

A BLUEPRINT TO FOLLOW

WANT TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL LACROSSE TEAM? LOOK NO FURTHER THAN OSHAWA'S LADY BLUE KNIGHTS LACROSSE CLUB AND WILFRED LAURIER UNIVERSITY'S WOMEN'S LACROSSE SQUAD — TWO ORGANIZATIONS THAT EXEMPLIFY TRADITION, WINNING AND TEAMWORK

// By Nicole Kallmeyer

There is no secret to building a successful women's field lacrosse organization. Just ask Lynn Orth or Barb Boyes, two women who have run two of the most outstanding lacrosse teams in Ontario, and perhaps all of Canada.

"It's a combination of a lot of years, a lot of leaders, and a lot of work on team," says Orth, the head coach of Wilfred Laurier University's women's lacrosse team, the Golden Hawks.

"The biggest key to our success is the [girls'] commitment level," adds Boyes, chairperson of the Oshawa-based Lady Blue Knights Lacrosse Club.

Although Orth and Boyes both site traditional methods of strengthening their lacrosse programs, their teams' superior reputations and numerous trophies indicate they must be doing something different, something *more* than the average lacrosse organization.

Laurier's team has won six consecutive Ontario University Athletics (OUA) championships to date, and

boasted six of the top 10 scorers in the OUA last year. In the last nine years, the Lady Blue Knights have grown to 430 from 90 members, many of whom move on to play for Team Canada or at U.S. colleges via athletic scholarships.

Luckily, these lacrosse leaders are willing to share the insights and strategies that got them to the top.

When Orth took over the reigns of Laurier's lacrosse team in 1998, women's lacrosse was in its trial year for varsity status in the OUA. "I was definitely not recruiting at that point because I didn't know how or where to recruit," she says.



Two years later, the team won its first OUA championship "almost by accident," and that marked the beginning of the Golden Hawks' rise and Orth's recruiting efforts.

She started sending letters to existing women's field lacrosse club players telling them about the program and the team's early triumph. She has done this every year since, and her pro-

motion efforts are boosted by a comprehensive web page established by Laurier's athletics department. The site's latest headlines are likely to entice any varsity lacrosse hopeful: "Lacrosse Hawks remain unbeaten," and "Lacrosse Hawks pick up six All-Star awards."

As for Boyes, she relies on a "solid volunteer base" to get the word out about the Blue

Photos: Wilfrid Laurier University

Knights. A media co-ordinator promotes the club in local papers, and other volunteers organize the production and dissemination of “high-end, glossy” posters and flyers. The club also heavily recruits from hockey teams in surrounding communities.

Successfully recruiting players is one thing, but keeping them year after year is another. Boyes emphasizes the need to create a family atmosphere in the league, where the girls can develop close relationships with their teammates and a true passion for the game.

“When they develop that passion, they keep coming back,” Boyes says, adding she tries to include fun activities for the girls in conjunction with their practices and games. The Blue Knights have travelled to Vale, Co., and Lake Placid, NY, while family picnics are organized alongside tournaments that mix all ages and skill-levels. “We go above and beyond trying to create opportunities for them,” she adds.

Camaraderie is also a key ingredient in Laurier’s recipe for success. The team spends time together both on and off the field, and older members help rookies integrate into the team and balance their athletic and academic commitments.

Similarly, the Blue Knights pride themselves on the mentorship that flows from coaches to players. Almost all the coaches played for the club and return voluntarily year after year. Boyes says her club is unique in its exclusive use of young, female coaches rather than older fathers. “How is a dad a role model for a female athlete?” she asks.

Taylor Landry exemplifies Boyes’ theory. The Under 19 A-team standout has played with the Blue Knights for six years. She says her best experience thus far has been learning from her coach, Kristen Millar. “Seeing her get a scholarship and seeing the success she created for her-



“I’m a very quiet coach. All my players will tell you I don’t ever yell at them on or off the field.”

Orth gives her players lots of input in practice, and although they discuss strategies and set plays beforehand, she allows the team to get creative in matches.

She also has a unique no cut policy. Anyone who comes to tryouts, stays on the team, although they might not get to play in games. “You might find a diamond in the rough who by her third or fourth year becomes a dominant player,” Orth says.

Orth’s willingness to develop inexperienced players is matched by Boyes’ attention to the Blue Knight’s non-competitive house league program. Boyes believes a solid house league is the foundation of her rep teams’ success and the overall growth of the Blue Knights program. Recently, the club has started house league teams for seven to nine year-olds. With such an early start, these girls are sure to become great competitive players in the future, says Hanna Burnett, who has the pleasure of coaching this age group.

Burnett epitomizes the success of the Blue Knights and Golden Hawks. She played with the Blue Knights for two years before playing goalie on Laurier’s team in her first year of university. She is also a past OUA all-star and has been coaching with the Blue Knights for two years. Like her teammates in both programs, she has become a strong, dedicated lacrosse player and a gracious competitor who fights hard to stay on top.

“Success breeds success,” Orth says.

If that’s the case, the Lady Blue Knights and Laurier’s Golden Hawks won’t be slowing down any time soon. ♦

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Photos: Lady Blue Knights