

# ‘On a cloud’: Isobel Cup win is a dream years in the making for Whitecaps

Heather Rule (/author/heather-rule/) Mar 18, 2019



Early in overtime during the National Women’s Hockey League’s championship game, Minnesota Whitecaps defenseman Lee Stecklein got the puck at the blueline after an offensive zone faceoff win from teammate Katie McGovern. Stecklein fired the puck through traffic toward the goal, hoping to get it on net, get a tip or create a rebound.

Her first indicator of success was seeing her teammates scream, then turn and jump.

“And then I don’t remember much. I was on the bottom of a pile,” Stecklein said with a laugh.

Her game-winning goal 49 seconds into overtime resulted in an Isobel Cup championship for the Whitecaps in their inaugural season in the NWHL, the first expansion team in the five-team league. The Whitecaps (14-4) defeated the Buffalo Beauts (12-5-1) by a slim 2-1 margin Sunday afternoon in front of another sold-out TRIA Rink filled with 1,200 fans in St. Paul.



**Minnesota Whitecaps**  
@WhitecapsHockey

GUESS WHAT MINNESOTA WE WON@LeeSteck2  
[pic.twitter.com/nV2kESeUS5](https://pic.twitter.com/nV2kESeUS5)

3,969 3:34 PM - Mar 17, 2019



[660 people are talking about this](#)

The championship moment seemed all the more special to original Whitecaps member Winny Brodt Brown, a defenseman and team captain who's played on the then-independent team since the very beginning in 2004. She joked with her teammates in the 17-minute intermission before overtime.

"I'm like, 'Hey, girls, I'm 41 (years old). Let's get this thing over with. Let's go home!'" Brodt Brown said.

"And they got it done," she deadpanned.

Once the celebratory pile of players disbanded, shook hands with the Beauts and grabbed their "Isobel Cup Champion" baseball caps, it was time for NWHL commissioner Dani Rylan to present the trophy to the Whitecaps. Brodt Brown, Hannah Brandt, Stecklein — named the playoff MVP — and original Whitecaps member Brooke White-Lancette, all came forward to accept the trophy.

The Whitecaps are the fourth different team to win the Isobel Cup in the league's fourth season. The front of the trophy, named for one of the pioneers of women's hockey, reads: "The Lady Isobel Gathorne-Hardy Cup 1875-1963. This Cup, shall be awarded annually to the greatest professional women's hockey team in North America. All who pursue this Cup, pursue a dream; a dream born with Isobel, that shall never die. EST. 2016."

It was fitting for Brodt Brown to be the first to raise the trophy and hoist it above her head as she skated around the ice. After so many years playing as an independent team, without something tangible — like the Isobel Cup — to play for, Brodt Brown finally held a trophy as a professional hockey player.

"You play for moments like this as a player," Brodt Brown said. "I never thought at my age I'd be playing in a big game in a moment like this again.

"I think it gives you purpose, it gives you all the energy."

Brodt Brown's sister and fellow defenseman, Chelsey Rosenthal, was the second player to take a turn skating with the Isobel Cup. At least, she thinks that was the order of things.

"It's kind of a blur," Rosenthal said.

Rosenthal has been with the Whitecaps since she graduated college in 2006. She said there wasn't any discussion beforehand about who was going to get the Cup first if they won.

"I think it's just like how they do in the NHL, the ones that have been waiting the longest to win a Cup. It was just kind of natural," Rosenthal said. "I think maybe the players all knew and maybe stepped back."

Rosenthal used the phrases "meant to be" and "long time coming" when discussing the championship. She also played a role in the game-winning goal.

"We changed forward lines, and (Stecklein) kind of looked back," said Rosenthal, who then motioned for Stecklein to stay on the ice during that first minute of overtime. "And then the next thing, the puck's in the back of the net."



**Minnesota Whitecaps**  
@WhitecapsHockey

First year in the @NWHL

We are #1!!

Thanks to all friends at the @StPaulSaints @mnwild @Vikings @minnesotalynx @MNUFC @MN\_Vixen @Twins @Timberwolves for your support this year [pic.twitter.com/L9JJuQ324W](https://pic.twitter.com/L9JJuQ324W)

780 9:20 PM - Mar 17, 2019



72 people are talking about this

Brodt Brown and Rosenthal's father, Jack Brodt, was on the bench as co-head coach of the Whitecaps. Again, only fitting after he helped start the original Whitecaps in order for his daughter Winnie to have somewhere to play hockey.

Jack Brodt couldn't hide his excitement during the postgame celebration either.

"I feel like I'm flying right now," he said. "I'm just on a cloud. This is unbelievable.

"It's probably one of the most exciting things for me as an individual, but to see these girls so wrapped up in this. They've been working hard all year, as have all the teams. ... We don't deserve it any more than anybody else, because they put in the same effort. We just happened to get one more goal."

He briefly recalled part of the long journey it took for the Whitecaps to get to this point, battling over the past six years to get a schedule, trying to get into the Canadian Women's Hockey League and being denied, he said.

