

Aurora Barbarians fall short in bid for fourth McCormick Cup



By John Reich and Jeff Doner

It was the kind of day that the Aurora Barbarians senior men's team feared most when they played Markham Irish this past Saturday at Fletcher's Fields in Rugby Ontario's McCormick Cup Championship game.

The Barbarians had previously faced the Irish in 2006 and 2008 on wet, muddy days losing both times by close scores.

The Aurora team was enjoying a comfortable run up to the Cup with eight consecutive wins taking advantage of their speed and fitness, ideal for dry conditions and warmer weather.

‘This club always has high expectations,’ Barbarian head coach Ian McLeod said during the week. ‘This will be our seventh appearance in the Cup final in the last eight years. But given the weather and poor field conditions anticipated for this weekend it would be hard to consider us as the favorite.’

And so it was, another wet, sloppy day and as it turned out, a boon to the Irish forwards who managed the ball superbly, depriving Aurora of possession and wearing down the Barbarian tight five while frustrating Aurora's speedy backs who were unable to show the skills that had brought them to the final game.

Working against the wind in the first half, the Barbarians gave up a penalty ten minutes into the game to trail 3 - 0. Nolan Ott from Aurora was sent off for ten minutes for a dangerous tackle infringement midway through the first half giving some additional momentum to the Irish.

During the ‘sin bin’ the green forwards were able to rumble into the end zone off a lineout play to touch the ball down and go ahead by 8.

Although the Barbarians played outstanding defense beyond that point stopping the Irish on two goal line stands, all that could be mustered offensively was a penalty kick by scrum half Bryn Davies ten minutes into the second half to make the score 8-3.

Aurora displayed a willingness to run, but the Irish showed great resolve in tackling and the deteriorating conditions neutralized any kind of offense maneuver.

Other than the three points from Davies, the game went scoreless in the second half, the referee blowing his whistle after two minutes of added time for injury signaling the victory for the Markham club and heartbreak for Aurora.

After the game, coach McLeod congratulated his stalwarts for a fine and exciting season.

?My guys gave it their all? he said after the game. ?The Irish played well in the conditions. They are worthy champions.?

Aurora's Second XV also lost out in the Gee Gage Championship game for development teams falling on the wrong side of a 29-7 score to the Toronto Scottish II. The conditions for this game were even worse as the pitch was inundated with casual water and the rain poured down throughout the match. The heavier Scottish team played well in the harsh conditions earning their victory in a decisive manner outscoring Aurora 5 tries to one.

Touching down for the Barbarians was captain James Coombes with the conversion coming off the boot of scrum half James Hulbert.

Academy programs begin for the Aurora Barbarians in January. The 2014 season kicks off in April.

Aurora Mayor loses friendly challenge with Markham counterpart

Prior to the match, Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti met up to set the terms of a friendly challenge.

Because the Barbs lost, Mayor Dawe now has to wear a Markham Irish jersey at the next Aurora Council meeting.

Prior to the game, both mayors were confident in their respective clubs.

?Of course the Barbs are going to win, hands down,? Mayor Dawe said. ?Mayor Scarpitti might say Markham is going to win, but he's just delusional.?

Added Mayor Scarpitti: ?I think Aurora will try to give it all it's got and we know that won't be enough, but we're looking for a great matchup and I think it really shows that rugby is alive and well in the region.?

There's no doubt Mayor Scarpitti is happy to be on the winning side of the challenge this time around.

?After wearing the jersey this morning, Markham better win, because it took me half an hour to get into it,? he said before the game. ?I didn't realize rugby jerseys were that tight.?