

Barbarians bring experience and skill to Ontario Women's rugby



By Jake Courtepatte

Not much has changed in the Aurora Barbarians women's rugby program from the 2015 season to the present: in terms of success, at least.

After hoisting the Ontario Women's League Cup in 2015 for the second time in four years, the Barbs are off to a 5-1-0 record this season to lead the six-team table.

Far and away the best offensive team in the province's top league, outscoring their opponents by an average of 36 points, an onlooker may think the Barbs have carved out their niche with a group of the same experienced players year after year. Not so, according to women's director Gill Hall, who said the team is "in a constant state of flux."

"Many players are in their early 20s and at that time in your life there are a lot of moving parts," said Hall. "We tend to have a core group of girls that are leaders and continue to push the team in the same direction that has found us some success in the last few years. This season we do have many new players that have complimented the existing group of players."

"They bring a lot of talent and are eager to learn."

Providing those lessons are two of the province's top rugby coaches. Head coach Kevin Jones has coached eight club teams in his three decades of experience, including stints with the Ontario and national squads at different age levels. Club coach Paul Loader has been with the Barbs since 2009, coaching the women to their first OWL championship in 2012.

"These two bring a wealth of knowledge to the team and have helped keep us focused," said Gill. "Our team has always had a philosophy that if we perform well the wins will come."

All in all, nine players have donned the Barbs blue for the first time with the women this season. With a penchant for success, the program was able to recruit a solid class of rookies to maintain their position as one of the top club teams in the province.

"I think the addition of some players who have played at high levels and for others have been a huge positive," said Gill. "Teams can stagnate without an injection of something new every now and again, so it is always welcome to have players who look at the game a little differently."

"That being said, I think we still have to work on playing together as a cohesive unit. We have seen moments of brilliance and had

some really well played games but we need to come together in the second half of the season.?

With the second half underway and only four games remaining, the most tasking challenge of the season came last week against the Guelph Redcoats, who evened their season record with a 51 ? 33 win over the Barbs. The two teams will meet again this Saturday at Fletcher's Fields in Markham.

?We know what kind of team they are now and what we need to work on,? said Hall. ?We were out worked at the breakdowns and did not make important tackles. Guelph is a team with a lot of size and a lot of experience so we will have to work on retaining our ball in contact as well as stopping them going forward with the ball. I may be biased but I think we are the better team.?

Their first loss behind them, Aurora can now focus on what is most important: a championship.

?We had a perfect record coming into this weekend but as far as I am concerned the OWL Cup final in August is the only win that ultimately matters.?

To learn more about the program, visit www.aurorabarbarians.com.