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World Lacrosse U19 Women’s Lacrosse championship celebrated many firsts for the sport

As Peterborough hosted the world earlier this month, the city saw firsthand the unprecedented growth of lacrosse and its international audience. From Aug. 1 to 10, eight first-time nations fielded teams at the World U19 level, scoring their first goals and initial wins, setting the stage for the sport to push towards a future return to the Olympics.

"When we offered to host three years ago, we knew we could organize a high-calibre event that would bring people together from all over the world," said co-chair and Kawartha Lacrosse founder Fred Blowes.

“We did not anticipate the scope of the countries that participated and the incredible interaction between the teams and the community. We have been blown away by the historic moments that occurred at our games and the bonds developed between athletes and the people they have touched."

The Peterborough-based championship was the largest World Lacrosse under-19 tournament ever – women’s or men’s -- with 22 teams on fields at Fleming College and Trent University. Large contingents of fans came from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China and several European countries. More than 3,000 fans attended Canada’s first game against England on Aug. 2; crowds of 2,000 attended the bronze-medal game between Australia and England, then 2,300 as Canada and the United States vied for the gold medal, which Team USA won. Intermittent rain dampened attendance somewhat, but not the spirits of fans in the stands.

Premier Doug Ford attended the final game, meeting with community leaders south of the main bleachers.

All the World games were live-streamed on Lax Sports Network, drawing 82,000 viewers by midway throughout the championship. Most of those came from Japan, Australia and New Zealand, although local fans also tuned in when they were unable to get to the stadiums. The games to determine the top-12 placements were also aired on the online Olympic Channel.

Even more fans were reached through the tournament’s official social media channels. On Facebook, 463,094 unique users were reached from July 31-Aug 11 with 23,669 engagements. Instagram saw 333,016 impressions and Twitter numbers were the most impressive with 1.03 unique impressions and 38,140 engagements.

The event ran at the same time as the national and provincial championships and two festivals for up-and-coming athletes, bringing the total of lacrosse players in the city to 1,400, along with their families and fans.

Peterborough Kawartha Economic Development surveyed visitors to gauge the economic impact of the games, with results expected in September. Early results show that many international visitors came before the games started or stayed
afterwards to explore Canada, spending more than anticipated. Event organizers received a $100,000 Sport Hosting Grant from the Province to offset some costs, such as transportation, anticipating a boost to the local economy due to an influx of visitors from around the globe.

During the closing ceremonies on Aug. 10, World Lacrosse President Sue Redfern acknowledged the commitment of the Peterborough-based committee to these games.

“I ask all of you to recognise the enormous amount of work that goes into hosting an event such as this and to thank the host organizers,” she said. “Your teams have been amazing, going out of their way to help everyone and make people feel welcome and this has been a very happy event with a great atmosphere. “

Thirty core volunteers have been pulling the championship together, drawing another 125 people in to help on game days. They worked closely with staff at Fleming College and Trent University, which also housed most of the athletes and officials.

“It was an honour to co-host the 2019 Women’s Lacrosse U19 World Championships with our partner, Trent University,” said Fleming College President Maureen Adamson. “Congratulations to the City of Peterborough, World Lacrosse and the organizing committee for the success of the event and bringing this incredible championship to our fabulous city.”

“It has been a great honour for Trent University to be a host and partner for the 2019 U19 Women’s World Lacrosse Championship,” said Dr. Leo Groarke, president and vice-chancellor of Trent University. “At Trent, we believe that sport has the ability to bring the world together – and this championship has certainly exemplified that international camaraderie. Thank you to the athletes, teams, organizers and volunteers whose talent and spirit have been truly inspiring!”

“The World Lacrosse U19 Women's Lacrosse Championship was a huge success,” said Mayor Diane Therrien. "It was great to see athletes and their families from across the world explore our City. The sportsmanship, athletic excellence and community spirit demonstrated throughout the Championship was great to see. Thank you to all those who volunteered and worked tirelessly to make this event possible."

In addition to the games, some committee members also organized the collection of goods for teams from Kenya, Jamaica and Uganda -- who had to withdraw its team one month before the competition. Local companies and individuals donated hygiene products and basic clothing to last the players for months. Meanwhile, the Peterborough Lakers raised money to help ship some of the goods home, after hosting the Kenyan team at a game in Cobourg.

“These games will leave their mark on the city and many people who participated as athletes, referees, coaches and volunteers for a very long time,” Fred Blowes added. “Everyone rose to the occasion to make our guests feel welcome and to host an unforgettable championship. We should all be proud of what we have achieved.”

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