

Reintroducing school sports will have to wait

By Robert Belardi

Schools will have to deal with organized team sports this fall. The York school board and St. Andrew's College have shed some light on what the fall season will look like. When Education Minister 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 be used to purchase 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. 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, the head coach of King City Secondary School's hockey and soccer team, as well as the physical education and weight training teacher. It does make sense. Why would the school board bring sports back when students aren't even in the classroom yet? While Matwijec continues to receive information every single 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 that makes sense, too. Who wants to grab another individual right now and forcefully bring them to the ground while sweat droplets are coursing mid-air right to vital entry points into the body such as the eyes, nose and the mouth? Probably nobody. Realistically, it's not the time for that now. What has been mentioned to return is indeed 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 are potential health implications and the fact that the boys' season, would traditionally begin in September. Matwijec 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 the private school division, the CISAA has their return to sport plans, return to sport staircase and a proposed multi-phased approach that looks at bringing sports back as soon as possible by stage. The league confirmed, their staged 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 the 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. These three documents were highlighted within St. Andrew's College's return to school guidelines. On The Country Day School's website, there's no mention of a return to sport just yet. Patrons could anticipate it might look very similar to St. Andrew's College's return to athletics guidelines, with sports such as yoga, spin, track and field and mountain biking all being considered. St. Andrew's will also allow for open gym sessions supervised by a SAC faculty member and intra-school leagues are being looked at as well. 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. "Right now, what we need is leadership. We need leadership right from the Ford government, from the school board, from our unions and the teacher level. The teacher level is huge. That's what the kids are looking for they need leadership right." 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 repour 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. No debate. 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.