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Members of the Laconia High School girls lacrosse team hoist the championship plaque after defeating Hopkinton for the Division III state title in Manchester on Tuesday. (Harry Kozlowski / for The Laconia Daily Sun)

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Laconia girls win lacrosse title

By HARRY KOZLOWSKI
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

MANCHESTER — A regulation girls' lacrosse game is 50 minutes long, but the Laconia girls earned their 2018 championship in just 14 minutes and 43 seconds.

That was the span opening the second half where Laconia scored six unanswered goals, putting themselves in the driver's seat to cruise to a 10-6 victory in the NHIAA Division III girls' lacrosse final played at Memorial High School in Manchester.

For the Sachems, it was their third title in the past four years; they also claimed crowns in 2015 and 2016. But this time the team had to fight their way past two higher seeds.

"It means a lot, especially coming in as the underdog," said junior midfielder Skyler Tautkus, who scored three goals Tuesday. "I think it really pulled our team together."

Laconia, the No. 4 seed, had to upset top seeded Derryfield in the semifinals in order to face the No. 2 seed Hopkinton Hawks in the final. "After beating

a seed above us, it gave us the confidence going into this game," Tautkus said.

The game started out as an unexpectedly low scoring affair, considering both teams combined for 73 goals coming into the final. The first half ended tied 3-3 on goals by Tautkus, Sydney Stevens and Nicole Turpin.

"I think both teams came out a little tight in the first half," said Sachems coach Bob Howe. "It's one of the lowest scoring halves I've seen in our history. It was just great defense."

The game was scoreless for almost 10 minutes before Tautkus put Laconia up 1-0. But each time the Sachems took a lead, the Hawks responded. Defense and goaltending dominated the first half.

The tightly played first half raised tensions for Laconia goalkeeper Hannah Dow, who finished with eight saves in the game. "I was really worried. All I could do is get big, play strong and trust my D. It was nerve wracking."

But it was a new game once the second half began. "I told them to go out, relax and have fun," said coach Howe, who noted the team had been strong in the second half of games all year.

"When Skyler sees Becca just getting a step, it's like 'let's go' and it worked out great. They did exactly what they did against Derryfield, and Pelham before that. They executed better in the second half."

Tautkus scoring off a free start began a string of six unanswered goals for Laconia in the second half. "I think we just turned it around completely. From coming out of a tough first half, we just pulled away," Tautkus said.

Rebecca Howe found her scoring touch in the second half as well, adding three goals of her own. Megan Gaspa and Caitlin Beattie also tallied to give Laconia a 9-3 lead with just 10:17 remaining.

"We just never got our offense clicking. That's very uncharacteristic for us," Hopkinton coach Tim Bassett said about his team's inability to keep up. "We knew what they were doing, but we didn't get there quick enough to stop them."

The Hawks finally answered with two goals by Lyndon Flanagan and Taylor Signor to cut the Sachems' lead to 9-5, but Tautkus scored once more with 4:26 to go to put Laconia up 10-5.

Flanagan scored one more late goal for Hopkinton, but the Sachems held the ball ran down the clock to seal the game. "It was a hard-earned win, this one was," said coach Howe.

Howe and Tautkus were the big scorers in this tournament with 14 and 12 goals respectively. Sydney Stevens had 8 assists to go along with her 9 goals.

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