

Young legs carrying Ladner Pioneers

Senior lacrosse team relying on up-tempo game to win 4 of 5 out of the gate

[Mark Booth](#) / Delta Optimist

May 31, 2017 12:00 AM



Impressive newcomer Tyler Kirkby fires a behind the back shot during the Ladner Pioneers 16-7 win over Nanaimo on Saturday. Kirkby led the winners with five goals. Photograph By Gord Goble

It's a Burnaby Mountain pipeline that has helped the Ladner Pioneers get off to fast start by playing an up-tempo brand of lacrosse.

"We are the youngest we have been and are the fastest we have ever been," claimed head coach Ross Frehlick who has been involved with the West Coast Senior Lacrosse Association club as a player and coach for the better part of 29 years.

"Everybody is buying in right now. I really like this group."

The Pioneers split a pair of weekend games to own a league best 4-1-0 record, including a dominating 16-7 home floor win over the Nanaimo Timbermen on Saturday afternoon.

They took advantage of a tired rival that played less than 24 hours earlier in Langley and were missing No. 1 goalie Danny Walters due to an injury. Frehlick offered little in the way of sympathy, knowing the importance of the win in just a 12-game regular season that sees the seven teams play home-and-home against each other.

"We know they and Langley are two of the teams that are going to be right up there and we had to take advantage of it," Frehlick continued. "This is a huge win for us and we have to keep it going. We haven't proved nothing yet. We went 7-0-0 last year and then went backwards."

Ladner stumbled down the stretch last season and eventually bowed out to the Nanaimo in the semi-finals. What has Frehlick more comfortable this time around is this young group should just keep getting better.

The Pioneers are led by homegrown talents Nathan and Sam Clare who have put up big numbers since launching their senior careers. Nathan had five goals and two assists Saturday, while younger brother Sam added four points in a 11-6 win over the Valley Rebels three days earlier.

Both enjoyed outstanding field lacrosse careers at Simon Fraser University. As did regulars Colton Dow and Eric Ransom. Now the latest Clan alumni to come on board has already made a huge impact.

Tyler Kirkby also scored five goals Saturday after netting a hat trick in his debut. He nearly cracked the New West Salmonbellies roster and will be used as a call-up player throughout the WLA season.

Kirkby was second in SFU scoring this past season with 41 goals and didn't have to look far to find a Senior "B" destination with Sam being part of the SFU coaching staff.

"He is a heck of a player," marvelled Frehlick. "He is going to be in and out of New West's line-up but wanted to keep playing."

Even with the retirement of longtime goalie Rob Cook, Ladner still has plenty of experience in net with veterans Nathan Wilson and Kevin Hill. Local standouts Ryan Keith and David Yee could also be rejoining the team soon. Cam Taylor is another familiar face who had five points against Nanaimo. Still, there is a clear youth movement with an emphasis on speed.

"In Senior 'B' when you are fast, you are taking time and space away from people," added Frehlick. "This is a process that started last year, quite frankly, and we are going to keep building on what we have.

"Sure we want to win (the league) in 2018 because we know Nanaimo is hosting (nationals) but if we are good enough to do it this year, we will go too."

The Pioneers were the team with the tired legs Sunday, falling 10-9 to the Victoria Wolves in the provincial capital. Kirkby had a pair of goals in a losing cause.

Boxla Bits... The Pioneers would love to have first place locked up with three games to spare. That's when they will lose the Clare brothers and Dan McDermott for a two-week period. The trio have have been named to the Team England roster for the European Box Lacrosse Championships in Finland.