

Lacrosse gems found in Penticton

By Emanuel Sequeira - Penticton Western News

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Penticton's Mitch Walton and Liam Kircher are prime examples that good finds happen in unexpected places.

While the majority of players on the Burnaby Mountain Lacrosse Association sophomore and freshman select rosters hail from Lower Mainland communities, the elite touring club will stray from the usual hot beds.

"We take pride in finding diamonds in the rough," said executive director Brent Hoskins.

With Kircher, the club didn't have to go far to discover him, he found them when he attended a summer camp. It's something he has done for several years.

"Right from the start you can see his passion," said Hoskins.

The seed for that passion was planted at age four when Kircher started playing box lacrosse.

With his second season about to wrap up with a trip to Florida Dec. 29 to Jan. 5, Kircher has enjoyed the experience. He has learned a lot from co-coaches Jeff Cathrea and Hoskins, who were named 2008 and 2009 Pacific Northwest Collegiate Lacrosse League Coaches of the Year. Where he has improved most is ball control.



Liam Kircher (above) and Mitch Walton have been improving their skills with elite teams in the Burnaby Mountain Lacrosse Association. Both have traveled with their respective teams for tournaments in the US.

At five-foot-one, Kircher doesn't let his size stop him from attacking the defence and being an offensive threat. Hoskins said that Kircher raises his game and plays against athletes two to three years older.

"He's great at converting," said Hoskins. "He has the ability to drive with the ball. He goes against big players. Creates opportunity for his teammates."

In Walton, the Burnaby club has a solid two-way player.

"He is capable in the defensive end and is excellent in creating chances," said Hoskins. "He's an unselfish player."

Since joining the club in the fall of 2008, the experience has been better than expected for the 15-year-old.

"I was just expecting that it would be a high-level team," said Walton. "That it would be good competition. Try to fit in and that's what's happened."

Walton was discovered by Burnaby while he competed in the B.C. Summer Games. During his two seasons with the club (fall of '08 and '09), he has learned more about the sport. Until playing with Burnaby, Walton, who played for Team BC in national competition as a 14-year-old, had never played on the field team. The first trip Walton took with the club was to Charlotte, North Carolina, while the second was to Baltimore, MD and New York. In Maryland, the team went winless, but Walton still felt it was a positive experience. The team benefited from playing talented teams.

"You get to know how real lacrosse is down there," said Walton. "The majority of the teams we played were Grade 12s so they have been practicing for three years."

Both players have dreams of playing at the college level and Hoskins said they have the skills to reach it. The key season for players to catch the eyes of scouts is in the summer of their sophomore year and Grade 11.

One of the things Hoskins likes about Kircher and Walton is they are very coachable.

"They want to become better," said Hoskins, who mentioned that strong academics is another important aspect of the club. "They both want to get feedback, ask questions and soak up information."