

The Founding of the Olde New England Lacrosse League (ONELL)

The origins of the Olde New England Lacrosse League go back to the summer of 2002. When the league's founder, Scott McKenzie, whose son had registered for the Nashua (NH) Park and Recreational lacrosse camp had volunteered to help the coaching staff. After a week of coaching and scrimmaging with the kids, he mentioned to the camp's director that he wished he could play again. The director said if you have equipment, just show-up at a summer league game and play. As he played throughout that summer, the idea of ONELL born.

McKenzie was introduced to lacrosse as a youth in suburban Philadelphia and went on to play midfield at Shawsheen Tech (Billerica MA) and then at Boston College. After college, he played in the Baggataway League until he was 32 when his son was born. In 2003, after a 13-year hiatus, McKenzie founded the *Rusty Bones Lacrosse Club of NH*, the first over-30 team in the state that would ultimately become ONELL's first team. The "Bones" played in the Nashua Park and Rec. Summer League. During some of the games he noticed there were several other older "laxers" like himself, playing. At this juncture, the vision of a men's over-30 league started to come into focus.

In the fall of 2003, McKenzie had begun advertising at a few local sporting goods stores to recruit more players for his team. This is when Brad Nichols saw an ad and had contacted McKenzie to inquire about the team and McKenzie mentioned his real goal is to create a league for older players. After some discussion, Nichols said he could put together a team and the *Manchester Elder Tribesman* became the second team to join ONELL. The arrival of a third team came about when McKenzie, a season ticket holder of the Boston Cannons, was renewing his tickets when he mentioned to the Cannons sales rep. that he was starting an over-30 league. The rep. put McKenzie in contact with Zack Lehmann of MetroLacrosse. Lehmann liked the idea of an all over-30 league and the *Stale Donuts* joined the league. Lehman introduced McKenzie to Rob Mossi of Sudbury MA. Mossi entered the *Sudbury Olde Patriots* as the league's fourth team.

During the early spring of 2004, it would appear the league's inaugural season was going to have only four teams. The league's fifth team joined when Lee Gunst of Portsmouth NH had learned of the league and contacted McKenzie to enter a team. Gunst mentioned he needed to come up with a name that would be comparable with the league's other team names, *Rusty Bones*, *Elder Tribesman*, *Stale Donuts* and *Olde Patriots*. McKenzie suggested, since Gunst's team would be representing the seacoast area, he suggested the name, "*Ancient Mariners*," and Gunst agreed with the suggestion.

With only four weeks remaining before league competition would commence, Mike Bergstrom of Billerica MA had contacted McKenzie mentioning he heard about the over-30 league and would like to join and the *Billerica Fakawee* become the sixth team to round out the league. The first season of ONELL was ready to begin play with six teams. Three representing New Hampshire and three representing Massachusetts.

The league's first official game was played June 15, 2004, on the grounds of the Anheuser-Busch facility in Merrimack NH. The contest featured the *Rusty Bones* vs. the *Elder Tribesmen*. The game was evenly matched as both teams exchanged taking the lead several times throughout the hard-fought contest. At the final whistle, the *Rusty Bones* had prevailed 15-12, and the league's first game was in the books. Since then, the "*Bones*" and the "*Tribe*" continue to represent the league's oldest rivalry.

The inaugural season of ONELL concluded with the *Seacoast NH Ancient Mariners* defeating the *Billerica Fakawee* to become the league's first champion. In the following year, ONELL expanded to eight teams and had added an over-40 division.

Since 2004, the Olde New England Lacrosse League has expanded to almost 40 teams representing communities from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Providence, Rhode Island.

The league's founder encourages teams to be actively involved in their respective communities. In the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans, McKenzie had coordinated efforts with numerous players representing various ONELL teams the Red Cross, Atlantic Sports and Major League Lacrosse professionals, Casey Powell, Mike Powell, Mike Battista, Bill Daye and others to create the Pro-Am tournament, "Lacrosse for New Orleans." This event raised over \$10,000 for the Red Cross to provide much needed aid to the storm damaged city. The League's spirit of community involvement continues to be a part of the league's identity.