

'Storybook ending' for Muskie boys

By Jamie Mountain
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Home is where the heart is but it's also where redemption was found for the Muskie boys' curling rink.

Just over a year removed from failing to advance to the all-Ontarios, when they lost a heart-breaking four-end second tie-breaker against the Hammar skjold Vikings (Thunder Bay) 3-2 at the NWOSSAA championships in Longlac, the black-and-gold redeemed themselves with a 6-3 win over Widdifield (North Bay) in the gold-medal game of the OFSAA championships Saturday afternoon at the Fort Frances Curling Club.

Skip Chris Silver, who had to sit out last season with a torn hamstring, was determined not to let his rink—Daniel Vandenberg, Jason Bazylewski, Owen Riches, and Ben Olson—suffer a similar disappointment on home ice.

"It seems sort of like the dream ending to our high school career," an elated Silver said following Saturday's golden win.

Silver, Vandenberg, and Bazylewski all will be graduating this year and couldn't have capped off a memorable week any better.

"Coming so close two years ago, and then getting injured and not making it [to OFSAA] last year, and then coming back this year at home and being able to pull it off after losing our first game just feels like the perfect storybook ending," Silver enthused.

The black-and-gold had opened play Wednesday afternoon with an 11-4 loss to Aldershot HS but rebounded with an emphatic 11-1 drubbing of Medway HS in just four ends that night.

The Muskies also pulled off a rare "eight-ender" in the second end of that win—a feat not previously accomplished at an OFSAA championship.

"It seems like we controlled



Muskie boys' skip Chris Silver, who is in Grade 12, bowed his head so he could receive his hard-earned gold medal to cap an excellent high school career. Silver led the black-and-gold to the title at the OFSAA curling championships with a 6-3 win over Widdifield (North Bay) on Saturday afternoon at the Fort Frances Curling Club.

—Jamie Mountain photos

most of the games," Silver recalled.

"We have more of a defensive style," he noted. "We like to play open with not many rocks in play and make them make the first mistake, and then capitalize on it."

"Throughout the year, we probably only shot like 70 percent as a team," Silver conceded. "But this week I feel like we shot over 90 percent as a team."

"We all focused and made the shots when we did, and

worked together well."

In Thursday's action, the Muskies beat Widdifield 5-3 in the morning before capping the day with a thrilling 7-6 comeback victory against Timiskaming that evening draw.

Trailing 6-3 heading to the seventh end, the black-and-gold stole three to tie it at 6-6 before stealing one more in the eighth to seal the win.

"That was a turning point game, that one," said Muskie coach Ron Silver, who also is

president of the local curling club.

"We were down and fought back, fought back, never gave up," he lauded.

"And that actually was the turning point of the tournament."

Fort High then cruised to a 8-3 win over Vincent Massey HS on Friday morning to finish with a 4-1 record in Pool 'C' and advance to the quarter-finals that evening, where they rolled to a 6-2 win over Silver-

thorn.

That set up a rematch with Aldershot in the semi-finals Saturday morning, which the Muskies claimed by a 7-3 margin to advance to the gold-medal game that afternoon.

"A great way to end their high school curling career in front of the hometown fans," Ron Silver said about his son, Chris, along with Vandenberg and Bazylewski.

"I wanna congratulate the Widdifield team," he added.

"We were in their shoes two years ago, lost the gold-medal game to the team that beat us in the round-robin, so it's just about the same type of situation."

"I know how they feel [so] congratulations to them because they curled fantastic, too, all week," he lauded.

Ron Silver also was pleased with the whole OFSAA experience at home and felt everything ran smoothly.

"It was fantastic," he enthused. "I mean, it's a great community, great volunteers, it's a great town."

"They get behind everything."

"The support was fantastic from everybody and it shows," he added. "All the people here had a great time."

"There were zero complaints that we heard of," Ron Silver stressed. "Everybody was nothing but compliments to us, the organizing committee, the curling club, the town, the athletes."

"It was beautiful."

The Atikokan Voyageurs also had a boys' rink compete at OFSAA here after they had qualified as the NWOSSAA silver-medalists because the Muskies, who won NWOSSAA gold, had an automatic bye as the host team.

Comprised of Jordan Ekstrom, Griffin Garuk, Chris Strom, and Isaac Strom, the Voyageurs compiled a 1-4 record over the week in Pool 'A' and failed to advance to the quarter-finals.

The Voyageurs had opened play Wednesday morning with an 8-3 loss to Bishop Allen Academy, then fell 5-2 to Silverthorn in the afternoon draw.

But they rebounded with an impressive 11-3 rout of Crestwood Preparatory College on Thursday before suffering a 6-2 defeat at the hands of Eastview SS that night.

The squad saw their tourney come to an end with a 6-2 loss to Brooklin HS on Friday morning.



Muskie boys' skip Chris Silver looked on hopefully as teammates Owen Riches and Jason Bazylewski looked hard on their brooms to get his stone down the ice during Fort High's 11-4 loss to Aldershot HS at the OFSAA curling championships last Wednesday afternoon at the Fort Frances Curling Club. But the black-and-gold rebounded with seven-straight wins en route to capturing the gold medal.



Griffin Garuk, right, and Isaac Strom of the Atikokan Voyageurs looked to sweep a shot down the ice during their rink's 11-3 win over Crestwood Preparatory College at the OFSAA curling championships Thursday afternoon at the Fort Frances Curling Club. The squad went 1-4 in Pool 'A' play to fail to advance to the championship