

Why the Lou Marsh Trophy winners this year will never forget it

Written By ROBERT BELARDI

Bayern Munich defender Alphonso Davies and Kansas City Chiefs offensive lineman Laurent Duvernay-Tardif were announced co-winners of the Lou Marsh Trophy last week.

This will be the third time in history co-winners have been announced since Graham Smith and Ken Read in 1978 and Wayne Gretzky and Rick Hansen in 1982.

The Lou Marsh Trophy is awarded to the best Canadian athlete of the year for their on-field performances and, in this particular case, integrity and class off of it.

But in a pandemic-riddled year, this 2020 award holds more merit than in years past. Uniquely as well, co-winners Duvernay-Tardif and Davies are the perfect combination of one of the best humanitarian efforts we've seen and one of the best Canadian soccer stories to date.

This past year, Duvernay-Tardif became the first doctor to ever win a Super Bowl. Although documenting only three games played in the entirety of 2020, Duvernay-Tardif became the first athlete to win the Lou Marsh Trophy representing the NFL and the first football player in the league this year to opt out of the season.

Instead of playing, Duvernay-Tardif took his doctorate talents to his native town Mont-Saint-Hilaire Que., to join a long-term care home to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

?The significance of Laurent winning the award is that he has brought a heightened awareness to the award for young football players and he has brought a standard of excellence that will enhance the status of the award as well as past and future winners,? Lee Barette, CEO of Canada Football Chat, tells The Auroran.

In the second year of CFC's inception in 2011, Barette lived in Montreal. He immersed himself in the Quebec football scene to provide a better service for Quebec-born players.

?I shadowed the McGill football team the entire season, Laurent's second year with the team, and first-year playing offensive lineman full time. I remember contacting Duane Ford (TSN) and telling him this is the best offensive lineman prospect I had seen.?

What Barette was also impressed by was Duvernay-Tardif's work capacity. He worked full-time at his family bakery while being a full-time student at McGill's pre-med program.

?He practiced once a week and attended team meetings when he could (rarely) and still performed at an elite level.?

Barette says the position Duvernay-Tardif plays is the most intellectually challenging position on the field. Knowing his previous history to be where he is today, at 29-years of age, it is quite incredible he left his Super Bowl winning Chiefs to join the frontline.

And knowing his history of rarely showing up to meetings and practices, what's missing a season for this man? That question will be answered next year should he return.

As for Davies, his past also reflects his current status now at one of the largest clubs in European soccer.

Davies became the second soccer player in the Lou Marsh Trophy history to win this award and the first male to do so; Christine Sinclair won the award back in 2012.

The former Vancouver Whitecaps prospect was sold to Bayern Munich in 2018, for a then, MLS record of \$22 million.

Davies joined the Whitecaps Residency in 2015-2016 and simply made his mark within the club.

“He was just a young kid with a big smile on his face. He didn't stay with us very long but in his first 16 games, he assisted or scored on every goal,” said Club Ambassador and U16 Residency assistant coach Carl Valentine over Zoom.

“Every time you see him, he has this infectious smile, this great energy around him. He just loved doing what he was doing. He was always the hardest trainer even though he was the most skilled young player we had at the time and we've ever had.”

When Valentine heard Davies became co-winner with Duvernay-Tardif, he simply was “blown away.”

Davies had an exceptional season at Bayern Munich becoming the first Canadian to win the UEFA Champions League.

“I'm so happy for him,” Valentine said.

In Vancouver Whitecaps folklore, Davies will always be part of this MLS club's long history along with other notable soccer names that have come to Canada's western metropolitan city.

Sir Bobby Robson and Ferenc Puskas made their mark with the then Vancouver Royals in the 1960s and the late Tony Waiters led the Whitecaps to a soccer bowl championship in 1979.

Valentine came over from England to play his professional career in Canada and appear for the national team in their only World Cup appearance in 1986. The Manchester-born forward leads the Whitecaps in all time appearances.

Valentine says this is what we need right now to look at inspirational people at this time doing what they're doing and the award this year is the best example of human nature. It's also excellent proof for young Canadian soccer players to know their dreams can become reality when looking at where Davies has come from.

Combining together the importance of both athletes winning this award and all of the notable mentions that came close, like Kadeisha Buchanan, the Canadian female athlete of the year, it is safe this award-winning combo is one of the most unique in the history of the trophy.

A doctor and a refugee from Ghana who found a home in Canada. That's quite something, isn't it?