

## Jaguars work hard for premier league title this time

THE Gauteng Jaguars lifted the Brutal Fruit Netball Premier League trophy for the second consecutive year after a 49-47 victory over the Western Cape Southern Stings at the University of Pretoria's Rembrandt Hall on Sunday.

The last time these two teams met, in the first round of the tournament, the Jaguars claimed a comfortable 51-43 win, but it was dramatically different match this time around, with so much more at stake.

This was the Stings' first ever appearance in a final, and the Jaguars' fifth. But the Western Cape side looked far from underdogs against the defending champions. The first quarter was a tight one, which ended 12-9 in the Gauteng side's favour.

The Jaguars certainly didn't look like the all-conquering outfit that had cruised through the tournament unbeaten in the second quarter, however. And the Stings took advantage of that loss of concentration, levelling the scores at 14-14 and then surging in front. Their lead grew to six goals at one point, but the Jaguars managed to return to their game plan and close the gap to three by half time.

A stern talking to by coach Jenny van Dyk as the Jaguars left the court at the break must have done the trick as they soon got things back on track, levelling the scores. But they still didn't quite regain that momentum they'd enjoyed throughout the tournament, never managing to take the lead and allowing simple mistakes into their game. They reached the final break three goals down once again.

The Jaguars came back fighting in the final period. They finally levelled the scores at 41-all and took the lead for the first time since that second quarter with just over six minutes left in the match. Those final minutes were frantic ones, with the lead exchanging



Erica Burger of the Jaguars swivels past a challenge by Stephanie Brandt of the Stings during the 2018 Brutal Fruit Netball Premier League final match. **PHOTO: BACKPAGE PIX**

hands, and the scores were level with just 60 seconds to go. The Jaguars then snuck in front and the Stings had a chance to equalise, but a wild pass into the circle went long and the victory was ultimately handed to the defending champions.

They had endured the pressure of coming from behind and held their nerve to claim the two-goal win, much to the jubilant crowd's delight.

Tshina Mdau was named player of the match for her efforts on wing defence for the Jaguars, while the Free State Crinums centre, Khanyisa Chawane, was named the player of the tournament.

A relieved Jaguars coach Van Dyk, said afterwards: "We had a good idea what to expect but I think the Stings' defence was quite hectic and they gave us a good go in that circle.

"A few changes later — it look a little

while to find the combination — but at the end of the day, the changes did work and did bring variety into it."

Stings coach said Annelie Lucas said: "We knew they were going to come out all guns blazing because that's the structure they play.

"We should have just kept the ball in hand and I think we just weren't patient enough.

"But the Jaguars were in this position five times already and this is our first so we're sending a message that we are here and we want to be first, and we'll definitely be back. I'm proud of the girls — with a score like this, it could have gone either way so I'm happy."

### Play-offs

Earlier in the day, the North West Flames beat the Free State Crinums 66-64 in a nail-biting play-off for third place that went into extra time.

The Crinums were three goals up before the Flames registered on the scoreboard. They finally levelled matters at 7-7 and then surged ahead to lead 15-11 by the first break.

By the final break, it was the Crinums who had their noses just in front on 37-39. Once again the fourth quarter was a see-saw battle, and while the Crinums had led by three goals at one point, heading into the final minute there was only one goal in it.

A frantic period ensued as the Free Staters tried to run the clock down, but managed to lose possession for the Flames to equalise. Vanes-Mari Proudfoot had the final chance to score and win the game with seconds left on the clock but missed the shot, sending the game into extra time.

The beginning of extra time was the first time the Flames looked dominant. They surged into a six-goal lead but the Crinums fought back to equalise and the game rolled past extra time into golden goal, with the Flames finally sealing the two-goal margin needed to win at 66-64.

"I felt like I played every ball with them," admitted a thrilled but exhausted Flames coach Elsje Jordaan afterwards. "When we went into golden goal I said to them 'please girls, don't do that to me,' but it seems like they enjoy putting me through pain," she added with a laugh. — Supplied.

### FINAL POSITIONS

1. Gauteng Jaguars
2. Western Cape Southern Stings
3. North West Flames
4. Free State Crinums
5. Gauteng Golden Fireballs
6. KZN Kingdom Stars
7. Mpumalanga Sunbirds
8. Limpopo Baobabs
9. Eastern Cape Aloes
10. Northern Cape Diamonds