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Laurentians look to recapture glory

By JOHN BROWNE, The Telegram

St. Lawrence Laurentians, with one less coach on the sidelines, are primed to regain the provincial Molson Challenge Cup, a trophy the team used to win on a consistent basis some years ago.

The Laurentians ran off eight straight wins on the Cup from 1995 to 2002, but lost in the past two finals to clubs which had never won the championship before.

Mount Pearl made history by beating St. Lawrence in 2003 and Marystown United claimed its first crown last season in the Laurentians back yard, which was a bitter pill to swallow for the Laurentian faithful.

St. Lawrence finished in first place after the first round with 12 wins, one loss and five ties for 45 points this season, three more than Mount Pearl/That Pro Look/Molson which had 11 wins four losses and three ties.

Mount Pearl finished first after round 2 play in tier 1 to set up Friday night's clash at King George V field between the top two teams. The winner earns a bye to Sunday afternoon's final.

Friday night's other contest has Holy Cross/The Keg, the third-place finisher in tier 1, playing Marystown United, the tier 2 winner.

Tongues are already wagging before the championship tournament opens because of the controversy surrounding the Laurentians coaching situation following the resignation of Jack Simms.

Simms was a co-coach this season with Derek Strang, the person tabbed to take over the coaching chores by himself next season. The duo replaced Junior Edwards who was at the helm for several seasons before he felt the brunt of a two-year championship drought.

Simms told The Telegram Wednesday night he didn't feel his resignation would have an adverse effect on the club as it heads into the biggest weekend of the season.

When questioned about why he quit, Simms initially answered: "I'd rather not say."

He added the decision was over "nothing serious. I don't know, I guess I just wasn't interested in it like I thought I would be.

"I figured the team was in good shape. We were struggling all year with injuries and we were still getting the job done, so I figured once we got all the players back and the fitness level back, we'd be in good shape for this weekend," Simms said.

Never comfortable

However, when pressed for a more plausible explanation, he said he felt it was “a very strange setup from the beginning” to appoint two co-coaches.

“It’s sort of like having two skippers on the same boat,” he said. “Who decides which way to go?”

Simms eventually admitted Strang and himself had different styles and philosophies concerning coaching.

“It was an uncomfortable situation to put anyone into. But I think Derek can look after the team for the rest of the season. He’s been pretty well doing it anyway,” Simms said.

“Basically I’ve been pushing the offensive style. My philosophy in regard to playing the game is to attack and then the opposition doesn’t get a chance to attack you.

“I kind of get perturbed when I hear someone saying ‘get back, get back,’ because you can’t be at both ends of the field at one time. Either you are going to attack or you are going to defend totally.

“Some might disagree, but I think there was some confusion on the part of the players in terms of what was expected from them.”

Simms said the two different systems may have been sending mixed signals to the players on the field all season.

“To get rid of some confusion, I figured I’d go. He’s (Strang) a lot younger than me and obviously he has a lot longer left to go a it,” added Simms, a member of the St. Lawrence Soccer Hall of Fame who coached the Laurentians to several titles in the 1970s.

“I like to do the unexpected,” Simms said about his coaching philosophy.

“We can all teach the basics, but that sort of stuff should be finished up in May or the last part of June. Then you should get into some tactics, stuff that the other team doesn’t expect ... something the other teams aren’t doing.

“There isn’t much difference, player-for-player, when you are talking about the top three or four remaining teams.

“So, as a coach, you’ve got to come up with something a little different to make the difference.

“We tried a few things, but I don’t think there was enough time put into it. That’s what happens when you have two people. He’s looking at equal time, but that sort of things needs full time,” Simms said.

“If you have four (practice) sessions a week, you need to work on a specific thing as opposed to doing it for two days and then going off and doing something else for the other two days.”

Simms said if he had his time back, he wouldn’t have gotten involved in a co-coaching type of setup.

“I thought things might have worked out better.”