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**EDUCATION: Football season on brink of being cancelled**

# Students face prospect of school without sports

BY JOHN CUDMORE  
STAFF WRITER

Even if the job action by York Region's public high school teachers was to end immediately, there is no guarantee the fall slate of athletic programs would get off the ground.

There has been no movement on the athletics front since June when York Region Athletic Association convenors and coaches agreed to delay declarations for sports activities until contract issues are resolved, said association president Greg Reid.

"We haven't met since June, we haven't even talked about meetings," said Reid, physical education department head at King City Secondary School.

"The union asked us to not participate in extra-curricular activities. But from a coach's side, they're swamped and don't have the time anyway."

It is the third time in as many school years that York Region high school sports have been hit by labour disputes. Last year, the winter schedule was threatened due to a two-week job action by teachers in the public board and a three-week strike by Catholic board teachers. In 1996, the spring sports calendar was shut down by a work-to-rule by teachers.

Most fall sports start in the third week of September, but since teachers are not holding practices, it is unlikely any activities would start immediately after a settlement.

Reid noted that athletics are caught in the cross-fire between the board and its teachers.

"At the annual general meeting we discussed the fact that negotiations always tend to impact on athletics. As much as sport should be pure, there is always the opportunity for politics to creep in."

Of the eight sports on the fall calendar, football will be hit hardest should the job action continue.

Two of the eight schools with senior football programs in York Region are members of the

Catholic board, including defending champs Brother Andre Catholic High School in Markham.

Terry Lyons, coach of the Brother Andre seniors, admitted he misses coaching.

"This was our year to defend our championship. We had a good squad coming back," said the seven-year coach.

"Obviously, I miss (coaching) dearly. It's a difficult situation for everybody, for the teachers and students. We're not doing what we love. We're caught between a rock and a hard place. It's a no-win situation."

As much as sport should be pure, there is always the opportunity for politics to creep in.

The season, which was due to begin last week, is in the greatest jeopardy due to the short time frame in which to play.

The season's not officially over, but it's obviously coming close to being over," said Dick Thomson, head coach of the Markham District High School seniors.

A football coach for 10 years, he said it is strange not to be playing in the fall.

Missing out on football is very tough on the student athletes.

"All summer long I look forward to football," said Rob Crocco, 17, a running back at MDHS. "You train for it all summer and then come to school and it's not there. It's disappointing."

Fraser Birt, a defensive tackle for MDHS, is not optimistic about this season. "I hope we play, but I fear the worst," he said. "I understand where the teachers are coming from, but I miss football."

Other sports on the fall agenda include girls basketball and field hockey, boys soccer and volleyball, cross-country, running, tennis and golf.

with files from Mike Hayakawa



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