



In a thriller, field hockey co-champs

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HIGHTSTOWN-- Two determined field hockey teams played to a 1-1 overtime tie as Peddie and Lawrenceville waged a battle royale yesterday on the Falcon turf field.

With the tempo at a torrid pace for the entire 60 minutes of regulation and 20 more in the two extra periods, Big Red had the Falcons on the ropes when Nikki Rivera slapped in a shot with an assist from Eliza Becker at the 22:21 mark of the second half. Emily Yu started the sequence with penalty corner.

Fittingly, junior forward Maddie Copeland tucked in a backhander from close range with the primary helper from MaryRose Croddick Molyneaux with 10:40 left in regulation. The goal was Copeland's team-leading 30th of the season, while Croddick Molyneaux gathered her 10th assist, also atop the leaderboard.

In overtime, field hockey rules reduce the number of players from 11 (10 field players and one goalie) to seven players (six field players and one goalie) to increase scoring chances.

The two sudden death overtimes were played with little respect for caution as the wide-open spaces created odd-man rushes. Shivani Chanillo stopped a blast from Copeland with 7:50 remaining in the second OT.

Falcon freshman goalie Danielle Rette found herself in a pressure-cooker and came up with two big stops during the extra sessions, the first a pad save with 5:35 left and the second crucial rejection coming via a sprawling save as the ball tantalized the goal line at 4:20. Gabby Palumbo scrambled back to help clear the rock from danger.

Big Red continued to push forward and sent a long shot inside the circle and got a lucky roll as the ball slid under Rette's boot towards the cage. Using a burst of speed, Palumbo was once again Johnny-on-the-spot and managed to deflect a shot earmarked for the golden goal.

"I just knew I had to get the ball out," Palumbo said. "They had one girl coming down.

She kicked it and missed it, and the ball ... I have no idea what was going through my head. I just had to get the ball out anyway I could and not let that girl shoot into an open net."

Palumbo never quit hustling as did the rest of the field players from both sides.

Diving bodies everywhere...a great one for the spectators and a nailbiter for the coaches.

"We won it (the championship), but we didn't lose," Palumbo said. "I am happy. They are a good team to share it with. They deserve it too. I would rather have won it three straight years in a row (outright), but we didn't lose."