



LAKERS, AGAIN, AT THE MANN CUP

THOMPSON CAPTURES MVP HONOURS



Chris White, John Tavares and Scott Self celebrate 2012 Mann Cup victory at Peterborough Memorial Centre

series in six games capturing their fifth Mann Cup title in nine years and 14th in franchise history.

While the series featured some of the game's greatest names – also including John Tavares, Tracey Kelusky, Shawn Evans, Athan Iannucci and Lewis Ratcliff, to name a few – it was a journeyman goaltender who stole the spotlight.

When the series began, Mike Thompson, a 36-year-old goalie who announced his retirement from the NLL months earlier, was almost an afterthought. While he did backstop the Lakers to the 2010 Mann Cup, he had played only 133 minutes for the team since. Reconstructive knee surgery forced him to miss the 2011 season and along the way he lost his starting role to rising young goalie Tyler Carlson, who led the Minnesota Swarm to the 2012 NLL final. Carlson was outstanding in leading the Lakers to the Ontario title in a five-game win over the powerful Six Nations Chiefs. Thompson wasn't even the back-up for the opening game of the Mann Cup, sitting in the stands as the third-string goalie.

Two games into the series the Thunder seemed to have Carlson figured out after taking a 2-0 series lead on 13-12 and 15-14 victories. Lakers head coach Jamie Batley played a hunch and dressed Thompson as the back-up for Game 3 and when Langley scored four goals on seven shots for a 4-2 lead 8:18 into the contest, Thompson replaced Carlson.

Thompson stopped a Langley breakaway in spectacular fashion and the series took a dramatic swing. He assisted on the Lakers' next goal and the Lakers rallied to win 14-10 and went on to sweep the next three games 9-8, 9-5 and 14-8. Thompson's 4-0 record, sparkling 7.25 goals against average and .813 save percentage earned him the Mike Kelly Award as Mann Cup Most Valuable Player.

It was quite a way for Thompson to end his career as he announced his retirement during victory celebrations on the floor.

Langley coach Rod Jensen had great praise for Thompson.

"We just didn't have the answer. I have to tip my hat," said Jensen. "Any time the guy had to make a save, he made the save."

Lakers' fans chanted Thompson's name as

the MVP award was presented

"That's the first time I think I have heard them cheer my name that much," said Thompson. "That was an awesome experience. We have such great fans who filled the building here again. It's an unbelievable experience to be here every night."

Tavares cemented his place in Mann Cup history becoming the first player to win the trophy eight times. Bill Wilson and Neil Doddridge have seven Mann Cup rings. Tavares is also the all-time leader in Mann Cup goals (92), assists (111) and points (203). Grant is closing ground at number two on the list. His 30 points, which placed him third in the series, improved his totals to 76 goals, 98 assists and 174 points.

When it came time to receive the Mann Cup Lakers' captain Scott Self stepped aside and allowed Tavares to be the first to hoist it.

"I'd love to go for number nine," said Tavares. "I don't know if I can but I'll definitely see if it's in the cards. I'm at the point in my life where I have to play season-by-season, meaning winter and summer. Hopefully, I can be productive and help the team win."

Billings led the tournament scoring with seven goals, 25 assists and 32 points edging 2010 Mike Kelly winner Shawn Evans by one point. Evans had seven goals and 24 assists for 31 points. Iannucci was fourth with 15 goals, 13 assists and 28 points.

The series was not without some controversy.

For the first time in Mann Cup history the Canadian Lacrosse Association introduced drug testing through the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport.

Uncertainty over testing protocol led to conflict between staff members from both teams with CCES testers trying to gain access to the dressing rooms after two games. It led to the CLA announcement prior to Game 5, that head coaches Batley and Jensen were suspended for the balance of the series. Both coaches appealed and were re-instated prior to Game 6.

The 2013 Mann Cup will be hosted by the WLA champion. ♦

Mike Davies is sports director at The Peterborough Examiner. He is entering his 18th year covering Ontario Lacrosse Association action.

// By Mike Davies

John Grant Jr. and Garrett Billings battled all winter for the 2012 National Lacrosse League (NLL) scoring title.

They carried that battle into the summer season as Grant, representing the Peterborough Lakers, and Billings, playing for the Langley Thunder, squared off for the Mann Cup. The annual best-of-seven Canadian senior A lacrosse championship series pits the winner of the Ontario Lacrosse Association's Major Series Lacrosse league against the British Columbia Lacrosse Association's Western Lacrosse Association champion.

The 2012 series was hosted in Peterborough with crowds of well over 3,000 witnessing some of the best box lacrosse seen anywhere in the world. The Lakers won the