

Aurora FC off to hot start in League1 Ontario season opener

By Jake Courtepatte

Just one week into what team staff are calling a 'rebuilding process', the Aurora FC men have already gathered three points in the 2019 League1 Ontario season.

The yellow and black took to the pitch off Ottawa's OSU Force for game one of the semi-professional soccer league's season on Saturday, where Aurora FC walked off with a 4 - 1 victory.

It was just five minutes into the game when OSU Force opened the scoring, pressing the away squad over the opening minutes.

Yet Aurora posted a pair of their own before the half, one off the foot of Nuno Carvalho and another from Niklaus Bauer in stoppage time, to take the 2 - 1 lead at the whistle.

Youssef Zaghoul and Max Ferrari each found the back of the net for the Aurora squad in the second half to secure all three available points.

Aurora head coach Michael Aquino was pleased with the results, especially given his team's inexperience at the high level of play.

"First off, it's a team that myself and coach Alex Sabatini have taken over as a duo and we are leading a rebuilding process," said Aquino. "I think we've only brought three to five players from last year's team, many of which are younger and will play U21 with some important League1 minutes as well."

Not all new faces are new to the league; however, Filipe Vilela was a staple with the Oakville squad, winning a Golden Boot in 2015.

"We're looking to him for that veteran leadership and hopefully to put some goals in the back of the net for us. He's a key player coming in."

Aquino added that veteran League1 player Michael Fayehun, previously of Unionville and winner of a national title with Humber College last year, brings 'experience to the centre-back spot.' Both Vilela and Fayehun have been named captains for the 2019 season.

As for the familiar faces, Aurora will rely on those like Ferrari and Parm Singh, who each played top minutes for the

squad in the 2018 season.

"**(Ferrari)** is a 2000-born player that was with Aurora last year and I believe he scored six or seven goals," said Aquino. "Very good in and out of possession and has an excellent mentality. Max will also be attending Humber College next year so we're excited to have him."

Aquino also said he sees "great potential" in Singh, who played top three minutes last year despite only being in grade eleven.

A challenge lies ahead for the Aurora men, who next face the perennial powerhouse Woodbridge Strikers, scheduled for Sunday as Aurora's home opener. Kickoff is set for 6 p.m. at Stewart Burnett Park.

As for the other half of the program, the Aurora FC women found themselves returning from Ottawa empty handed, after falling 2 - 1 in a close match with the OSU Force.

Veteran goalkeeper Meaghan Phillips was able to keep the home side off the board for the first seventeen minutes before she was beaten, and holding onto a 1 - 0 deficit into the late stages of the second half.

Courtney Chocol tied it up for Aurora in the 70th minute on a penalty kick, though OSU Force earned the three points with an 81st minute strike.

Despite the loss, head coach Gianni Cimini sees a number of standouts who can make this season a success, like veterans Markela Bejleri, Phillips, as well as captain Laura Morelli, who joins the team from the University of Guelph.

"Really, there are so many good pieces in this group to highlight and some excellent chemistry in there as well," said Cimini.

"You can't say there is one piece that stands out, but we have a lot of young talent that is eager to prove themselves. This could be the year that they prove it."

Next up for the Aurora women is a meeting with DeRo United FC in Toronto on Sunday, before hosting their first home game at Stewart Burnett against Hamilton United on May 18.