

?Spirited? Aurora Spartans take basketball gold as division champs



By Jeff Doner

Heading into the Ontario Basketball Association's Provincial Cup in Kingston last week, the Aurora Spartans U13 bantam boys basketball team knew they had tough fight ahead of them as the eighth seed in Division 6.

But the spirited group that has played together for the better part of five years prevailed and won all four of their games on route to winning gold in their division.

?It definitely felt really good and it felt like the hard work that we put in paid off,? said player Johnathan Avjousti. ?We bonded together really well building relationships and it has just been really good over the past few weeks.?

To win gold, the team beat the third seeded Toronto Motion West 54 ? 45 in a come from behind win. In game two they used an early lead to down Brampton 59 ? 30, sailed past the Chatham ? Kent Wild Hawks 62 ? 53 in the semi-finals, and then again held on to an early lead against the first seeded Brantford Hawks to win the gold medal by a score of 54 ? 45.

In that final game, Johnathan recorded a career high 34 points to lead his team to gold.

?In the first quarter we jumped up by 12 points and at the end of the half we had an eight point lead,? Johnathan said. ?At the start of the second half they started to come back, but then we kind of pulled away with it. It was just overwhelming and it just felt really good.?

Coach Andrew Avjousti said the victory meant a lot for the club as they went winless in the previous two Provincial Cups and that it was pure hard work and bonding that helped put them over the top.

?The difference this year comes from a couple things. We got them into more practices, more tournaments, more games and we set them up with a development coach for more skills training out of Villanova,? he said. ?The guy that runs the basketball program out of there [Derek Alexander] he had some private sessions with the boys to go over some defensive plays.?

The hard work obviously paid off for the team, as they also recently were selected as winners of the Ford Drills and Skills competition that sent them down to the Air Canada Centre for a Toronto Raptors game.

Aside from that, Andrew said the team has worked relentlessly this season to get better in an attempt to move up the OBA rankings.

?We had some issues earlier in the season where we didn't think the boys were being aggressive enough,? he said. ?The boys put a lot of heart into the weekend and we prepared them well for this tournament and worked on some fundamental skills where we felt they had some weaknesses, like with rebounding and defense and it just seemed like everything came together and the boys peaked this weekend.?

The team is pretty well finished for the season now, but will continue to practice and will also play in a couple of summer tournaments to keep sharp for the season in September when they will compete at the major bantam level.

For more information on the Spartans or IEM Basketball, visit www.iembasketball.com