

RMLL 2020 Season Report

The loss of the 2020 season means two things for the RMLL in terms of officiating. The first, is that the 2019 report still encapsulates the issues and current state of officiating within the RMLL. The second, is that how leagues and provinces intend to deal with COVID, is still very much undecided. I anticipate that due to cohorting and restrictions, should they still exist in the 2021 season, will have our pool of officials shrink. As such, the ALRA will put even more emphasis on recruiting new officials through the fast-track program, and reaching out to officials who may have left a few years ago, for personal reasons. Included below is the 2019 Season report. A few items were addressed, and I am pleased to announce a much more collaborative relationship has been established with the ALA in the selection process for officials to national and international competition.

RMLL 2019 Season Report

1. Growth and Recruitment

Approximately 75 officials who were assigned RMLL games, or were eligible to be in 2019. With a turnover of retiring officials, or officials who may no longer be interested in the RMLL, I expect this number to stay approximately the same for 2020, which is consistent with the last three years. The officials working their way through Minor Provincials, Summer Games, and Minor Nationals have continued to impress, and should continue to push for the above number to increase. Christine and I had discussed an RMLL Application form, for officials who are interested in starting to work the league, which was published on both the RMLL website, and the ALRA website. We received responses from four individuals, two of which were utilized during the 2019 season. My goal is to have this published more prominently for the 2020 season, so more responses are gained. Currently, all who filled out the form were already officials, but I would like to see more individuals with lacrosse experience who are interested in officiating, but may not be currently registered in the ALRA, filling out the forms, especially retired Sr B players, and Junior graduates who are not continuing on the Senior lacrosse.

2. Season Overview

The approximately 75 RMLL officials all received RMLL jerseys, which was a goal for the 2019 season with the addition of the jersey number line on the RMLL games sheets. There is discussion about a redesign for the RMLL jersey to standardize with Saskatchewan and Manitoba, adopting the WLA/NLL style of black and white stripes. Over 700 games were covered, with one game needing to be canceled due to poor highway conditions and the subsequent road closer, which blocked the official from being able to make the game. Due to the conflicts with clinics and other games, we unfortunately could not find another official to cover this game. Less than 1% of the games needed their start times moved in order to facilitate appropriate officials to be assigned. Mileage costs did not significantly differ from 2019, but were slightly reduced. The inclusion of two BC based Tier III teams, accounts for approximately 14% of the RMLL's total mileage bill, but only represents approximately 3% of the total games played. In an effort to reduce this cost, I am reaching out to the BCLOA, ALA, and RMLL to host and certify officials in this area to be Level 3 referees, which are required for Junior and Senior

level games. This would have two benefits in terms of mileage. The first would be the cost of sending officials to BC to work these games. The second would be allowing the Alberta officials who would have to spend their weekend in BC to be in Alberta to help us cover our games.

3. Season Accomplishments

The 2019 season largely carried on the programs from 2018. These were:

- Tier II Three-Official Mechanic
- Referee Interprovincial Exposure Agreement
- Uber Clinic
- Sr B Three-Official Mechanic
- Jr A Regular Season Shot Clock Official
- Individual Official Achievements

Tier II Three-Official Mechanic

The Three-Official Mechanic was piloted in the Tier II division in 2018 with the goal of having twelve games (six in Wheatland and six in SALA) staffed with one official each that we are preparing to be full-time RMLL officials. The full details of this project's origin and vision can be found in the 2017 RMLL planning meeting minutes. The results for 2019 were a sharp drop from 2018. In 2018, seven games utilized this program, while in 2019, only two were completed, while eight were budgeted for (\$680 total). As such, it is my recommendation that this program not be utilized in 2020, and I will not be submitting the project request. The reason so few games were able to use this was largely due to scheduling conflicts with other games, both minor tournaments, and other RMLL games.

Referee Interprovincial Exposure Agreement

The RMLL is unique as it spans four provincial bodies, allowing for difference in officiating standards to go unnoticed, or accepted. As our league grows and becomes more established at the Tier I and Jr A levels, where out of province teams are the most common, a unified standard becomes more important. We succeeded in having one Alberta officials travel to Saskatchewan to work Jr A playoffs, and one Alberta official travel to Manitoba for Tier I (three regular season games). One official traveled from Saskatchewan to Alberta to assist with covering Jr A playoffs. For the first time, we had a Manitoba official travel to Alberta to officiate two Tier I games, which was a goal for the 2019 season. Saskatchewan official also traveled to Manitoba for their playoff series against the SWAT (two Tier I playoff games). We unfortunately were unable to have Manitoba officials travel to either Alberta or Saskatchewan, but it is a goal for the 2019 season to accomplish both. This will be done likely by lowered the Saskatchewan travel to Alberta, although the demand of the RMLL season did require Saskatchewan officials to travel to Alberta to cover the games with qualified officials. A matching budget of \$7,000 that was allotted in the 2018 and 2019 seasons is requested for the 2020 season.

