

Aurora FC snap losing streak with season-ending shutout



By Jake Courtepatte

The third season of Aurora FC football is in the books.

A tumultuous year for both the men's and women's squads in League1 Ontario, the men were able to cap off the season on Saturday with a shutout in front of a hometown crowd.

With a roster consisting of a number of new faces, Nicholas Rallis scored at the 23-minute mark in his League1 debut, finishing off a Max Ferrari rebound.

After pouring six shots on goal in the first half, the offense kept coming in the second when Petros Vasilos snapped one home after a throw-in to double the lead, holding on for the 2-0 win.

The clean sheet, goalkeeper Sunny Dhaliwal's first of the season, snapped a five-game losing streak for the Aurora squad, who spent a good portion of the late season testing young talent after being eliminated from playoff contention.

Closing out the season with a record of 3-10-3, the men were able to jump Toronto's ProStars FC in the final week of play, finishing in a similar third-to-last position as the Aurora women.

And while neither may have improved on their 2017 records, women's assistant coach Marc Hamilton saw the positives in the developmental side of the program.

"It was a bit of an up-and-down season," said Hamilton. "But I feel like working with a young group, that's to be expected. I feel like they've become more organized, more cohesive, their technical and tactical development has been great."

Chief among those was first-year player Markela Bejleri, who managed the only multi-goal performance on the season for a goal-starved Aurora squad.

"I think mainly for me, it was the physicality of it," said Bejleri. "It was always something I needed to work on. Also, just the overall mentality of the game—to know how to work hard and fight."

Bejleri, who spent time at the Albanian Under-19 camp last September and was called to the national team for World Cup qualification in 2018, captained the Aurora squad to a solid record of 1-1-1 to end their season in August, showing leadership and promise in an up-and-coming roster for next season.

"She's not the most vocal player in the part, but I think she leads by example," said Hamilton. "I also think it's her sense of creativity, on and off the ball—she provides a great role model for the younger players to look up to."

Both sides of the Aurora FC program will begin camps this fall to start filling out next season's rosters.