

Aurora Soccer Club's Charity Day features two engaging exhibition games to support Southlake



The Aurora Soccer Club (ASC) hosted its Annual Charity Soccer Day on Saturday afternoon at its Industrial Parkway complex.

More than 200 spectators and supporters watched Canada edge The Rest of the World 1-0 in the lid-lifter followed by Scotland's thrilling 2-1 triumph over England in the main event.

All four intrepid squads, comprised of players ranging from 25-65 years of age, braved the sweltering 31-degree heat on the verdant south pitch and manifested one of the Club's main objectives to 'inspire soccer for life.'

One of those players modelling 'soccer for life' was ASC President Martin Ambrose who played for The Rest of the World contingent.

Sporting Jersey #16 and surviving his shifts in the July humidity, Ambrose said he was pleased by the success of the Club's long-running event.

'The tradition of this goes back almost 40 years. We're celebrating the demographics of our teams and, hopefully, we'll continue to grow the event. It really is a celebration of the sport and there was some nice banter between the teams throughout the game.'

The hospitable Club President was also satisfied to get back on the field after a prolonged absence due to injury and was happy to see three members of the extended Ambrose family suited up for the World side.

'My daughter Ciara was on the field for the first time in five years after recovering from a concussion. Her fiancé Scott was back on the field for the first time in years, too. They've both been focused on building careers while living in Belfast, so they haven't played at all. I haven't played for years as well due to an Achilles injury. It felt tight out there, but I've been cycling to stay in shape. It was great to be back on the field.'

In attendance with Ambrose to watch the exhibition games was Aurora Sports Hall of Fame honoured member Ed McNally who played 37 games for Team Canada.

McNally, who coached the ASC Hearts to an Ontario Cup championship in 2001, reflected between matches at our midfield table on how he built his upstart squad from a membership comprised of only 140 players.

'Winning with a club this size was huge. When we were playing and beating Toronto teams, we were beating clubs that had memberships over 1,000.'

The 2014 ASHoF Hall of Famer has fond memories about his team's provincial championship and its third-place finish in the Nationals.

?We were a very close team and we played so well together. We recruited well and we were fit enough and good enough. I also had a great Assistant Coach and Manager John Pickering who was so valuable to the club. He treated our players like they were professionals right down to having their uniforms laid out for them pre-game in the dressing room. John organized us and was a big key to our success.?

McNally, sporting his black ASHoF cap and red ASHoF golf shirt, was pleased to see the ASC's Charity Day growing.

?The best part of this event is being with the people you grew up with?so many have had great careers. To do this annually over the last 34 years is very satisfying. It started in Newmarket, but we moved it here to our fields and clubhouse where it's much better for fans and players.?

Despite the friendly nature of the two exhibition games that McNally viewed on Saturday, both games were hotly-contested, engaging, and competitive.

The main event featuring England versus Scotland was kicked off by a range of dignitaries, including Mayor Tom Mrakas, Sport Aurora President Ron Weese, Aurora Sports Hall of Fame President Javed Khan, as well as Ambrose and McNally who gathered at midfield for the coin toss and photos.

McNally, born in Paisley, Scotland, sported a navy blue tartan tam and flowing orange locks which filled the Opening Ceremonies with much merriment. Both anthems were played to celebrate the ancestry of the respective players. ?God Save the King? was belted out by the English players and a pipe band version of ?Flower of Scotland? stirred the Scots.

The England-Scotland game is a much-loved tradition at the Aurora Soccer Club and spectators were bedecked in Scottish and English flags and jerseys. The ardent fans took their place on the bleachers, umbrella tables, fence rails, and shaded benches. A brisk westerly breeze and strategically-placed misting fans saved the spectators and players from the oppressive humidity.

The first half was scoreless largely due to the heroics of Scotland's keeper Stuart Watterson who flew in from Glasgow for the game. Watterson frustrated the daylighters out of Coach Alan Dean's crew. However, ASC Hearts star Colin Kilner gave the England fans something to cheer about early in the second half. The talented attacker got loose off the left wing, dribbled through two Scottish defenders, deked Watterson, and chipped the ball into the yawning cage to give England a 1-0 lead.

The Scottish side pressed for the equalizer and hemmed in the English at the East end of the pitch.

A beautiful cross from Harris McLucas off the left wing set up a brilliant header by Alec Mackrell that beat England's keeper Barry Kilner. Mackrell's nugget off his noggin tied the score and capped off a sustained series of scoring chances by the Scots.

Coach Paul Cunningham's blue-clad Scottish side took the lead minutes later when Ciara Ambrose?playing her second game of the afternoon ? fired a bullet off the right wing from 15 yards into the net past Kilner.

Ambrose's marker elated the St. Andrew's Cross Flag-waving enthusiasts, including five spectators who joined the players' on-field celebration.

Ambrose described her game-winning goal: ?There was a fumbled ball, then a ricochet and I took a touch and then put it inside the post. It felt great, especially hearing and seeing all the fans going crazy.?

For her late-game clutch goal, Ambrose was voted Player of the Match.

The Player of the Match in Game One was Team Canada goaltender Jithin ?JJ? Jerard who kept his squad in the contest with a series of brilliant saves.

After a hard-fought, scoreless first half, the Rest of the World team pressed its territorial advantage in the second half and two big saves by Jerard kept the white-clad squad off the scoresheet.

Jerard's counterpart in the World net?Harry Bezruchko-- was particularly busy in the second half, too, repelling three scoring opportunities by Team Canada until Domenico Gullo booted a low, stealthy shot along the turf and inside the right post to give the red-clad nationals a 1-0 lead. Bezrucho and Jerard shared Player of the Match honors.

A key factor in the opening game was the World's disallowed goal late in the second half by Sam Bawab whose top shelf marker bulged the twine and seemed to tie the game.

After officials ruled it was off-side, the World squad's vociferous fan base disagreed vehemently. It was a tough one to accept for Bawab who characterized the disallowed goal as ?The turning point.?

?I got around the defender and posted him so I could get space. It went top corner.?

Despite the disappointment of the disallowed goal, Bawab was pleased with the quality of the game.

?Overall, it was a good, spirited game. Great competition out there and it was an edgy game, too. Both teams wanted to win. Since it was a friendly, I didn't argue much about the disallowed goal. If that was a league game, I would have got carded.?

The ASC's Charity Soccer Day?after much passion and athleticism on the field ? closed with camaraderie in the clubhouse and pleasantries on the patio. The BBQ buffet was enjoyed by fans and players who donated \$5 per plate to Southlake Health.

The 71-year-old sports organization lived up to its mission statement by inspiring active community and connections through its myriad concessions and draws on Saturday in support of Southlake.

By Jim Stewart