

## Ladner Pioneers closing in on first place finish

[Mark Booth](#) / Delta Optimist

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Ladner Pioneers Nathan Clare fends off a pair of Royal City opponents in Thursday's 10-9 home floor win. The Pioneers now sit at 9-1-0. Photograph By Mark Booth

Sitting atop the league standings is nothing new for the Ladner Pioneers. The way they are doing it most certainly is.

The storied franchise has enjoyed plenty of success as a perennial frontrunner in the West Coast Senior Lacrosse Association. This year is no exception.

Ladner improved to a 9-1-0 with an 11-5 win in Coquitlam on Sunday night and are on the verge of locking up first place and a bye directly to the league semi-finals.

The Pioneers are surrendering just six goals per game, which is far and away best in the league. They have always had solid goaltending and take pride in their defensive play.

Ladner also tops the circuit in scoring and, surprisingly, is the WCSLA's least penalized team.

For years, intimidation was a key ingredient in the club's success. Now it's more about a young roster deep in talent that thrives playing a run-and-gun style.

"We used to go into each season thinking we needed 250 goals for, 100 against and about 1,000 penalty minutes," chuckled head coach Ross Frehlick. "Now it's all about playing uptempo lacrosse. Our goal is to get out there and play at a pace other teams can't keep up with.

"It definitely is a new era for lacrosse here. We have never had a team like this before."

The regular season is unfolding exactly the way the club had hoped knowing all along three key players will soon be leaving for the European Box Lacrosse Championships in Finland. Nathan and Sam Clare, along with Dan McDermott, will be suiting

up for Team England. The trio are key pieces in the Pioneers' success with Clare brothers providing plenty of offence and McDermott anchoring the back end.

The hope was first place would nearly be locked up before their departure. They will play their final game Thursday (8 p.m.) at home against Coquitlam and a win would give Ladner a five-point cushion on Langley with three games left.

At very worst, a top two finish would advance Ladner directly to the WCLA semi-finals and the trio would not miss any post-season action.

That doesn't mean the Pioneers aren't looking to add some depth prior for the stretch run.

They welcomed back one of their alltime greats when goalie Rob Cook decided he wasn't finished stopping shots at the age of 49. He joins Nathan Wilson and Kevin Hill to give Ladner three quality netminders.

Wilson was excellent in a big 10-5 win at Langley on June 16 and Cook made a solid debut in last Thursday's 10-9 triumph over a tough Royal City team. It was Hill's turn in Sunday's win over Coquitlam.

Frehlick has no concern carrying three goalies the rest of the way but it does give him one fewer option for runners on his 25-man roster with three regulars about to head to Europe.

He called-up juniors Riley Taylor and Jayven Gill for the Coquitlam game and wants both to be eligible for the playoffs, along with part-time veterans Quinn Waddington and Travis St. Germain. The hope is Mike Berekoff will be available too. The local standout led the team with 40 goals last season.

"Rob called me up and said he wanted to play. There is no way we would ever say no to him with everything he has done for this team," added Frehlick. "He's not our No. 1 goalie. Right now, I don't know who that is. We wanted to carry three goalies all along and we are in a good position.

"We are also looking at potentially adding a couple of WLA cuts."