

A new dawn for minor football



nathan anderson

airdrie city view

Somebody better call Rand McNally. Because minor football is now on the map in Airdrie.

The Airdrie PeeWee Storm dominated the Sherwood Park Cougars, Nov. 11, winning Alberta's first ever tier III provincial championship 20-0.

"It's huge for the city. This is going to start changing football in Airdrie from here on out. These boys are a part of history, and they don't even realize it yet," said Storm head coach Thomas Rohl following the contest.

"This is a historic moment for the city, and I hope that the city will understand how much it means for us to give this to them. This is for the city of Airdrie, from the coaches all the way down to the kids."

This year's PeeWee Storm team, a squad of 11-12 year olds, featured just nine veteran players. The team won three regular season games, but caught fire in the playoffs, officially claiming the Storm's first-ever city championship with a 22-14 victory over the Calgary Falcons, Nov. 4. Not bad for a team and program traditionally banished to underdog status.

"Looking at it now, because of the score and what the kids did - we deserved to be there. We were a better team than we were throughout the season. It all came together, and we proved that we were good enough to be there. The kids worked hard all season, and they proved that," said Rohl.

- Nathan Anderson Photo

After winning the first ever Alberta Tier III Provincial Championship, the Airdrie Storm's first goal is to grow the sport our city.

The championship is also a first for Rohl, who has been coaching peewee and bantam football for 14 years. Back in 1996 he took a bantam team to the North finals, but his team gave up a touchdown with just 28 seconds left in the game, losing to the Cowboys. Then, last year, Rohl's peewees lost 16-6 to the Calgary Falcons in the city championship game.

"This is the first time I know how the other guys feel. It's the first time I've been part of a championship team and it feels great," he said.

Minor football has traditionally taken a back seat to other kids' sports in Airdrie, but Rohl hopes those days are officially over. And no longer should talented local players feel the need to play for Calgary-based teams, he added.

"Parents, plain and simple, want kids to play for championship teams. That's the way it is. Now we have a championship. This is just huge for Airdrie, whether it be atom, peewee, bantam or high school. We're going to get players coming out that we normally wouldn't see, just because of a championship... The pressure is now on us as coaches to keep bringing in and developing players. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves, and we enjoy it, because we see great things to come."

"Where do we go from here? As for Tier III, we're always going to be able to challenge for that. That will never be a problem. With the right kids and our program developing, we are poised at a point where tier II and tier I teams are going to have to start being concerned about us. Because we're coming."

- SEE GAME STORY ON PAGE 16-17