

## Nearly 700 youth rugby players compete in Aurora Barbarians' annual Mini Youth Festival



670 rugby players braved windy and cool conditions at Sheppard's Bush and St. Maximilian Kolbe CHS to compete ardently in the Aurora Barbarians' annual Mini Youth Festival on Sunday.

The 57-team Festival featured squads from across the GTA including the Caledon Cavaliers, Markham Irish, Barrie RC, Toronto Nomads, Oshawa Vikings, Ajax Wanderers, Burlington Centaurs, Toronto City RC, and the host Barbarians which fielded nine teams in the two-site tournament.

With the aroma of Harvey's grilled burgers wafting through the Barbarians' tent, club president Steve Hall said he was pleased by the level of participation in this year's tournament.

'We've got almost 700 players out here today? U6-U12 teams are here at Sheppard's Bush and a U14 tournament is being run at St. Max.?

Hall explained the purposes of the annual tournament, which started as a modest event, but has expanded into one of the top youth festivals endorsed by Rugby Ontario.

'It's about giving back? passing on a love of the game from the older generation to kids. It's also about fresh air, friendships, and teamwork. Rugby is a game for life. I've been playing it for 45 years and still have the friends I made through the sport.?

The engaging Barbs' leader noted the positive impact of his organization's tournament on the Town of Aurora: 'It's a great experience connected to sports tourism and it's connected today to the Street Festival on Yonge. Our Festival brings people from across York, Durham, Halton, Simcoe, and Peel Regions into Aurora. In the future, it would be great to bring the events together a bit more through coupon books and discount incentives. But most importantly, it's great to see the kids being active, having fun, and playing a sport outdoors.?

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese? long-time supporter of the Barbs in his role as President of Sport Aurora? praised the local rugby club's ability to grow their annual tourney.

'I wanted to offer my congratulations to the Barbarians for growing the sport in our community and for the success of the Festival. This has become one of the premier rugby festivals in the province for six-to-ten-year-old boys and girls. It's unique. The tournament brings in 600-700 families into our community and the Barbs have been exemplary for developing players from the Playground to the Podium.?

Hall? having seen Barbs' star Chloe Daniels ascend to the podium as a Team Canada silver medalist at the 2024 Olympics in

France delineated an extensive list of Barbarians currently playing for elite provincial, national, and international teams.

We have 12 of our women playing for the Ontario Senior team. McKinley Hunt and Claire Gallagher are playing on Team Canada's Senior Women's team that is ranked #2 in the world. Andrew Quattrin is playing for the Senior Men's Team Canada. Unfortunately, Chloe Daniels won't be able to compete in the World Cup for the Senior Women's national team this year while she's rehabbing an injury, but she's here helping us by coaching. Our Senior players like Chloe do come back to coach?it's part of our culture.?

Also part of the Barbs' culture is winning and Hall noted that the Senior Men's squad is off to a good start in 2025.

Our men's team is three games into the season. We had a big win against Toronto Scottish last week. Our club also has a big series next weekend when we host Oshawa for six games right here at Sheppard's Bush.?

Three Aurora Barbarians RFC teams will take to the pitch on Saturday, June 7, starting at 9 a.m. when the U16 Girls host the Oshawa Vikings, followed by a Women's team doubleheader versus Oshawa at 10:30 AM and 12 PM.

A Men's team tripleheader at 1:30, 3:00, and 4:30 rounds out the six-game series against the Vikings.

All six matches will be played at the Sheppard's Bush turf field on Industrial Parkway.

**By Jim Stewart**