

Aurora Jays flying high in OBA tournament play



Walter Guerra, Vice-President of Competitive Programs for the Aurora-King Baseball Association and his teams have been on a rampage at OBA tournaments in the last four weekends.

Three of his organization's rep baseball teams have accrued three golds and two silvers in the last five weeks, including three golds by the red-hot 11U Aurora-King AA Jays in tournaments held in Aurora, Niagara Falls, and Caledon.

Two weekends ago, the 14U Aurora-King AAA Jays captured a silver medal in Barrie and the 13U AA Jays were silver medalists at the prestigious Mississauga North Tigers tourney in mid-June.

Guerra, who is also the Head Coach of the 12U Aurora-King AA Jays, attributes the organization's broad-based success to a couple of key factors.

?The basis of our recent success has been two-fold; firstly, the kids are multi-sport athletes who work hard on and off the field. Secondly, we have very knowledgeable coaches who are very dedicated and committed to teaching the game to our players. When you put those two together, you're going to get results.?

Those results are particularly remarkable regarding the 11U Aurora-King AA Jays.

This youth baseball juggernaut won three tournaments in a row in late-May to late-June.

Head Coach Kevin Charbonneau?who also serves the local baseball community as the AKBA's President?and his 11U Jays won their own tournament they hosted two weeks ago in Aurora, they captured a tournament in Niagara Falls in mid-June, and defended their tournament title in Caledon in late-May.

Three gold medals is quite a feat for an entire season for most OBA ball clubs, but winning three in four weeks puts a program on the map.

Coach Charbonneau's young charges captured the tournament they hosted last weekend in Aurora by beating the previously-undefeated Markham Mariners 10-7 in the semi-finals and their high octane offense provided double-digit production in the finals in their 11-6 victory over Stouffville.

Prior to their tourney triumph on home turf, the 11U Jays fought through a team-wide illness in Niagara Falls to defeat St. Catharines and avenge last year's OBA championships loss to the Garden City to get to the Final Four. In the semifinals, the Jays defeated the hometown Niagara Falls Falcons 15-12 and captured gold by outlasting the North York Blues in the final.

The 11U Jays closed out the month of May by defending their Caledon tournament title with a string of impressive victories. In the semifinals, the Jays beat the Royal York Cardinals 6-3 and defeated the perennially-strong Mississauga Tigers 8-4 in the finals.

When asked what the secret has been to this mid-season success, Coach Charbonneau noted that "there are no bad apples on the team. The players are respectful, focused, and attentive. The team has undergone a metamorphosis. Two years ago, we won one game all season. We shuffled some players and built team chemistry and skills. The bond is really strong now between parents, players, and coaches."

Much of the team's improvement is due to Charbonneau's unique focus regarding tournaments and regular season games.

"Our focus is on winning tournaments and developing our players so everybody gets equal amounts of playing time in regular season games."

This blend of player development and going all in when it counts at tournaments has yielded evident results for this successful young team whose next YSBA game is a tournament in Kanata in mid-July.

In addition to the stellar results that the 11U team is compiling this season, Guerra also talked about the quality of athletes that the organization is attracting to the baseball diamond. On his own 12U team, Coach Guerra noted that, "ten of the twelve on my rep roster are hockey players."

"I very much enjoy coaching so many talented, multisport athletes."

He attributed the movement of quality athletes back to baseball due in part to the recent success of the Toronto Blue Jays.

"Baseball registration numbers tend to rise when the Blue Jays are playoff contenders. Our numbers are up to approximately 650 registrants?400 in House League and 250 in Rep."

The dedicated administrator and coach also noted the range of rep teams that are clad in Aurora King Jays uniforms in 2023.

"Currently, we have seventeen Competitive Baseball teams?fifteen at the rep level from U8-U14 and two Select travel teams."

Coach Guerra, who is a teacher when not coaching between the white lines, also expressed relief that "the kids have come back to school and community sports after the awful time they had during COVID."

The Aurora-King Baseball Association has definitely bounced back from the scourges of COVID and the sky's the limit for its rep teams over the next two months as they compete in the YSBA championships in July and August, the Canadian Eliminations in August, and the OBA playoffs in early-September.

It'll be a summer of great expectations, based on these compelling mid-season results heading into July.

By Jim Stewart