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Export date: Thu Mar 28 8:48:50 2024 / +0000 GMT

Saints player ready for chance to be noticed by Canada Football Chat

Processing the very thought of Canadians having the opportunity to play football at a high level, is not as far down the pecking order as you might think.

This past year, Kansas City Chiefs offensive lineman Laurent Duvernay-Tardif became the ninth Canadian to win the Super Bowl and the 16th Canadian to step foot out on the field, according to Sporting News.

In the college system, Oklahoma State Cowboys running back ? and Edmonton native ? Chuba Hubbard was a hair width away from winning the infamous Heisman Trophy, the ultimate prize in the competition. In the last 20 years, only three running backs have won the Heisman. Being a Canadian and coming that close is more than just an incredible accomplishment.

You might ask, how far have we really come as a country in our development of this sport?

?I would say it's better now than it's ever been and it's only going to get better,? said Marcello Lio, head coach of the St. Andrew's College Saints first football and junior basketball teams.

That's all thanks to the impenetrable belief system coordinated by Canada Football Chat. This organization has been the mantra in Canada for young athletes who are passionate about playing football.

?They've done an excellent job recognizing the top talent and ranking the top talent. You'd be surprised, I think there's over 30 to 35 Canadian kids that are going to division one in the NCAA this year,? Lio explained to The Auroran.

On the website, there are currently 18 D1 Prospects. Every year, the CFC hosts a prospect game and a youth prospect game on TSN.

Grade 12 students at St. Andrew's College Nathan Falconi and Brendan Dilworth, who recently committed to Queen's University, were noticed through Canada Football Chat and participated down south.

All provinces in the country compete amongst one another. This year, the Saints have seven prospects attending the Canada Football Chat Top Prospects Camp and tryouts for Team Ontario. The hope is by mid-April, if there are no cancellations due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the prospects will be cut and Team Ontario will be formed.

?In 2012, I took a stint with the junior national program here in Canada. So, I had an opportunity to recruit across the country,? Lio said.

The former quarterback's coach at York University went on to add that Ontario does very well versus other competitive provinces such as Quebec.

This year, Grade 11 students, including quarterback Cameron Mitchell, defensive lineman Kieran Walters and offensive lineman Ty White will make an appearance in the prospects camp.

Grade Nine youngsters include quarterback Anthony Lio, running back Ahston Watson, defensive back Joseph Aitoro and offensive lineman Nihaal Rana, who will compete as well.

Lio speaks highly of each and every one of them.

Mitchell missed the prospects camp last season and is excited about making it out this year should everything run smoothly. He has been working on his pocket presence and delivery.

For a tall player, he has the assets to be a great quarterback.

White is returning again and Walters is a great defensive tackle with some good potential at the U-sports level.

As for the Grade Nines, Rana, Aitoro and Watson are ready to compete at a high level. Lio used to coach Rana at the Bantam level. Watson is a special running back and Aitoro has turned some heads with a great nose for the ball.

Lio went on to add that his son Anthony received offers from schools in Chicago, Lio's hometown, before choosing St. Andrew's College.

Lio, who played at York University and in Europe professionally, has worked with his son and says that he has been fortunate to be coached by him throughout his life.

By Robert Belardi