

Rugby showdown as Barbs take on Brits



By Jeff Doner

The Aurora Barbarians U18 had a taste of international play as they welcomed the U18 rugby team from Churcher's College, Petersfield, United Kingdom for a friendly match on Sunday.

Both teams braved the stifling heat and headed out to St. Maximilian Kolbe for the game.

“Besides having a really hot day, we had a good field,” said Tim Brochu, president of Aurora Barbarians rugby. “The advantage of having these incoming tours is the cultural exposure, but also the different style of play, so the benefit for our guys is seeing any different tactics that they have or a different style.”

Bill Baker, tour director for Churcher's, said the match against Aurora was just one stop as part of a Canada/US tour.

“We do a senior tour every two years and it's very much a developmental tour for our domestic season that starts in September, and we have some tough early [games] so this is about trying to get two different groups playing together,” he said.

“We did South Africa two years ago and our head coach fancied coming and having a look around Canada and the United States. He heard there was some good hard rugby going on over here, which there is.”

Throughout the game, it became increasingly evident that Churcher's was kicking the ball a lot and sending the Barbs downfield to tire them out.

Eventually that strategy began to work as Churcher's jumped out to an early lead.

“The big difference really is a lot of the teams we've played in America and Canada are physically much bigger,” he explained. “What we've tried to do is negate that by hopefully having a better technique and a little more understanding of the game. Today, for example, the tactic was to try and kick the ball over the top, turn their backs and get them running and moving around the field. When you're tiring the spaces become available.”

Barbs associate coach Ryan Stickle said Churcher's brought a well-balanced and organized strategic attack.

“I think their players have been playing rugby for a lot longer than our guys have, so they're a little bit more organized and natural as rugby players. In Canada we've got a lot of natural athletes.”

In the end, the Barbs succumbed to a relentless attack and lost the match 27 - 5.

Tom O'Kelly, Churcher's team captain, was a vocal and motivating force for his team that was banged up from a previous match in Cleveland.

"It went really well today," he said. "We had a long day and were really hot, but it was a great effort from the guys in these conditions. It was really good."

O'Kelly gave kudos to the Barbs players after the game.

"They had some really good runners, especially their full-back; he was a brilliant runner and very tough to tackle," he said.

Kieran Joyce, a fly-half on the Barbs, said the Churcher's plan of attack took them off their game.

"Canadian rugby is usually a bit more physical, we just lost the ball a lot more - a lot of turnovers - they used it when they had it and they liked to kick it past us and have us chase it. They definitely got us a little fatigued. They were down on numbers, but they made us run."

After the game, both agreed that the match was beneficial to team development.

"We've got a big, long season ahead of us and this is when we can gel as a team and get ready for the real season," said O'Kelly. "It's fun to come here and win as well."

Joyce agreed: "It's great to meet these guys and it's cool to have them over at your house. It's a social thing as much as it is part of the game."