

2022 RMLL Development Commissioner's Report - Greg Hart

Development requires us to understand what standards we can use to gauge the progress of the RMLL. There are two basic dimensions - quality and quantity. Quantity includes a requirement for geographic and gender diversity. We aren't successful if we only continue expansion of players in one specific place or in only boys lacrosse. Quality refers to the effectiveness of coaches, players, and officials. If we are not tracking and then addressing quantity and quality issues, it is unlikely that they will just organically resolve themselves. It will lead us to asking questions about the way the whole interdependent system of lacrosse operates throughout the RMLL and in the interactions with other lacrosse entities (like minor LGBs). There is no way to be successful without the cooperation and support of the Alberta Lacrosse Association (ALA).

Overall, it is time to bring a more formal lens to the question of RMLL development so that actions and reporting can be aligned. This report represents an opening suggestion of some structure along with examples from the current year. It is time for the RMLL - at a global level as well as at a division level - to determine what outcomes we are playing for, what kind of experience we will provide, what principles we will use to ensure success, what the strategic pathways look like, and consider what actions we need to be great at to make it all work. Flowing out of this, a clear understanding of the structure and resources required to reliably deliver will appear. We have talked about these issues in fragments (like, what happens when our ED-for-free decides she wants to retire) and now it is time to bring some formality to the process.

There are four interdependent areas that contribute to and result from development. I will highlight key issues and questions in each area.

Players

The data shows that player numbers are down coming out of COVID. This isn't surprising but it underlines the necessity to bring a more deliberate approach to recruiting and retaining more players at all divisions. Overall - even before COVID - player numbers have been quite flat with little overall growth. In fact, there have been declines at the junior level that have been partly offset by increases at the Senior level. It would be interesting to understand what factors have been driving the growth of senior numbers.

The number of teams reflects this and we have seen division structure slowly changing with the clearest example of the slow elimination of Tier 3.

In terms of quality, anecdotally the lacrosse appears to be strong and the strong showing of RMLL teams at national tournaments suggests that - at least at the most elite levels in each division - Alberta is producing teams hitting above the per population figures. This doesn't tell us about what is below that and a study of the level of parity needs to be considered as an activity for the development commissioner heading into the 2023 season.

Coaches

We have very little access to information about the quality and quantity of folks in this role. It is a role that is filled by people who played when they were younger and - in some cases - by people still playing. It would be great to determine a way to collect coach quality info from assessments by master coaches, feedback from players, and feedback from officials.

Officials

Officiating took a major hit in numbers from COVID and it will be interesting to review the data from coaches about officiating quality. Anecdotally it seemed to be pretty good considering the

challenges although it was clear that officials were often in games for which we might have preferred a different option.

The UberClinic continues and it is probably time - in conjunction with the RMLL RIC - to review the approach to this clinic and general referee development in the RMLL. We do have a lot of data on officiating effectiveness and we know the quantity of officials is currently low.

Fan Support

People have a lot of choices about what they do with their time and outside of families and friends, most divisions in the RMLL are challenged to attract more fans to their games. Sometimes this seen as a nice-to-have, a way to bring in a little extra money for the teams, and while that is true, it is a source for growing the other elements of the game. The awareness and excitement generated by fan exposure turns the wheel on player participation and retention. This is an area - again in conjunction with Alberta Lacrosse - that we should bring some attention to as a way of getting some strategic implementation happening.

Interaction with Minor Lacrosse

We need to return to the idea of tightening relationships in an organized way between the RMLL and minor lacrosse. This doesn't mean something as formal as vertical alignment but supporting the regenerative growth of the sport means that the players, coaches, and officials who are operating in the RMLL are able to drive renewal at the minor level. This is vital because without renewal we will see core weakening of the player supply at the RMLL level. There is a trend that is visible - even before COVID - of declining numbers of graduating minor lacrosse players. In order to address this, I would propose going through the new Executive Director at the ALA to discuss some co-created time-bound outcomes along with the potential strategic pathways that might be open to us to collectively pursue.

Summary

While the quality of play and number of players suggests that - in most divisions - the game seems to be okay, we don't really know and we certainly can't act on bringing about improvements. Bringing some more formality to the development portfolio and engaging with the ALA and other key nodes (including the NLL teams) in the system of lacrosse is necessary. Starting by clarifying where we want things to go and what that looks like will be a necessary opening step.