

3HL Tour bringing fast-paced hockey to Aurora

By Jake Courtepatte

The Saints come marching in this Saturday, and with them they bring an exciting new take on pro hockey.

The 3HL Tour, the world's first ever 3-on-3 professional hockey league, makes its fifth tour stop in York Region in what promises to be an action-packed day on the ice at the Aurora Community Centre.

The London 3s, Milton Flyers, Guelph Brewers, Kitchener Lions, Newmarket Saints, Markham Millionaires, Oshawa 88s, and Toronto Bees will each be vying for their share of a fifteen-thousand dollar prize, all over the course of just under three hours: about the same time length as an NHL game.

With seven games consisting of two seven-minute halves, the action rolls from 3 p.m. until just before 6 p.m., with warmups beginning at 2p.m.

In just its inaugural season, the 3HL Tour has already received a lot of interest from fans in its first four stops. Pat Gregoire, the 3HL's Director of Media Relations, credits the open-ice style of play that it allows as well as the NHL's transition to 3-on-3 overtime.

"3-on-3 Hockey provides more open play, which allows players to be more creative with the puck and makes for more scoring opportunity," said Gregoire. "The NHL has seen a ton of success with their new 3-on-3 overtime format that has created end-to-end non-stop action, but only for five minutes. With the 3HL, we like to say its overtime, all the time."

After stops in Toronto, Oshawa, Collingwood, and Guelph, it only made sense to bring the Tour to Aurora, home of league-leading scorer PJ Buys. Coming off successful stints with the OJHL's Newmarket Hurricanes followed by the BCIHL's Trinity Western University, Buys now plays a leadership role with the Saints.

"(Buys) approached Justin Fox, the CEO and Founder of the league, and was adamant that the 3HL make a stop in Aurora," said Gregoire. "He told us if we came to the ACC, the seats would be filled with fans wanting to see exciting professional 3-on-3 hockey. Aurora is a great hockey town that has a very tight knit community, that has been unbelievable in supporting this event."

"We couldn't be more excited to have an event at the Aurora Community Centre. It's a great venue and I think it's going to be rocking on Saturday night."

The rosters of all eight teams are filled with aspiring and accomplished pro, collegiate, and ex- junior hockey talents. The majority of the Saints hail from York Region, including Aurora native and captain Chris MacKinnon, a former back-to-back top-ten scorer in the OHL with the Kitchener Rangers.

Also featured on the Saints is 2014 Hobey Baker finalist and Mercyhurst University goaltender Jimmy Sarjeant, who had a four-year stint with the Hurricanes from 2007-2011.

Along with the action on the ice, emerging country artist Kris Barclay and his band will perform between games, while vendors, a beer garden, and food trucks will also be on hand.

Though tickets can be purchased at the door if available, Gregoire and his team expect a sold-out crowd. If you want to ensure a ticket, they can be found at www.3hltour.com/tickets.