



Arkansas dethrones Alabama for club hockey championship



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HUNTSVILLE, Alabama - The past two champions battled in today's final for the South Eastern Collegiate Hockey Conference's fifth annual tournament.

Defending champ Alabama took on Arkansas, which won in 2010 and 2011 but wasn't here last year because of a suspension. The tournament for club teams will return to Pelham the next two years as decided by vote. Each team has a voting member, which is normally the head coach or a club officer.

The tournament was held in Pelham the first two years, followed by Columbus, Ga., the third year and then here the past two years. Tennessee won the 2009 title and then came Arkansas' two straight crowns and Alabama's in 2012.

"So Alabama's looking to repeat and Arkansas' looking to be the first three-time winner," SECHC commissioner Kenny "Sarge" Day said before today's games.

Arkansas got it done by beating Alabama 8-0 to capture its third Army Strong Championship Cup.

The Razorbacks (27-9-1) controlled the action from the outset and led 4-0 at the first intermission. First-period goals came from Tucker Campbell, Martin Sundstedt, Forest Mudgett and Jansen Polk. Sundstedt, who scored on a power play, also assisted on Mudgett's power-play goal. In the second period, the Razorbacks added a power-play goal by Justin McDowell and a goal by Trent Ritchie. The third period brought two power-play goals by Garth Derry.

"Awesome win for the boys," Derry, a senior, said. "Couldn't do it without them. Good win for this program."

Arkansas avenged last week's 4-3 loss to Alabama that knocked the Razorbacks out of national tournament contention. Last week Alabama qualified for the American College Hockey Association Division III national championship, March 12-16 in Springfield, Mo., by beating Arkansas and South Carolina in Irmo, S.C.

"Today for us was about redemption and I think the better hockey team won today," Razorbacks coach Brian Gallini said. "And I think last week the better hockey team didn't win and we had something to prove coming into this weekend. And we feel like the score proved it."

Arkansas goalie Kevin Scheer, a sophomore, made 14 saves for the shutout and was named the tournament's most valuable player.

"It's all team effort," Scheer said. "The guys played really well in front of me and I couldn't have done it without them."

Alabama (20-12 plus one overtime win) got outshot 51-14. Goalie Sean Vinson made 43 saves for the Frozen Tide.

"Arkansas has a great hockey team," Alabama coach Mike Quenneville said. "We had a game plan coming into it, one of them was stay out of the penalty box. They scored five power-play goals. You can't beat a hockey team as good as they are by taking too many penalties. Hat's off to Arkansas. They're a good hockey team and congratulations to them."

In today's third-place game, Florida beat South Carolina 9-3. Danny Hill scored a hat trick with three goals for Florida (18-6-1). Michael Dutka had two goals and two assists. Michael Jugan added two goals. Brandon Bukstel and Scott Schilson had a goal apiece. Goalie Jake Lewis made 38 saves.

"We've battled all year," Gators coach Mike Marcinkiewicz said. "We've had injuries. We've got a good bunch of kids. This was my first year as head coach. I'm looking forward to coming back next season and building upon the finish of this season."

Eric Patterson had a goal and an assist for South Carolina (19-7). Thomas Whitmeyer-Weathers and Derek Maggs added a goal apiece for the Gamecocks. Goalies Dale Turner and James Maples made 27 and 15 saves respectively.

Conference commissioner Day said factors in the voters' decision to move to Pelham included the Alabama game-day staff, which uses many of the former Birmingham Bulls workers; the hockey volunteers who show up in full force; and the Pelham Ice Complex which can accommodate 3,500 fans. Also, Pelham Mayor Gary Waters, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and huge hockey fan, personally wrote the bid and pushed for the SECHC to return to his city

"We're disappointed in the coaches' decision to move it," Gina Conard, assistant director of the Huntsville Sports Commission, said. "We look forward to the opportunity to get the event back in two years."