

Series sweep sends Pioneers to nationals

Ladner beats Nanaimo 14-6 at home Sunday to win series in three

[Ian Jacques](#) / Delta Optimist

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Eric Haydon holds up the West Coast Senior Lacrosse Association championship trophy with the Ladner Pioneers captains following their three-game series sweep of the Nanaimo Timberman.
Photograph By IAN JACQUES

The Ladner Pioneers are West Coast Senior Lacrosse Association champions following a dominating 14-6 game three victory over the Nanaimo Timberman Sunday afternoon at Sungod Recreation Centre in North Delta.

The three-game sweep secures a berth in the national championship later this month in Montreal.

After the teams played to a 4-4 tie after the first, the Pioneers scored eight unanswered goals before Nanaimo was able to muster their fifth.

Spencer Bromley paced the attack with five goals and three assists while Ryan Benesch and Luke Wiles each had three goals and four assists. Ryan Keith scored twice while Cody Hawkins added a single.

Goalie Eric Kratz was solid between the pipes, making 38 saves picking up his second win of the series.

Pioneers coach Ross Frehlick said heading into the series they were hoping for a sweep.

"We were hoping we would only have to go there [Nanaimo] once," said Frehlick. "We've won 13 in a row and we're on a roll, but now we have to re-group and get ready for the next test."

Ladner won game two 12-9 on Saturday night in Nanaimo.

It looked like it would be an easy night as the Pioneers led 6-1 after the first and 9-2 mid-way through the second, but Nanaimo scored six unanswered to cut the lead to 9-8 before Ladner scored a pair to salt the game away.

Benesch led the way with four goals and seven points, while Dylan Lacroix had a hat-trick. Bromley, Riley Phillips, Wiles, Cody Nass and Riley Taylor each added singles.

Dan Lewis made 31 saves as Nanaimo outshot Ladner 40-39.

"Our defence played well, goaltending was great and offensively we had a great attack throughout the series," said Frehlick. "Last night [Saturday] they [Nanaimo] went on a big run and that was all on the offense and not getting off the floor, so today [Sunday] we focused on that and it makes everything go well."

In the series opener on Thursday, a 9-8 Pioneers home win, Bromley had two goals and four assists, while Keith scored three times and added one helper. Connor Davidson, Wiles, Tyler Kirkby and Phillips all scored singles with Kirkby and Phillips each chipping in with a pair of assists.

Kratz was solid between the pipes stopping 31 of 39 Nanaimo shots as Ladner outshot the Timbermen 50-39.

Benesch, Wiles and Hawkins, all imports from Ontario and Alberta, were huge for the Pioneers in the series.

“We leave for nationals on Aug. 23. We have 10 games in eight days. To get to the medal round you play eight round robin games in six nights and then the semifinal and final. Hopefully we are there at the end. We’ve been there the past few years and we knew what we needed to make the final and we got that help to get some quality guys. Hopefully we go there and do what we need to do.”

Ladner is one of if not the hottest team in the country having won 13 straight games dating back to the regular season and six straight playoff victories.

The club is clearly on a mission to produce a special season in memory of former player Thomas Haydon who lost his battle last fall to pancreatic cancer at the age of 36.

“We’re doing well. I’m excited to go back east,” said team president John Burr. “I know it’s going to be tough. My gut feeling is we are going to medal. We have a solid team, good bunch of guys, great coaches. I’d like to thank all the fans who came out to support us all year. It’s been awesome.

“Thomas is a part of our family and our firefighter family. It’s still very emotional, but very special for all of us.”