

REBELS SET STANDARD FOR JUNIOR “B” LACROSSE EXCELLENCE

>> BY MIKE HANCOCK

National Champs for the Past Four Seasons

THE SIX NATIONS REBELS are Canadian Champions. If you think you have heard that before, you're right.

The Rebels have won six of the last eight Founders Cup titles; four in a row. Each championship season has seen Six Nations win in rather dominating fashion with 2014 being no exception.

Only the Calgary Mountaineers (2009) and the Halton Hills Bulldogs (2010) have sipped from the golden chalice of Junior “B” supremacy over the last near-decade.

“Battling for the national championship is the mindset from day one of each season,”

said Rebels President and General Manager Scott Maracle. “With the Rebels success over the past eight years, management, coaches and players have an expectation that the team will be one of the top Junior “B” teams in Canada every year.”

To reach that goal, the Rebels first must win Ontario. The 2014 Western Conference of the Ontario Junior “B” Lacrosse League (OJBLL) was an intense battle and every team knew that Six Nations was the team to beat, but just how could they do it.

The Rebels finished the summer on a 48-game regular season winning streak dating

back to the 2012 season. That loss was a 12-10 overtime defeat at the hands of the St. Catharines Spartans. Six Nations finished that season 18-2.

The Orangeville Northmen looked to be the odds-on favourites to meet Six Nations in the Western Conference finals, and that forecast proved true. With Orangeville allowing the second fewest goals-against in the OJBLL (Six Nations allowed the fewest), this looked to be a potentially formidable playoff opponent.

After the defending champions Six Nations pulled out a low scoring opening game of the series 7-3, the stage was set for a close battle.



Game 2 was also a Six Nations win, but the following game provided the first dent in the pristine armour of the Rebels with Orangeville pulling out a 10-9 win.

Game 4 of the series showcased the dominance of one of the most talented Junior "B" players in recent memory in Zed Williams. A Junior in the fall at the University of Virginia, Williams hails from Irving, New York and was unable to make all the Rebels games due to work commitments and often lengthy lines at the border to enter Canada from the United States.

He scored four goals and added four assists in the Rebels series winning 15-4 victory to pace Six Nations to their fourth consecutive Ontario Championship. Not only did he make his presence felt at the offensive end, he also played just as many shifts at the defensive end of the floor, seemingly playing almost every minute of the game.

"Zed Williams is a great athlete," expressed Maracle. "He can play any sport, fortunately for the Rebels he loves lacrosse. When Zed and his older brother Zach joined the Rebels in 2012, neither had played much box lacrosse so there was a learning curve for both players. Zed definitely sees the floor very well and can draw the other team's best defenders to him, which opens up the floor for the other shooters to make a play."

Waiting for them on the other side of the ledger was long-time rival, the Halton Hills Bulldogs.

Halton Hills started the regular season 3-3, but after that, went 13-1 with their only loss over the final 14 games coming in overtime at the hands of the Green Gaels in overtime.

The Eastern Conference playoffs proved to be much of the same dominance for Halton Hills as they too suffered just one loss in the Eastern playoffs. Their most thrilling victory of the post-season was a double-overtime win over the Akwesasne Indians to clinch a three-game series sweep and capture the Colby Michael Hancock Memorial Trophy as Eastern Conference Champions.

"It was a very special victory for our club," said Bulldogs Head Coach Blaine McCauley. "We always set winning the East as an initial goal at the start of each season and to accomplish that goal is rewarding."

The Ontario Championship Series had all the makings of an instant classic. It was a rematch of the 2008 and 2011 Ontario finals, which Six Nations won both matchups. It also set up a marquee matchup between the two premier players in the league in the Bulldogs' Seth Laidlaw and the Rebels' Williams.

Halton Hills was definitely looking to get back to the Founders Cup tournament and were also hungry to avenge a 2011 Ontario finals loss to Six Nations. A best-of-five series in which the Bulldogs led two games to one, but couldn't close things out.

Game 1 of the 2014 Ontario finals was almost over as soon as it started. The Rebels wasted little time in sending a message that they had no interest in relinquishing their grip on the Founders Cup. Six Nations led 10-1 after one period on home floor at the Iroquois Lacrosse Arena and went on to a rather easy 16-2 win in the series opener.

Game 2 shifted to Halton Hills and the Alcott Arena in Georgetown. The Bulldogs rallied from a five-goal deficit with just over three minutes remaining in the second period. The home side rattled off five in a row to tie the game in the early minutes of the third frame. The visiting Rebels outscored the Bulldogs 3-2 over the final stages of the period and went on to a one-goal victory, 14-13.

Laidlaw and Williams put on a brilliant display of lacrosse each scoring five goals. Williams topped all scorers with 12 points, while Laidlaw had eight in the loss for the Bulldogs.

In the do-or-die game for Halton Hills, they battled tooth and nail for the first 30-plus minutes of Game 3 in Six Nations. However,

a 5-3 game in favour of the Rebels was blown open when Six Nations scored four goals in the final five and a half minutes of the second period to take a commanding 9-3 edge after 40 minutes. The Rebels cruised to a 13-5 win and another Ontario title.

"We have a lot of respect for Six Nations," said McCauley. "They have set the bar very high for every lacrosse team in the country, and maybe not just at the Junior "B" level. To be as dominant as they have been for that length of time is truly an incredible accomplishment."

At the Founders Cup in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Rebels most difficult challenge came from the Iroquois Lacrosse Association representative, the Seneca War Chiefs. Six Nations defeated Seneca 12-6, early in the week-long tournament. In the round robin, Six Nations outscored their opponents almost 6-1 as they notched 118 goals and only gave up to 20 goals, posting a perfect 6-0 record.

In the Founders Cup Championship game, the Rebels met the War Chiefs to no one's surprise. Six Nations once again doubled up Seneca, this time by a score of 14-7. The man at the top of the point parade in the Canadian championship was once again sniper Zed Williams who was more of a playmaker on this day, scoring just a single goal but adding seven assists for an 8-point game.

"There are some teams that need to develop a long-term program to challenge for the Founders Cup," explained Maracle. "Overall the competition did improve as the Seneca War Chiefs were a worthy opponent in the championship. The Rebels could not take the game lightly, which brings out the best in the Rebels players for the entire contest, which is what you want in the end".

"It is unbelievable that the Arrows (Junior "A"), Rebels, Rivermen (Senior "B") and Chiefs (Senior "A") won their respective Ontario Championships and all four teams made it to the finals at their national championships," said a proud Maracle. "The entire community is passionate about the game of lacrosse, it's in our blood."

So the question remains, will Six Nations win their fifth straight OJBLL and Founders Cup titles in 2015? Despite being the target of every Junior "B" team in Canada, one would have to say that the Rebels are as safe a bet as any to do what might seem impossible in today's lacrosse world: win a fifth straight provincial and national championship. **OLM**

