

EDUCATION: Catholic teacher refuses to follow union ranks, unlike many newer, young teachers afraid to cause waves

Coach takes heat as he resumes role

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

With four classes to teach and a new contract still not finalized, Chris Deighan was absent from the high school coaching ranks last semester.

However, with only three instructional periods this spring and contract negotiations settled, the 15-year teaching veteran resumed his position as head coach of a successful

track and field team this spring — much to the chagrin of several of his colleagues at an Aurora Catholic school, who left him notes and discussed the issue at a staff meeting in February.

With the local teachers union encouraging its 2,700 members not to assume any voluntary activities to protest the contract imposed by a provincially appointed arbitrator in January, only a handful of teams from the

nine Catholic high schools are participating in the York Region Athletic Association schedule.

The teachers are upset with a contract that froze salaries and allotted high school instructors an extra class.

"When the contract came up, we had a chance to negotiate and we didn't win," explained Deighan in an interview yesterday, as he spent his lunch hour making plans to take 30 students to the Ontario Federation of Schools' Athletic Associations track and field championship later this month in Etobicoke.

"I enjoy that part of my day and I missed that when I wasn't coaching. I don't want other people missing out if I can afford the time. I took some flak from co-workers, but that's their opinion and it doesn't really concern me. I've been upfront from the beginning and didn't sneak around with my plans."

Deighan, who cut track practice from five to three days a week, said his union executive has yet to take him to task for coaching, but realizes younger teachers are under more pressure not to break ranks from the union's position.

"I remember there was a strike in my first year of teaching, and I was just naive and followed everyone around. You just don't know," he added.

"A lot of people would like to coach and they can't because they are so busy."

"I think that's where people in the high positions just don't realize the ramifications."

Markham's Brother Andre and Father Michael McGivney, and Vaughan's Holy Cross and Father Bressani have joined Cardinal Carter in fielding a few athletic teams, but that's a far cry from years past, when the Catholic schools would enter midget, junior and senior clubs in every sport.

In a deputation to trustees in April, local union first vice-president Claire Laughlin accused the board of remaining silent as the provincial government attacked educational funding and warned trustees that without a return to six teaching periods, her members

will do no more than what is required by law.

"No sports, no plays, no evening or after-school interviews anymore," said Laughlin.

And that comment stung members of the Brother Andre high school council, who insist students are missing a large portion of their education when sports teams and school activities are cancelled.

They are asking the school board and teachers union to try to reach a compromise before school resumes in September.

"The solutions are not obvious, but the leaderships of these groups must become more creative," said Brother Andre parent Hugh Erwin, who recommends an increase in class size, although the 22-student board average is mandated by the Ministry of Education.

"We are looking for any solution, but it has to include the trustees and the teachers. The teachers need to be the leaders of the activities, but the teachers also need the time to spend on these activities."

The board is considering dropping the high school teaching workload from seven periods to 6.5 or 6.25.

And Newmarket Trustee Theresa McNicol hopes the strained relationship between the board, its teachers and students can soon be mended.

"Grade 9 students are unable to approach teachers because the bonding between the two has not happened. Hopefully, that can be repaired because it's important for that bonding to occur," she said.

"Students need to learn to trust teachers. It's almost like at 2:30 p.m., (the schools) are like a ghost town."

Alison Vanspall, chairperson of the school council at Thornhill's St. Robert high school, said the time for action is now, after students have been deprived of extracurricular activities for the past two years.

"The buzzwords have been children are our first concern, but in practice, it has been far from the truth," she said.

"Do what is best for the students."

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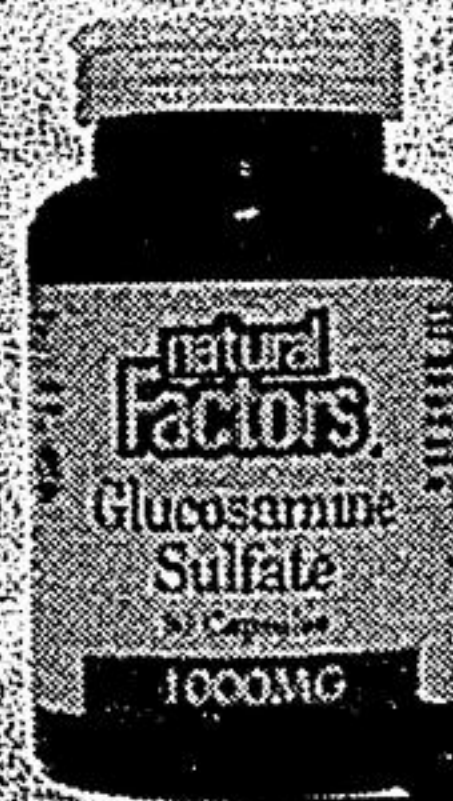
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