

## Nationals an eye opener for Ladner Pioneers

### B.C. champs finish 5th and discover top teams loaded with senior 'A' talent

[Mark Booth](#) / Delta Optimist

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Ladner Pioneers Mike Avery was recognized for his outstanding season by being named the WCSLA Defender of the Year.  
Photograph By Mark Booth

The Ladner Pioneers made significant strides this season to become the best Senior "B" lacrosse team in B.C., but contending for a national championship again is going to take a whole lot more.

That's the consensus after the club returned home with a fifth-place finish at the President's Cup in Six Nations, ON. Ladner closed out the tournament Sunday morning with a 13-10 win over Quebec champions Kahnawake Mohawks.

The Pioneers opened with two straight wins then were overwhelmed going through the teeth of their schedule — losing games to Six Nations Rivermen (ON), Native Sons (CanAm), St. Albert (AB) and St. Regis Braves (TNSLL) by an aggregate score of 55-18 — to be promptly knocked out of medal contention.

It was their first trip to nationals in a decade and provided an up close look at what the new format looks like with more teams and games. It proved to be a real eye-opener.

Bronze medalist Native Sons were led by 2017 National Lacrosse League MVP and scoring champion Lyle Thompson of the Georgia Swarm. Kahnawake's roster included Colorado Mammoth's top scorer Callum Crawford, while two-time champion St. Albert were paced by one-time New West Salmonbellies' standouts Keegan Bal and Richard Lachlan.

The Pioneers were the last B.C. team to win the President's Cup 13 years ago and now they know why.

"This was the 11th time I have been to the President's Cup and this was far and away the deepest I have seen it," said general manager and head coach Ross Frehlick.

"Our guys left absolutely everything on the floor. Sure we could have been better in all phases of our game but we still never would have been any better than fifth place.

"That's how big of a separation there was. We were simply out-talented by some of those teams. It was a real shock to our guys. I'm actually happy as hell we beat a team with a \$125,000 payroll in our final game."

The Pioneers have a young nucleus of players that should be well-positioned to defend their West Coast Senior Lacrosse Association championship in 2018. However, the long-term goal was to also be competitive at next year's President's Cup which happens to be in Nanaimo.

Frehlick has been involved in the game long enough to know it's going to take more than dedicated off-season workouts.

He won't be given a \$100,000 budget to recruit players with. Instead, his focus will be on a current strong core of local talent that is playing in the WLA ranks.

The Pioneers have an excellent reputation in the lacrosse community and the hope would be some of those Delta Lacrosse alumni step away from their senior "A" careers for one season to try and win a national championship for their hometown team.

"What we need is to bring the Ladner guys home for one season," said Frehlick. "Maybe the nationals being in B.C. next year would be the incentive to do it. You need those level of players to compete."  
Frehlick's senior "A" shopping list would include two or three scorers, a couple of defenders and a goaltender in the prime of his career.

"You really noticed the top goaltenders. They made the saves look easy. That's what we need," he added.

### **Boxla bits...**

The Pioneers played the entire tournament without leading scorer Tyler Kirkby who was sidelined with a tailbone injury. He was named to the WCLA First All-Star Team, along with defender Jake Carey.

Mike Avery was named WCSLA Defender of the Year, while Frehlick shared Coach of the Year honours with Royal City's Don Cruickshank and Scott Janssen.