

JUNIOR B – TIER I

Growth and Recruitment

-237 players representing 10 teams (down from 260 and 11, respectively). Incidentally, 2010 numbers were 238 players on 10 teams.

-110 regular season games, minus those cancelled with the Fort Saskatchewan Rebels folding.

-Midget combines held in North and South, as well as Graduating Midget information nights in both North and South. Generally, the response seemed stronger in the South.

-CLA funding proposal developed, that included amongst other goals, the possibility of considering the interior of BC as a future expansion opportunity. Additionally, further to the addition of the SWAT and Gryphons, the possibility of adding teams from SK and MB remains an option.

-Unfortunately, as mentioned the Fort Saskatchewan Rebels did fold shortly before the season began (roughly 1 week to the first game when the announcement became official). Regrettably, we were unable to find a solution amongst the 4 (now 3) North teams to keep the Rebels going. As I am aware, 4 players promptly left to pursue work interests, with 1-2 more players shortly thereafter, as their roster had been reduced to 11 runners.

-The Manitoba Gryphons were granted a full schedule; however, it would appear that the necessary vote required was not actually reached, though the error was recognized after the division had already moved ahead with the decision.

-Incidentally, I came across players in the South who opted not to play given the current format for player selection, as well as a third player who opted to try out for Junior A in BC at the recommendation of his coach.

-Finally, I received a letter from a concerned parent stating that his sons (and supposedly others from the same team) intend to quit lacrosse if a suspected team policy in the South, whereby players are allegedly encouraged to stay in Tier 1, is not rectified.

Season Overview

As this was my first attempt at this role, the learning curve was steep. I endeavored to open the lines of communication amongst myself and all willing teams early with an invite to a 1-on-1 meet and greet. Unfortunately, I enjoyed only minimal success with this initial request; however, I did have the opportunity to communicate and openly discuss team philosophies with several clubs throughout the season, in dealing with conflicts, concerns, and requests. In general, I found the majority of members to be reasonable, appropriate, and intent to develop the game and the division. Although it is easiest to focus on the negative aspects of the season, I was

tremendously encouraged by the reports of strong and respectful competition between several teams, and the resolution of multiple conflicts as determined by those members involved (not requiring my interpretation nor judgment).

Season Accomplishments

In speaking with several team representatives, tallying award votes, and tracking the gamesheets and reports, the level of competition was often very high, and generally respectful. To that end, our playoff seeding came down to the wire, and the series (particularly the semis and finals) were reported as great, fast-paced, action. The Mountaineers represented well at the Founder's Cup, with a third place finish!

Additionally, I received significant feedback with respect to our current Operating Policies. In the coming weeks, I plan to circulate these amendment suggestions, to be considered and voted on by the division members at the AGM, in order to reconcile the discrepancies in our outdated division manual (or the need for a division Operating Policy).

Season Setbacks

Our first speed bump dealt with the eligibility of a first-year Junior in the North entry draft. Despite clear regulations, two North members perseverated in raising this grievance on multiple occasions – including a game protest which specifically noted that no regulation had been breached.

As mentioned, just prior to the season's start, the Fort Saskatchewan Rebels folded. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the roster was reduced to 11 runners. Despite efforts to encourage the remaining teams to trade the rights of "bubble" players to the Rebels, in exchange for those same players' rights next year, only one player was (effectively) lent to the Rebels. Subsequently, they folded with a week to spare before the first game of the season.

Another conflict, which demanded an excessive amount of time on three occasions, related to the eligibility of a previously signed Tier 1 player as a call-up from Tier 2. Unfortunately, there were conflicting regulations, and I ruled with that which recognized his previous affiliation in Tier 1 (prior to registering in Junior A, then Tier 2). Despite this ruling coming prior to the season, I found myself re-defending the decision in June to a third team, and again to that same "third team" as well as additional members of the lacrosse community. Thankfully, this contradiction within our regulations has since been addressed at the recent Executive meeting.

Additionally, I found myself sifting through an accusation against a team for i) having biased referees, ii) not protecting the visiting team's property from destructive fans, iii) providing an inadequate facility for competition, as well as a call to have this team removed from the league. Thankfully, through the fortunate availability of video review and a conveniently timed trip to this rink by Greg Hart, many of these allegations were not supported (if not, disproven outright).

A number of teams were involved in a back-and-forth in which both teams called into question each other's integrity in coaching, and players' respect for safety. These clubs were encouraged to approach this conflict with cooler heads, and multiple constructive discussions took place near the closing of the season; it should be mentioned that one player was taken to hospital by ambulance for spinal injury concerns, where (thankfully) there was no permanent damage.

Unfortunately, the majority of my time was spent dealing with grievances in the North, and one club raised the majority of those issues. Furthermore, given what I felt were bullying tactics, complete disregard for decisions and their basis, as well as repeated calls against my integrity (including those incidents where I was not the ruling executive member), I recused myself from dealing with all matters pertaining to this club.

Looking to the Future/Upcoming Season Goals

Update Division Operating Policy, or revert to simply using the league's Regulations.

Enhance communication between division members.

Elevate the members' responsibility to each other in the division, and the league.

Nathan Finkbeiner

Jr. B Tier I Commissioner