

Sports Hall of Fame recalls Aurora Hearts historic win



By Jake Courtepatte

For those in the Aurora soccer community, the year 2001 stands out as a moment the town was put on the provincial soccer map. After many years of being the bridesmaid, never the bride, the Aurora Hearts men's soccer club finally tamed the beast and took home the coveted Ontario Cup.

"We kept making it three or four years in a row, but we were just never able to make it over that next hump," said player-coach Ed McNally in a reunion of the team at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex. "We went down to Markham to play Niagara Falls in the semis, and I knew when we hit the semis, we were going to win."

"We had never gotten over that quarterfinal hump. It was just quarters, quarters, quarters, eliminated, eliminated, eliminated. That year felt different."

After taking down Niagara Falls, the Hearts met with Hamilton in the Cup finals, a tough match for those who had experienced falling short year after year.

"Hamilton always had good teams," said McNally. "They were always in the finals."

It was McNally, who entered the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame as a member of the 2014 class, who put home the tying goal in a hard-fought match to send it to extra time.

Down 1-0, McNally converted on a free kick before it took three penalties to earn the provincial title.

"(Keeper) Jon Cortese didn't know we won? he saved three penalties, and then got up and was wondering 'when's the next one?' while we're all running at him. It was a moment to remember for sure."

McNally and the rest of the 2001 Hearts team will have their story told and memory kept vivid by the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, who has chosen the Hearts as the latest to be featured in their "Moments in Sports."

One of over sixty stories collected by the Hall of Fame committee for the "Canada 150 Moments" campaign back in July of 2017, the program has developed into an ongoing series to showcase the stories that have shaped the sporting history of Aurora.

"What started out as a Canada 150 special outreach project in 2017 is now an ongoing program by the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame and its partners, the Aurora Museum & Archives and Sport Aurora," said project manager Karen Merk. "When the Moments in Sport initiative launched on Canada Day, audio clips of some of Aurora's most significant sporting moments were available on the ASHOF website as well as on-air through the Hall's radio partner, 105.9 The Region."

Featuring mini exhibits across Aurora at the Aurora Community Centre, Town Hall, and the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, the Aurora Hearts are the latest to have their accomplishments exhibited alongside articles and items from the team's history.

The Hall is also gearing up for the annual induction dinner on November 8, a gala bringing the best in Aurora sport from past and present together to welcome in this year's class of inductees.

Those getting the call to the Hall this year are triathlete Paolina Allan, pro golfer David Morland IV, NHL linesman Loring Doolittle, and York University men's basketball coach Robert Bain.

For tickets, and more information, visit www.aurorashof.ca.