

Aurora Town Square is the place to be on Friday the 13th to watch Nembhard's Pacers take on OKC in NBA Finals



Auroran Andrew Nembhard's quest for the Larry O'Brien Championship trophy has begun in earnest and local residents have been gifted with an opportunity to support the NBA star.

The Town of Aurora has invited residents to the Town Square to watch the NBA Finals featuring a collection of young Canadian stars gracing the rosters of both the Indiana Pacers and Oklahoma City Thunder.

OKC superstar point guard and Team Canada leader Shea Gilgeous Alexander is Toronto-born and was voted the league's MVP in late-May. Fellow Thunder and Team Canada starter Lu Dort—the rugged defensive stalwart who hails from Montreal — has been playing with his "Elbows Up" far before this popular phrase was coined.

Sunday's night's gathering at the Mirkopoulos Plateia in the Del Manor Amphitheatre was affected by drizzly conditions, but over fifty folks braved the elements to watch Nembhard's upstart Pacers take on the OKC Thunder in Game 2 of the NBA Finals.

Rob and Anna Gaby—ardent Raptors fans and Aurora residents for over thirty years—have hitched their wagon to the Indy Pacers to support a hometown hero like Nembhard and his Montreal-born teammate Ben Mathurin. Rob Gaby said he was pleased with the setting and the experience at Town Square.

The best part of the event was the people of Aurora supporting Andrew Nembhard and all the Canadians on the Indy Pacers. It was also great that during the game, the NBA broadcast crew took notice that 30 per cent of the starters were Canadian: Nembhard from the Pacers and Gilgeous-Alexander and Dort of the Thunder.

Gaby also noted the quality of the presentation on Sunday night.

The set-up, screen, and sound were all great. The screen was over 15-feet wide and the café was open, too. It was supported by a multicultural audience and it was great to see the Mayor there, as well.

Mayor Tom Mrakas—who has attended both of the watch parties and is looking forward to this week's gatherings and giveaways on Wednesday and Friday—was pleased with the Town Square set-up and happy to support one of Aurora's favorite sons.

Overall, the presentation of the game is incredible. The equipment is great. It's the first time that we're doing a watch party for a sporting event of this magnitude. I was really pleased to see the numbers increasing with each event and with the giveaways and rising interest in the Finals, I'm looking forward to even more support from the community for Andrew. Cheering for one of our own—for someone who was born and raised in Aurora and whose family still makes it their home—it's important to return the favour

to Andrew. He's been such a great ambassador for the Town and he's mentioned Aurora in many national broadcasts.?

Mayor Mrakas also flashed forward to future watch parties that could be hosted at the Aurora Town Square: ?It's a great venue for a sporting final and we envision it being used for Olympic viewing events, hopefully another Blue Jays World Series, and maybe a Leafs' Stanley Cup appearance. It's just great to bring the community together and celebrate.?

Even though there wasn't as much to celebrate on Sunday night when the Pacers dropped Game 2 to the #1-seeded Thunder 123-107, Aurorans savored another strong performance by Nembhard who scored 11 points, pulled down 4 rebounds, dished out 4 assists, and made 3 steals in 32 minutes as Indy's starting shooting guard.

Last Thursday, Nembhard's gutsy Indiana squad edged OKC 111-110 in Game 1 as Pacers' point guard Tyrese Haliburton hit a 21-foot jumper with 0.3 seconds remaining to steal a coveted victory on the road. Nembhard contributed 14 points, 6 assists, and 4 rebounds to Indy's attack.

Former Raptor and fan favorite Pascal Siakim, who led the Pacers with 19 points, provides another compelling reason to back Indy at Town Square.

Prior to their loss on Sunday, the Pacers had set an NBA playoff record by winning the first two games of their first three series and were seeking a fourth straight 2-0 series lead before the Thunder responded to their shocking loss on Thursday night with a full effort in Game 2.

OKC's Canadian contingent fared well in the second game of the series: Western Conference Finals MVP Gilgeous-Alexander poured in 34 points and Dort put forth a stellar defensive performance by restricting Haliburton and Siakim's point totals.

Game 4 of the NBA Final Series will be presented at Aurora Town Square on Friday, June 13.

Tip off will be 8:30 p.m. Doors will open at 8 p.m. and attendees are encouraged to bring their own chairs, pack a blanket, and dress for the weather.

Attendees are also encouraged to wear gold to support Andrew Nembhard's Pacers.

Sunday's watch party is free and proudly presented by the Town of Aurora.

By Brock Weir