This page was exported from - The Auroran
Export date: Fri Mar 29 10:10:44 2024 / +0000 GMT

Special Olympics Aurora Bocce ready for first taste of competition

By Jake Courtepatte

Almost one year in the making, Special Olympics Ontario ? Aurora (SOO) is ready to roll out their first team of competitive bocce players this weekend in Richmond Hill.

Three teams of four will be representing Aurora as the ?Aurora Rollers?, a program that began as an outdoor sport in May 2014.

?It started last summer as a fun, tryout kind of sport,? said team manager Jeff Hauley. ?There was so much interest that the executive determined it would be a full sport sponsored by Aurora.?

The program was such a hit that they started an indoor program this January, keeping the players competition-ready all year round while continuing to develop their skills.

The biggest obstacle for the program, however, was finding an indoor court to play on. Currently, Aurora has no indoor facilities for bocce, which is usually played on a crushed stone surface.

They've had to make due with carpeting and hardwood flooring at Our Lady of Grace Church on Yonge Street, just north of Wellington, in Lynet Hall.
?It's something that hopefully down the road we'll get in Aurora,? said Hauley. ?It makes things kind of difficult, but our players are still learning nonetheless.?

Between the two programs, SOO ? Aurora now fields 21 bocce athletes, with 15-17 involved in the indoor program with quite a bit of overlap.
And according to Hauley, the development rate of the players is quite high.

?It's a relatively new sport to Canada, if you're not in the Italian community. But it's one of the fastest growing sports in the world because it can be started from any age. Anyone from kids to seniors can play.?

While the sport is simple enough in its rules, there is quite a bit of skill involved in terms of distance, power, and ball strategy, all of which Hauley says his athletes ?have all picked up extremely well.?

This weekend comes as their first real test, having competed only against each other recreationally until now.

And the players are ready and raring to go.

?They're all pretty excited,? said Hauley. ?We're pretty much sending everybody. They're looking forward to showing off what they can do. They can meet other bocce players and check their skill against somebody other than the people they see every week.?

The competition will also double as preparation for sending a team to the Special Olympics International Bocce Tournament at Seneca College King Campus at the end of April.

Athletes will have the opportunity to stay in residence and play a number of games against athletes from 24 teams around the world. The outdoor program will start back up in June.