

Aurora sides added to Ontario semi-pro league roster

By Jake Courtepatte

Aurora's soccer community reached a major milestone last week by being named one of two teams involved in an expansion into the semi-professional League 1 Ontario next season.

Operated by Aurora Youth Soccer Club (AYSC), Aurora United FC will field both a men's and women's squad, with the core group of players under the age of 23. Along with the addition of U-21 teams, AYSC executive director Jim Brennan said the league "can allow players to stay with the club in Aurora before finding the next step."

Joining Aurora as newcomers on the men's side are FC London, North Toronto Nitros, and Toronto Skillz FC. In the women's division, the league has also added FC London, Darby FC, and Kingston Clippers.

"It is a pleasure to welcome these new teams into League1 Ontario," said League1 Ontario Commissioner Dino Rossi in a statement. "This continued growth speaks to the strong reputation the league has built over the past two years, and its importance as a part of this province's High Performance player pathway."

League1 Ontario operates as a "pathway" for players on the provincial spectrum to take the next step in professional soccer, a sort of stepping stone to bridge the gap between youth and amateur status and the professional level.

"From a technical perspective, it is crucial that the province's best players have accessible, domestically-based opportunities to properly finish their development years," said Ontario Soccer Association Technical Director, Gary Miller.

"The standards-based approach of League1 Ontario ensures players will have the appropriate 'finishing-school' environment, giving them the best preparation possible to take further steps in the game."

Sanctioned by the Ontario Soccer Association, the budding league has grown in leaps and bounds in its few years of existence. Beginning with a 10-team men's division in 2014, the league will now operate as a 12-team men's division and a 7-team women's division.

From a tiered perspective, the league is on par with the United Soccer League in North America, one step below the North American Soccer League and two steps below Major League Soccer.

Running from May to October, fans can expect to see home games played out at Sheppard's Bush.