

Lacrosse Day in Durham back bigger and better than before

Celebration of national sport, Canada's 150th birthday Saturday

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WHITBY — Lacrosse Day in Durham is back for a second go-round on Saturday, this time bigger and better than a year ago as a celebration of Canada's 150th birthday and the country's national sport.

Involving as many teams and programs in Durham Region as possible, the daylong event at Whitby's Iroquois Park Sports Centre gets underway at 9 a.m. when the Oshawa Lady Blue Knights take to the field for the first of four games.

Home to 42 provincial championship teams and dozens of players who have gone on to lacrosse scholarships since founding in 2000, the Lady Blue Knights will showcase their under-11 elite team at 9 a.m., under-13 elite at 10:30 a.m., under-13 competitive team at noon, and under-11 competitive team at 1:30 p.m.

Indoors on Pads 1-4, the region's impressive array of box lacrosse teams will also be featured, including minor programs of Clarington, Oshawa, Uxbridge, West Durham and Whitby as well as five local junior clubs and two men's teams. There will also be a showcase of players beginning at 11 a.m. on Pad 3.

There will be presentations made throughout the day, running from 11:50 a.m. until 7:50 p.m., including from the cities of Oshawa and Pickering, towns of Uxbridge and Whitby and the Municipality of Clarington.

Following is a breakdown of the junior and senior box lacrosse games, and what they could mean to each team:

Jr. C, Whitby Warriors vs. Clarington Shamrox, noon, Pad 1

Heading into a Wednesday game against Peterborough, the defending Ontario champion Shamrox sat in third place in the East Division with a record of 7-2, while the Warriors were tied for fourth at 6-6.

The Shamrox have three games in hand on Peterborough (9-3) and had four on Cornwall (9-4) before Wednesday's game, so first place in very much within grasp if they can finish strong over the final seven games.

The Shamrox downed the Warriors in their only previous meeting, 11-4 in Bowmanville May 31.

Sr. B, Brooklin Merchants vs. Oakville Titans, 2 p.m., Pad 3

The Merchants, also coming off a provincial championship in 2016, have struggled so far this year, sitting in fifth place in



Jason Liebrechts / Metroland

WHITBY — Brooklin Redmen's Mark Cockerton looked for an opening through tight coverage from Cobourg Kodiaks' Doug Utting and in Major Series Lacrosse action at the Iroquois Park Sports Centre last week.

the six-team league with a record of 2-7.

They will face a tough task in the Titans, who sport a 7-1 record, good for second place behind the Six Nations Rivermen (10-0).

The Merchants have been steadily improving since three blowout losses to start the season, including 13-3 in Oakville June 4.

Kyle Whitlow, who has spent plenty of time up with the Brooklin Redmen, leads the Merchants with nine goals and 18 points despite playing in just four games.

Jr. A, Whitby Warriors vs. Six Nations Arrows, 4 p.m., Pad 1

If the Warriors (7-4-1) have any hope of finishing in first place in the Jr. A standings, they will have to take down the mighty Six Nations Arrows (9-1) Saturday. With eight games remaining, the Warriors also have a road date with Six Nations June 25 and a home matchup with Mimico (7-2) July 7 that will be crucial to the quest.

After losing 11-6 in Mimico Saturday, the Warriors bounced back for an important 9-8 home-floor win over the Brampton Excelsiors Tuesday, led by two goals and six points from Dawson Theede. Connor Kearnan and Dyson Williams also notched a pair of goals each, while rookie goalie Brett Dobson improved his record to 4-1-1 despite an eight-point effort from Brampton's Jeff Teat.

Jr. B, Green Gaels vs. West Durham Ironheads, 6 p.m., Pad 3

The Green Gaels will likely head into the final game of their regular season with first place in the East all locked up, but it's sure to be an important one for the Ironheads, who are battling for one of the final three playoff spots.

The Green Gaels went into a Thursday home date at 15-3 and needing only a win over winless Newmarket (0-18) to clinch first place in the conference, and also with a bolstered lineup with the deadline acquisitions of Brandon Porgy from Welland and Tyler Sonnichsen from Alberta.

The Ironheads picked up a pair of key road wins last weekend, 10-9 in Nepean and 11-8 in Gloucester, improving to 8-8-1 for the season and moving into a tie for sixth place. They have another important game Wednesday at home against Orillia (8-9) before closing out against the Green Gaels Saturday and back home against Mississauga (8-8-1) Sunday at 2 p.m.

Major Series, Brooklin Redmen vs. Cobourg Kodiaks, 8 p.m., Pad 1

The Redmen and Kodiaks will meet for the third time this season as the marquee attraction and conclusion to Lacrosse Day in Durham, with the Kodiaks looking for their first win of the season.

The Redmen spanked the Kodiaks 15-4 in Cobourg June 4, but the Kodiaks made it much more interesting three nights later in Whitby, forcing overtime before falling 10-8.

The Redmen (3-2) went into a Wednesday home date against unbeaten Peterborough (3-0) off an 11-4 loss in Oakville Monday, a game that saw Brooklin fire 56 shots on net only to be stymied by goalie Nick Rose.

Brooklin continues to have players trickle back following the National Lacrosse League final, which saw 11 from last year's team partake, but it appears unlikely they will get stars Mark Matthews and Shayne Jackson back.



Dr. Douglas Smith
Guest columnist

Athletes must train their brains

Our job over the last four decades has been to strengthen and stretch the athlete's brain to be more creative, open-minded, confident, intelligent, focused, resilient and supercharged.

Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes, no pills, or easy solutions. It can take months and years to develop the mind of a champion and elite athlete.

It has been noted that it takes 10,000 rigorous hours of continuous learning, physical practice, effort and daily commitment to produce a professional athlete. That's just the physical side of training.

The psychological side of training athletes requires the same amount of learning, effort and practise as the physical side.

Teaching athletes how to change their attitudes, beliefs, anger, fear, doubts and insecurities to be more adaptive, healthy and rock solid is not an easy process. As they say, old habits die hard.

Unfortunately, most of us have been led to believe we are not good enough to be champions and leaders. We learn to be afraid of making mistakes and looking like failures, so we don't put in the effort or discipline to improve our skills.

We accept a mediocre performance as good enough. The more we repeat these insecurities and failures, the more deeply these mental blocks become ingrained and hardened.

In order to do justice to the athlete, we need to take a longer-term view of psychological training just like we do with training the body in sport.

NHL, NFL and NBA coaches often rely on psychologists to train them in how to get the most out of their players and have them work individually with players over several seasons to enable them to believe they can be the next world champions.

If we want our kids to be great champions in sport and life, we need to give them a genuine opportunity over time to develop a powerful sense of confidence, self-esteem and a strong belief in their potential of being the next great one.

Let me assure you that all great champions have had several years of solid psychological training.

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