

450 Rugby Players flock to Aurora for the 2nd Annual Barbarians' Festival



Over fifty rugby teams from across Central Ontario and the GTA competed in the 2nd Annual Aurora Barbarians' Festival at Sheppard's Bush on Sunday morning.

Khalil Ajram, Co-President and Treasurer of the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club, expressed his satisfaction about the setting of the tournament.

It's great to showcase Aurora and the playing facilities at Sheppard's Bush. We have the York Central Firefighters here today for the kids and local food vendors to feed the players and families. It's great to do this in Aurora and the Town has been so supportive of the Festival. Next year, we'll have a second turf field, too, as the facilities at Sheppard's Bush continue to improve.

Coach Ajram noted that over 450 families travelled to the tournament from centres including Guelph, Collingwood, Oshawa, Caledon, and Toronto. We have fifteen different rugby clubs competing on the pitches today.

Ajram elaborated on the experience for the young athletes participating in the Barbarians' Festival:

The day provides positive feedback for players from coaches after playing rugby for a day, the kids get freebies, and enjoy a Harvey's hamburger after the matches are completed. Teams tend to hang around after the matches are completed; they enjoy their meal and socialize. There are so many good friendships that are generated on and off the field after a day of rugby.

The Barbs' President spoke about the growth of his Rugby Football Club and the brotherhood and sisterhood that is woven into the fabric of rugby culture: Our motto is A Club for All' and we've registered 490 players from the ages of 4 to 70.

Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora, praised the Barbarians' positive impact on rugby and the Town of Aurora: The best part of this tournament is how it serves local interests and visiting families. It shows us that rugby is growing. Committing to out-of-town sports events stimulates parents and children to get involved and gives them an opportunity to see a well-organized tournament. The Festival has a real economic impact on local businesses, too, especially restaurants serving breakfasts, coffee shops, and sports stores selling last minute equipment needed on the pitch. We're happy to promote a tournament like this through Sport Aurora's social media.

Aurora's Ward 1 Councillor doubled down on the Barbarians' reputation as a sports organization: The Aurora Barbarians are recognized as a club with lots of expertise with good facilities for their athletes. The Barbs are producing players for the national and provincial teams, as well as university and college teams across the province. There are no limits it seems regarding the Barbs'

rugby opportunities.?

As he scanned the playing fields where hundreds of kids were competing, Councillor Weese discussed the importance of athletes playing different sports rather than focusing on only one, especially at a young age: "Most of the kids here today are probably playing multiple sports. Probably hockey in the winter, and rugby and possibly other sports in the summer. It's so healthy for kids to play multiple sports and enjoy various athletic and social environments with other kids and other parent groups.?"

By Jim Stewart