

## Minto Cup

This has been a long time coming. I would like to congratulate A.J., Dave and the entire Edmonton Miners on their inaugural trip to the Minto Cup. Without the hard work and tireless effort of these two gentlemen and others Alberta would not even be in the position we are now.

I had a wonderful time representing not only Alberta, but also the Rocky Mountain Lacrosse League at the 2003 Minto Cup. From the time I arrived until I left, not once did I feel like an outsider. All of Ontario and Burnaby welcomed us with open arms and made us feel like we belonged. It was nice to talk to people that remarked that they themselves had not wanted Alberta in the Minto Cup a couple of years ago, but now totally agreed we deserved to be there. I had the opportunity to spend time with president of the OLA, Ontario's Jr. A. Commissioner and of course all the representatives from Burnaby. They asked lots of questions and were able to answer many of mine. One item they pressed on was that by 2005 Alberta will have to have at least 4 Jr. A. teams.

The Edmonton Miners should be very proud of their performance at the Minto Cup. We did not come away with a victory, but the boys held their own and made a very big impression on everybody there. I believe know that we know what we have to do to be even more competitive in the future.

I would also like to congratulate Todd Lorenz on a great job he did representing Alberta as one of the official referees.

Since my return home I have received emails both from Ontario and B.C., again congratulating Alberta on their success and they are looking forward to seeing us again.

I would like to recommend that in 2005 when Alberta hosts the Minto, that it be held in one center. In Ontario the Miners and Burnaby all stayed in Kitchener, but 2 of our games were held in St. Catherine's and Orangeville. I believe that we would be better to promote the game in one location and be able to cut down on costs for busing.

This trip to the Minto was a real learning experience for myself and an eye opener and I look forward to Alberta's continuing success at the Jr. A. level and to continue some of the friendships and partnerships I have had the opportunity to make.

Rhonda Croswell

## THE MINTO CUP

Firstly I must tell you that it takes courage for those who stand up against the status quo and state that change is required. No doubt you will have all heard the many arguments that Alberta should not be playing in the Minto Cup. Fortunately there are many in the upper levels of lacrosse that understand that for lacrosse to grow we need to make changes and that change does not always have immediate success. While many people have blamed the CLA for forcing the issue I suggest to you that it was not only those in the CLA that have seen the need for change but also many key people in the OLA and the BCLA. Without these people our experience in Kitchener/Waterloo could have been very negative. To the contrary we were treated like all others there with the same respect shown to all the teams. To be sure we were the new kid on the block but at no time were we shown any disrespect and in fact I felt that people went out of their way to welcome us. Our first experience was the news conference where all the executives took time to welcome us which, I guess, I expected but then to have the players and coach of St. Catherine's come over to say hello and introduce themselves made me feel that we were welcomed to the event.

The Miners first experience against St. Catherine's was intimidating for the young men on the Miners. Our first Jr. A game outside of Alberta against the number one ranked team in the country was a tough way to start and in their barn. For the first period we stayed with them on the score board for the first part but a late goal and the score was 4-1. I thought that once we got through that period we would get better but that was not to be the case as I think that the intermission gave the boys time to think of where they were and we fell apart, having an embarrassing 10 goals scored upon us. It would have been easy to give up but we went into the dressing room with the thought that we had to win the period. Credit the Miners as no one in the dressing room gave up and neither did St. Catherine's as evidenced by the fact their first power play unit continued to play and their top players saw lots of floor time. The result was a 2-1 period for them. Not too bad for a team that just got thrashed the period before. Coming away from that game no one on our team could say that we played any where near as well as we could.

The next game was against the Norsman in Orangeville where they have a very good record. In that game I still do not believe we played near our potential but we were much better. We did have outstanding goaltending but we made a number of simple errors which come from inexperience and playing at a speed which were not used to. That being said we did have our chance to make the game much closer than what Orangeville wanted. The turning point came when the score was 2-1 near the end of the first when we hit the goal post and they got the rebound well down the floor and put it in to take a 3-1 lead into the dressing room. In the rest of the game we competed but made some fundamental mistakes. Again the second period hurt us. Final 11-4.

Our third game was without a doubt our best. You could clearly see that our team had vastly improved as we took on the defending champs. back to take a 6-5 lead into the first intermission. A couple of bad breaks in the second shifted the momentum to Burnaby. They took control and although we closed the gap to 10-8 we could not come any closer with the final set at 15-9.

So how did we do? Well we did not reach our ultimate goal of winning the Minto Cup but then only one team each year does that. What we did do is gain a tremendous amount of experience to bring back to Alberta with the hope of passing it onto others. We now understand where the bar is and what we must do to reach the ultimate goal. We will not do it without the growth and continued improvement of the RMLL but we do know one thing for sure. We know that it is not too far away and well within the reach of this province to bring home a national championship. We have the athletes, the skill, the will and the determination. What we do not have is the experience. As of 2003 we have now started to gain that important element.

Was it a positive experience this year? I have never come away from a tournament with a losing record and felt so positive about the future as I do this one. We have a lot to look forward from this. For the Miners who will be returning next year (and there are a lot of them) they now know how good they are and the fact that this team was the youngest team out of the four is very promising. We know that the people involved at that level now have a new found respect for our league. I believe that a number of these people felt that we were going to be blown out of the water. For those who were actually at the games they could clearly see that with experience we will quickly become very competitive. As for lacrosse in Alberta we have much to be proud of and much to look forward to. With 500 graduating Midgets next year we are just beginning to see the bulge of minor players coming into our system. I say it is a bright future.

So what was the highlight of the Minto? For me it came just after the final whistle of our final game when one of the Burnaby captains came to our bench, handed me the game ball and shook my hand and said to me " the game ball is for you and your first Minto Cup, we have a new found respect for you guys". Respect, the first step of our journey.