

Nine Stripes come back to earn first point in the Island Games

The Canadian Premier League never thought their second season as a professional entity would be held in a hub city.

Held at the University of Prince Edward Island's (UPEI) artificial turf field in Charlottetown, its 35-match tournament began on August 13 between Forge FC and Cavalry FC.

Already dubbed a unique tournament by York9 FC head coach Jimmy Brennan, the League's presser prior to the first official kick-off informed fans, players and media of a creative beginning to the games.

The Mi'kmaq Community blessed land for the commencement of the Canadian Premier League Island Games in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Blessing and Ceremony were performed by the first Mi'kmaq Poet Laureate of PEI, Julie Pellissier Lush and The Mi'kmaq Heritage Actors, a group established in 2011 and made up of Indigenous youth, said the League.

They also mentioned that every team will honour Black Lives Matter before every match, making a statement at the centre of the pitch, where Black Lives Matter is written.

Forge and Cavalry tied their match 2-2 on the Friday and it was time for the Nine Stripes head coach Jimmy Brennan to address the media before his club's heavy-weight tilt last Saturday against newcomers to the league; Atletico Ottawa.

Brennan said everyone is in the same boat. Fitness levels are as good as they can be, but it will all be about making the right adjustments at the right time and bringing in the right guys off of the bench.

He also said the bond with the group is becoming stronger. Seeing each other every day and having access to ping pong tables and television in the hotel has given all the players enjoyment in a very restrictive bubble.

The Nine Stripes began without Christopher Manella, captain Manuel Aparicio and Michael Petrasso due to injuries. One of the favourites of the tournament, already down three men,

Central defender Luca Gasparotto wore the captain's armband.

With Nigel Reed and former Canadian International Craig Forrest on the commentary for CBC in this game, this tilt was off to a slow and scrappy start.

New signing from Spain, Alvaro Rivero, rifled a strike directly at goalkeeper Nacho Zabal. Joseph Di Chiara threatened the opposition in the 23rd minute with a low shot that trickled past the post and passed a trailing Gabriel Vasconcelos who couldn't tuck it in.

Towards the end of the first half, it was Atletico Ottawa that began to control the tempo of the game.

Fullback Vashon Neufville sprinted past Ryan Telfer on the left-hand side of the box and his low-cross into the 18-yard area found Mohamed Kourouma who tucked the ball into the back of the net for the first goal for Ottawa's new franchise.

The club's second goal didn't take long. One minute in the second half, Miguel Mista's men got on the board again. Francisco Acuna was sent in behind the defence from an over-the-top pass and fed the ball across to Malcolm Shaw for the second goal.

The celebrations didn't last long, however, as Neufville was given a second yellow card after a collision with Di Chiara and Ottawa went down to 10-men.

When Brennan said there will come a time to adjust and to decide as a gaffer, this was the moment.

His triple substitution following the red card saw 16-year-old forward Lowell Wright, 19-year-old Max Ferrari and Japanese international Wataru Murofushi come on and make an instant impact.

Just over seven minutes of being on the pitch, Ferrari made a surging run down the right flank and set up Wright for the easy tap in to bring the game back into arm's reach.

The Brampton native became the youngest CPL goal scorer at 16 years, 11 months and 26 days and said it meant a lot to be the first one to score for the club this year.

?It means a lot. First, I got to give thanks to God for blessing me to be able to do that and I got to give thanks to the gaffer Jim and Stalteri for trusting me,? Wright said after the game.

Over two minutes, Y9 was awarded a penalty and Joseph Di Chiara tied the game up from 12 yards out.

The match ended 2-2 with York9 coming close to completing a comeback, having taken 11 shots in the second half and holding 60.1 per cent possession.

?I was disappointed going into half time conceding in the 47th minute,? said Brennan in the post-game press conference.

?It was a terrible goal for us to concede. We had a good conversation at half time. Said what we needed to work on and we came out in the second half flat footed. Made those changes right away brought on the young boys to give us some life and changed our formation as well.?

Y9 began the match in a 4-4-2 diamond formation and transitioned into a 4-3-3.

Brennan acknowledged this is the first competitive match, and, at times, there were some moments where the club did the right things. It was a scrappy first half and it took time for the guys to get into rhythm, and Brennan felt that the team did create chances at some points in that game.

The gaffer began a lot of his experienced players on the squad, before bringing in some of the young players. He says his young players proved a point.

?We told them, go out there, go express yourself, go play your football and enjoy it. They did today and then they proved a point and more or less, showed us they can play. They can compete in this league.?

This will provide Brennan and his staff flexibility in the starting lineup and provides confidence to the younger players on the roster.

By Robert Belardi