

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAAC SETS OBJECTIVES FOR 2014

The Directors of the Ontario-based Soccer Academy Alliance Canada (SAAC) organizations met recently to share thoughts on recent developments in the soccer landscape and to chart a course for the organization that has been leading the player development evolution in this province since 2005. An open and frank discussion amongst some of the most experienced soccer professionals in the province solidified the following beliefs across the membership.

- The OSA's OPDL concept still has merit, and while Academies are not currently eligible, they will continue to provide independent high performance programs at all age groups. The SAAC organizations, some of which have been operating in a standards-based model for over eight years, have no doubt that they will continue to provide top quality standards-based programming to their players, regardless of whether or not they are part of the OPDL.
- If anything, the SAAC model has been further validated by recent events. The OPDL setup borrowed heavily from SAAC in areas of technical standards and program calendar to name a few. The one important area they did not follow our lead was in putting full decision making powers in the hands of soccer professionals. The public relations nightmare that followed the 11th hour political maneuvering prior to the announcement of licenses showed the soccer community that they still haven't got it 100% right and that SAAC is still leading the way.
- SAAC and its members will continue to raise the bar for standards-based programming while maintaining
 its affiliation with the OSA, CSA and FIFA. Upon its inception in 2005 SAAC established FIFA affiliation as a
 prime objective. The rationale being was that an organization created to change the way the game is
 managed across the country must operate from within the system in order to achieve its goals. The recent
 OPDL decision does not change this fact. Affiliation was an objective before OPDL was ever even a concept,
 so SAAC will continue to work from within the system to not only maximize benefits for players currently in
 the SAAC system, but also to push for change at all levels of the game.
- SAAC remains the best *proven* environment in the province for promoting the development of players and coaches in the game. The SAAC Academies continue to work together to elevate coaches and players to a new standard. All of our members take pride in the growing number of coaches that are choosing to expand their knowledge both locally and abroad. SAAC Academies have proven on the field that they can sustain these high level programs over many years and provide a professional environment that produces results:
 - Over 30 Nationally licensed coaches (UEFA, USSF, CSA) across our membership
 - Over 40 players sent to NCAA Division I programs in the past 5 years
 - Over 70 players sent to Canadian University and other post-secondary institutions in the past 5 years
 - Over 20 players sent on International pro trials in the past 5 years
 - Over 10 players placed on National youth and senior teams
 - Over 10 players signed to **Pro clubs**, including 2 players taken in the 1st round of the 2013 MLS Draft by Toronto FC

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While the 2013 season winds down to completion in the next few months, plans are already underway for a 2014 program that will build on our current positions as leaders in player development. Some highlights include:

- Integration of FIFA standard Age Groups. In 2014, SAAC will be adopting FIFA standard age groups for its competitive divisions. Leagues will be offered for boys at the U15, U17 and U20 divisions. Depending on the number of teams entered, these divisions may also be tiered based on pre-season assessments and consultation among SAAC technical staff. Younger players will participate in our development leagues, while older players will compete in the OSL/OWSL U21 and Senior Divisions.
- A high performance 9v9 league for 2001 Boys. There was a strong consensus from SAAC technical staff especially those that have spent time overseas that maintaining small-sided games up to the U13 level is the best way develop key skills in young players. The SAAC Board of Directors voted unanimously to retain a 9v9 program at this level.
- A high performance 9v9 program for Girls. While it has been a few years since SAAC ran a full-fledged allgirls league, our members have continued to provide opportunities for high performance female athletes looking for an alternative to the club system. In 2013 alone, we had **over 150 girls** registered in SAAC at various levels. Over 10% of our U11-U13 players – a critical stage of development – were female. We will not only encourage our top young female players to continue in our integrated development system, but in 2014 we will be offering our members the opportunity to put together all-girls teams at the 2001 (U13) age group in 2014 to compete 9v9 internally against our 2002/2003 boys teams, and externally against other allgirls teams in exhibition games with local clubs.
- A comprehensive ID program for National, Provincial and Regional Programs. SAAC takes great pride that players from its member organizations have represented Canada at all youth levels and even the senior men's team, demonstrating a clear path for our high performance athletes to our national teams. Going forward, SAAC members will be taking an even more structured and pro-active approach to identifying and reporting players to coaches at the high performance programs for which they are eligible.
- A competitive league structure for U14/U15 Girls. With the growing interest in the academy route for female players, SAAC is resurrecting its Showcase Girls program and plans to run a league aimed at 1999/2000 born girls in 2014. There are dozens of girls graduating from our development programs, and dozens more training part time with various members. The time has come for SAAC to provide a bridge for these players to compete and develop before entering senior-level programs.

Soccer Academy Alliance Canada is a Not-for-Profit organization which regulates and promotes private soccer academies across Canada. Our mission is to develop world class soccer players in Canada on a continual & systematic basis by providing our members with best-in-class training, facilities & competition. For more information on SAAC and its programs, contact Lino Terra, Operations Manager at <u>saac@academysoccer.ca</u>.

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