

YRDSB and St. Andrew's College offer multiple outlooks for sport this year

Of all the uncertainties that have continuously plagued what was previously a robust school system before March, a few things are becoming certain.

When Stephen Lecce announced the reopening of schools in Ontario two weeks ago with specific plans at the elementary and the high school level, there were also very explicit details pertaining to where all the money is going to be invested.

A total of \$308.7 million is going to go towards PPE, more staffing such as 1,200 custodians, cleaning supplies, health and safety, cleaning and PPE for transportation services through the school, testing capacity, 500 nurses, mental health and special needs students.

A school year truncated prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has essentially everything it needs to fully function for the year, given the number of the cases remains low and the potential of an outbreak continues to be mitigated.

What it does not have, temporarily, is extracurricular activities. By and large, sports will have to wait.

“We've been told specifically for right now, there are no extracurriculars right now. That doesn't mean it will be for the year. That's not what is being said. What is being said, is a wait and see thing and that makes sense to me, even as a coach,” said Bradley Matwijec, Head Coach of King City Secondary School's hockey and soccer team, as well as the physical education and weight training teacher.

While Matwijec continues to receive information every day from the York Region District School Board (YRDSB), Sick Kids and the Ministry have held conversations regarding a number of sports that may be deemed unsafe to return to play.

Football and wrestling have been discussed and, realistically, it's not the time for that now.

What has been mentioned to return are soccer and hockey. Matwijec said that students may be required to wear a plastic face shield while playing hockey for this season if it does, indeed return.

Soccer is outdoors and although Matwijec says he is nervous and will coach it, there are still potential health implications and the fact that the boys' season would traditionally begin in September.

Matwijec says he guesses that the school board will look into a decision after one month in school.

“It's all going to be what the numbers dictate,” Matwijec said.

“They're talking about a vaccine in December. So, what if the vaccine doesn't come until January? Doesn't matter. That's going to solve a lot of problems when it comes to the sports.”

As for St. Andrew's College, the private school division is looking at roughly the same concepts. According to their return-to-school document, the CISAA has released a return to sport plan, a return to sport staircase and a proposed multi-phased approach that looks at bringing sports back as soon as possible in stages. The league confirmed their process is not the same as the provincial government's.

In the multi-phased approach, the CISAA looks to bring back low risk sports such as swimming and cross-country, as well as individual sports in class and intramural sports within schools. The organization looks to ease the return of moderate-risk sports such as basketball and soccer.

Modified practices would begin for higher-risk such as football, wrestling, lacrosse and dance when deemed safe to do so.

Individually as a school, St. Andrew's wants to incorporate sports. The school said their campus allows enough space to hold ?fitness activities, such as spin, yoga, track and field, mountain biking and more.?

SAC hopes to incorporate intra-school sports opportunities while allowing an open gym for students, under strict supervision by a SAC faculty member. Students can sign up for Fall sports now. The document also includes advisories for middle school and high school students and provides a detailed look at using changerooms.

As everyone can guess, what this year's sports situations in schools can look like, right now, these students need exercise. The YRDSB is considering gym classes in limited capacity and pushing for classes to be outdoors.

Sports, such as tennis, ultimate frisbee, soccer and other outdoor activities are being considered.

What every adolescent also needs is a leader for their mental, physical and social fitness.

Matwijec is urging that the care of the students is of the utmost importance. Students' education through sport is lost for now, and the things we need remember and what forges who we are are the experiences with our friends, the rapport from our coaches, the memories in the game and the respect of your opponent.

Whenever the school boards decide to discuss a plan to implement the game and should the novel coronavirus remain as far away from schools as possible, these factors must be considered.

Health is a priority, there's no question.

If it can be done, for a lot of these students, sports is more than a game and it's a part of their development, just like the books.

Sports were permitted within the return to school announcement, as long as they adhere to all physical distancing protocols, all equipment is cleaned and areas are sanitized.

By Robert Belardi