

Lady Redbirds lacrosse growing in York Region



By Jake Courtepatte

Boys lacrosse is long since established within York Region.

With roots in East Gwillimbury over a quarter century ago, the organization now known as the Redbirds settled in Newmarket in 1996.

It has grown to provide box and field lacrosse teams at both the house-league and rep level, boasting a handful of alumni at the NLL level as well as dozens of collegiate players.

Now, the girls are finally earning recognition through the Lady Redbirds program.

Last weekend they got the opportunity to host a weekend of girls lacrosse for the first time in their history, as more than 600 young athletes, many from Aurora, converged on Ray Twinney and George Richardson Parks. Unlike the boys rep program, the girls schedule consists of a Saturday or Sunday festival each week, where a dozen girls lacrosse associations from central Ontario come together at a rotating host site, each team playing two games on the same day. Over the course of the season, each rep team will play 16-20 games culminating in a trip to the Provincial Championships ? at which the U13 Redbirds earned their first silver medal last season.

This year, the U13A squad is tied for second in their division, defeating both St. Catherines and Mimico over the weekend. The U15 team won their only matchup with Kawartha, while the fledgling U11's and U13's came up short in their games.

Lacrosse is a unique sport, in that the game changes severely between levels and genders. Dawn Beal-Nacevski, director of the girls program, understands that girls lacrosse is a different game from the boys, and it must be played as so.

As U15 coach Fraser Cowell explains, ?The first three things someone will likely notice are that each team has eleven players plus a goalie (versus ten plus one for boys), that the girls wear almost no equipment except for eye protection, and that the goalies also have much less equipment ? to the point that they look human. The girls game is a non-contact game, and there is no cross-checking. The girls are allowed a certain level of stick checking (called a c-check).?

Cowell goes on to explain that ?the girls' sticks have virtually no pocket to cradle the ball, and thus running and passing become critical skills. You'll also notice that the girls carry their stick higher, about face height, and the lack of a pocket causes them to cradle the ball carefully. The lack of a pocket really encourages a skill game vs a physical game.?

With the season running from mid-April to late July, the Lady Redbirds take on opponents from around the GTA and Golden Horseshoe area, including Brampton, Halton Hills, Hamilton, Kawartha, Kitchener-Waterloo, Oakville, Orillia, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Six Nations, St. Catharines and Toronto.

There has been a steady growth in the organization's three years of operation, and by next season Beal-Nacevski and her team hope to expand the house-league program as well as add an U17 division into the mix.

For those looking to give the game a try, the Lady Redbirds will be hosting three 'Welcome to Lacrosse' clinics over the next year, with the first coming this fall. Dates are yet to be finalized, but you can contact Dawn at dawnbealnacevski@gmail.com or 416-689-8875 for more details.