

Women's hockey wins inaugural Division III championship

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cle that went over Hutchinson's shoulder into the net.

The second period saw Middlebury continue to control play, but Augsburg's goal had given them some momentum as they looked to tie the game. Neither team was able to put the puck in the net, and Middlebury entered the third period with 2-1 lead still in hand. To start the third, Sylvia Ryan '00 was able to put the puck past Schmidt just three minutes into the period, building Middlebury's lead and giving the team room to breathe. Catherine Elkins '02 gave Middlebury a 4-1 lead when she took a loose puck that was out of Schmidt's reach and put it into the net (assists to Labbe and Ryan). With about eight minutes left, Catherine Pullins '00 took the puck in Middlebury's defensive zone, rushed up ice, faked the shot and then slipped the puck into the net, bringing the final score to 5-1. With the win, Middlebury needed either a win or a tie in the Saturday game to bring home the national crown.

Middlebury truly shut down Augsburg with strong defense—the Auggies rarely got quality scoring chances, and Hutchinson played well to take away any opportunities Augsburg had. Said Hutchinson after the game, "Augsburg had some trouble breaking through our de-

fensive line but when they did they made some great plays and it was so much fun to be involved in the play and face some great shots." Hutchinson made 10 saves in the win.

Going into the second game, the team could sense that it was on the doorstep of reaching its goal for the season. Said Pullins, "When we were in the locker room before the first period of the second game, one of the girls said to the team that this was it. This was the end. We did not have to save any energy for any other game, because this was the farthest we could go." Coach Mandigo commented, "We were focused and confident, but not overconfident. In game one, we played very well in the third, but the first two periods could've gone either way."

In the second game, Middlebury again came out firing, showing that there would be no chance of a let-down from the win the day before. While Augsburg also had their chances, Beth Denoncourt '00, playing in her final collegiate game, was up to the task, and kept the game a 0-0 tie. Four minutes into the game, Elkins sped up ice on a breakaway at the end of a Panther penalty kill, and with a couple quick moves, put the puck into the net, giving the Panthers a 1-0 lead. At 5:37 of the period, Erin Neil brought puck

around the front of the net, and after a flurry of shots by several Panthers, was able to give Middlebury a 2-0 lead (on an assist by McDougall and Audrey Pellerin '03). Less than one minute later, Labbe headed towards the Auggies' Schmidt on an end to end rush, and with no Augsburg defenders able to catch her, scored to put the Panthers up 3-0 early into the game. With six minutes left in the period, Labbe and Ryan found themselves on another Middlebury breakaway, this time with Labbe receiving a beautiful pass from her line-mate to tally Middlebury's fourth goal in the opening 14 minutes of the game (also assisted by Elkins). The shocked Auggies took a timeout, hoping to regroup after being blown away so quickly. The Augsburg players came out with new fire, and towards the end of the period, were able to cut the lead to 4-1, as Sarah Garrison took a puck that got away from Denoncourt and poked it into the net.

In the second period, Middlebury again showed up ready to play, and made sure Augsburg would have no chance to get back into the game. Eight seconds into the period, the Panthers received a power play, and before the Matthews Arena announcer had even finished announcing the penalty, Ryan ripped a power play goal into the net for a 5-

1 lead (assists to Elkins and McDougall). Captain Sarah Hall '00 scored off a scramble in front of the net at 16:04 of the period, assisted by Jacqui Phillips '03 and Angela Kapus '03. At 18:48 into the second, Phillips scored a power play goal (assisted by Carpenter and Amber Neil '03), giving Middlebury an amazing 7-1 lead. Finally, with just 12 seconds left in the period, Ryan took a loose puck and got it past Schmidt (assisted by Labbe and Laurie Richmond '02), putting the Panthers up 8-1.

According to Hall, "The first and second period on Saturday were two of the best that we played all year." Carpenter explained, "We reached our peak game speed [in game two] and after the first few shifts things fell into place and we never let up. After the second period of game two, when we were up 8-1, we all entered the locker room eager to get back on the ice."

