
Timbermen spoiled otherwise terrific season for Pioneers

Ladner comes up short against rival in league standings, playoffs and pivotal game at President's Cup

[Mark Booth](#) / Delta Optimist

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Ladner Pioneers has some terrific battles this season with the Nanaimo Timbermen but came out on the short end of most of them.

Photograph By MARK BOOTH

They were much closer to a potential podium finish than their sub .500 record indicated. That's why Ross Frehlick needed a couple of weeks before talking about his team's fortunes at the President's Cup.

The Ladner Pioneers GM and head coach watched his team limp home with a 4-5-0 record. The seventh place finish was actually two spots worse than what was accomplished a year earlier but the final position was misleading to say the least.

The Pioneers had destiny in their own hands when they took their 3-1-0 record into a pivotal round-robin tilt with the host Nanaimo Timbermen.

A win would not only lockdown a spot in the semi-finals but also go a long way to eliminating their West Coast Lacrosse League rival which entered the pivotal tilt with a 2-2-0 record.

A 2-1 lead evaporated during a two-minute span in the second period and Ladner never recovered in a gut-wrenching 8-6 defeat.

Another loss followed 14 hours later to Ontario champion Oakville and the Pioneers' medal hopes were suddenly over. They closed out round-robin play with a 10-9 defeat to eventual three-time champion then split a pair of meaningless placement games.

The Timbermen not only went on to make the playoffs but lost 10-8 to St. Albert in a memorable championship game.

An otherwise impressive 2018 campaign will be remembered for Ladner's inability to beat Nanaimo, including a deciding game 14-13 overtime loss in the league finals two weeks earlier.

That's what leaves a bad taste in Frehlick's mouth. A shorthanded line-up managed 13 goals against the Timbermen but only six were produced in the rematch despite being at full strength with extra additions.

"In the end, we just didn't get enough from our big guns," he said. "To only score six in such a crucial game was very disappointing." We lost by a combined three goals to the two teams in the gold medal game."

Frehlick added he sees no reason why Ladner can't make it three straight trips to nationals in 2019. He has a young nucleus of players, including goaltender Zach Wickett — a local product who once and for all is fully capable of replacing the legendary Rob Cook.

The Timbermen are expected to take a step back without the services of NLL playoff MVP Jeff Shattler. A young team in Victoria may very well be Ladner's great threat moving forward.

Boxla Bits...

Former Delta Islanders standout Tom Johnson led the Pioneers in tournament scoring with 24 points, including 12 goals. The 32-year-old North Delta native was a late season addition the club hopes to have full-time next year.

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