

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – January 7th, 2020

Barrie Minor Lacrosse Association Statement on Contraction of Jr. A Lakeshores and Official Request for Retraction from Ontario Jr. A Lacrosse Association

Barrie, ON - The news that the Ontario Jr. A Lacrosse League (OJALL) has contracted the franchise of the Barrie Lakeshores came as little surprise to those familiar with the organization, nor should have it been surprising to the Junior A council. The statement on the situation issued by OJALL last night, however, was a shock to both me and the Barrie Minor Lacrosse Association Board of Directors.

The statement took time to “thank” the Lakeshores and specifically cite “the lack of sustainable minor programs in Barrie and the surrounding area” as the main reason for this decision.

The OJALL’s statement is false, unnecessary, and offensive. On behalf of our Board, volunteers, graduates and, most importantly, the hundreds of young lacrosse players in Barrie, I demand that the OJALL immediately retract and apologize for its ignorant attack on our organization.

Lacrosse teams unfortunately come and go, so I’m unsure why the OJALL even felt the need to cite any specific reason for the state of the Lakeshores. Regardless of the need for an explanation, blaming a minor lacrosse organization instead of the group that has managed the Lakeshores for the past 10 years is, frankly, bizarre.

Let me point out that, this isn’t the first, second, or even the third time that the management of the Lakeshores have been in this type of situation. As a reminder:

- The U19 Lakeshores of the OJMFL (Junior Men’s Field) last played in 2017. The league announced in 2019 that they were “moving on” without the Lakeshores.
- The Barrie South Simcoe Minor Lacrosse Association (aka the Barrie Tornado) ceased operations in December, 2012. Our organization, the Barrie Minor Lacrosse Association (aka the Barrie Bombers) was formed in the aftermath.
- Perhaps most famously, the Lakeshores withdrew from the Sr. A league (Major Series Lacrosse) one week into the 2010 season, on the very day that they were supposed to host their season opener against Brooklin.

I note this pattern not to criticize or disparage the management of Lakeshores, but to point out the absurdity of the OJALL’s insult to Barrie (and by extension Zone 4) minor lacrosse.

Our “unsustainable” minor lacrosse organization is significantly bigger today than in 2012 when the Tornado collapsed. We have more players, more teams, more volunteers and have restored the reputation of minor lacrosse in Barrie. In just seven years, our program has won 5 Provincial Championships, 5 Provincial Silver Medals, sent 3 teams to prestigious “A” Qualifiers (including back-to-back Midget teams full of players who are today in their prime Jr lacrosse years), and won dozens of tournaments at all ages / competitive levels. Recent BMLA graduates include the 2018 OJALL Rookie of the Year, Jakob Power, 2018 OJCLL East Most Valuable Player, Wyatt King, and 2017 All Canadian, Joe Connor. Many more Bombers have played for Team Ontario or headed south to play on scholarships in the NCAA.

It is true that, after six successful years of Midget lacrosse, we did not have a Midget team in Barrie for the 2019 season. Our organization has dealt with low registration numbers in the 2002-2004 cohort since we came into existence. These problems date back to the previous Barrie Tornado organization and the lack of effective grass-roots recruitment/development of young players during the dying years of that regime.

Although we were able to stabilize the 02 and 04 age groups, we were less successful at rebuilding the 03's. We could have put together a skeleton Midget team in 2019 but decided that it would be in the best interest of our players to allow them to play elsewhere last year, primarily in Innisfil Minor Lacrosse. Those 03 players would have been eligible to play for the Lakeshores this year.

Of note, not only will our Midget team return in 2020, but we will have two rep teams at the Bantam, Pee wee, and Novice age groups this year, ensuring a viable Midget program for many years to come.

The idea that this single-year anomaly is to blame for the Lakeshores' woes is ridiculous. In 2019, there were more than sixty Barrie Minor Lacrosse graduates (born between 1998 and 2002) eligible to play for the Lakeshores. Those players include:

- nine 99's who played Midget "B" in 2015 (ranked #22 in Ontario);
- nine 00's who played Midget "B" as minors and "A" as majors (#22 & #16);
- thirteen 01's who played Midget "A" for one or two years (#16 & #9)

The 2019 Barrie Lakeshores roster included zero BMLA 98's, one BMLA 99, one BMLA 00, five BMLA 01's (one did not play due to injury), and one BMLA 02. One additional 01 played as a non-roster affiliated player (AP) for the Lakeshores.

I should also note that only 4 of the 13 out-of-area players that the team drafted between 2015 and 2019 were on the Lakeshores roster last year, and just one played more than 10 games.

The reality is that many eligible players (including draft picks and those from surrounding centres) had no desire to play for the Lakeshores and many quality players in the area opted to play Jr. B or Jr. C instead. Despite these facts, the OJALL opted to deliberately and specifically blame minor lacrosse for the failure rather than team management and/or player recruitment issues.

Based on the above, I must insist on behalf of Barrie Minor Lacrosse that the Ontario Lacrosse Association and the Ontario Jr. A Lacrosse League immediately withdraw last night's statement and issue a corrected version of this release removing the inflammatory and inaccurate statement.

I trust this will be corrected immediately.

Sincerely,

Tom Hanrahan

Vice-President, League Development (on behalf of Andrew Prestwich, President & the BMLA Board)

Barrie Minor Lacrosse Association / www.BarrieMinorLacrosse.com