
Newcomers have leading roles in Pioneers clinching 2nd

NLL veteran goalie Brodie McDonald makes 42 saves in Ladner's 8-5 win over Victoria

[Mark Booth](#) / Delta Optimist

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The Ladner Pioneers final wave of player signings includes Eli Gobrecht from the Major Lacrosse League's Denver Outlaws. The defender was a standout in Ladner's win on Sunday over Victoria. Photograph By MARK BOOTH

It didn't take long for the Ladner Pioneers' final wave of signings to make a difference in their attempt to return to the President's Cup for the second straight year.

The Pioneers secured second place and a potential favourable route to nationals with an 8-5 win over the Victoria Eagles on Sunday to close out their regular season schedule.

It means they will have an opening round bye and home floor advantage for a best-of-five semi-final expected to start next Wednesday in Ladner. A series win would also lock up a President's Cup berth if league champion and host Nanaimo prevail in the other final four match-up.

On an afternoon when the offence wasn't firing on all cylinders, Ladner relied on stellar goaltending from Brodie McDonald and key goals in transition to put away a pesky Victoria team.

McDonald, 28, was making just his second start with the club after signing last week, producing 42 saves. The 6-foot-7 Vernon native has played in the National Lacrosse League for the past seven seasons, including most recently with the Vancouver Stealth.

The Pioneers also shored up their backend with the addition of Eli Gobrecht from the Major Lacrosse League's Denver Outlaws.

The former Ithaca College All-American and New York native is making a transition to the box version of the game. He joins recent signee Pete McFetridge — another NLL veteran — along with local standout Sam Clare who is back after missing much of the regular season with a leg injury.

McFetridge and Clare scored key second period goals in transition with the Pioneers on their heels. Ladner built up a 4-1 lead after one but it's five-on-five offence did not score again.

"We would not have won that game a month ago," said Pioneers GM and head coach Ross Frehlick. "Those guys were absolutely huge for us.

"As unreal as (50-year-old veteran Rob) Cook has been for us over the years it was just time. Stats don't lie and we ranked near the bottom of the league in goaltending. And now we have some big guys at the back who can move too. We are getting to where we want to be."

In the past, there have been concerns of disrupting team chemistry for the current season and beyond with late season additions. However, the ever-changing senior "B" landscape makes it nearly impossible for teams to stand pat.

It seems like more NLL players are going the senior "B" route for their summer ball due to their lesser time commitment. Nanaimo turned heads by recently signing 2018 NLL playoff MVP Jeff Shattler of the Saskatchewan Rush.

The Pioneers also have invested a lot in trying to make it to Nanaimo for nationals.

It began a year ago by taking on the big expense of attending the 2017 President's Cup back east, just so players would get experience under their belts.

"That's why second place is so big for us," added Frehlick. "If we finish third we are having to play Langley (in the first round) and then maybe have to make three trips to Victoria (in the semis) at \$1500 (in travel costs) for each game. That's money we need for the President's Cup."

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