

Game: CF Montreal is no longer the only pro soccer team in town

Grub and Game

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Editor's Note: As a foodie and sports aficionado, I have asked Mike Cohen to combine two of his loves into a new column. Welcome to Game and Grub.



Welcome to a new format for my Montrealer column, where we mix Game (sports) and Grub (food and restaurants).

Way back in 1981, I became an instant pro soccer fan when the Montreal Manic—owned by Molson Brewery—burst onto the local sports scene. In the early going they were playing to sellout crowds at Olympic Stadium, but after their third season the honeymoon was over and the franchise folded.

Today, we have three professional soccer teams in the Montreal area: CF Montréal, the upstart FC Supra du Québec, and the year-old Montreal Roses.

CF Montréal kind of lost me when they switched over from their original name, the Impact. That franchise was born in 1992 under the leadership of Joey Saputo. They played in the cozy Claude-Robillard Stadium in Ahuntsic, which could accommodate about 6,000 fans. In 2008, Saputo Stadium opened next to the Big O. It seats more than 20,000 fans and I must say it is a beautiful, well-maintained facility. Joey Saputo and his family fully funded the project.

CF Montréal now plays in Major League Soccer, the elite level of the sport in North America. While they do have a devoted fan base, I lament the fact that their community relations efforts leave much to be desired. Back in the day, Saputo himself visited schools with players. That is hardly the case right now. While soccer is now the highest participatory sport in Quebec, I would bet that—aside from season-ticket holders—few fans could name even one or two players on the roster.

I shared these thoughts with the team president two years ago when I attended a game, adding that the annual Sports Celebrity Event I help organize for the Cummings Centre has not benefited from a CF Montréal/Impact representative in many years. Those comments clearly were ignored.



Supra team president Rocco Placentino

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Chef Alexandre Joubard and server Anabel at the Commodore

Enter FC Supra du Québec, an expansion franchise in the Canadian Premier League. They begin their maiden season April 11 in Victoria, with their home opener set for April 19 at Stade Boréal in Laval against Ottawa.

Rocco Placentino, a former Impact player and until recently the head of soccer in the borough of St-Laurent, is the Supra president and co-founder. He has fond memories of watching the original Montreal Supra—the new team's namesake—as a child in the late 1980s. That Canadian Soccer League club played five seasons at Complexe Claude-Robillard from 1988 to 1992.

If the Supra make more of an effort than CF Montréal (which admittedly would not be difficult) to connect with the community, they could eventually surpass the bigger club in popularity. Incidentally, some of their home games will also be played at Claude-Robillard.

Finally, there is the Montreal Roses of the Northern Super League, now entering their second season. This women's professional soccer circuit is top-notch. The Roses also play at Stade Boréal. They open their season on the road April 25 and play their home opener May 2 against Vancouver. With the growing success of women's soccer at the Olympics and on the world stage, this league and team have arrived at just the right time.

Soccer fever—catch it!

Grub: Lunch at the Commodore and Royalmount's First Food Festival

Between meetings, errands, and packed calendars, a great lunch can feel like a small luxury. What better way to step away from the office—or catch up with friends—than over a beautifully crafted table d'hôte in a space that feels like a true escape?

Tucked inside the Honeyrose Hotel near Place des Arts, the Commodore offers exactly that: a warm, elegant setting where midday dining feels both unhurried and elevated.

I recently enjoyed a sensational lunch at the French bistro-style Commodore Restaurant and Café with general manager Antoine Naoum. We first met several years ago at another property he oversaw and reconnected last summer when I attended a special event at the Honeyrose.

Lunch began with a toast of prosecco before warm bread arrived at the table accompanied by a generous spread of “Honeyrose” butter. I started with a piping-hot bowl of salmon chowder.

When executive chef Alexandre Joubard came over to greet us, Antoine suggested he prepare a steak for me. Later he told me he follows me on Instagram and noticed that steak is often my dish of choice, so he wanted me to experience his version. The 10-ounce



Jaime at Balam

grilled sirloin arrived perfectly prepared—medium rare, just as requested—served with crispy fries, seasonal vegetables and a house-made béarnaise sauce.

Our server, Anabel, recommended the crème brûlée for dessert, which proved to be an excellent choice.

Commodore is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The restaurant seats 55 people in the dining room, with an additional 36 on the seasonal patio.

For more information, visit www.commodoremontreal.com. A more detailed review can be found at www.mtlrestorap.com.

Saveurs Royalmount

The first edition of Saveurs Royalmount recently took place, centered around the high-end shopping complex's urban park. This limited-time culinary series showcased a curated selection of restaurants through exclusive menus, tastings, and chef-driven experiences designed to spark discovery and entertainment.

I enjoyed a tasting at Le Fou Fou, where a passport included beef tartare from Prime, bao chicken from Sacré Bao, a taco from Hogar (I substituted beef for the pork), and dessert from À La Table. Their uber-popular banana pudding was sold out, but I happily settled for a delicious chocolate cake instead.

Tiramisu also offered a shrimp arrabbiata dish, though unfortunately their kitchen was closed the night I attended.

Balam, meanwhile, is the fourth and largest restaurant from the La Catrina Group, located in the urban park. The kitchen has created a menu that honours Mexican roots while reinventing them with modern touches.

My mother was my guest as I took advantage of Saveurs. While tortillas were not included on the tasting menu, we asked our manager-server Jaime if some could be brought out. They arrived with freshly made guacamole—a great start to the meal.

This was followed by bowls of delicious ceviche and oysters (ostras con margarita). For the main course I chose the tantalizing duck (pato y mole), while my mother opted for the pescado a la talla, a sea bass she thoroughly enjoyed.

Dessert was a decadent serving of churros with chocolate sauce. The tasting also included a drink: a mezcal maracuyá. The smooth, smoky character of mezcal combined with the tropical brightness of passion fruit created a unique and well-balanced cocktail.

For more information visit <https://restaurantbalam.ca/en/>. A more detailed review can be found at <https://cohenculinarynews.blogspot.com>.