

Athletes, coaches welcome new Ontario scholarships

First-year students must have 80% to earn \$3,500

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Athletic programs at Ontario universities aren't asking for a lot.

All they want is a reasonably level playing field when they are competing for a Canadian Interuniversity Sport title.

In recent years, the Ontario University Athletics conference has been playing

at a disadvantage when facing its counterparts from the Atlantic provinces and Western Canada, it says.

Schools from the East and West can entice prospective student-athletes by offering up to the cost of tuition for them to attend their school and play sports.

Such hasn't been the case for OUA schools.

But starting in the 2007-08 season, OUA member schools could see this disparity narrowed when they will offer athletic financial awards to prospective student-athletes.

Under the proposed program, a school can offer a first-year student-athlete up to \$3,500.

However, there are some limitations.

The student-athlete must be a CIS eligible student-athlete and possess a minimum Grade 12 academic average of 80 per cent or equivalent. The eligible student-athlete can be a direct entry from high school or a transfer student, providing he or she hasn't completed one full year of study.

For OUA coaches, the move is welcome.

"The financial awards are a great item for the OUA conference," Bill Pangos, York University head women's basketball coach said. "I'm looking forward to this. I think it will help us."

While the money will be welcomed, the Holland Landing resident was quick to note York has not announced where the money will come from.

"It's definitely not coming from government sources," Mr. Pangos said. "But it will come from university sources."

"The bottom line is that

this will be helpful. I have players who have an 80 per cent grade average. Now I can recruit youngsters who are in Grade 10 or 11 and tell them if they can get an A average after Grade 12 they can get up to \$3,500," Mr. Pangos said.

While the women's basketball program at York stands to benefit, other sports might not to the same degree.

York men's hockey coach Graham Wise thinks the incentive won't alter his program dramatically.

Based on his 19 years on the job in recruiting players, the Stouffville resident noted a good number of players who join his program come after labouring a couple of seasons in tier two junior A.

And only a small percentage would be eligible under the rigid academic guidelines placed on successful candidates.

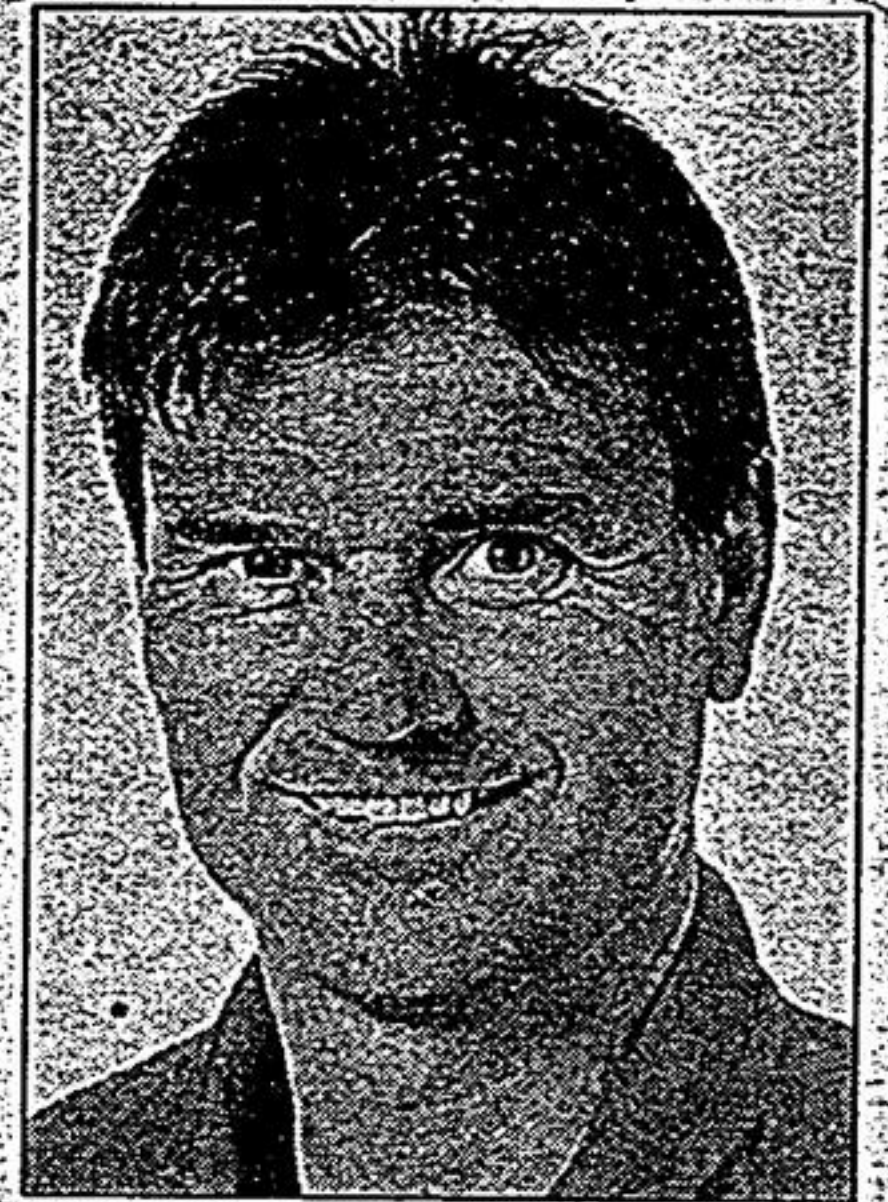
"Of the 250 kids I recruit, maybe two or three might have over an 80-per-cent average," he said. "But this program is beneficial to other sports, particularly to those where the students go directly into a university program from high school."

Even coaches outside the OUA see the program as a positive step. Especially where it can be utilized with a specific sport association's financial incentive package.

Stouffville's Henry Brunton, Royal Canadian Golf Association national men's coach, says a carded national performer who qualified for the OUA package could receive an extra \$1,800 a month under the RCGA's High Performance Program.

If a student-athlete can combine both packages, Mr. Brunton thinks it might provide the incentive needed to attend a university in Ontario rather than go to a U.S. school.

"It's very exciting for us," he said. "This will be helpful for the OUA. Right now



GRAHAM WISE: York University hockey coach says scholarships will affect other sports more.

there's a lot of competition in Canada to recruit players to be the best they can academically and as an athlete and the culture of high performance golf is changing. We're hoping we will have at least 25 per cent of our national teams players studying in Canada."

For some student-athletes currently in high school, the OUA's proposal is tempting.

"I kind of want to stay home," said Sarah Wells, a Grade 11 Unionville High School student who was the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations senior 400-metre low hurdles champion. "But as compared with a full scholarship, to get \$3,500 isn't a lot of money."

Marlee Johnson's decision to attend the University of Maryland Eastern Shore on an athletic scholarship was easy.

"When I was in high school (Newmarket High School) no schools in Canada offered fastball," the Stouffville pitcher said.

"Before, the only chance to get a scholarship was to go to the U.S. But now it seems like they (OUA schools) are showing that they care."

"I think it's a great idea. I think it will make things more competitive since the schools will be putting some money into athletics."

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