Uber Clinic

The 2019 edition of the Uber Clinic was one of the best attended in recent years. Primarily attended by officials who currently working in the RMLL, or were about to enter their first year of the league, we also had officials who wish to enter the league. One of the goals of the 2019 Uber Clinic was to expose more officials to the RMLL and what it has to offer. The Friday portion was reinvented, borrowing from the WHL where our new or second year RMLL officials traveled in one day earlier to focus on league specific expectations and rules, in an environment of their peers. This was a goal arising from the 2018 Uber Clinic feedback.

Sr B Three-Official Mechanic

In an effort to deepen the pool of Sr B officials, we borrowed from the Tier II Three-Official Mechanic, and applied this for two home games per Sr B team in the 2019 season. The goals were similar, to utilize officials who we believe to be skilled enough to begin officiating in the 2020 season, or even the end of the 2019 season, as Sr B regulars. We used three officials in the south, and three officials in the north. All teams had their two home games staffed with three officials. We are in need of former players or officials who have taken time off to return continue this program. The officials we currently have were slightly less experienced than was desired, although all will receive either two-man or three-man Senior B assignments next season. The challenges of this division are different from Tier II, as the level of officiating is required to be much higher, as the players are much more skilled, and used to a certain standard of officiating. The commissioner, Norm Shaw, and I were in contact throughout the year discussing the pros and cons of the system. It needs to be communicated to the teams that this is not a system using referees to achieve a higher rate of correct calls and non-calls, but rather to introduce new officials to the level. If the division is interested in pursuing the utilization of a three-man mechanic for performance, then different selection of officials would occur, where they were all very experienced with Sr B, as opposed to just being introduced.

Jr A Regular Season Shot Clock Official

The Jr A Division, through commissioner, Sean Aggus, requested a third RMLL official be provided at the end of the regular season, after issues arose in the application of players leaving the bench at the end of periods/games, and during altercations. This copies the model Saskatchewan has used, where this official runs the shot clock, as well as monitors the benches and the minor officials. I believe this was successful, as the four games it was utilized in before the playoffs had no issues. To make sure this is cost neutral to the teams, I would suggest that this come from fine money for coach feedback forms that were not submitted on time, or through the casino funds (guidelines for casino funds in relation to officials/referee cost can be found here:

[https://aglc.ca/sites/aglc.ca/files/aglc_files/Guidelines%20-%20Sports-Use%20of%20Proceeds%20\(5504\).pdf](https://aglc.ca/sites/aglc.ca/files/aglc_files/Guidelines%20-%20Sports-Use%20of%20Proceeds%20(5504).pdf)

Individual Official Achievements

One of the easiest ways to judge the performance of a program is the number of officials it produces that make their way to the pinnacle of performance. With this in mind, I would like to congratulate Joe Catalano on his recent hire to the NLL, joining Ron Getz, Ray McCarthy, and myself as the four RMLL officials in the league. Additionally, Red Deer resident and social media magnate, Todd Labranche, has giving his years of NLL experience and feedback to RMLL officials he has watched in person. Todd has also taken on the role of WLA (BC Sr A) Referee-in-Chief, which afforded me to travel to the WLA to officiate Sr A lacrosse over the summer. The plan is to open up a pipeline of Alberta officials into BC, to allow for our top end officials to continue to develop over the summer. Joe also attended the Minto Cup, working two games in the final series, and Raymond McCarthy officiated the gold medal game at the Presidents' Cup.

4. Season Setbacks

This 2019 was one of turbulence for the ALRA. The loss of the Manager of Officiating Position at the ALA office, along with international and national referee selection issues highlighted strained relationships. That being said, none of these issues are unsolvable, and open communication and dialogue would solve most of the issues.

- Scheduling
- Coach Complaints, Process for Rule Interpretations & Perceived Conflicts of Interest
- Larry Bishop Memorial Tournament
- RMLL Interprovincial Assigning
- World Championship and National Selection Issues

Scheduling

Scheduling of appropriately qualified officials continues to be a struggle as the sport of lacrosse is primarily a weekend endeavour. The logistics of the RMLL, in terms of travel, arena availability, and scheduling constraints, demand that it be a weekend league, so more officials or more officials who are primarily dedicated to the RMLL are required. The questionnaire we have developed is designed to find officials who may have fallen through the cracks at the LGB level, officials that have taken time off, or those who are new but qualify for the “Fast-Track,” program. As demonstrated in the 2019 season, this silver bullet will not change our fortunes overnight. The RMLL has done a fantastic job of utilizing more weekday games, which has lessened the referee drain, but a significant effort needs to be made to not stretch referee resources thin in our two major centres. Calgary vs Calgary, or Edmonton vs Edmonton games on Friday, Saturday, and Sundays are a significant issue. These are the days we need to focus on travel games, especially in an effort to reduce Tier II’s overall mileage, which typically consist of rural teams. This one change would drastically reduce overall mileage costs, albeit at the cost of a few practices for each team a year.

