

Local rugby player takes on nation in Calgary



By Jeff Doner

Kevin Rush isn't sure where his rugby career is going to take him yet, but the Aurora native recently had the honour of representing his province at the U19 Canadian Rugby Championship in Calgary as part of the Ontario Blues squad.

Playing for the Laurier Golden Hawks during the school year and the Aurora Barbarians senior men's team in the summer, Rush said he was proud to make the team and that the experience he gained was beneficial.

"Unfortunately, I didn't play as much as I wanted to, but it was really good," he said. "I was surrounded by the best in the country in my age group and it was just really cool to see the Canada guys. It was good seeing all the different teams and what they bring. BC has got some huge guys that can run a whole game. It was just really cool to play with Ontario."

Part of the reason why he didn't see much playing time was because of an injury in his first game of the tournament against British Columbia.

"In the first eight minutes I got an elbow against BC," he said, pointing to a gnarly scar over his eye. "I got 18 stitches from that and it took an hour and a half to stitch up."

With his team expecting to make it deep into the tournament, they fought hard against the competition, but were humbled by the Prairie Wolf Pack, a team composed of players from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

"That was a game we lost, but should have won," he said. "We didn't really perform. A lot of people had the mentality that BC and Ontario would be in the finals, but Alberta came out gunning this year and we simply underperformed, they just kept putting on pressure."

But the team brushed it off and went on to defeat Quebec handily to earn tournament bronze.

Rush, 18, did get some more playing time in, which he said is important if you want to take your rugby career further.

"The big thing for the U19 team is to showcase yourself for the U20 Canada team," he explained. "That's what a lot of guys think of it as, because a lot of the coaches and personnel for Canada teams are there watching."

He also said nationals wasn't just about playing the games, but there was a huge educational side of things as well. There were tutorials and seminars on what it would take to play for Team Canada that included sessions on workouts, nutrition and hydration and strength and conditioning.

?They were all important if you want to get into U20. It taught us what we need to be at if we want to play with them.?

Playing the position of tighthead prop, the former football player, who found himself gravitating towards rugby, hopes to continue to gain experience on the field with the Ontario squad.

?I'm a very physical player, which is why I think I made it to Ontario; my only problem is knowing every play of the game. I'm not at the point yet where I can predict a play, but that's just due to a lack of experience.?

But obviously the coaches of the Ontario team liked what they saw for him to make it on the 24-man roster.

These days, Rush is playing quite a bit of rugby between the Barbarians and Golden Hawks varsity team.

Going into his second year studying computer science, Rush said he is loving Laurier, but admitted he has his eye on maybe transferring to Queen's in hopes of joining their rugby program.

Back at home, he is in his fourth year with the Barbs and gave credit to the Aurora organization for helping him succeed in the sport he loves.

?I started with the Barbs and that's where I learned all the basics,? he said. ?That's where I fell in love with rugby and the Barbs are just a great club. We have all sorts of natural talent here. There have been some great guys.

?Fellow Barbarian Nolan [Ott] has been a really good mentor for me. He always talks to me, tells me what I've got to do and why.?
Rush now faces many big decisions about his rugby career and where it is headed.

?Rugby-wise, I just want to get better. I won't be here for the finals for the Barbs, because I'll be in school and I won't be able to play a lot of the games unless I come home. Ontario/Canada-wise, I'm not sure, but if I can keep going and play rugby for Canada, I would love that. To play the top level of rugby for my country, that would be so cool.?