



# St. T's all set for OFSAA

by Garry Forbes

For the very best athletes, nothing ever comes easily. They give a hundred percent game in, game out, no matter what their opponents' relative strength.

For the past two years, the St. Theresa's High School Senior Crusaders have powered to the Ontario Federation of Schools Athletic Association 'A' Division (750 students or less) championships. Though it may have appeared at times that they didn't have to give it their all at all times to win, they did anyway. And they took it all.

This year the Crusaders moved up into OFSAA's 'AA' Division - composed of Ontario's largest schools, those with student populations of more than 750. Considering their history, the move wasn't particularly astounding. Considering the school's population, however, it is indeed.

St. Theresa's is Ontario's smallest Roman Catholic school, with a total population of about 180 students. Only 85 are boys, and only a small percentage of that number are Senior boys. In other words, a good number of the Senior boys at St. Theresa's are on the volleyball team.

This year, the Crusaders jumped all over their local big-league opponents -- including Midland Secondary School, second-largest school in Simcoe County -- in Georgian Bay Secondary Schools Athletic Association Zone 2 competition.

They then breezed through the GBSSA 'AA' championships, beating other Zone champions from Woodbridge, Collingwood, Parry Sound and Newmarket.

Jumped all over? Breezed? Perhaps not. They worked. It only looked easy.

Now comes the final step -- the OFSAA 'AA' championships this weekend in London. In this one, the term "they worked" will be an understatement, and the word "breezed" will not appear in any report.

Coach Rick Presse says his team has what it takes, but so do several other schools. So, in addition to their usual hundred-percent effort, it may take another twenty percent or so of pure, undiluted luck.

"I'd say there are six or eight teams that can take it," says Presse. "There's no single

team that has dominated provincial play this year. Last year, David and Mary Thompson (Scarborough) won most of the tournaments and took the OFSAA championship pretty easily. This year, different teams have won every major tournament."

And St. Theresa's hasn't been one of them. Aside from a smattering of local tournament victories, the Crusaders entered two major provincial exhibition events this year.

The first, hosted by David and Mary Thompson, the school whose four-year reign as Ontario champs will be threatened this weekend, was their first real taste of top-of-the-heap competition.

After finishing first in their round-robin pool, the Crusaders lost in semi-final play to eventual-champs Guelph.

In their next major tournament, the York University High School Classic, the Crusaders won the consolation title after suffering three losses in round-robin games -- including a 2-1 defeat at the hands of the Blenheim Secondary School Bobcats, ranked one of the three strongest teams in the province.

The Crusaders were encouraged by their performances at the two major competitions -- as they should have been. For the first time, they were taking on schools which are, in terms of numbers, far above their heads. And they showed they are at least as good.

But then, most schools don't have the same calibre of feeder system as does St. Theresa's. Volleyball is, at this time of year, easily the most predominant athletic activity for boys at the school. And the interest -- and excellence -- extends right down through the Junior and Midget ranks, even to local elementary separate schools. It's a pipeline of volleyball talent from which the Senior Crusaders are the polished finished product.

Presse says this year's pipeline is in the best condition it's ever been. And it follows that the finished product is polished to its brightest shine.

This weekend in London, the Crusaders are hoping to mesmerize their tough opponents with a blinding gloss. At the same time, they'll work. Hard. Because, they know, that's how they got the gloss.

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