

POWLESS LEADS ARROWS TO MINTO CUP VICTORY

>> By PERRY LEFKO PHOTOS: WARD LAFORME JR.

HONOUR, TRADITION, CULTURE AND HISTORY are words that sum up the meaning of the Six Nations Arrows Provincial Jr. A lacrosse franchise. Since its inception in 1980, the organization has had success winning provincial and national championships, but there was something dramatically different about the 2014 season, separating it from all previous ones.

The phenomenal Johnny Powless — JP93 — entered his fifth and final year of junior eligibility, looking to cap it off with his first national Jr. A title, having won a Senior A title with the parent Six Nations Chiefs in the Mann Cup and three consecutive championships with the Rochester Knighthawks of the National Lacrosse League. Austin Staats, a precocious 15-year-old, joined the team possessing some of the talents that made him comparable to Powless at that point of his career. And two tough guys, Patrick Thornhill from B.C. and 16-year-old Trevor Stacey from Quebec, were acquired to add the muscle that had been lacking the previous year when the Arrows lost in the final of the Ontario Lacrosse League championship to the Whitby Warriors, who would go on to win the Minto Cup. For all of these reasons, the Arrows felt good about their chances going into the 2014 season after placing second in the league the previous two years.

The Arrows management and coaching staff decided to sit out Powless, the team's captain, for the entire regular season because he had cracked a bone in his left hand, suffered early in the NLL playoffs. He played the remainder of the playoffs with a playing cast, helping the team to win its third consecutive NLL title.

"It's just the depth we had in our organization that allowed us to rest him," first-year general manager Jake Henhawk said. "We thought it would be better for him to rest instead of risking more injury to the hand during the regular season. It was an easy decision."

One of those players would be Staats, a 15-year-old midget junior A player who would display his talent and maturity beyond his age. He led the team with 78 points (41 goals, 37 assists) during the regular season, placing 12th overall in the league in total points. But he missed the entire post season with a severe knee injury.

But by that time, Powless had recovered from his injury.



Johnny Powless led Minto Cup series scoring with 29 points (8g, 21a).



The league-leading arrows beat the St. Catharines' Athletics and the Peterborough Lakers in consecutive series and then overpowered Whitby Warriors, sweeping the Warriors in four straight. Powless topped the playoff scoring with 63 points (21 goals, 42 assists) in 13 games.

The Minto Cup pitted the Arrows against the West representative, Coquitlam Adanacs, at the Langley Events Centre in British Columbia. The two franchises faced one another in the 1992 final, which Six Nations won.

The Arrows scored eight seconds into the opening period on a goal by Brandon Montour and upped it to 2-0 when Josh Johnson potted one, but the Adanacs replied with two to tie the game after the opening 20 minutes. The Arrows led 6-4 after two periods, but the Adanacs bounced back with three in the third, including the game winner by their top player, Wesley Berg, who scored at 10:51.

Game two began with three consecutive goals in the first period by Coquitlam, before the Arrows replied with one by Haodais (Joseph) Maracle inside the final four minutes. They trailed the rest of the way en route to a crushing 11-6 loss.

In both games, the Arrows committed too many penalties, resulting in power-play opportunities for the Adanacs.

"I think the players let their emotions get the most of them," Henhawk said. "They couldn't keep them in check and we ran into a lot of penalty trouble and to Coquitlam's credit they capitalized on their chances and we didn't."

According to Montour, the team suffered from the jitters playing in its first Minto Cup as a group. Coquitlam was playing in its fourth Minto final in five years, hoping to win its second since 2010.

"We didn't want to mess up, but it was some silly mistakes that cost us," Montour said.

"It was just a poor overall effort," Arrows' coach Marshall Abrams. "We came out flat and they jumped all over us."

Game three became the pivotal turning point of the series. With a day off, the team travelled to a reserve in North Vancouver, where it enjoyed a hearty salmon feast.

"I think it helped the guys relax a little bit and get focused," Henhawk said.

Some of the veterans called a players'-only meeting to reinforce the importance of coming together to create a memory that would last forever.

Abrams also offered some positive reinforcement before the game.



Brandon Montour and Johnny Powless celebrate Minto Cup victory.

It culminated in a 19-5 Arrows' win. Powless had seven points.

"We had our backs against the wall a little bit and we knew we could play better," Powless said.

"After those two games, we kind of recuperated and played Arrows lacrosse and it really showed," Montour said.

The game featured 15 game misconducts and 54 penalties because Coquitlam tried to physically challenge the Arrows.

"It was a blowout, and in the third period it's usually what happens in a playoff series, guys start taking more penalties," Powless said. "That's just part of the game."

"The last two minutes of the game was just garbage," Henhawk said. "With about 12 or 15 minutes left in the third period, they brought out their wood sticks to try to intimidate our players and maybe try and hurt a few guys. But we just kept our defensive guys out there and used our wood sticks, too. We had used them all season."

"A couple of our guys really wanted to get them back, but at that point (the Adanacs) were still up in the series, so we wanted to keep our composure and it really worked out," Montour said.

"In the first two games, we took too many penalties and were undisciplined," Abrams said. "This time we were heavy on the cross-check and took it on the chin when we had to and answered on the scoreboard."

