

York 9 FC set to kick off inaugural season this weekend

By Jake Courtepatte

For fans of the green and black, the day is finally here.

York 9 FC is scheduled to face Hamilton's Forge FC this Saturday, kicking off the inaugural season for both the club and the Canadian Premier League.

Temperatures are expected to hang around the ten-degree Celsius range at Hamilton's Tim Hortons Field on opening day, an unwelcome change of conditions for the fully-rostered York 9 club, who returned from a conditioning stint in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic last weekend.

"It's nice to get some sun on the face for the players," said York 9 coach Jimmy Brennan. "It does kind of rejuvenate you a bit after being indoors for so long."

It's been a whirlwind April for the club, who unveiled their official kits on April 5, sporting the nine bright green stripes across the abdominals, representing the nine municipalities of York Region.

Last week also saw the league strike a deal with CBC Sports to live broadcast ten of the CPL regular season games, including Saturday's opener.

CBC Sports' Scott Russell and Andi Petrillo will host CBC's coverage of the broadcast games. Commentary will be provided by longtime soccer broadcaster Gareth Wheeler, and former Canadian international player Terry Dunfield.

Yet, for the York club, they return to Canada focused solely on what is happening on the field.

"You're in an intimate setting where every day you're working with your teammates," said Brennan. "You start creating bonds where you really get to understand one another."

Midfielder Joseph Di Chiara added that the goal was "to maximize as much field time as we can," after spending time earlier in the preseason at Vaughan's Ontario Soccer Centre.

"When you're training at home, it's not the same as spending 24 hours for ten days straight where

you're eating together?you do everything together.?

The Forge FC squad followed suit in heading to the Dominican to get in some exhibition games against local clubs, where Di Chiara said he got a chance to check out his upcoming competition.

?You try to improve every day. Then eventually, when that day comes, you're in full flight. If you look at the big picture and think, 'wow,' you maybe get a little overwhelmed.?

Brennan said he now has his club focused solely on Saturday's match since returning home.

As for the rest of the roster, Brennan and his team have finally put to paper the twenty names that will represent this Nine Stripes this season, including eighteen Canadians. Those who have been following League1 Ontario play since its inaugural year a few years back will recognize some friendly faces, including former Aurora FC players Morey Doner and Simon Adjei, as well as former Vaughan Azzurri teammates Austin Ricci and Colm Vance.

Over 23,000 are expected at Tim Hortons Field when the green and black take to the pitch on Saturday, a sell-out collaboration between the stadium and the league for the historic day.

The York club will see its first home action on May 22, when they take on AS Blainville at York Lions Stadium.