

Some GDHS teams operating with teachers' help

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

While most public schools in Ontario have gone without extracurricular activities this winter, there is a thaw in the works for Georgetown District High School student-athletes who've been frozen out of sporting activities.

The Rebels have five teams operating despite the withdrawal of volunteer time by teachers in the extracurricular programs to protest the provincial government's controversial Bill 115.

Two of the GDHS varsity teams—swimming and wrestling—are actually still eligible to compete at Ontario Federation of Schools Athletic Association championships next month for the winter season, something that athletes in team sports will miss because they didn't play enough games to qualify for provincial playdowns.

Archery, boys' hockey and boys' basketball are also practising and hope to play in exhibition games or tournaments, but will have difficulty finding opposition to play as most teachers at other schools have refused to return to their previous coaching and supervisory volunteer roles.

The extracurricular ban is in response to the provincial government's use of Bill 115, which froze teachers' wages, cut benefits and took away teachers' bargaining rights.

Georgetown's senior boys' basketball team played an exhibition game last week

at home against Waterloo Collegiate, another team that has opted to break ranks and play. Rebels' head coach Steve Pettit, a retired teacher, organized the game in order to continue a 13-year team tradition of honouring its graduating players with a "Seniors' Night" ceremony involving their parents.

After the contest, GDHS teacher and assistant coach Randall Keast said his involvement with the team hasn't been well received by some of his fellow educators.

"We made a commitment to these young men in December and paused. Now, the (job action) is over, so we're back finishing up our season," said Keast, who is the co-ordinator of GDHS's International Baccalaureate program.

"We had to make some tough decisions that are not too popular with our colleagues, but at the end of the day, I have to look in the mirror at myself, making a commitment as a teacher. It's what we do here at Georgetown. It's school first. You've got to see the bigger picture."

At Acton District High School, no individual or team sports are currently operating in the winter season.

GDHS principal Nick Varricchio referred all questions to Halton District School Board director of education David Euale, who has been working with his staff



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to come up with ways to provide supervision for extracurricular activities.

Euale confirmed that the sports teams at GDHS were being supervised by teachers.

"We've got pockets of activity coming back and others continue without interruption," he said.

"This is primarily a provincial matter, but I'm always optimistic things will return to normal in the near future.

Hopefully with the change in the (education) minister's position and the premier's position, it will come to a resolution."

Officials with the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario were slated to meet yesterday (Wednesday) with a member of Premier Kathleen Wynne's transition team, two government mediators, four school board directors of education and an observer from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association to begin finding some possible solution to the impasse.

Not just sporting activities have been affected.

At GDHS, it was announced last week that the annual prom will be organized entirely by a student committee this year, with no school involvement.

Euale pointed out that each of the 17 public high schools in Halton has its own method of organizing events such as proms or theatrical productions.

"It varies by the school. Some schools don't have proms at all, while others are school-run or community-run," he added.

How the labour dispute will impact the post-secondary school opportunities for high school students shut out of extracurriculars varies, with some elite athletes already planning to take a "victory lap" fifth year in order to get recognized by university athletics programs.

"I was fortunate because we went to a tournament early in the season and I got some looks (from scouts) there, but had we not gone, I would probably have come back here for another year," said 6-foot-7 GDHS senior boys' basketball centre Sebastian Beckett, who hopes to attend either Western University or McGill in Montreal primarily because of their well-regarded business school programs.

"It was supposed to be a pretty good year for us and we trained pretty hard in the off-season, so it's kind of a shame, but we can't do anything about that now. We still practise a lot though."

The team was 1-1 in the Halton Secondary School Athletic Association Tier I division until the work-to-rule sanctions took effect in early December. GDHS's senior boys' basketball team did compete at a tournament in Ann Arbor, Mich. during the holidays and will also travel to Buffalo this Wednesday for an exhibition game. They plan to host the annual Rebels vs. Cancer Classic fundraiser Feb. 26-28.

— With files from Torstar News Service

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