

## Sport Aurora announced coach and athlete of the year at Breakfast of Champions



Sport Aurora returned with the Breakfast of Champions event for the first time following a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hosted by the Town of Aurora, the event saw long-time NHLer and Team Governor of the Aurora Tigers Jim Thomson, and three-time Olympian and Aurora Sports Hall of Fame member Mark Heese, entertain the audience.

This annual event is in celebration and recognition of a coach and an athlete who have made a substantial impact in their sport.

This year, head coach of the Aurora Tigers, Greg Johnston, was recognized as Sport Aurora's Coach of the Year. Fullback for CF Montréal in the MLS and starter for the Canadian men's national soccer team helping them reach the World Cup, Alistair Johnston was named Sport Aurora's Athlete of the Year.

You can say it's the year of the Johnstons, although these two gentleman have no relation to one another.

Greg Johnston, who formally played in the NHL for the Boston Bruins and the Toronto Maple Leafs, as well as in Europe for several years, took over the head coaching position of the Aurora Tigers at the beginning of last season.

At the helm, Johnston brought the Tigers back to the Ontario Junior Hockey League playoffs following numerous non-contending years of hockey, posting a 25-23-2-4 record. Last season, the Tigers fell to the Collingwood Blues in two-straight games. The Tigers are currently 7-6-3 this year.

The Barrie native was excited and humbled to be named athlete of the year.

"First of all, I was very surprised, very honoured and humbled. To be recognized in a community and very fortunate to coach in Aurora and become part of the community; to be recognized by the community in that way is quite an honour and a privilege. It's certainly appreciated very much," Johnston said.

"But you have to have fun coming to the rink and enjoy coming to the rink. We certainly try to create that atmosphere and that culture here. The players I truly believe enjoy coming to the rink. That's my focus is to make sure the guys are having fun at the rink, learning and developing."

For player of the year, a lot can also be said about Alistair Johnston. The 24-year-old defender moved to Montreal initially and then to Aurora when he was young. Since then, he has left his mark on the Town.

Johnston played youth soccer with Aurora FC and Richmond Hill SC. He made his first appearance with the Canadian U-18s back in 2015.

Johnston attended St. John's University and then transferred to Wake Forest University in 2018. In January 2020, he was selected 11th overall by Nashville SC. In December 2021, he was traded by Nashville to CF Montréal. In 33 matches this past year, he has scored four times.

For the Canadian men's national team, Johnston has made 28 appearances donning the maple leaf, scoring one goal in the process.

He helped lead Canada to an 8-2-4 record, finished first in the CONCACAF World Cup Qualifiers, seeing the Canadians qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 36 years.

In an acceptance video sent over to Sport Aurora, Johnston said he was thrilled to be recognized.

"I just want to say thank you for choosing me to be the Sport Aurora Athlete of the Year. It's an award that I never thought growing up, I would be in the running for. It's pretty cool to win that," he said.

"It's been a really successful year for myself and the entire Canadian Men's National Team. Qualifying for our first World Cup for the first time in 36 years is pretty special. It's been really amazing to be able to say I was a part of that and helped out in whatever way I could to be a part of that journey. Hopefully the whole Town and the whole country will be behind us."

**By Robert Belardi**