The third period saw Middlebury skate well, but despite 14 shots on net, the game stayed at an 8-1 score. Denoncourt only faced four shots in the final period, for a total of 11 saves in the game. She commented, "As a goalie, keeping Augsburg to only two goals in the series was not that difficult, our defense only allowed a total of 23 shots the entire series."

All season long, Middlebury has won with outstanding offense, oppressive defense and strong goaltending. Hase praised the goalies in particular, saying, "I only wish our goalies, Megan Hutchinson and senior Beth Denoncourt, had received more attention through the season and through Beth's career. They are the best goalies out here, but that seems to just be something only our team knows."

Mandigo stressed that there were several standout performances on the weekend, and that his entire team had played great hockey. He specifically pointed out Carpenter and McDougall, saying that in many ways, both had played their best hockey of the season. McDougall "played great back-to-back games, while Sarah knows her role and played well with it." Obviously, Carpenter's early goal in the first game set the tone for her play on the weekend, and for Middlebury's chance to win. Mandigo also stressed that Elkins was outstanding in her ability to "dominate play and control the puck," while Kapus and Neil played great games as well.

Ryan, who was named the MVP of the national championships, talked of how the team came together to earn the wins: "There was an all around team effort put forth throughout the entire tournament. Everyone stepped up her game and we really took control from the start. Being a senior and having that be my last game, I couldn't ask for anything more. It was great to look in the crowd in Boston and see that, even though it was not a home game at the Chip, there were still people there to cheer us on. Middlebury is a great place to play hockey, I am lucky to have been given the chance to experience how great it truly is."

McDougall echoed Ryan's sentiments, stating "Being a senior, I am so excited that I can leave Middlebury having won a national title. I

will remember this championship and this team for the rest of my life." McDougall's excellent play on the weekend earned her a spot on the All-Tournament team, along with Elkins, Carpenter and Labbe. Captain Sarah Hall commented, "I know that I speak for all of the seniors when I say that if you have to accept that it has to end, and it does, I could not have asked for a better group of people or a better way to end than this. It is every athlete's dream to go out on top, and every person on this team has made that dream possible for the six of us. Being the first team to win a Division III national championship in women's hockey is a phenomenal achievement, and I know that we will all cherish it for the rest of our lives."

Said Pullins, "We rose to the top, played with our hearts, and did what we had to do. We did it for ourselves and our coaches... and for the seniors who will never again be lucky enough to skate with the Panther pride that we had for the past four years. Although a memory, it will last forever."

The Panthers finish the season with a school record 27 wins, bringing their record to 27-2-1 on the season. Elkins, Labbe, Pullins and Ryan were all named All-Americans, giving Middlebury an amazing four of the six spots on the First Team. Ryan's 33 goals this season set a new school record, while her 114 career goals make her the career goals-scoring leader.

Pullins finished her career with 52 goals and 55 assists, putting her sixth on the all-time scoring list with 107 points. Denoncourt finished with eight shutouts this season, and her season goals-against average of .79 puts her second in Middlebury's record books for single-season GAA, while her season .925 save percentage ranks fourth all-time. Denoncourt's eight shutouts this season set the single season record for shutouts by a Middlebury goalie.

Mandigo gave special praise to his seniors: "Sylvia's done it all for four years, and will graduate with over 200 points. Catherine Pullins is our all-time leading scorer among defensemen. Sarah Hall is one of the most outstanding captains I've ever had, and Christa McDougall works so hard, and can be physical when she has to. Kelly Hase has great hands and great vision, and Beth Denoncourt doesn't get the recognition she deserves for her great accomplishments. I cannot give them all enough credit. There's satisfaction in seeing the seniors win the national championship, to see history in the making."

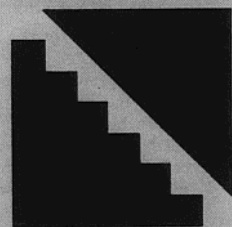
He went on to state that being a part of the first-ever national championship series was an honor for Middlebury, and that, with the growth in women's hockey, "it's been a long time coming. It was a memorable experience."

Kelly Hase may have summed it up best, saying, "I could not have asked for a better way to end my hockey career here. Who can ask for more than going out on top? I have loved being a part of this team, and the memories I have with my team are always something I will cherish. I feel lucky to have been a part of it for the last four years."

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