

Barbarians U18 club splits doubleheader with English squad



By Jake Courtepatte

The Aurora Barbarians U18 men's team played host to some special visitors Tuesday night from across the pond.

The double-header took place at St. Maximilian Kolbe CHS, as the Barbarians welcomed Gravesend Grammar School from England.

Gravesend certainly had the advantage in experience, as the grammar school had a long rugby history spanning over a century. As for the Barbs, this season marked the first to have enough players registered to field both an 'A' team and 'B' team. However, Gravesend coach Emlyn said his team would not take the Canadians lightly.

'It's really interesting to play in a country where rugby's up-and-coming and just starting to grow,' said Emlyn. 'So I think the boys find it really interesting to play people who are different sizes, who come from different backgrounds, and especially from different sports.'

The first match saw the Barbs 'B' squad match up against Gravesend's U17. Barbarian Aidan Brown said that while team strategy remained similar against their experienced overseas opponent, they had to take advantage of their opportunities.

'Watch what their mistakes are,' said Brown. 'And if they keep repeating them, we have to pounce on them.'

Brown had three tries in what would be a 35 - 14 victory for the Barbarians.

'We see how they play, having played together for years,' said Brown. 'These guys are so far ahead of Canada in rugby, and for us to win against a team like this shows we're improving.'

The Barbarian 'A' squad took on the Gravesend U18 team in the second match of the evening.

Although the Barbs dropped the match 5 - 42, head coach Sandy Townsend said he sees value in the experience his players had.

'We want to provide our players with the highest opportunity we can to challenge them,' said Townsend. 'We want to present them with a chance to show what they can do against some of the best, whether in Ontario or overseas.'

As much of the U18 team graduated at the end of last season, Townsend called this a 'reloading year.'

?I would say that next year looks really good,? said Townsend. ?Not that I'm writing off this year. We've had two U16 teams for the last two years, so it's nice to see those kids graduate and stay with us.?

The trip was Gravesend Grammar School's third to Canada, having also visited South Africa twice and both Los Angeles and New Zealand once since 1999.

So what makes Canada and Aurora worth three visits? The answer should not come as a surprise.

?The hospitality,? said Emlyn. ?The people we've met along the way have been fantastic. The welcoming we receive, the people that we meet, the rugby that we play, has always been in good spirits. It just keeps us coming back for more.?

For more information on the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club, visit aurorabarbarians.com.