

York9 FC manager Jimmy Brennan hopeful for return to action soon

One year ago this Friday, July 10, York9 FC made history.

The club became the first Canadian Premier League team to take on a Major League Soccer team. At that very thought, York9 FC was galvanized to take on the Montreal Impact in the third round of the Canadian Championship in front of 5,252 raging fans; the highest recorded home attendance.

?It was a great moment especially for our players to test ourselves against a big club like Montreal and I think it's a moment that will last in their minds for a very long time, especially considering we should have won that game,? said York9 FC head coach Jimmy Brennan.

A defensive error and conceding two penalty kicks ultimately led the Nine Stripes to their exit, falling 3-2 on aggregate.

The memory of a competitive match blanketed with the sounds of blaring fans in the stadium seems like it was just yesterday.

Now with COVID-19, Brennan says it's difficult to sit out the season when other leagues in Europe have resumed, but he knows the league is working diligently to put a safe plan in place.

?We're expecting some news, hopefully in the next week or two, as to where and when we'll start up and get this going.?

Last season, York9 FC were off to a slow start in the Spring Competition with a 2-5-3 record.

Brennan says the beginning was an adjustment. Players have to develop chemistry and buy into the system. That's exactly what his boys did. In the Fall Competition, the club posted a 7-2-9 record, potting in 30 goals in the process and defeating the eventual champions, Forge FC, 4-0.

?We finished off well and it's about building that squad ? now that's going to carry over into next season,? Brennan emphasized.

?We felt we have built a good squad and we have the right pieces in place. Obviously, our momentum is halted, but I think overall we're very happy with the squad that we have.?

The Nine Stripes have brought in Valour FC midfielder Michael Petrasso, former Ottawa Fury midfielder Christopher Manella and brought back winger Ryan Telfer on a permanent deal for veteran leadership.

The club has purchased a handful of South American forwards such as Brazilian talents Gabriel Vasconcelos from Corinthians and Jaco to

bolster the attack.

The Nine Stripes have also signed their 2019 CPL-U Sports draft pick from Cape Breton University, Isaiah Johnston, to a deal until 2022. Johnston becomes the fourth U-20 signing this summer along with Max Ferrari, Ijah Halley and Julian Altobelli.

Brennan says all senior players on the roster that are part of the nucleus of the club will play a vital role in nurturing younger players heading into their first year in the league.

Already in July and with a return to play format being worked on, Brennan says every game will mean something.

?Every game, one game at a time, win, win, win. It's getting into a competitive mindset and having the players understand there's no room for error.?

The club is currently practicing at limited capacity.

Brennan, who became the first CPL head coach to obtain a UEFA Pro Licence following an eight-year process this past week, says fitness levels are of the utmost importance for the players. Every training session is set with objectives and all of his players are currently following the guidelines.

According to Concacaf president Victor Montagliani, the CPL surpassed expectations in its inaugural season. Despite the shortened year this year, a good first step might prove a lead to a prosperous future.

?I think it surprised a lot of people. When you start a league from scratch you're not sure what the quality is going to be. What I was really impressed with was just how professional and dedicated and talented these young Canadians are.?

And, in turn, the professionalism and dedication from clubs is also something to note. York9 FC became a club of the ?firsts? this past year, introduced their first women's supporters' group ?The Dames of York,? and the first club to sell a player (Emilio Estevez) to a top-flight league in Europe (Eredivisie).

Just like last season, Manuel Aparicio will lead the club as captain. Brennan has known Aparicio since his days with Toronto FC.

The Nine Stripes were supposed to kick-off their season at the tail-end of the Easter weekend against the Halifax Wanderers. There is no telling if that will be the first game of the year when the CPL introduces their plans, hopefully, in the coming weeks.

By Robert Belardi