

15U Panthers edge Utah Lady Grizzlies 2-1 in opening game of 27th annual Silver Stick Tournament

Karys Dysart and Paige Gallant scored one goal each to lead the 15U Central York Panthers to a thrilling 2-1 victory over the Utah Lady Grizzlies on Friday afternoon at the ACC.

The Panthers-Grizzlies contest, featuring a dramatic last-minute goal by Dysart, served as a crescendo to the colorful Opening Ceremonies of the 27th Annual Silver Stick international hockey tournament.

Central York Panthers President Mark Dubeau, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and a quintet of Silver Stick executives took to the red carpet at centre ice to kick off the prestigious tourney. Opening ceremonies included a gesture of international sportsmanship when the Canadian and American teams exchanged coins and the team captains posed for two ceremonial faceoffs.

All four teams—including the U11BB Panthers and Southern Colorado Blue 10U-- gathered for a group shot with the dignitaries in the neutral zone.

Mayor Mrakas welcomed attendees at the ACC to the long-running tournament, but played favorites with his final remark before the ceremonial faceoff: "With all due respect to all the teams at the tournament, let's go Panthers."

The Mayor got his wish for a Panthers' win, but the outcome of the Central York-Utah game was not determined until the final minute of play.

Dysart fired the game-winning goal with 27 seconds left on the scoreboard. Her high wrist shot from above the right faceoff circle found a seam through a maze of players, beat Utah goaltender Addison Luth cleanly, and elicited a spirited celly by the Panthers.

The articulate hometown hero described her decisive marker.

"I called for the puck and saw an opening to shoot it. It all felt surreal. I had no idea that it went in, but it was a nice way to end it. It was a good feeling to win a hard-fought game."

Dysart credited Panthers' goaltender Clara West for playing a key role in the win over the Lady Grizzlies.

"She's really good. She keeps us in so many games. Clara is always there and she's a leader of this team in so many ways. She holds us together."

In addition to the stellar goaltending Central York received from West, Dysart noted that the team had this game circled on the calendar for weeks and discussed the importance of starting the tournament strongly on Friday afternoon.

"We've known about playing an American team for over four weeks so we really wanted to win this game. It's nice to be part of this tournament and to win our game today."

After a scoreless first period that showcased the goaltending talents of West and Luth, the blue-clad Panthers opened the scoring at 8:20 of the second period. Central York forward Paige Gallant fired a wrist shot from between the circles that seemed to handcuff Luth. Gallant's quick shot dipped through the five-hole and into the left corner of the net to give the home side a 1-0 lead.

However, a parade to the penalty box by the Panthers near the end of the second period gifted the Lady Grizzlies with a 5-on-3 power play. Utah took advantage of the extra space on the ice against the Panthers' triangle defense when Grizzlies' defender Katie Damon snapped a shot from the right point that sailed past a screened West. Damon's power play goal tied the game 1-1 with eleven seconds left on the clock.

The Panthers and Grizzlies pushed through the final frame, creating numerous scoring opportunities including three breakaways that were foiled by the valiant netminders. Dysart's last-minute heroics sent the Panthers' fans home with a big international tournament win to cap off the Silver Stick's Opening Ceremonies.

Utah Lady Grizzlies Head Coach Bryan Bylsma was gracious in defeat and applauded both teams.

"It was a hell of a game. Getting to play games like this, to play strong Canadian teams, is why we're here. We're here for the competition connected to Silver Stick tournaments. We qualified in California to play here. This is the first time in Canada for most of our players so it's an exciting time for them."

As the son of Stanley Cup-winning Head Coach Dan Bylsma looked up at the tournament schedule at the ACC, the friendly bench boss had one goal in mind for his Utah squad: "We have to win tomorrow."

By Jim Stewart