

TOWNSEND, HOMER "Red"

## Red honored for athletics work

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One of the last of a rare breed is only one way of describing Homer (Red) Townsend, long-time former boys' physical education teacher at Belleville Collegiate Institute.

For one thing, it could be said that for many years, Townsend was literally the "only show in town" as far as secondary school sports for boys is concerned. Until 1954, BCI was the only public secondary school in the city, and even Catholic teenagers had to complete their secondary graduation at BCI, so "Red", as he is commonly known, had them all.

Presentation of the Central Ontario Secondary School Athletics (COSSA) group Pete Beach Award this week left the 83-year-old retired teacher in a state of almost stunned humility.

The award is in memory of a man who was athletics teacher at Albert College for many years and who devoted himself to the organization of athletic events in Ontario secondary schools.

The awards program is handled through the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association, embracing 18 groups across Ontario, with each group allowed to present one award annually. Candidates may be a current or former physical education educator.

For Townsend, the years at BCI spanned 1943 to 1972. He also did some supply teaching at BCI previously, and spent a few years in schools at Ottawa and Picton.

Because he was born and raised in Belleville himself, for most of the students Townsend taught, he knew their background, their parents, and probably even their grandparents in a day when Belleville was a less transient society.

And it was a time when corporal punishment was considered a normal part of the stiff discipline expected.

Townsend has seen the times change and speculated with a quip: "If I were teaching today, I'd probably wind up in the penitentiary

for some of the things I've done."

Some former students remember frequent bare-handed slaps, even slashes with a hockey stick.

But another, Jack McBride, circa 1945-1950 student, says Townsend only disciplined when necessary. "He was fair; there was no favoritism and there were no grudges."

And Townsend himself says: "In those days, young people were expected to do what they were told."

As for getting the award, even as an educator Townsend ran out of words. "I am very, very, very much surprised."

But as a person who knew Beach well and worked with him for many years, Townsend describes him as "a wonderful man," and the award, therefore, is "a great honor."

He recalls a career of teaching which has seen some of his students go on to become highly successful entrepreneurs, and important movers and shakers, or, in some other cases, known criminals.

Developing character was always a key thrust of his methods — not just trying to form a winning team. That, at least, is how McBride recalls it. "We had a strong team one year and spent a week playing in the all-Ontario finals in Toronto. Even in crucial games, Red gave every member of the team a chance to play, when he could have gone with his five best at all times."

He also wondered where the funding came from for meals and accommodation for the week in those days, hinting that Townsend probably paid much of it from his own pocket.

Still another former student recalls being skinny and weak, a bookworm type, unsuited to the basic athletic and gymnastic skills required at that time.

But as the youngster was making an all-out effort to haul himself around the parallel bars, Townsend arranged to have him literally dragged through the required positions to get a passing mark.

To raise funds for his Boys Athletic group, Townsend started a

BCI variety show called Boys' Night, with singers, musicians, gymnasts and even a precision team from the cadet corps. That show became a tradition, later turned into Kampus Kapers, McBride recalls.

While Townsend taught gymnastics, basketball and football to hundreds, perhaps thousands of boys, his own favorite sport, he says, is hockey. It is a game he played in Belleville as a young person, and with the death of his father when he was a child: "playing hockey was what put me through school."

Basketball is another of his favorite sports, with the opportunity to be able to play "in any weather and at any time."

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