



THE GLITTER OF GOLD

GOOD STRATEGY AND TEAM CONCEPT KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR TEAM ONTARIO AT NATIONAL LACROSSE CHAMPIONSHIPS

// By Andrew Wareing | Photos: Pixels Photography

When it comes to lacrosse in Canada, nothing glitters quite like the gold that can be won at the National Lacrosse Championships.

And no gold has glittered quite so bright as that which was taken home by Ontario's provincial teams who took part in the Ontario National Lacrosse Championships held as part of the Ontario Lacrosse Festival during the first week of August. The final national games took place August 7 and involved the Girls' Bantam Lacrosse,

Warrior Pee wee and STX Bantam teams, all of whom took gold. Other provincial teams competed at national tournaments outside of Ontario.

For head coach Doug Hastie's STX Bantams and Troyhann Santos' Bantam Girls, their opposite numbers from B.C. were the teams to beat and they managed to do so handily at the end of championship play on the Saturday. But not before undergoing some tough trials during round robin play and semi-final action.



Hastie says the bar was set high by the B.C. team when Ontario lost 10-4 in early round robin play.

"When B.C. beat us, the coaching staff sat down together to talk about what was next. We knew we had to have a different game plan," he says. "When we lost to B.C. we knew they were going to be our competition before the tournament started because they had been top teams the last two years. We got together and threw out a bunch of ideas on how to beat them. Then, when we met with our players, we told them they had to be the best. They stepped forward and we won."



Step forward they did after a game that had Ontario dominating the game in the first period (5-0) followed by a single-scoring second for Ontario and B.C., and a shut-out third for both, ending the gold-medal game 6-1 in Ontario's favour.

This year also marked the second year of play for exclusively girls teams, including Santos' Bantams. As such, the inclusion of women-only teams is still in its early stages, but she notes many are seeing that the difference really is no difference in the quality of play out in the rink.

"Last year, I don't think people knew quite what to expect. It was a novelty," she says.

"Because of how the festival is designed, by default we had a lot of people filter through our games on their way to other arenas and so we had more spectators watch us. As a result, once they watched us, they realized that this is athletes playing lacrosse. They train like the boys do, they go through the same process...we see them as dedicated athletes trying to make a dedicated team."

Losing to B.C. in their first round robin game, it meant that Ontario had a lot of refining to do to their game before they made it to the championships. Facing Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Atlantic provinces and the Iroquois First Nations teams gave the Ontario team a chance to make improvements in preparation for their final battle with their west coast opponents, which saw a solid 4-0 shut out.

"I think the biggest thing was that we developed a team concept," says Santos. "Throughout the tryouts and training, there were very specific things we wanted the girls

to do, strategies and approaches that took them out of their realms. The first game was an opportunity to get used to playing by these strategies. Each game, they got stronger and kept believing in the team concept so, by the time they got to the final game, they had confidence in what they were doing and confidence in each other."

Having the National Lacrosse Championships at the Ontario Lacrosse Festival has proven a positive step for increasing the profile of both organizations, says Ron MacSpadyen, marketing director of the Ontario Lacrosse Festival.

"It's symbiotic," he says. "The largest crowds for the national championships have always been at the festival. As it's grown larger, it's become more of a stage for national games. And we have had some great ones over the years."

Key, says McSpadyen, is the relationships, not just between the Canadian Lacrosse Association and the Ontario Lacrosse Festival, but with organizations within the communities of Ajax, Clarington, Whitby and Oshawa, which hosted the event.

"Logistically, it's a challenge," he says. "It takes a good number of volunteers, volunteers with experience in putting together this. You don't do what we're doing without the help of a serious partner in this town. Without staff who understand how to deal with a large event like this, it would never happen." ♦

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