

THE BEAUTY OF COMPETITION

ACROSS ONTARIO, MORE AND MORE MINOR LACROSSE ASSOCIATIONS ARE SPRINKLING IN A LITTLE COMPETITION ON CHAMPIONSHIP DAY, AMIDST ALL OF THE HOT DOGS AND HAMBURGERS

// By Andrew Wareing

As the Ontario house league lacrosse season drew to a close this year, it was obvious to see that the standard “last day barbecue, let’s play for fun” format has evolved into something a little bit more competitive.

While not necessarily a new change by some organizations, many minor lacrosse organizations across the province have been making the move toward adding more of an air of competition to their end-of-season wrap-up. The London Minor Lacrosse Association is one of those organizations.

“Last year, when the games finished, everyone just went home. There was no pizzazz! No ‘buzz!’ This year, the coaches said there was a real buzz out there,” says Karie Wells, executive director of London’s growing league.



“We think our Weekend of Champs is a great way to end on a positive note,” adds Doug McLaren, director of house league for the Milton Mavericks Minor Lacrosse Association, which has about 200 young people participating across five age divisions. “For the competitive side, they get to pick up on

games, check the stats on the web and find out how other teams are doing. But the house league doesn’t have that. (Competition) adds a level of intensity to the game.”

The basic format for many associations’ house leagues is a round-robin style competition with the top teams playing in the final

championship game at the end of the day. However, what was absolutely important this year was that all participants came out of the experience feeling like 'a winner' with everyone taking away an award. Although competition exists, the emphasis in all of these house leagues remains on fun.

Raffles of prizes supplied by local sponsors also meant participants came away with something. For younger players, such as the Peanut division encompassing ages four to six year olds, skills development through different activities is still a top focus.

McLaren says the feedback from the participants was that the increased level of competition in the house league final game just added an extra level of excitement for everyone participating.

For several of the organizations, making it work took more than just effort. It required



we have lot of great coaches, that was something we didn't have a lot of issues with."

Planning is also key in London where Wells says championship day this year went remarkably smooth. "I had parents," she says, "and other people all coming into the office on the day, asking me if I needed any more help but we had so much help preparing, it went off



without a hitch. Countless hours of work and countless phone calls to sponsors who were so easy to work with and without a moment's hesitation. Some didn't even know we had an organization until we told them about it."

Volunteers, no doubt, drive every minor sport in Canada, and lacrosse is no different.

"When it comes to volunteers, you have to treat them well because they become our voice out there in the community," says Carolyn McCutcheon, president of the Whitby Minor Lacrosse Association, which boasts more than 1,550 players of varying ages. "We had 300 registrations this year and that means 300 voices out there talking about the association."

Of course, over the years, some associations have been challenged by shrinking participation in the sport. Wally Tymkiv, president of the Oakville Minor Lacrosse Association, says among the solutions is to work with the local hockey association, including having sign up tables at local minor hockey events and relying on the word of mouth of parents who have their children involved in both sports.

"We get a lot of promotion from the parents," he admits, "When their kids go into hockey from lacrosse, they see there is a lot of hand-eye coordination. The other thing about lacrosse is that it is a very physical game so they look at 'Little Johnny' and see he knows how to take a hit. We get a lot of attention to lacrosse that way." ♦

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teamwork by a host of parent and community volunteers and the local board of directors. Not to mention, a lot of planning.

For Kelly Lafranchise, vice-president of the Gloucester Griffins Minor Lacrosse Associa-

tion, planning the house league final day began well before the beginning of the actual season. In Gloucester, membership in its house league has varied over the years. It currently sits around 600 with the aim always trying to attract more players.

With the help of the board and volunteers, says Lafranchise, "we sat down and mapped out what we wanted to be for next year. We want to start planning now and have our road map ready. The important thing though is that we've got a great volunteer base. Whenever there were vacancies, people jumped in with both feet. And, because