“Finally, Dani (Rylan) came to us and said, ‘We got a spot for you,’” Brodt said. “And I said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

After they were officially welcomed into the league last spring, this first season turned into a successful run for the Whitecaps, winning their first six games as members of the NWHL and selling out 10 games (all eight regular-season games, plus two playoffs) at TRIA Rink. They finished as regular-season NWHL champions, earning the top seed and home-ice advantage for the semifinal and championship games.

The jam-packed crowd, plus those fans who watched the live stream via Twitter, was treated to an entertaining, fast-paced hockey game from start to finish.

Both teams came out flying from the puck drop, with Buffalo putting the pressure on the Whitecaps defense. It took 7 1/2 minutes of game time before the Whitecaps registered a shot on net, though they had other chances that just missed the mark.

Buffalo took a 1-0 lead with 2:59 remaining in the first period on a shot through traffic from defenseman and USA Olympian Emily Pfalzer.



The [@BuffaloBeauts](#) strike first! 1-0 with 2:59 left in the first.  
[#MINvsBUF](#) [#IsobelCupFinal](#) [pic.twitter.com/koPZLjbZUN](https://pic.twitter.com/koPZLjbZUN)

34 1:29 PM - Mar 17, 2019



[See NWHL's other Tweets](#)

The Whitecaps tied it just 1 minute, 22 seconds later with a blast off Amy Menke's stick for her fifth goal of the season.

That was the end of the scoring until the game-winner, as team defense was once again a staple for the Whitecaps.

"I think championship hockey, everyone just ups the intensity," Stecklein said. "And you have to, otherwise Buffalo would have put some away.

"You just have to keep going and hope that one goes in eventually."

Goaltender Amanda Leveille made 22 saves, while USA Olympian Nicole Hensley stopped 29 shots for Buffalo. She started the game with Canadian Olympian Shannon Szabados out with a lower-body injury.

It's not any wonder the game was a tight contest. Three of the four regular-season games between these teams were one-goal affairs — all three of which were Whitecaps victories. This marked the only overtime game of the season for the Whitecaps.

"It was an emotional roller coaster, just because Buffalo's so good, too," Brodt Brown said. "They're hitting pipes, we're hitting pipes.

"We were blocking shots like we've never all year, and so were they."

The ice was resurfaced before overtime, and the Whitecaps ended the suspense quickly with Stecklein's goal.

"I saw Lee take the shot, but it was kind of screened," Jack Brodt said. "So I don't know if their goalie saw it or not, to be honest with you. But we told our players to go to the net."

Co-head coach Ronda Engelhardt said she saw the shot go through the goaltender's legs and into the net. Then her eyes went toward her co-coach.

"I just wanted to look at Jack, because I knew he would be enthusiastic," Engelhardt said. "He deserves this."

To get to Sunday's championship, the Whitecaps beat the Metropolitan Riveters in Friday's semifinal game, 5-1 — a game originally scheduled for last weekend. But the semifinal was postponed after bad weather played a role in the Riveters' inability to make it to St. Paul for the original game.



**Minnesota Whitecaps**

@WhitecapsHockey

#IsobelCupChamps 

WE DID IT MINNESOTA!!

THIS IS FOR ALL THE GIRLS WHO DREAM BIG 

[pic.twitter.com/pDIpHclYCZ](https://pic.twitter.com/pDIpHclYCZ)

2,923 3:58 PM - Mar 17, 2019



565 people are talking about this

“It was just an unfortunate situation,” Leveille said. “But that’s Minnesota for you. That’s the way the weather works around here.”

Both teams had to quickly regroup. The game was rescheduled for 7 p.m. Friday. No problem, right? Well, except it was a typical work day for most of the Whitecaps players.

“So a lot of people finished work and came right to the rink,” said defenseman Amanda Boulier. “I’ll be honest, that worried me a little bit, just because most of the times when we have games, you have the full day to focus.

“I think that might have helped us, because we didn’t have time to get nervous.”

The Whitecaps were used to that routine in a way, with late-evening practices held on weekdays. With the postponed game, the team actually got three more practices in throughout the week.

The shift in the schedule didn’t seem to faze anybody on the ice — nor did the flashing lights from a fire alarm that a youngster pulled in the closing minutes of the second period in the semifinal game. Play continued, the fire department successfully stopped the alarm during the second intermission, and the Whitecaps went on to win the semifinal and achieve the ultimate goal.

Safe to say that as Sunday afternoon rolled into evening and the Whitecaps sat back to watch the Minnesota Wild game down the street at Xcel Energy Center, they were a happy bunch.

“It’s indescribable,” Rosenthal said. “The players that have been around and kept us here, if it wasn’t for the people that played before this team, we wouldn’t be here today.”

*(Top photo: After winning the Isobel Cup, the Whitecaps brought the party down the street to Sunday’s Wild game. Credit: David Berding / USA Today)*

### What did you think of this story?



MEH



SOLID



AWESOME