

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

SPORTS



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SOCCER TOWN

Stouffville Mustang Thomas Vlahakis (right) battles Joshua Ghobrial of Kleinburg Nobleton in under-14 action at Ballant-rae Park Wednesday. The teams tied 1-1. See more photographs from the match at yorkregion.com

At left, Sophia Pollastrone (left) and Kaitlyn Elcone fight for the ball in a Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club and Doncaster Rovers SC camp for boys and girls Wednesday. Doncaster Rovers head coach Ben Nawson looks on with other campers at the Stouffville Arena fields.

Seven-aside rugby tackles official status

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
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The seven-aside version of rugby as played by area high schools during the fall months was primarily carried out as a means of tuning up for the traditional 15-aside York Region Athletic Association spring season.

But when the YRAA kicks off its 2013-14 fall schedule, there will be more at stake — a title for boys and girls.

For a two-year period, the activity will be deemed as a probationary sport.

Steve Shantz, YRAA athletic co-ordinator, revealed a movement to have fall rugby incorporated isn't new, as a vote on the subject had been turned down the last four years.

But with seven-aside rugby coming in this fall, Shantz is optimistic it will be well received — especially from schools that do not field football teams, which requires a bigger commitment in terms of the numbers of coaches and the cost for equipment.

"The sport goes after a different group of people," Shantz said. "I think more schools will

put teams in."

As well, Shantz cited with seven-aside rugby being a part of the next Summer Olympics and with Canada having a high degree of success in this discipline as compared with traditional 15-aside rugby, it should become more popular.

"Canada tends to do better in sevens than 15s. The sport will definitely add more credibility," he said.

Some schools are already excited by the prospect of fielding sevens teams.

Among the beneficiaries will be schools that launched rugby programs this past year such as Bur Oak Secondary School in Markham, which fielded a junior boys' team.

"I think it'll be great and we will try to get it going," Andrew Ebisuzaki, Bur Oak coach, said.

Citing they've laid out a foundation with the start of a junior boys' team this past spring, Ebisuzaki was optimistic it will create other opportunities for students to try the sport.

"Hopefully we can get some senior kids to try playing sevens and if we can generate enough interest we might be able to field a senior boys' 15s team in the spring," he said.

Also favouring the decision were established rugby programs that ran sevens teams such as Stouffville District Secondary School.

"We're very excited and pleased," said Jamie Hewitt, Stouffville's head senior boys' coach. "There's lots of teams that play sevens tournaments in the fall."

Acknowledging the sevens game is a far more wide open game than 15s, Hewitt says the fall version provides a good opportunity for players to develop specific skills such as ball handling.

As well, the sport provides first-year Grade 9 students with an opportunity to try it for the first time. If they enjoy it, they might come back to play 15s in the spring.

For some schools such as Alexander Mackenzie High School in Richmond Hill, the formation of a fall seven's league might be the saviour to keep rugby programs afloat.

Colin Butler, Alexander Mackenzie High School physical education head, cited it marked the first time in the last 16 years their school did not field a boys' rugby team.

The YRAA isn't the only provincial association to have sevens fall rugby, as Shantz noted.

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