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Athletes concerned by threat to stop high school sports

MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

Storm clouds have blown over the local high school sports scene in recent years in the form of short-lived teacher strikes and work-to-rule actions.

But some ominous-looking clouds approaching over the horizon in recent days could cast a permanent downpour on high school sports — not just locally but across the entire province.

At the York Region Athletic Association's annual meeting last week it was announced that convenors and teachers who organize and coach high school sports are not prepared to make a commitment for the next academic year, if public and separate school board negotiations force teachers to teach seven or seven-and-a-half out of eight classes.

Those affected said this would leave them with no time to conduct the preparations required for each teaching day.

In a written statement Thursday, the YRAA said it has found itself in a tough position.

Normally by this time of the year coaches, convenors and sport declarations

would now be in place for the fall and winter seasons, said Greg Reid, YRAA president, in the news release.

"However, many of our teachers who volunteer their time to coach and convene have informed us that they are unsure of their ability to commit at this time. Therefore, the YRAA will postpone fall and winter sport declarations and the acquiring of convenors until our members' level of commitment is such that there can be a resumption of competition."

"Should an agreement be reached by this summer or early in the school year, Reid said, the fall sports itinerary, which includes boys' football, soccer and volleyball and girls' basketball and field hockey and boys' and girls' cross country, could be salvaged. "We could lose one week of the fall season. But it's not critical."

Local students are well aware of the potential ramifications and fear for a loss of high school sports.

"I'm scared that (an end to high school sports) is going to happen," conceded Jodi Gram, a Grade 9 student from Markham District High School.

"It (sports) helps get me through the day. It's what I look forward to," added the 15-year-old Gram, who was a member of the girls' varsity basketball, handball, volleyball and soccer teams.

Chris Gudge, a 16-year-old Grade 11 student from Father Michael McGivney Academy, echoes Gram's feelings. He feels an end sports could cause irreparable damage to the high school fabric.

"I think it's going to hurt, especially for the new kids coming into the school. They won't get exposed to what high school has to offer," he said.

A gold medalist in this year's provincial junior boys' 100 metres and 200m, Gudge also pointed out the absence of high school sports would personally affect his chances in earning an athletic scholarship in the U.S., something he definitely wants to pursue.

Gudge and Gram sympathize with the teachers' situation and are hopeful high school sports can be saved.

"The teachers say they're doing it (striking) for the good of the students. I want sports and I think there has to be a better way (to settle things). It seems that at the moment we're (the students) are the one's who are suffering," added Gram.

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