

# SPORTS

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Laurentians true blue

## Knowing how to win

BY DON POWER

R-B News

For Junior Edwards, coaching the St. Lawrence Laurentians senior men's soccer team is both heaven and hell.

As Edwards himself pointed out, the job is not that difficult.

"Pretty well anybody could coach that team," he readily admitted.

Perhaps because of that, there's tremendous pressure placed on him and the players to win. Nobody will accept anything less than a Challenge Cup championship.

"Everybody expects you to win every year," Edwards said. "It's getting harder every year. There's always that one team who wants to knock you off, to say, 'We beat the Laurentians.'"

Fortunately for the people of St. Lawrence — a sleepy Burin Peninsula town of about 1,400 — they haven't had to accept anything less in seven years. It's been that long since St. Lawrence has finished without the title as provincial champs.

That championship streak was kept intact on Labour Day weekend in St. John's, when young superstar Richard Kelly scored the only goal in the Laurentians 1-0 win over Feildians in the Challenge Cup title game.

*Despite a small population, out-migration and an ever-changing roster, St. Lawrence's senior soccer team continues to dominate St. John's and the provincial Challenge Cup. A lot of it is pride.*

When the streak began in 1995, Kelly was 13, and just one of the many St. Lawrence kids who all dream the same dream — to one day wear the Laurentian blue.

"The people around here live for soccer," Edwards said in an understatement.

"I've got a little fella who's 10, and from the time he gets up till he goes to bed, he's got a soccer ball with him. All the kids are like that. They all have the love for the game and the community."

"I think once they're born, every kid wants to wear the jersey," said Challenge Cup commissioner Doug Redmond.

"They're truly committed to St. Lawrence. You'll always hear the comment 'They're true blue.' The St. Lawrence players are true blue."

### SOCCKER SUCCESS

Community pride, perhaps more than any other factor, is the driving factor in the immense success of the St. Lawrence Laurentians.

Since 1951, when provincial senior men's championship tournaments were

first played, the Laurentians have been dominant, winning more than half of the titles.

In the 1970s, the Laurentians ran off a string of five straight Challenge Cup crowns. In two of those years — 1975 and 1977 — the club won national silver medals.

During the 1990s, St. Lawrence regained its dominance, and capped the decade with a national bronze medal in 1999.

Players like Wils Molloy, Keith Farrell, Al Slaney, Frank Haskell and Joe Turpin — to name a few — are among the standouts who have worn the Laurentian blue.

After their retirements, younger stars followed in their footsteps, and made names for themselves. Players like Harry Kelly, Bob Spearns, Paul Slaney, Keith Jackman and Scott Bishop — all of whom have played on the seven championship clubs. They've been followed by Blair Aylward, Alex Turpin, Rudy Norman, Andrew Perrott, Randy Turpin, Clinton

Edwards and Richard Kelly.

When you consider the out-migration from St. Lawrence over the years, that the talent level on the Laurentians has remained so high is remarkable.

"There's such a loyalty to playing for that team," said super fan Lyle Drake, who operates a web site which proclaims St. Lawrence as the 'Soccer Capital of Canada'.

"As a kid, you burn to someday wear that uniform of that senior team. And that's what keeps us strong. There's a lot of loyalty."

Gord Dunphy, who coached a few of those championship teams in the 1990s, agreed pride in St. Lawrence is a huge factor. Soccer has kept the younger men in the community longer. Soccer brings them back home.

"Maybe the main reason is very simple — because of our heritage," Dunphy said. "A kid in St. Lawrence lives blue, eats blue, and sleeps blue. That's the intangible that's hard to get into."

Dunphy also coached the Burin Penin-

sula under-16 all-stars to the provincial title this year. He said St. John's — which has thousands of kids registered in minor soccer — had by far the strongest team, but failed to win.

Why? Why does a soccer association that has more people than the entire town of St. Lawrence not dominate?

Dunphy answered his own question. Simply put, he said soccer is king in St. Lawrence. That means all the best athletes in the town play soccer.

In addition, he said, kids from St. Lawrence learn how to win at a young age.

The minor teams are coached by former coaches and players who have seen success at the senior level. They pass on that knowledge to their younger players.

"Right now, Mount Pearl probably has the top minor soccer system in the province," he noted. "But, who can they relate to? What players are coming through their system? What coaches are in their system? Who have been winners?"

"Mount Pearl is close enough that they should open the door and win once, they will be there for the long term. But will they open the door and win once without getting discouraged before they win?"

"Knowing how to win is huge."