategy, but that shot didn't lose us the game."

Regrouping proved difficult for the Bears as they dropped their final round-robin game 7–5 to the eventual men's champions from Queen's.

The loss sent the men's side into a six-end tie-breaker with UPEI, and they were unable to conjure up their great early tournament shot-making, dropping the shortened match 4–1 and eliminating them from contention.

"Our last two round-robin games, we didn't get the bounces we needed, so we had to play a good UPEI team. I missed a few shots which gave them an early lead and we were forced to play aggressively without knowing the ice, which meant we didn't make many shots," Richard explained.

Just like the Bears, the Pandas started strong with a 12-2 victory over Dalhousie. However, in a tight battle with the Waterloo Warriors, the Pandas lost 7–6.

Nevertheless, thanks to an 8–5 win over UPEI and a gritty 7–6 victory over the two-time defending national champions from Wilfred Laurier, the Pandas forced a tie-breaker with the Warriors.

Tied 6-6 in the eighth end, without the hammer, and looking like a steal was imminent, Pandas skip Jessica Mair failed to deliver a perfect guard with her last stone. The miss proved costly as Waterloo skip Katherine Pringle made an amazing angle raise to score two and grab a lead she would not relinquish.

“I just gave it a little outward motion, so how I released the stone affected the curl in it and I think that would have made a huge difference had it curled a little more,” said Mair referring to the misplaced guard she threw in the eighth end.

“[Against Waterloo], we just couldn't put back-to-back shots together and we hit stones on the wrong side.”

Despite failing to reach the semifinals, Mair was grateful for the opportunity to play the championship at home in front of friends and family.

“It was awesome being at home because we knew the ice and had lots of fans supporting us.”