

Pioneers off to finals & back east

Ladner headed to President's Cup national tourney for first time since 2007

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Ladner Pioneers Mike Tebbutt heads towards the net during his team's dominating 24-8 victory over the visiting Nanaimo Timbermen on Monday night to sweep the WCSLA semi-final series. Photograph By Mark Booth

The Ladner Pioneers are a step closer to their first provincial title in a decade but it's an even bigger prize that has really piqued their interest.

The Pioneers completed a three-game semi-final sweep of the Nanaimo Timbermen with a dominating 24-8 win on Monday night in Ladner to advance to the West Coast Senior Lacrosse Association championship series against the Royal City Capitals.

It also means they are headed to the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve in Ontario for the President's Cup, starting Aug. 27. It will be Ladner's first appearance at the national championships since 2007.

The Pioneers and Timbermen were the lone clubs from B.C. willing to commit to attend the week-long tournament that has now been expanded to include nine teams.

The trip will potentially serve Ladner well for 2018 when the showcase event will take place in Nanaimo. However, head coach Ross Frehlick sees no reason why this group can't bring home the storied franchise's third-ever national title.

"Being B.C. champions is something but what we really want is rings and the only way to get that is by winning the President's Cup," said Frehlick. "Guys are going to understand what it's going to take but for sure we can have success back there."

"They are all buying in right now and there is definitely a good vibe going on. I don't remember the last time it was like this but it must be frustrating to play us because there is no time or space out there. Teams are having a hard time keeping up with us."

The Pioneers had to shake off nearly two weeks of rust in their 8-6 series opening win against Nanaimo last Thursday. They then proceeded to go to work in a big way by dominating their longtime rival like never before.

One night later on the Island, they blitzed the hosts with eight goals in the opening 20 minutes and rolled to a 17-8 victory. It was a loss that disheartened a usually competitive Nanaimo squad that showed up for game three in Ladner with just 14 players.

The Pioneers again jumped to a big early lead and cruised the rest of the way, finishing the night with nearly 80 shots.

"Our offence is flying right now. I know it's not going to be like this all the time but our guys are playing with a lot of confidence," added Frehlick.

Rookie standout Tyler Kirkby led the way in the game two victory with eight points, including a hat trick.

Nathan Clare enjoyed a five point night, including three goals, while Andrew Schwab, Colton Dow and Sam Clare each scored twice. Spencer Bromley and Wyatt Pinder had a goal and three assists each.

With ice returning to the Ladner Leisure Centre next week, all of the Pioneers' home games in the finals will be played at Sungod Arena in North Delta. Game one is slated for Wednesday at 8 p.m. and game three goes next Saturday.