

## Calvin McHugh captures prestigious Presidents' Award at Aurora Barbarians Rugby Club's Annual Banquet



Khalil Ajram, Co-President, Treasurer, and U18 Head Coach of the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Club, reflected on his sports organization's very successful 2023 season and functioned as prognosticator as we discussed, respectively, the Barbarians' Awards Ceremony and the year ahead for the 22-year-old sports organization.

The Barbarians are rich in rugby tradition and 2023 was a bumper year in which the organization grew to 533 members including 40 coaches, 22 teams, 12 referees, and the Club produced 20 National Team players and 50 Regional/Provincial Team players.

Enviably achievements, indeed.

Many of those players and coaches were honored on January 2 at the Barbarians' Annual Awards Ceremony and Ajram observed that one of the highlights of the night was Calvin McHugh capturing the Bob Martin Presidents' Award.

The amiable administrator and coach delineated McHugh's significant contributions to the Barbarians both on and off the pitch.

Calvin has gone beyond the call of duty for us. He's been with the Barbs since he graduated from Kolbe in 2012. Not only has he been a great performer for us, but he really helped our Adult Touch Rugby program take off with his positive leadership.

Dozens of rugby players and organizational builders were honored at the annual banquet, including Taylor McKnight (Women 1st XV MVP) and George Manoukas (Men 1st XV MVP). The Kevin Jones Coaches of the Year Award went to Ivan Barron and Dave Weber.

Amid the celebrations was a poignant presentation in which Jadyn Sage was honored posthumously with the James Green Sportsmanship/Perseverance Award.

Sage was 16 when she passed away suddenly at the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre in Barrie on October 2, 2023 and the #Play4Jay Teammate of the Year Award was introduced this year to honor her memory.

She was remembered as an accomplished athlete and an incredible cook. Rugby was the center of her life.

The inaugural winner of the memorial award was Mikhaila Irving.

Other young Barbarians honored at the event included Malayla Zheng who won the Paul Loader Rookie of the Year Award and Briar Barron who was named the Steve Hall Rookie of the Year. Outstanding Junior Awards went to Bronwen Earle and Charlie Chilcott.

Club Leadership Awards were earned by Dakota Smith and Zach Moore while Connor Libby won the John Reich Unsung Hero Award (M) and Jess Cormier won the Graham Brown Unsung Hero Award (W). The McLeod Family was recognized for their hard work for the organization with the Doug Heaton Contribution Award.

In addition to honoring so many notable achievements in 2023, Coach Ajram outlined a number of notable events on the Barbarians' 2024 calendar.

The Barbs' home opener is at Fletcher's Fields Rugby Stadium in Markham on June 1.

Prior to the regular season opener for all their teams, the Barbarians will be travelling to Kingston to compete in the Billy McLaughlin Cup.

In response to all the positive feedback their club received in 2023, the Barbarians will host the Second Annual Youth Festival at St. Maximilian Kolbe and Sheppard's Bush during the first weekend of July where Ajram hopes to double the number of participants to 500. Last year's inaugural event was a big success with all games running on time and teams were really happy with the fields, facilities, and amenities.

On June 28-29, the Barbarians will co-host an 80-team tournament at Fletcher's Fields.

Coach Ajram hopes the tournament will provide a proper sendoff and recognition for the venerable rugby facility which will be in its final year of operation in 2024.

He also expressed optimism for a number of his Barbarians squads for the upcoming season and noted that over 100 Junior Barbarians are training weekly at the Dome.

Ajram predicted that his U18 Girls team will be very competitive as will the U18 Boys and the U16 Girls and that they expect strong opposition from regional rivals Barrie RC and the Oshawa Vikings over the course of the 2024 season.

**By Jim Stewart**