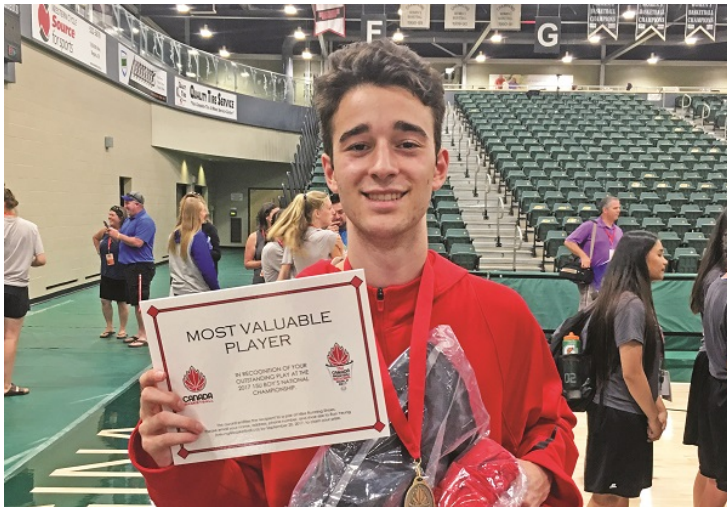


Aurora ballers lead Team Ontario to national championship



By Jake Courtepatte

A pair of homegrown talents brought home a national title on the hardcourt over the weekend in the Under-15 National Basketball Championship.

Johnathan Avgousti and Ryan Nembhard, both of Aurora, were instrumental in Team Ontario's gold medal performance at the event held in Regina, Saskatchewan.

"It is quite an honour getting selected to represent the province, when you consider the number of players that tryout and the length of the selection process," said Avgousti's father, Andrew.

Though it was Nembhard's first year with the program, playing at an underage level, Avgousti earned redemption in his second go-around at the tournament, helping Team Ontario to a bronze medal last year after a defeat by Nova Scotia in the semifinals. A lengthy process brought both Aurora players on board to a roster mostly consistent of GTA talent, a favourite to win the tournament.

Ontario did not disappoint in going 3 ? 0 in round robin play, cruising through teams from Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia to earn a bye into the semifinals.

Knocking out Saskatchewan on the back of an eleven-point effort by Avgousti, Ontario prepared to meet Quebec in Saturday's final. "Both teams played tough in the early going," said Avgousti.

Despite jumping out to an early 7 ? 0 lead, Quebec quickly countered, though Avgousti's thirteen first-half points helped Ontario to a 39 ? 35 lead at recess.

"Quebec gave Ontario everything they had, but the deep Ontario team simply turned it up a notch in the second half and never looked back."

Coming out hot in the second half, Ontario led by 22 points heading into the fourth quarter, eventually taking the championship by a score of 88 ? 71.

With a fifteen-point effort, and an average of fourteen points per game throughout the tournament, Avgousti was awarded the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

Nembhard also impressed in his first year with the program, leading the tournament with an average of four assists per game, along with seven points and five rebounds.

Having just completed his Grade Nine year at Crescent School in Toronto, Avgousti has aspirations of representing the red and white at the national level, and continuing to play basketball at a Division 1 Ivy League school.