

SDSS athletes' response to relay meet is disappointing

It's enough to make Julian Franklin, Ged Stonehouse, and Dave Connell, not to mention a couple of dozen others, shake their heads in disbelief.

For surely the above mentioned patron saints of the Stouffville Community Track have got to be more than a tad disillusioned at the absence of interest shown in the track to this point by the student body at Stouffville District Secondary School.

Where are all those kids who willingly fired off the hundreds of letters of support that young Julian hoisted into the trunk of my car that memorable night back in 1990 when he shamed the York trustees into giving the Stouffville school the financial commitment that made the track facility possible?

The fact that good old SDSS couldn't even field a team for its own relay meet this Thursday is disappointing. Talking to Connell and local track enthusiast Fred Robbins, Stouffville's answer to that battery company's bunny that keeps on going and going, two things quickly



SPORT NOTES
Bruce Stapley

became clear:

First, that school board cutbacks have soured the attitudes of high school coaches and athletes alike towards things athletic; and second, that this town's illustrious youths of all ages aren't prepared to pay the price with regards to the disciplined training required in track and field if they think they can't win.

The first item, that of the hard economic times, is a reality everywhere, and it has surely affected school athletic programs.

"These are sad times," he told me recently. "Economic cutbacks are hurting the athletics program. It can make for a lack of interest in both the students and the coaches. And also, the kids have got so many other things that they do today."

But the second, the instant gratification factor, doesn't speak well for a generation of youngsters who had better quickly come to the realization they are going to have to work twice as hard to get what their parents took for granted in this uncertain world.

"I think some of the kids saw those Pickering High School athletes whizzing by them at last year's relay meet and figured there's just no way they could ever compete," Connell said.

Robbins, a former high school track star whose records still stand, concurred.

"The kids just don't want to train hard if they think they're just going to get beat."

Robbins feels the key lies in getting to the kids when they are in Grades 4 and 5. In recent

years, he has been working with interested students at Orchard Park P.S. where his own children attend, in an attempt to plant the seed.

The results have spoken for themselves: Luke Anderson, Jonathan Tamlin, and Peter Reed, a trio of boys he coached at the public school level, have gone on to be a part of the SDSS Midget boys' cross country team which has won the York Region crown the past two years. The cross country program has always been one of Connell's own pet projects, so with he and Robbins working in tandem, the results have been quite evident.

Robbins thinks it's a matter of adult coaches acting as motivators and role models for the kids.

"There's interest out there, but you've got to go and shake the

bushes," he said. "You've got to get them when they're young. You've got to just get them to want to do their best, and not worry about winning. They've got to understand that if they work hard, they can't help but get better. And ultimately it's the coaches who can help them discover what their best actually is."

"I'm confident it will happen here in Stouffville," he added. "It will take a few years, but the kids have to understand that Olympic champions aren't made in one year. Michael Smith (Canadian Olympic track star) took 10 years to get to where he is today. And the track club we've started here in town should help develop interest as well."

Amen.

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