

King City Basketball Club wants more for local children



Meet the basketball team! Front (left to right) Matthew Mckensy, Chris Boodhoo, Marilisa De Simone, Alessandro De Simone, Chris Sun, Rupinder Assi. Missing from photo are Steve Dimitriou, Pat Ramundo.

By Robert Belardi

Alessandro De Simone is a real estate agent by day. But once the Steve Madden dress shoes make their way to the closet and the suit precipitously flies on to the chair after a long day, he is a basketball enthusiast; maybe even a connoisseur. Living in Richmond Hill and growing up in an Italian household, De Simone grew up the odd one out. He never played hockey. It was baseball and basketball for him. At his grandmother's house on Christmas Day, the feast and the presents were completely shadowed by the mid-day Knicks and Bulls game. Then he saw Jordan sink a reverse lay-up and smoke the Los Angeles Lakers in the 1991 NBA finals. He held his own stat sheets of Jordan. What he was good and bad at. The rest is history. The Bulls were his team. When baseball locked out in 1994, the year after Joe Carter hit the most famous home run in Toronto Blue Jays history, De Simone solely turned his attention to none other than the great, Michael Jordan. I was personally blessed with the timing of the Jordan documentary *The Last Dance*. That was how I grew up in basketball was with Michael Jordan. So, he is what got me off baseball and the Blue Jays. He moved downtown and became a season ticket holder for the Toronto Raptors home games and met with Raptors general manager at the time Brian Colangelo; one of the best moments he has experienced to date. Since moving to King Township five years ago, De Simone knew something was missing. Hockey is the predominant sport children play. But, what if a child, such as his own and others, don't want to play hockey? There's almost an element of social isolation that comes with that when you're a kid. If your friends are playing another sport and your kid isn't interested, you want to make sure they have options, De Simone said. When he moved to King there was no basketball program. You might think that can't be right, but children from King had to travel to Vaughan or Aurora to shoot hoops. Basketball was only played in schools and a separate entity ceased to exist. There may have been programs in the past, but De Simone says nobody refutes his claim when he says he is the first to create a basketball program in the township. In November 2018, De Simone began a non-profit organization and voila, King City Basketball Club was born. He sent out flyers to every elementary school in King Township. With the help of his friends who he had previously played basketball, De Simone was pleasantly surprised. I think I gave flyers through grades J.K. all the way to Grade 6. First day, we just did an open house for people to come in and get a vibe and learn about the program. I had almost 70 kids show up. De Simone says parents have said told him and his staff the difficulty of having a child interested in another sport other than hockey and living in King City. It was frustrating for them but with this outlet, De Simone has garnered motivation for young children who might be struggling to find it. These kids might have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning but when it's for basketball they fly out. In February of 2019, his first program began. He gained a permit to host his sessions out of Cardinal Carter high school. A 9-10-week program insinuated and King Township valiantly offered their services as well to assist, with a late spring early summer program to top it off. Amidst this transition of being a real-estate agent and father, De Simone also reached out to professional entities such as the NBA, NBA Canada, Basketball Canada and Junior NBA to seek advice and exposure. Some have responded and once more

businesses are permitted to open and normalcy ensues from our pause from reality, De Simone anticipates more help. This year, his spring program was cancelled after a successful beginning in the winter. But, more children continued to attend. We split it (the gym) in half. We still get full court on either side. We do drills for about 20 minutes and then we scrimmage for about 40 minutes. The first half an hour is used as a shoot-around. He focuses on fundamentals from children aged six to 12. However, he will accept younger if there is a child adamant on joining the club. De Simone says some kids are at the door 15 minutes earlier than the start time and don't leave until he shuts off the lights. There has been an excellent reception so far from children and parents. De Simone wants to enter these players in tournaments, of course, if he has the right number of players from the same age. Eventually, beginning a rep program in the township would ideally be the finishing touch. He already has reversible home and away jerseys with names on the back for his players. King City Basketball Club waits for further restrictions to be uplifted and hopes it will be in time for the winter season. De Simone needs volunteers. For those interested in volunteering, please call 416-799-8000 or email info@kingcitybasketballclub.com. The basketball club is growing and they want every child and parent to join them for the beginning of next season.