The Arrows did something different in game three, donning black jerseys that were

a throwback to the '92 team. The Arrows had brought three different types of jerseys to the series and planned to rotate them.

"Being down two games to nothing and going to the black jerseys and winning, we just figured 'why not? Let's just keep it going.'" Henhawk said.

The Adanacs scored 12 seconds into game four and led 3-0 with less than two minutes played, so Abrams called a timeout. The Arrows trailed 3-2 after the first period, but rallied to win 10-7. Powless had six points.

"Lacrosse is a game of runs. They scored three quick ones, but it's a long game. It's not going to be over in the first few minutes," Powless said. "Everybody on the bench stayed positive and that was the key."

The Adanacs had never lost two in a row in the 2014 season, but the Arrows simply had too much firepower and would go on to win game five 12-7.

The sixth game was tied 7-7 at one point, but then the Arrows tightened up defensively and kept up the offence en route to winning 14-8 and claiming the Cup. Powless assisted on the Arrows' ninth goal with a beautiful behind-the-back pass to Johnson, who scored easily.

"Winning four straight games after losing the first two is something that I, in my 33 years as Commissioner, have never witnessed before," noted OLA Commissioner Dean McLeod.

Powless was named tournament MVP, totaling 29 points with eight goals and 21 assists.

"It's a team game, so I've got to give my teammates a lot of credit for everything but my

main goal coming into the season was just to win the Minto Cup," Powless said. "Knowing it was my last year was a dream come true. Ever since I started playing junior, that's all I ever wanted – winning the Minto Cup. So now when we're old we can tell our kids and grand-kids we were down 2-0 and came back. For the graduating players, this was our last year, so it's kind of sad but it's great we came out on top. To win a Minto Cup, a Mann Cup and a National Lacrosse League championship in the same year is pretty sweet."

"To come back from a two-game deficit, especially in a national championship, was pretty special," Henhawk said. "There's no describing the feeling. Growing up here on the reserve, it was a goal and a dream come true, especially with the Arrows. To play or even be associated with the Arrows, it's just a big thing."

For Montour, the series had added meaning because he planned to retire from lacrosse after the season to concentrate on his hockey career. The Anaheim Mighty Ducks drafted him in the second round in June following a season in which he starred for the Waterloo Black Hawks of the United States Hockey League. He was voted USHL Player of the Year and Defenseman of the Year. He had already committed to the University of Massachusetts.

"We'd been so close every single year and to top it off like that, you can't ask for anything more than that," he said.

The victory was more than just a team win: It belonged to everyone associated with the Arrows.

"The support system that we have on the reserve with Six Nations is second to none, probably the best in all of lacrosse. I'm sure everyone is going to agree with that," Montour said. "Playing in front of our community and showing our skills, I think that's probably the biggest thing why we are so successful. For a player, a coach, a fan and everybody back home watching on the reserve and in B.C., we knew that winning would be something we'd remember forever. That's the biggest trophy in lacrosse, so to win it is pretty special."

The Minto Cup fused the past with the present because of a black jersey, the players who wore it and the fans who embraced the values of the Arrows, 25 years after it started. It truly was a silver anniversary. **OLM**

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PHOTO: WARD LAFORME JR.

NLL PROVIDES SOME PRE-DRAFT DRAMA

JOHNNY POWLESS will resume his professional lacrosse with a team that plays in the same arena where he concluded his junior A career playing in the Minto Cup.

The National Lacrosse League's Vancouver Stealth, who play at the Langley Events Centre, which was the site of the Cup, acquired Powless in September from the Rochester Knighthawks in a blockbuster deal. In exchange for Powless, teammate Joel McCready and the Knighthawks' 2014 first- and third-round picks (9th, 23rd overall), the Stealth gave up its 2014 first- and second-round picks (2nd, 11th overall) along with first-round picks in 2015 and 2017. The trade happened just before the start of the 2014 NLL Draft.

The Stealth finished last in the West Division with a 4-14 record in their first season in Vancouver.

Both Powless, a forward, and McCready, a transition player, had requested trades, and it took awhile to materialize.

It seemed somewhat surprising that the 21-year-old Powless, who had won three consecutive NLL championships with the Knighthawks since turning pro, would want to be dealt.

"I'm a younger player and I'd been in Rochester for three years and just wanted to try something new," Powless

said. "Hopefully we can come together as a team and gel really quickly and have a great season."

He will go from being a young player on a roster of older players to the focal point of marketing the Stealth.

"I think it's pretty cool," Powless said.

Rochester felt it had enough talent to trade Powless while also loading up on picks for the future.

Stealth Head Coach Dan Perreault is excited about acquiring two proven winners. He described Powless as a "lacrosse prodigy."

"He has the ability to change the course of any game with his skill – be it a highlight-reel goal or a deft pass," Perreault said. "Being able to team him up on the floor with someone like Rhys Duch will change our entire offensive perspective."

"It's not often that opportunities like this come up, and we wanted to make a statement to our fans and team of our intention to compete for the Champions Cup in 2015," Stealth President/General Manager Doug Locker said. "Bottom line, this trade is a game changer."

Powless scored 30 goals and totaled a career-high 53 points last season with Rochester. In three seasons, he's totaled 144 points (78 goals, 66 assists) in 50 games.