

Why Charlottetown just might be the right spot for the Canadian Premier League

The Canadian Premier League's newly-minted 'Island Games' will kick-off at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) on August 13.

In full perspective, it is a great idea. It makes sense to move to an island with low COVID-19 counts and to be completely sequestered away from other sports leagues and from the mainland itself.

P.E.I., won the vote, defeating Langford, BC and Moncton, NB. All three are arguably very safe places. But, down the ladder of consideration, Team Canada Rugby 7s will begin their training in Langford this month. So, maybe that was why British Columbia's island wasn't in the mix.

Upon arrival, visitors entering PEI must self-isolate for a 14-day period. But, Commissioner of the Canadian Premier League David Clanachan said in a Zoom conference call with reporters that players, coaching staff and front office will be self-quarantining for 14-days prior to departure, being tested twice for the virus in the process.

'Once we land, along with our health and safety protocol folks, along with their health and safety people, our players will be tested yet again, twice more in a five-day quarantine period,' Clanachan said.

He described this as a 'bubble, within a bubble.' While teams take up rooms in Delta Hotels along the waterfront nobody is permitted to interact with residents on the island.

In getting back to play, the Canadian Premier League has wisely chosen to take their time.

'The key here was we didn't have to rush back into it because we hadn't started our season. That's the key thing. A lot of other leagues are trying to finish seasons that they already started,' Clanachan said.

And he's right. There was no need to rush. The only thing Clanachan had to worry about was getting a year in before winter comes around and that was plenty of time to form a decision and to ensure the safety of everyone in the league, as well as including travelling media.

In deciding some of the adjustments to the league, Clanachan has paid close attention to other soccer leagues globally. He will be adopting the five-player substitution rule instead of the traditional three substitutions per match. Roster sizes will remain the same at 23.

The Island Games tournament will be a 35-game season set to finish in September. All eight clubs will play each other once in the 28-game first phase with the top four clubs entering a six-match group stage. The top two clubs will then battle it out in a winner-take-all final.

The tournament will feature last year's champions Forge FC against Cavalry FC kicking off.

But, with the NHL and NBA recently returning, Clanachan believes soccer in the country will not be overshadowed by the other competitions.

'You're looking at the only Canadian league that's playing. Soccer supporters are different. I think we have a real opportunity. People are looking forward to live sport,' he said.

'Truthfully, ours is a great game. It's action-oriented and played at a great pace. I think we're going to find more fans because of this Canadian league coast-to-coast.'

One Soccer holds the rights to all matches however, Clanachan revealed the CPL is currently speaking to two-linear broadcasting companies in Canada to broadcast matches live on television.

This has posed a challenge not just for the league, but for clubs. Tactically, this can be one of the most exciting tournaments around. Every team is playing as if it is their last game. It seems no team can fall behind without the potential of falling out of the tournament before it even began.

By Robert Belardi