

Pro lacrosse strengthens its Anne Arundel links

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BALTIMORE - Annapolis businessman Brendan Kelly was announced as the new president of the Bayhawks franchise of Major League Lacrosse last night in Baltimore, one of several front office moves that moved people with ties to Anne Arundel County to the Bayhawks' front office.

Kelly, the founder and president of Annapolis-based consulting firm Smartlink LLC, is also in the final stages of purchasing the franchise, which has captured two championships since it debuted as one of the MLL's original six in 2001 and moved its home games to Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium last summer after playing in Baltimore and Washington for its first eight seasons.

"We really want to make the Chesapeake Bay Region's professional lacrosse team the most successful lacrosse team in the land," Kelly says.

Annapolis resident John Lamon, who served as an assistant coach this year, was introduced at the press conference as director of sales, while former Severn School coach John Tucker will remain as head coach for the team.

"The challenge ahead of us is a big one, but we're excited for it," said Kelly, who played lacrosse at Baltimore's Mount St. Joseph's high school and Salisbury University and whose Smartlink post-college club team has become one of the most successful in the country in the last decade.

"This is about the future of lacrosse and the kids growing up today being able to say that they want to play professional lacrosse. A lot of people may not realize how lucky (current professional players are) because there was no such thing for years."

Kelly and Smartlink served as title sponsor for the league's championship weekend in Annapolis and provided all the marketing for the event, which drew 7,000 fans for the finals in August between the Toronto Nationals and Denver Outlaws. Many current Bayhawks have also played for Kelly and Smartlink in the past 10 years as well.

"I think its great to see (Kelly and Smartlink) take over the team, because when you see how professional they've done things on the club side, it's really amazing," said Archbishop Spalding grad and Team USA midfielder Kyle Dixon, who has played on Smartlink since graduating for Virginia in 2006.

Using players such as Dixon and South River graduate Michael Evans to market the team locally is a big part of Kelly's plan to help improve the team's attendance numbers, which were third out of six MLL teams in '09 at 4,420 per game - well behind No. 2 Boston (8,080) and No. 1 Denver (10,127).

"Oh, I'm already talking to my former coaches and making sure we bring guys out to our games," said Evans, who was a rookie this summer after taking the Schmeisser Award as the top defensive player in Division I his senior season at Johns Hopkins. "I've got connections with AYLA and Davidsonville youth, the Lamons are plugged in at St. Mary's, we've got a lot of folks that have these connections and we're going to get people to the games."

Kelly also stressed that the front office plans to take advantage of Annapolis' central location in the Baltimore region, marketing to fans in areas such as the Eastern Shore and south county that don't have college lacrosse as readily accessible as fans in Washington and Baltimore.

"It's really my job as president to sell tickets and expand the game," Kelly says. "We want to include everybody - we can't just market to the kids in the AYLA, we have to get kids coming from all over the place.

"We're spoiled sometimes in this area with all the great lacrosse we get to watch in the spring, but people aren't driving from the shore to catch games in Baltimore, so hopefully we can make them see the Bayhawks as a local team they want to support."