

## Aurora Barbarians introducing ?non-contact? rugby for post-COVID-19 play

The Aurora Barbarians will introduce non-contact rugby post COVID-19, says senior women's head coach Khalil Ajram.

Following a club review surveying parents, players, staff, alumni and future players, it was deemed this is a safe and necessary alternative for multiple age groups.

?That's something we are going to establish when we return. We're going to have touch leagues,? Ajram said.

?That's what our club's new premise will be after. We're still going to run our programs.?

The club is thinking of hosting contactless matches Sunday afternoons and evenings. For those travelling on the weekends up north, it might be ideal to run the programs then.

Contactless rugby, via flag or touch, is one of the major development tools used in New Zealand and Australia for youth.

Since the inaugural season of OZTag in 1992-93 in Australia, the league has grown significantly in the country.

Currently, there are over 80,000 participants nationally.

?What I see happening with rugby, is the rugby 7s, which is the Olympic sport, might grow in popularity. You can have seven people playing seven people in a way bigger area.?

?I feel non-contact rugby, will gain a lot of traction following all of this.?

The Town of Aurora, Rugby Ontario and Rugby Canada have all been working on a return to play model. The Town of Aurora has avidly been discussing protocols and measures on a weekly basis.

Ajram says Rugby Canada has lifted their national suspension of the sport as of June 19. Rugby Ontario is currently creating their policies to initiate a return to play model as well.

Once the model is finalized and the Certificate of Insurance (COI) is reopened, Ajram says there will be a five-step process to return to play, each step to be evaluated two to three weeks at a time.

In Stage One, players are not permitted to share equipment but are allowed to train six feet apart. Here, there will be plenty of individual training modules in place.

?After that step is done after two to three weeks, then step two is pass-ball, remaining in the social distancing area. Step three allows for touch and flag rugby. Stage four will be a return to practice as we knew it before so we can have contact and stage five is full out games,? Ajram explained.

Practices will be scheduled for approximately 45 minutes at a time. Ajram has ordered sanitizers, cleaners and personal protective equipment on Amazon.

Heading into what reports are indicating as ?the new normal? Ajram believes organized sports will not resume until April of 2021.

He is hopeful this is not the case. From now until the winter season, Ajram is also hopeful some rugby training would be able to move indoors to a dome.

**By Robert Belardi**