Additionally, the times that games start at needs to be examined. Not every home team can have the ability to play in “primetime” at 7 pm on a Saturday night. Teams and divisions need to be open to making sure their games do not overlap with the time of games of their geographical neighbours. For example, if there are a group of home games in the Wheatland area, Vermillion, Lloydminster, and Wainwright should not all be playing at the same time. Instead, staggering the games in Vermillion and Lloydminster, so the same officials could work both games, whether they are traveling in or not, would help dramatically lower their mileage bill, and the number of officials the ALRA needs to send to cover games. This is also true in Edmonton, where Tier II teams often play at the same time.

One method that should also be looked at is the scheduling of back-to-back games with the higher division team scheduled first. For example, if there are Sr B and Tier II games to be played on the same day, or Jr A and Sr C, if the officials are “fresh” in the higher

level games, this provides a better product for the higher level teams. Additionally, the second game would then have higher quality officials, who can handle the rigors of back-to-back games, with the second being not as strenuous as the first. This also allows for mileage to be split.

Coach Complaints, Process for Rule Interpretations & Perceived Conflicts of Interest

The RMLL needs to ensure that complaints from coaches are handled correctly, and the forms for feedback are utilized, in addition to conversations with the division commissioners. Without these datapoints, we are unable to track trends, growth, and regression. Any rule interpretations are to include the RMLL Referee-In-Chief, as per RMLL Bylaw 7.08.2. Direct contact with the CLA has been discouraged by the ALA office in the past and occurred again this year. Unfortunately, during an RMLL playoff game, it was reported to me that a member of the ALA Executive, who was affiliated with the team in the game, chased down the division commissioner while carrying a rulebook, shouting obscenities at both the officials in the arena and the commissioner. This type of conflict of interest is prevalent in lacrosse and leaves the RMLL with a blackeye when it occurs. This type of referee abuse must be handled severely.

Larry Bishop Memorial Tournament

Unfortunately, we were not able to have a Referee-in-Chief at the Larry Bishop Memorial Tier I tournament, which took away from the development of five of our RMLL officials who committed to Red Deer under the belief they were going to receive coaching and feedback from one of our top RMLL officials. All officials were appreciative of Mike Fynn, the division commissioner, stepping in to help when needed, but not having an RIC was a negative at the event. We rarely get to have our top officials in the same room for a day, let alone a weekend, so it was disappointing to not have someone with a high-level officiating background to assist the officials in terms of enforcing the RMLL standard and rule interpretations. To correct for this, I have submitted a budget proposal for an Larry Bishop Memorial Tournament to have an RIC.

World Championship and National Selection Issues

At the eleventh hour, the ALA did not endorse the ALRA's Founders Cup, Minto Cup, and Presidents' Cup selections. The blanket blocking was unprecedented, and reasons given actually raised issues with the ALA's Regulations for selection, not the ALRA's process. Fortunately, an amicable resolution was agreed upon, with the original Minto Cup and Presidents' Cup selections, Joe Catalano and Ray McCarthy, attending those tournaments. As mentioned above, Joe worked on-floor in the final Minto Cup series, and Ray McCarthy was the Crew Chief in the Presidents' Cup gold medal game. The level of disconnect in the ALA referee evaluation cannot be understated, and shows the ALRA's efficacy in referee selection for these tournaments. Unfortunately, due to similar reasons as mentioned above, the RMLL will not have any officials attending the 2019 World Indoor Lacrosse Championship in Langley, BC, after Tony Reid officiated the Gold Medal game in 2015.

5. Looking to the Future/Upcoming Season Goals

The 2020 season appears to be one of advancement for our RMLL officials. We will need to promote officials, especially in the Wheatland and CDLA regions to facilitate covering the games with qualified officials. Goals for the 2020 season will be to lower the need of GELC officials travel to Wheatland, and lower the travel for the BC teams, by facilitating a collaborative Level 3 clinic in BC. The Sr B Three-Official mechanic, the Interprovincial Exposure Agreement, and the Uber Clinic are all goals to continue pursuing in the 2020 season.