

RMLL Development Commissioner's 2013 Report - Greg Hart

The focus in 2013 was heavily on officiating in the various divisions of the league. We also reprised the Super Clinic for coaches.

2013 Super Clinic

The clinic was very successful again with a great mix of talent and participants. This year it included Walt Christianson from Victoria and the blend of his approach with other instructors created a wonderful experience for everyone. Walt commented that this sort of a approach is light years ahead of what is being done in BC and he was amazed at the keen participation of so many coaches.

This idea should be continued with an eye to expanding the geographic scope and creating advanced streams for those who have already attended previous clinics.

I would propose a survey of coaches and players prior to the 2014 season to determine where they think are the most important and relevant aspects of coaching that need to be addressed in the RMLL. We can then make adjustments to clinics and other interventions to address these needs.

Officiating

The RMLL works in cooperation with the Alberta Lacrosse Referees Association (ALRA) to work on the development of officiating. This is always a challenging part of the lacrosse operation for any league anywhere.

We are aiming to have the ALRA put the most competent officials available in any game and match them accurately to the demands so that a safe, consistent and fair game can be delivered.

One of the most significant steps that the ALRA and RMLL took in 2013 was a realignment of referee competency rankings. These rankings were reworked in a consultative manner and used the coach evaluation data HEAVILY to focus areas of emphasis. Any officials who did not agree with their ranking were encouraged to schedule formal peer evaluations. This does not mean that referees with rankings below the level required for a particular division don't work those games, it just means they are a lower priority for those games (there are just not enough qualified referees for this to happen but knowing what ranking officials SHOULD be at is critical to development). This re-ranking saw some officials ranked lower and others ranked higher. The higher ranked officials - younger referees in particular - were moved into more challenging games with good results. An interesting result of all the challenges that were initiated by re-ranked officials found that the rankings were accurate and none were moved up as a result of peer evaluations

Speaking of younger referees, we have identified a number of promising officials from this pool (some of which were selected for and performed well at national tournaments) and we are proposing to run an Elite officiating clinic early in the 2014 season to focus mentoring and development on this critical group of 15 or so referees. They are the future leaders of officiating in the RMLL - both in terms of taking on-floor assignments and bringing up the next group of officials. The format will be a weekend of classroom/video work mixed with a large number of Junior B and Junior A games for on-floor experiences.

In this past season, we brought some of these people into Calgary or Edmonton for concentrated exposures to higher level games with strong partners and direct mentoring. We will continue to do that in the future.

Evaluations

Evaluations are conducted in three different ways:

1. Self-evaluation by the referee after the game
2. Peer evaluation by a trained referee using the CLA rubric
3. Routine coach evaluation using the RMLL form

Peer evaluations were more plentiful than in previous years and helped us refine competency rankings, work on specific improvement opportunities and select officials for national competitions.

The coach evaluations have highlighted significant trends for referees overall and for specific officials. They contributed in many important ways including competency rankings and officials being restricted from certain levels of participation. The coach rankings directed our attention to officials who needed to have a peer evaluation. Overall the numbers are about the same with coaches (not surprisingly) feeling that penalty selection is the least consistent part of the game. As discussed below, there are some good reasons for these consistency concerns.

We brought in Todd Labranche, a colleague of mine and NLL crew chief, to carry out evaluations and mentoring over the Canada Day and RMLL Showcase weekend. He was able to see many referees in a variety of different games. All the referees appreciated his perspective and support and his evaluations lined up very agreeably with the evaluations that had been conducted on the officials by people in Alberta.

Changes to the Game and Consistency of Calls

2013 was a new rule year and the two biggest changes were the severe penalties for fighting and the restructuring of the high sticking rule. The penalty data shows that fighting dropped across the board in all divisions of the RMLL (37% of the previous year) and there was no associated increase in severe penalties for cheap shots (e.g., spearing and butt ending which actually dropped slightly and majors for slashing stayed

about the same). The argument could be made that the cheap shots increased but weren't called but it seems unlikely as even if they weren't all being called, an increase in the behaviour would generate an increase over previous years calls.

The high sticking rule generated a dramatic increase in major calls for high sticking (as it should since the minor in the new rules requires very insignificant contact). These calls rose 615% after already climbing steadily in the last several years as it was emphasized to officials. Match penalty calls were not significantly elevated (another sign of no increase in cheap shots) and should have been higher under the high stick rules showing referees are still reluctant to make that call. Other penalties getting increased attention were the check from behind and boarding (both emphasis calls) with significant increases in major calls. Players and coaches are still not clear on the new high stick rule and need to become more familiar with the specific wording so they understand how it is applied.

In Junior B, Senior B and Junior A, there is a suggestion of significant inconsistency between Edmonton and Calgary officiating - specifically that Calgary officials are calling the game much more tightly than in Edmonton. This correlates with anecdotes from players and coaches. The effect does not appear in other divisions and so seems to operate only within a select group of officials. The RMLL will work with the ALRA to even out this disparity for the 2014 season.

Assigning

The RMLL audited ALRA assignments twice during the season and once at the end to determine to what extent the assigning was matching referee competency rankings. There were some concerns early in the season but it improved as the season progressed. This is an area that the RMLL will continue to work closely with the ALRA to get the best possible result for the teams. It will be discussed at the RMLL planning meetings.

Ongoing Challenges

The RMLL has expanded across a very large geographic area and we have seen the results of targeting referee and coach development support to certain areas. We need to expand this to include places like Saskatoon, Winnipeg and (possibly) the interior of BC. This will mean engaging referees and coaches from these areas in RMLL clinics and programs and sending support people to those areas to carry out evaluation and mentoring activity. This will be a key focus for 2014.