

International Bocce tournament at Seneca in the books



By Jake Courtepatte

There was an unprecedented international presence at King City's Seneca College campus over the weekend, where 24 teams converged for the 2015 International Special Olympics Bocce Tournament.

Teams travelled from as far away as Italy, Greece, San Marino and Malta for a weekend of friendly competition and companionship.

Lee Prioriello, Youth Bocce Canada President, said the popularity of bocce continues to grow ? in large part due to its inexpensive nature and simple execution.

Over 400 special needs kids in York Region work with the youth bocce program each year.

The athletes were given an Olympic welcome upon their arrival Thursday, taking part in an opening ceremony before retiring to their rooms in a makeshift athlete's village to rest up for play the next day.

Sami Jo Small, a three-time Olympian in women's hockey, was a guest speaker at the ceremony, and praised the athletes for their efforts in a sport that is still looking to make a strong impact in Canada.

Locally, the area was represented by the York Region Bocce Rollers and the Aurora Rollers. The Aurora team got off to a great start with a 9 ? 6 victory, but it was their inexperience that cost them with back-to-back losses, failing to reach the championship rounds on day two.

But in their first year of competition, they can certainly take pride in how far they have come.

?They've come really far,? team manager Jeff Hauley said. ?It's great to see how well they've all picked up the game, and it seems like we have players that will want to stick with it.?

York Region, meanwhile, took a 3 ? 0 round-robin record into the second day of competition, only to fall to a team from Toronto and also miss the championship round.

An impressive four high schools from York Region sent delegates to the games, including the Sacred Heart Crusaders, who barely lost the bronze medal in a hard-fought and well-attended game on Sunday.

Port Colborne won the gold medal.

At the closing ceremonies, Newmarket's own Justin Hines, who has used his singing to raise millions for charities involving disabilities, gave a performance.

Special Olympics Ontario of Aurora will start their outdoor program back up in June, with a number of returnees from the winter program and some fresh faces. For more information to join, check out www.aurora.specialolympicsontario.ca.