

Aurora athlete Rio Speller-Drews signs to US college



By Jeff Doner

Another one of Aurora's young athletes is off to play sports and study in the US.

Rio Speller-Drews, an 18-year-old soccer star, recently committed to the College of Charleston on a soccer scholarship just in time for the upcoming season.

Originally, the soon-to-be-graduated Aurora High student was committed to a soccer scholarship with Old Dominion College, but a coaching change at the school left her looking for a Plan B.

"I started to look around at other schools and Charleston was just a really great fit for me, so I signed my letter of intent and now I'm attending that school," she said.

"It was great the first time when I signed with Old Dominion and then I think even better the second time when I knew everything was finalized and I actually signed my letter of intent."

Now that things are ready to go for the upcoming season, Speller-Drews said she is excited to get things going with her new school and team.

"They're in the process of rebuilding their team, so I'll be in the third recruiting class for this coach and it's a really great recruiting class coming in, so the soccer program is definitely going to be going in an upward direction," she said. "The school itself is really well known and is quite good academically and they offer some great programs and give me a great education."

She will be leaving for South Carolina at the beginning of July to take some summer courses to lighten the load for when the season starts in the fall and will be studying for a degree in exercise science.

Throughout much of her life, Speller-Drews developed her soccer skills at the local level with the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, participating in just about every program and playing each year except for her last.

"I think I'm naturally a pretty dedicated person, but I have to say, at the time I think I was playing for Aurora (AYSC) and a few of the coaches really pushed me to keep going," she said. "They just kept saying, 'things are coming your way and it will all fall into place'. They kept me motivated and offered me extra help."

Last season she played with the Burlington Youth Soccer Club, where she won the Ontario Cup with her team and also excelled at a

few American showcases along the way. She has been keeping a keen eye on some of the soccer being played south of the border to get a feel for what she'll be walking into.

"It's pretty physical. I think that will be my biggest challenge. The girls are just really strong down there. I need to start lifting the weights, I guess," she laughed.

But it hasn't all been easy for Speller-Drews, which she said makes it all worth the while.

"I've had a lot of disappointment along the way," she said. "I was released from the provincial program a few times and we were talking about it the other day, if I hadn't gone back after being released for the third time, none of this would have happened. It was a lot of dedication and taking the disappointments and working from them and making myself better. I kept putting in a lot of hard work and it eventually paid off."

Growing up in a soccer household, Speller-Drews said she would like to develop a career within soccer or sport in general. A goal after university is to try and find some playing opportunities overseas.

"My whole family is pretty into soccer and I guess they saw I had the potential," she said.