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# It's no go In bid for Girls team In hockey *Williamsville drops Plans to enter sport*

By Sandra Tan  
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Unfortunately for pony-tailed ice hockey players in the Williamsville school district, the puck stops here.

The district has dropped plans to field a girls varsity hockey team next school year.

"At this point, without competition within 75 miles of here, I can't recommend putting an all-girls varsity hockey team in place," Superintendent Howard Smith told the Board of Education on Tuesday.

The announcement is a blow to parents and students who have spent the past two years lobbying to make Williamsville the first public school district in Western New York to field a school-sponsored team.

"I'm disappointed, but I understand their position," said Pam Berus, the mother of a hockey player who will enter her senior year at North High School this fall. "The district has always been upfront with us."

Coincidentally, on the same night Smith announced the district was dropping its proposal for a girls hockey team, another group of parents and students with Amherst Central Schools was asking its School Board to consider starting a

girls varsity ice hockey program this fall.

They said they decided to come forward with the request after learning that the Williamsville district might form a team.

Back in November, Williamsville Central Schools had listed a preliminary \$25,000 budget request to field a single, district wide varsity team. Girls from all three district high schools would have been eligible to try out.

But Smith and Athletic Director Jim Rusin cautioned at the time that the district faced serious challenges to making the team a reality. The proposal hinged on having several other school districts in the region agreeing to start up their own varsity programs.

To date, there are no public schools in Western or Central New York that sponsor an all-girls varsity team, though Rusin thought there might be a stirring of interest in the Monroe County region.

Most districts don't even have club, intramural or junior varsity hockey offerings for girls even though, according to New York State Amateur Hockey officials, roughly 900 girls ages 18 and under play on all-girls teams in Western New York.

The only high school in the region that currently sponsors a girls ice hockey team is Nichols, a private school.

Smith said Tuesday that he called four district superintendents in Monroe County – Fairport, Brockport, Rush-Henrietta and Pittsford – two weeks ago to find out if they had any intention of sponsoring girls ice hockey teams in 2008-09.

None were, he said, which was too bad because the district would love to put a team forward.

But if Williamsville started a team next year by itself, district officials said the team's closest competitors would be an unrealistic three-hour bus ride away.

Some of the problems that face girls hockey are the same problems that used to face boys hockey programs years ago. The sport is expensive in terms of equipment and the renting of ice time. Public schools don't have their own rinks, making practice and play time logistically difficult.

Even so, the Williamsville district pioneered boys varsity ice hockey in Western New York years ago, and officials said they look forward to doing the same with girls ice hockey one day.

"Maybe it's one more year," Smith said. "I don't know."

He added that if it turns out that several other school districts in the region agree to sponsor girls varsity teams in the coming weeks, he will reintroduce the girls hockey proposal. Berus said she is confident the district won't give up on the idea.

"To come this close, it is very disappointing," Berus said.

But, she added, "I know the door is not closed. I know next year they will look at it again."

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