

#3 Virginia surges in the second half to defeat James Madison 4-1

By: Cate DeSousa

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. - Despite a scoreless first half at Turf Field, the #3 Virginia Cavaliers managed to put up a strong fourth quarter to defeat in-state rival James Madison University 4-1. Both the Dukes and the Cavaliers entered today with a three-game win streak, but the Cavaliers were able to execute on corner penalties, ultimately giving them the edge.

Beyond the Cavalier win, the Sunday matchup touched the hearts of the UVA community, as the game was dedicated to the One Love Foundation. One Love is a national non-profit dedicated to ending relationship abuse. The foundation honors the life of Yeardley Love, a former UVA lacrosse player, who tragically passed away in 2010. The Cavaliers played with a strong sense of purpose, which was evident throughout the game against James Madison.

Both teams were off to a slow start offensively. Virginia had one shot on goal during the entire first half, while James Madison had none. “I think we didn’t have the situations. We felt rushed and didn’t execute it as well,” said Virginia head coach Ole Keusgen, who felt his team was trying to create plays that weren’t there. “We changed it a little so we had more time and more space to execute.”

Virginia created a momentum shift during the second quarter, as they totaled six shots on goal, but, as Keusgen pointed out, the Cavaliers were unable to execute. Early in the second quarter, Virginia had a consecutive trio of penalty corners all inserted by Virginia’s standout freshman Mary Adams. On the third penalty corner, Adams sent the ball to the top of the circle, connecting with Mia Abello, but the shot was ultimately blocked by James Madison goalkeeper Molly Schreiner.

Schreiner is a standout in the Mid-American Conference, and she showed her strength in the cage during the second quarter. She made multiple clutch saves to stop the Cavalier offense and keep the Dukes within reach.

Late in the third quarter, the Cavaliers clicked offensively, as Emma Watchilla had an impressive reverse chip shot from the left side of the corner, sending the ball to the back of the cage. This was a critical turning point for the Cavaliers, as noted by Virginia captain Mia Abello. “Emma came in clutch. She had a great game, played a lot of 1v1 [battles] and won them with speed, and that’s exactly what we needed for her to put it in the back of the net,” said Abello, “So, yeah, that was a blessing.”

Watchilla's goal not only sparked momentum for the Cavaliers, but it also instilled a sense of urgency for the Dukes. With only 14 seconds left in the third quarter, James Madison midfielder Ava Drexley-Amey responded and tied up the game 1-1.

What ultimately allowed the Cavaliers to pull away during the fourth quarter was their ability to execute on corner penalties. Virginia took six penalty corners during the fourth quarter, converting three into goals. Central to this fourth-quarter surge was Abello, who consistently controlled the ball on penalty corners. 50:15 into the game, Abello took a shot off a corner play that was tipped in by Adams. On the second successful corner penalty, the ball was inserted again to Abello, who this time took a strong shot and sent the ball directly to the back of the cage.

Virginia's three-goal burst showcased the team's depth. The scoring was not carried by a single player, as four different Cavaliers managed to find the back of the cage. Two of the four Virginia goals came from freshmen, as Mary Adams and Riley Savage each tallied their first collegiate goals. It will be crucial for the Virginia team to continue this balanced offensive effort as it heads into ACC play.

Looking ahead to this week, the Virginia team will face #4 Boston College at home on Friday and #5 Syracuse on the road on Sunday. The Cavaliers will look to extend their win streak and carry over the momentum from this dominant win over JMU.