

Cats in danger of missing semis

The Canterbury Cats are in danger of missing the semi-finals of the national hockey league after losing their round four game 1-5 to Wellington yesterday.

Canterbury has not missed the semi-finals since the league was instituted in 1999 and only once – in 2004 – has it failed to reach the final.

Until 2004 Canterbury had been in every final of the old national tournament and the national league since 1978.

Now the team languishes in seventh place with three rounds left, and all are must win games for Canterbury to ensure it has a chance of reaching the final in Albany in two weeks.

It was an abject performance by Canterbury yesterday. It was thoroughly outplayed by Wellington and was fortunate that the score was not higher. It took some smart saves from goalkeeper Charlotte Walker in the second half to keep Wellington to five goals.

By the end of the game the Canterbury players might have been wishing that, as in some other sports, a mercy rule applied.

In the first 10 minutes Canterbury had two good chances to score. After 3min a Honor Dillon shot beat the goalie but Frances Shaw, covering, knocked the ball off the goalline.

Three minutes later Dillon made a break into the circle but Liz Perry sitting on the goalpost could not turn the cross into the net.

After 11min and from its first penalty-corner Shaw scored for Wellington from a rebound. Wellington went 2-0 ahead after 22min, Niniwa Roberts scoring from a penalty-corner, the first goal of a hat-trick.

By contrast Canterbury failed to force a penalty-corner in the match, an indication of the limited times it reached the Wellington circle. Wellington had 11.

Roberts put the game beyond doubt six minutes into the second half. She scored from a field play five minutes after the break and a minute later belted home a penalty-corner. She won the player of the day award.

At 31 and less than a year after becoming a mother Roberts has revitalised her career after missing the New Zealand team last year.

Dillon scored Canterbury's solitary goal with 9min left and Suzie Muirhead completed Wellington's scoring in the final minute.

Roberts, Muirhead and Australian international Teneal Attard were beacons for the Wellington team.

Canterbury battled to get any dominance in the midfield and there was a lack of support for the ball carrier.

Next weekend Canterbury plays Midlands and Central.