

METEORIC RISE FOR RIVERMEN IN SENIOR “B” LACROSSE

>> BY MIKE HANCOCK

ANOTHER LACROSSE DYNASTY could be in the making. While the Six Nations Rebels have proven to be in the midst of something magical with four straight national Junior “B” titles, the Six Nations Rivermen might just be on the verge of something special at the Senior “B” level.

In just two short seasons, the Rivermen have gone from an expansion franchise, to Ontario Champions and Canadian runners-up. The Six Nations four major box lacrosse teams almost pulled off capturing the four premier national titles: Mann, Minto, Founders and President’s Cups. The one title that eluded the Six Nations lacrosse community in 2014 was the President’s Cup.

Given their meteoric rise through Senior “B” lacrosse and their strong leadership behind the bench, there’s every reason to believe the best is yet to come for the Rivermen.

“Head Coach Stew Monture has proven himself in various levels of lacrosse,” said Tom Johnson, 1st Vice President and Director of Team Operations for the Rivermen. “Stew gets the most out of each player and has established himself as a respected coach. He is a very large part of the success we’ve had after only two years in the league. I have listened to Stew’s dressing room speeches to his players. They are very intense and it shows what type of passion and love he has for the game of lacrosse, his players and for Six Nations.”

After losing in the Ontario finals in 2013 to the eventual President’s Cup champions, the St. Catharines Saints, the Rivermen were hungry for an Ontario Championship and a



shot at the Canadian title in 2014.

The Ennismore James Gang (14-2) and St. Catharines Saints (13-3) finished the regular season in the top two positions in the overall league standings and earned first round playoff byes. Despite their solid records, it wasn’t evident from the start of the season that they would be the top clubs. The top four teams, adding Six Nations (11-5) and the Oakville Titans (7-9) into the mix, were all very competitive with one another throughout the season.

The Rivermen pulled off a 2-0 series sweep over the Sarnia Beavers in the first round of the playoffs, outscoring their opponents 30-14 in the pair of games. In the other first round series, Oakville also took care of Owen Sound in two straight to advance.

While the Ennismore sweep over Oakville may have been a predictable outcome, the Rivermen’s handling of the defending national champions from St. Catharines was a

little more surprising.

Trailing 9-7 in the third period of Game 3 and leading the series 2-0, it appeared that Six Nations had left the door open for St. Catharines to spark a rally. That door was quickly slammed shut with the Rivermen scoring five goals in the final 14-plus minutes of the final frame to go on to a 12-9 win and a berth in the Ontario Championship Series against Ennismore.

Game 1 of the Ontario finals went to Ennismore on home floor and after two periods in Game 2 of the series, it looked as though Ennismore was set to take a 2-0 series lead as they led 6-5 heading into the final twenty minutes of regulation play.

The Rivermen, led by veteran Delby Powless had other ideas. Powless scored the first two goals of the third period to kick-start the comeback. From there, Six Nations would outscore Ennismore 4-1 down the stretch and 6-1 overall in the third period to take an 11-7 win at home and even the series at a game apiece.

Next, Six Nations seemed to build on that momentum on the road as they limited the James Gang attack and toughed out a 2-1 lead after one period. The second period was all Six Nations, they outscored Ennismore 6-1 in the first ten and a half minutes of the middle stanza and cruised to an 11-4 win and a 2-1 series lead coming home.

An opportunity to win a championship is special. Doing it at home is unique.

“I’m proud to be from Six Nations and the way the community supports their lacrosse teams at every level is great,” said Johnson. “Lacrosse is good medicine. From the youngsters to the elders, you see the sense of pride they have for their respective teams.”

In front of a large gathering of faithful fans at the Gaylord Powless Arena in Six Nations, the Rivermen took control of the potential championship clinching game in a hurry. After giving up the first goal of the game, all they did was score the next seven goals to lead 7-1 after the first period.

The celebratory beverages that were surely on ice, were anxiously awaiting their consumption as the result of the next 40 minutes of play were never in doubt. An 11-5 win, a 3-1 series victory, an Ontario Championship and a ticket to the President's Cup in Coquitlam, British Columbia were the fruits of their labour.

"They really seemed to buy into the system and the vision set out by their coaching staff," explained Oakville Titans General Manager Josh Briscoe of the Rivermen's success. "I think in the end, that really helped them gel as a team and make their deep run this year. There were four teams that were really stacked closely together, but they peaked at the right time and surged through the playoffs beating some tough teams."

The President's Cup tournament didn't

start well for the Rivermen as they dropped their first two games of the event. After those setbacks, Six Nations battled through the remainder of the round robin, winning all four of their remaining games to finish with a 4-2 record and fourth place in the standings.

After defeating the top-seeded Kahnawake Mohawks of the Quebec Senior "B" Lacrosse League in the semi-finals, it was off to the President's Cup final against the second-seeded Onondaga Redhawks of the Can-Am League. The Redhawks had handed the Rivermen a 14-12 loss on the opening day of the tournament, so Six Nations was looking to return the favour on the tournament's biggest stage.

In the championship game, Six Nations carried a 4-3 lead into the final period and were poised to bring the trophy back to Ontario. Onondaga rallied over the final 20 minutes however, outscoring the Rivermen 6-3, to pull off a 9-7 come from behind win and capture the 2014 President's Cup.

"We arrived with limited players," said Johnson. "Two of our players were in Halifax winning the Founders Cup and missed the first games of the tournament. Our

Junior "B" call-ups were limited also because of college commitments. Playing eight games in seven days takes its toll and the bumps, bruises, strains and sprains with no days off really add up fast. The team played through adversity but came up just short." As such, team trainer Jaime Lawson went above and beyond her duties and was a major contributing factor to their success at the nationals.

"For the majority of our players it was their first time at the President's Cup," said Johnson. "The host and President's Cup committee were exceptionally welcoming. Our native brothers and sisters from the neighbouring native community in British Columbia made us feel at home. They showed the passion to our team that they show to their own home teams."

The Rivermen may not be too far away from making the President's Cup dream a reality. With the recent dominance of the Six Nations Arrows in Junior "A" and the Six Nations Rebels in Junior "B", one has to believe that there is more success on the horizon for the newest member of the Six Nations lacrosse community. **OLM**



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