

## 2016 Junior B Tier II Season Report

This season was a great season filled with all the drama and excitement that has made me excited to be a part of this league since I attended my first Junior game 7 years ago!

From the first game of the season where the Olds team bus broke down on their way to their first Tier II game in Medicine Hat to the final minute of the league gold medal game, this season has been an absolute whirlwind of excitement, opportunities, work and even heartbreak and, I am humbled to have been a part of it.

I am extremely happy to say penalty count programs and other initiatives to minimize on-floor misconduct during games which were implemented during the 2014 and 2015 seasons, have solidified into viable tools which kept this season one of the most incident free that I have participated in. One of the rules implemented was a player exceeding 100 minutes in penalties during the regular season receives a 2 game suspension; I am happy to report only 1 suspension was issued for the infraction this season, down from 7 instances from the 2015 season. Also this season there was only 1 team that exceeded the 650 penalty minute threshold as well, which resulted in their being assessed a \$250 dollar fine.

There were only 2 defaulted games this season, both from a small market team which had almost their entire team graduate from high school in one weekend! Guess which games they missed!

Over all our numbers were down a bit this year, we had 385 players playing on 17 teams, down slightly from the 409 players and 18 teams of the previous season, but we were very happy to welcome the Olds Mavericks to their inaugural Tier II season as well as the return of the Yetti's, although now staged in Sylvan Lake rather than Innisfail, for this season.

Another newly implemented system for the 2016 season was a tournament style playoff to determine the North and South division winners as well as the league overall winner. I confess I was a bit skeptical when the format was presented at last year's Planning Meeting but, after attending the tournament which was held in Lethbridge, it was a real show case to demonstrate the competitiveness of the Tier II league. The 2 top finishing teams from each of the North and South divisions came together in a round robin format to determine, first the respective division champions in games played against the other team in their division on the first night of the tournament, and the overall league champion from the two top finishing teams from the remainder of the games played in the tournament.

There were so many positives that came from the tournament I don't know where to start but I suppose the first congratulations should go to the Lethbridge Barracudas and their booster club for pulling the tournament together in 5 days as, until the Sunday before the tournament, they didn't even know if they were going to be in it. The tournament came together seamlessly.

Next would be to the fans that travelled across Alberta to support their teams, at any given game in the tournament I doubt there were less than 250 people in the arena and that number would swell to more than 500 for the Barracuda's games!

Third tip of the toque would be to Dean Smith and his team of referees assigned to the tournament; on floor officials Chris, Isaiah, Brent and Duane immediately, immediately set down the tone for player conduct that would be acceptable for the tournament, and then enforced it consistently and evenly for the entire rest of the weekend! You guys are ALL a credit the ALRA! That was without a doubt some of the best and most consistent refereeing I have ever seen in the Tier II division.

Finally to the teams themselves; North representatives Lakeland Heat and the Sherwood Park Titans played an 8-6 game on Friday night to establish the Lakeland Heat as the North division winners and, the Lethbridge Barracudas and the Olds Mavericks battled to a 16-10 finish to crown the Lethbridge Barracudas as the South Division Champions! Congratulations to both teams for finishing first in their respective divisions!

The rest of the tournament was played to establish the representatives for the overall league championship and, the play was so competitive that, after Lethbridge established themselves first over all, the three remaining teams in the tournament were all squarely tied for second place. The tie breaking formulas applied to break the tie and declare Sunday's final game participant, needed to go to a THIRD round formula before the Olds Mavericks could be determined as the overall second place winner!! The tournament was THAT competitive!! And continuing in the same vein, the final game between the Cuda's and Olds was tied at 10-10 with less than 40 seconds remaining in the third period!!!! It is unbelievable how competitive the top teams in our league are!!

Without the tournament format to show case the level of competition in our league, it would be hard to understand that the players have that level of skill and ability across the entire province. It was an unreal thing to see and I am entirely convinced that is the provincial format we need to use going forward.

In their inaugural season the Olds Mavericks scored with less than 40 seconds remaining in the period to pull out an 11-10 win and the gold medal!

Congratulations to both teams for making it to the provincial finals and to Olds for their efforts during their first Tier II season!!

On a personal note this season was a bit trying for me in my first year as commissioner, as the learning curve was steep, but hopefully I have the big hurdles behind me and can focus now more on doing rather than learning.

I am looking forward to representing you all once again in our division of the RMLL for next season and, seeing you all at the AGM.

Warmest regards,

Wayne Zadderey

