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A hockey league for girls is panel's goal

Athletic directorsteam up to clear wayfor female players

By Sandra Tan
News Staff Reporter

Local high school girls are getting closer to wearing pads and skates on school-sponsored ice.

The athletic directors from nine school districts across the region, including the Catholic school system, agreed this week to form a standing committee to work on making girls ice hockey a reality in Western New York.

"It's been a long, long time coming, but today was a historic meeting," said Williamsville Athletic Director Jim Rusin after meeting with fellow directors from Erie and Niagara counties. "We now have the best boys league in the state, and eventually we'll have the best girls league in the state."

The only area high school that currently sponsors a girls team is Nichols, a private school.

This week, however, administrators for athletic programs in Williamsville, Amherst, Clarence, Kenmore- Town of Tonawanda, Sweet Home, Hamburg, Niagara Wheatfield, West Seneca and the Monsignor Martin Association were present at the meeting and spent 90 minutes hashing out the obstacles to starting up a regional league.

Rusin said that while the group is committed to getting a local girls league started, it would be extraordinarily difficult to clear all the hurdles necessary to field girls teams as early as next school year.

"I don't know when," Rusin said. "I just know it's going to be happening."

Not everyone agrees that next season is too soon to start a girls league, given that boys have had a league for 20 years.

"I don't think it needs to go at as slow a pace as they're presuming," said Helen Drew- Meosky, a volunteer parent coordinator for the cross-district effort to establish the girls league. "We have considered these issues. We have answers for them. . . . If there are issues that can't be resolved before next year, so be it, but I have yet to hear one



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issue that couldn't be."

As a sports attorney, Drew- Meosky is sensitive to the requirements of Title IX, a law that requires gender equity in every educational program that receives federal funding.

She's also a former ice hockey player with five daughters and two sons, all of whom play the sport. There are hundreds of other girls in this region like hers, she said, and local recreation leagues are having difficulty finding room to accommodate them all.

Yet there are few school-sponsored varsity opportunities for them.

While girls with strong hockey ability are allowed to play on school-sponsored boys varsity teams, she said, they're still overlooked for scholarships, miss out on a lot of team camaraderie, and have higher chances of being hurt because boys hockey allows checking while girls hockey doesn't.

Rusin responded that the newly formed committee, of which he is chairman, is wrestling with the same issues for girls ice hockey that athletic directors struggled with long ago for boys hockey.

There are issues regarding league formation, conflict with travel team schedules, questions about player abilities and sustained interest, availability of ice time and costs to the district, he said.

"One thing that's important to me, being committed to this program, is this has to be done the right way the first time around in order for it to succeed," Rusin said.

Drew-Meosky acknowledged that local school districts have come a long way. But she also said she doesn't want the campaign to lose steam.

"You're going to lose a generation of girls who won't have a chance to play, and that's just sad," she said. "If there are issues that we can overcome, why not do it now?"

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