

Aurora FC director says 2026 World Cup will have 'huge impact' on Canadian soccer

By Jake Courtepatte

Though still eight years in the future, the 2026 FIFA World Cup is arguably already changing the landscape of Canadian soccer. After a successful bid for the world's largest sporting event went to the trio of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, under the banner of 'United 2026' in April, the Canadian soccer community immediately began speculation on Canada's possible qualification.

Yet, according to Aurora FC technical director Dave DiPlacido, the impact begins at the base of youth soccer.

'Just leading up to it?the amount of coverage and press it's going to bring to the game,' said DiPlacido. 'Already there's been huge strides in growing the game, I think that this is just going to add more fuel to the fire.'

With the addition of professional teams across the country, including the newly-formed Canadian Professional League set to kick off next spring, DiPlacido has seen the game grow considerably since his minor league days with the Aurora Youth Soccer Club.

According to the Canadian Soccer Association, the amount of players registered for youth soccer in Canada in 2017 reached a total over 800,000 for the first time, surpassing hockey as the number-one youth sport in the country.

And now, with the world's best set to take on stages across the nation in 2026, those numbers could grow at a record pace.

'I think this is just going to add to that,' said DiPlacido. 'For young players that are aspiring to do things in the game, this is just more fuel.'

'It's going to inspire a generation of footballers to want to compete, to want to get to the next level.'

With the winning bid still in its infancy, the FIFA Council is yet to announce which hosts, if any, will receive an automatic qualification into the tournament. Canada last appeared in the men's World Cup in Mexico in 1986, finishing dead last in the group stages while going winless: their only appearance to date.

Yet with the growing stardom of young athletes like Alphonso Davies, a Vancouver Whitecaps superstar set to make his European debut next season, DiPlacido said he sees 'a lot of quality' in Canada's up-and-coming footballers.

'We have challenges in the country, obviously with the size and trying to identify the top players and bring them together in the proper environment, but I think that's changing now with some of the professional academies,' said DiPlacido, referencing the developmental programs in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. 'That, and with the Canadian Professional League coming in next year, that's going to allow more opportunities for more players.'

'I don't think we're as far off as people think. Obviously I'm a little biased, I see a lot of the young players on a daily basis, I just feel they need something to strive towards and this could maybe be something that helps everyone in the game.'

While the women's national side has seen considerable success in recent years, finishing sixth as the home squad in the 2015 World Cup and earning a pair of bronzes in back-to-back Olympic Games, the men haven't fared as well: Canada currently ranks 79th in the world, just behind much smaller countries like Macedonia and Ivory Coast.

Yet DiPlacido said he hopes Canada can qualify for the 2026 tournament, even if they don't earn the automatic bye.

'They will be increasing the number of teams for the tournament, so that bodes well for our chances. We're doing a lot of good things for grassroots soccer in this country now, there's a lot of quality from the sixteen, eighteen, twenty-year olds.'

DiPlacido said he was 'under the impression' that the trio of countries would win the bid before the actual announcement in June, but was still ecstatic at the outcome.

'Until it actually happens, you don't really realize the amount of an impact it's going to have on our country and our soccer in this country.'