

Toronto Blizzard partners with FC Bayern Munich to improve grassroots soccer for boys and girls

By Robert Belardi

From the moment he was born, Giuseppe (Joe) Parolini has been drawn to soccer and soccer has been drawn to him.

Born 400 yards outside of the stadium in Naples, Italy, Parolini and his family emigrated to Toronto when he was six.

Since setting foot on Canadian soil, he has done nothing but make an impact in the game. In the 1986 World Cup, he was the athletic trainer for Canada.

Having coached the Hamilton Steelers in the Canadian Soccer League afterwards, in the 90s, Parolini got involved with the Toronto Blizzard as a general manager. In 1999, he officially took over the club.

In soccer, you don't just have one job at one given time. Parolini began the girls' program at Woodbridge SC under president Marcello Reda. He began a scholarship program with the club to give players the chance to earn the right to education along with sport.

After leaving Woodbridge, Parolini got involved in the Canadian Women's Sr. World Cup team and U-20 national women's team from 2009 to 2011 with coach Carolina Morace. But he took a look at the grassroots system once again and he realized there was a big problem.

"I left the women's national team and U-20 national team in 2011/12, and I saw the problems that we had with the youth coming up. I said, you know what, we need a scholarship program," Parolini said, in an exclusive interview with The Auroran.

"We (Toronto Blizzard) are number one in Canada for scholarships over nine years and I said that's still not enough? We started talking in concept. Just before COVID, I was in New York again with a good friend and we started talking about being more proactive and we started reaching out to European clubs. We had about 12 that showed interest. As we're going through the process, a lot of them we eliminated very quickly because they wanted affiliations and licensing deals just so they can make money."

One of the clubs that was not eliminated was German giant FC Bayern Munich. The Toronto Blizzard sent over a 116-page document that was sent over to the Board of Directors just before this past Christmas.

The club's international director came over to inspect the club's facilities and to watch a few practices. He liked what he saw and both clubs eventually signed the partnership about a month-and-a-half ago.

"It's been exciting. They posted it right on the front page of their website. The players are endorsing it: Alphonso Davies, Leon Goretzka, Leroy Sane. It's just amazing. It's going to take youth player development in this province to another level," Parolini said.

In a press release that came out last week, the club announced that youth players between the ages of eight and 18 years old will have the opportunity to learn and develop as an FC Bayern Munich player.

The methodology will come directly from coaches from the club itself that will be passed on to young Canadian players.

"We've seen first-hand the incredible talent coming from Canada," said FC Bayern Munich Campus director Jochen Sauer in the release.

"Our partnership with Toronto Blizzard will allow us to share our coaching philosophy as well as identify and help develop young

talent in Toronto. We look forward to introducing this partnership to the province of Ontario with the Toronto Blizzard.?

A week-long ID camp will be held in Maple, ON this summer from July 4 to 11. FC Bayern coaches will be coming to Canada and will be delivering the practices.

Parolini said he will be inviting directors and coaches from other clubs in on the Zoom calls to be involved in this partnership.

With this initiative, Parolini said that this opportunity will not only be for players who want to have a future in soccer. This opportunity is a chance also for players to earn a scholarship, and if soccer doesn't work out for them, there is an education to fall back on.

?At the end of the day, not everybody is going to make it pro. What they loved is, if they don't make pro or they don't get sold to another entity, they still have the scholarship program as their base to fall back on and get an education. So, we're really taking care of the player,? Parolini said.

Players interested in registering for the camp, can register here form.jotform.com/221358206834051.

To contact Parolini directly, you may reach him at JoeParolini@TorontoBlizzard.com.