

Rugby World Cup 'Watch Party' attracts more than 220 to Town Square



The final score of Saturday's Rugby World Cup championship game wasn't to the liking of more than 220 raucous spectators at Aurora Town Square.

However, like the valiant Canadian Senior Women 15's, a 33-13 loss to #1-ranked England did not dampen the spirits of the Aurora Barbarians-based crowd.

As the clock wound down on Team Canada's 20-point loss to the mighty Red Roses squad, the Barbs' faithful and friends gave the silver medal-winning Women's team a rousing standing ovation and a 'Hip Hip Hooray for Canada' chant which was captured for posterity by the CTV crew documenting the event.

Red-jerseyed rugby fans enjoyed the TSN/CTV2 feed on the Town Square's big screen and reveled in Asia Hogan- Rochester's try which opened the scoring, put Canada ahead 5-0, and raised hopes for an upset of red-hot England.

However, the white-clad Red Roses, which had won 62 of their last 63 matches, built a 21-8 half-time lead and Team Canada could not narrow the margin in the second half. Saturday's dominant victory over #2-ranked Canada ended England's 11-year drought at the World Cup.

The brave Canadians competed vigorously to the eightieth minute of play in front of 81,885 fans at Twickenham's Allianz Stadium—the home of England Rugby. Team Canada earned its berth in the World Cup championship final with its own impressive string of victories including a 34-19 dismantling of six-time champion New Zealand in the semi-finals.

To qualify for the Final Four in England, the Canadian 15's overwhelmed a series of teams starting with a 65-7 thrashing of Fiji, a 42-0 shutout of Wales, a 40-19 win over Scotland, and a 46-5 thumping of Australia in the quarterfinals.

Starter McKinley Hunt—a graduate of Country Day School in King City and a star player for the Aurora Barbarians—fronted a list of local players rostered by Team Canada for international play in 2025.

Rugby fans and Aurora residents Brian and Hilary Musker whose daughter Alex played for both the CDS Cyclone and the Barbs soaked in the atmosphere at Town Square.

Brian said he thought the event was wonderful.

It was great to be in a community centre like the Town Square and sharing the game with so many Aurorans.

Hilary was equally impressed by the viewing experience: Being able to watch this championship with so many people who are rugby fans raises the sport's profile in town. Throughout the game, I was trash-talking my sister, Alison, who lives in England.

Echoing the Muskers' excitement about the Watch Party was Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee Marco Di Girolamo. Inducted into the Hall of Fame as a rugby player in 2022 after starring for Team Canada, Di Girolamo was pleased to see so many people immersed in rugby in the Aurora community. The current Barbarians' Head Coach thought it was great that the Town and the Barbs brought so many people together to cheer on Team Canada today.

On a familial note, Di Giralamo noted that My daughter enjoyed cheering on her heroes on Team Canada.

The Canadian contingent in England gave Di Giralamo's daughter much to cheer about, especially the performance of speedy Asia Hogan-Rochester who contributed ten points to the 15's attack versus England with two tries one in each half and churned up over 100 yards from scrummage.

The best news for Canadian rugby fans and national team aspirants on Saturday was a post-game announcement that served nicely as a consolation prize for attendees.

Despite the loss in the championship final to England, Team Canada's Sophia de Goede was named World Rugby Player of the Year further heightening Canada's profile in international rugby. She is the first Canadian to earn such an honor since Magali Harvey won the award in 2014.

Mayor Tom Mrakas who attended the event co-sponsored by the Town and the Barbarians was taken by the Senior Women's five-game performance in England.

What an incredible run by Team Canada at the World Cup. The entire country was behind them, and they've inspired a whole new generation of players including so many right here in Aurora.

Mayor Mrakas credited the Barbarians Rugby Football Club for drawing so many residents to Watch Party: It was fantastic to see the Aurora Barbarians play such a big role in today's event. They're a true example of community spirit and passion for the game, and we're lucky to have them representing the Town. He also expressed his satisfaction at seeing people of all ages coming together at Town Square to cheer on our women's rugby team this is exactly what we envisioned: a place where the community can gather, celebrate, and create lasting memories. Cheers to the Town team for organizing such an outstanding event.

By Jim Stewart Local Journalism Initiative Reporter