



Lakers in the News

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Lakers crack national Top-10 hockey rankings

KEN PAGAN, THE NUGGET **October 28, 2009**

Less than a month into their inaugural season, the Nipissing Lakers men's hockey team has cracked the national Top-10 rankings.

The Lakers, who are riding a five-game winning streak in posting a 5-1-1 record through the first quarter of the season, were ranked No. 9 in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport men's hockey rankings, released Tuesday.

The University of New Brunswick and University of Alberta remain at No. 1 and 2, while the UQTR Patriotes, the top-ranked team in the OUA, move up to No. 3.

The Lakers had garnered some attention in the initial rankings a week ago, and two more weekend wins over Concordia and the University of Ottawa have vaulted them into the Top 10.

It's huge for a team in its first year to be nationally ranked," said Nipissing athletics director Vito Castiglione, noting neither of the Lakers' OUA soccer teams have ever come close to cracking national rankings.

It's a true testament to the job (head coach) Mike McParland did with recruiting and surrounding the team with some good guys.

I never would have thought the team would be nationally ranked in its first year. I think it's awesome."

The Lakers are one of six teams from the OUA conference in the Top-10 rankings, joining No. 4 Lakehead, No. 7 McGill, No. 8 Wilfrid Laurier and No. 10 Waterloo Warriors.

Castiglione said he was somewhat optimistic about the hockey team's chances in its first year when it was placed in the OUA East division, where there seemed to be more opportunity to contend for a playoff spot.

While a national ranking wasn't expected, one of the benefits of launching the hockey program was the team could help the university build a national profile -- and that appears to be happening.

Hockey will be a profile sport for the school and this gets our name out there," Castiglione said. This is great for recruiting in the future and it's great for the university."

McParland and the players were aware of the ranking when they took the ice for practice Tuesday, but the head coach prefers to look at the big picture and downplay any rankings seven games into a 28-game schedule.

If anything, I think it's more of a small sensation for North Bay and especially for Nipissing, being such a small school playing with these big, established teams," McParland said. It's a credit to the people who have put in a lot of hard work over the last two years to get this program up and running."

McParland said staying in the Top 10 would be outstanding" but the probability is low, with the Lakers facing four of the teams in the Top 10 over the next month.

It should be entertaining and exciting hockey for the fans in North Bay with Laurier, Waterloo, UQTR and McGill coming in -- you can't ask for anything better," he said.

I hope we can compete and stay with them and maybe surprise one of them. I don't by any means think after seven games that we should have a place cemented in the Top 10. Let's just be the small kid on the block and keep taking baby steps. It's our first year and we're seven games in -- let's build a foundation before we build a roof."

Where the national ranking will help, however, is in legitimizing the hockey program and aiding the recruiting process for the four to seven players who might be targeted to join the team for next season.

Team staff is already preparing a promotional DVD for prospective players, highlighting the team, the crowds and the arena.

As old as our rink is at 54-plus years old, it's still a palace compared to the rinks we play in and now with our dressing room finished, it has to be an attraction," McParland said.

The Lakers host the University of Ottawa Gee Gees (2-4-0) at Memorial Gardens Friday at 7 p. m.

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