Golden goal leaves Laurentians silver 10/15/02

By JOHN BROWNE, The Telegram

The faint gasp heard 'round old King George V Field Monday afternoon was the sound of more than 7,000 fans sighing.

Sean Margison scored five minutes into the second 15-minute overtime period to give Manitoba a 1-0 win over the St. Lawrence Laurentians for the 2002 Challenge Cup national men's soccer crown.

The Golden Goal was the one spot of tarnish on an otherwise sterling run by Newfoundland and Labrador's representatives, who were ranked 10th heading into the 10-team tournament. The sudden goal by the Sons of Italy Lions appeared to shock the crowd, which had been anticipating another improbable St. Lawrence win.

Although the Laurentians won twice and tied once in getting to the final, they'd been outplayed in every match. However, they more than held their own in the final only to have their Irish luck run out.

The teams had battled through a scoreless 90 minutes of regulation time, including a thrilling final five minutes that saw Laurentian goalkeeper Pat Byrne and Manitoba keeper Steve Sawatzky make outstanding saves that had the fans roaring.

But when Margison, the ever-dangerous Manitoba striker who had missed some good scoring chances earlier because of Byrne's work, finally broke in on the Laurentian keeper in the second overtime, he put the winner away with ease.

"I knew that if we eventually kept working we'd get something," said Margison. "We worked hard all year and we earned this."

Sawatzky saved the game for Manitoba by just getting his hand on the ball and pushing it inches wide of the low corner of the net late in regulation time.

"They had some dangerous forwards and they had some good shots on net but we kept them off the board and we're glad to be going home with the gold medal," he said.

Manitoba coach Chic Devenney said his team is a "fast, aggressive team" and it finally began playing that way at the end of the game. The amiable coach was gracious in victory.

"We really met our match today. The Laurentians did a fabulous job in shutting us down. But we played hard and we played for that goal.

"I can't explain the excitement on our bench when he (Margison) scored the winning goal, but it's a team game and we've got 17 players and they worked very hard for me. It's been a glorious road."

Devenney, a Scotsman who came to Canada a decade ago and got his citizenship five years ago, said as soon as he arrived in Winnipeg he looked for an opportunity to coach a soccer club. He said he likes to bring young players through his system.

"We believe in a fast, attacking game with some control, but we also have some experienced players, including fullback Tony Nocita, the team's captain and a former professional."

Devenney said the one thing the Lions had that eventually brought them the championship was a belief in themselves.

"We believe in team work and train with intensity," he said. "When you come to our club you are expected to hunt and fight for each other. It's a real family affair in the dressing room."

"Both teams played really hard,'' said Manitoba defender Tevin Olivier-Job, who plays the same position for the Memorial Sea-Hawks in the Atlantic universities conference.

Olivier-Job said it was a little extra special for him to play against MUN teammate Richard Kelly for the top prize.

"All tournament long Richard and myself were talking about what it would be like to play each other in the gold medal game. We knew we had a shot but we weren't 100 per cent sure it would happen, so this hyped both of us to play this game,'' said Olivier-Job.

St. Lawrence veteran Harry Kelly, who played his last game with the senior Laurentians, said there is no reason his team won't be back next year.

"The guys in our dressing room know what it takes to win and hopefully they can take it one step further next year and bring the Cup back home."

St. Lawrence got to the final by beating Alberta 3-1 Sunday on goals by Alec Turpin, Chris Caines and Richard Kelly.

Nova Scotia beat Alberta 2-0 for the bronze medal.