

Sports camps allow serious athletes to hone skills

Traditional camps branching out into sport specific areas

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

Summer camp has traditionally been an outlet for fun and activity.

Summer sports camps have evolved to embrace the sport-specific notion for the serious athlete to complement a traditional blend of activities catering to fast-paced lives of children.

It is still possible to spend a week or two at hockey camp or chasing soccer balls at the many elite camps and academies sprouting up.

Horseback riding, volleyball, in-line skating, it's all out there, in fact. Or, kids can come up with a combination of all of the above.

In York Region, the two main players when it comes to offering sports camps are Camp Robin Hood and Camp Green Acres, both of which offer traditional camp situations. They also provide access to specialty packages, the latter through its All-Star Sports Camps that, now in its fourth year, offers up to 11 sports activities.

Backed by a combined 100 years of experience in the camping industry, the two

big players in sports and day camping are not merely playing games. With children signing up for sessions ranging from one to four or more weeks per summer, it's year-round, big business.

"You have to be a little different and we chose from Day 1 to offer as many sports as possible," said Darren Greenspoon, a former York Region high school teacher, who started as Green Acres swim director five years ago and is now sports camp coordinator.

Camp planners recognize the necessity to stay current with the latest trends. They also work closely with the Ontario Camping Association.

"Yes, we're going in for sport-specific camps, but also going for so many other things to allow kids to branch out," said Richmond Hill resident Howard Grossinger, a former York Region high school teacher, who is a director for Camp Robin Hood.

"We're finding in our business that more specialized camps are cropping up and we've added sport specialty camps, too. If the public trusts us in one program, why not in another? We don't see it as empire building, but as good opportunities to give families choices."

In recent years, programs offering a dabble in several

sports have adapted to a changing society and offer a chance to introduce a child to sport or develop those serious about their game with an intensified week of instruction.

Robin Hood Camps, now in its 60th year of operation, includes the Roger Neilson hockey camp, St. Andrew's College Day Camp, Robin Hood Sports Academy Day Camp and Camp Madawaska, a highly regarded volleyball camp near Bancroft. In all, the family-owned business includes six camps and a leadership centre.

Green Acres operates specialty camps in several sports, ranging from basketball and baseball to horseback riding and in-line skating.

One important aspect of the camp experience that never goes away is the time spent away from their sports by campers.

"Parents who get their kids involved in camp are not so concerned with sport instruction as with what their kids are doing when not at a sport," Grossinger said. "That's especially so in this day of bullying at the schools."

At St. Andrew's, sports is only part of the package because not all kids are into sports all the time. The trick is to balance sport and non-sport elements to provide



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Camp administrator Howie Grossinger at Robin Hood Camps on Reesor Road in northern Markham, just south of Stouffville. Sport-specific camps are becoming more popular, he said.

campers with the ultimate experience.

"We know all kids don't enjoy doing sports all day, so we offer half-day sports and the other half whatever they are interested in whether it's drama or arts."

Founded 40 years ago in Montreal and moved to the Markham/Stouffville area in 1986, the Green Acres program is based on 70 acres of former farmland, a setting that provides program flexibility. Experience, according

to co-founder Eddy Bogomolny, is a great teacher.

"What kids like one day, they might not the next, so we can put them into something else the next day if needed," said Bogomolny, who founded Green Acres along with Leon Hochgalube. "Parents see it as a chance to be introduced to other things"

"Kids are now focusing in more on specialty camps. In golf, for example, Tiger Woods has opened up the

whole vista of golf. But as much as kids may love a sport, doing drills all day can become too much."

Greenspoon is unfazed by sport camps operated by municipalities and rivals.

"Competition is a good thing," he said.

"We cater to a certain market. There's lot of kids to go around."

Contact Camp Green Acres at 905-887-1400 or Camp Robin Hood at 416-736-4443.

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