

School Sport with a Difference

Prince Albert and Area Athletic Association

“Instead of having one team for the boys and one team for the girls, we have as many teams as kids that want to play.”

Bill Simpson is one of education’s champions for promoting sports participation in schools. Their intramural program has a different agenda from other leagues – participation is emphasized. Roughly 40 schools participate in the Prince Albert and Area Athletic Association a team is provided for everyone who wants to play. “What the Prince Albert and Area Athletic Association (P4A) does is create a sports season with the various sports and does a lot of the planning, scheduling and organization allowing the school coaches to focus on coaching.”

P4A has proven so popular that it has grown steadily in numbers of participants, to the extent that they quickly moved to include different levels of teams. A key theme of Canadian Sport for Life is to see increased participation in sport and physical activity at all ages. To this end, our schools are a good place to begin. Some children have the benefit of joining community clubs or programs that offer sports and dance training, but many do not. However, everyone goes to school, so our school system has a unique opportunity to offer physical activity programming that reaches the largest possible segment of youth.

“Because the organization is there, schools will sometimes enter more than one team,” explains Simpson. “Where those kids play then becomes the challenge.” Schools are given the option to enter teams in the A level or the B level according to their own discretion. The result is that every participant is able to compete at a level that suits them, and everyone can achieve some variety of success. “The P4A works really hard to keep as many people participating as possible,” says Simpson.

What do the participation numbers look like? With the P4A league representing grades 6-10 across approximately 40 schools in 2008, there were about 1000 volleyball players, over 500 students playing badminton, about 1200 athletes at the annual track and field meet, and around 1000 basketball players. That’s a lot of young people being active in a city of only 40,000 people, even when you include the surrounding rural areas.

To accommodate the desire of those who like to compete for titles, the P4A also hosts extravaganzas at the end of each season where they recognize tournament champions. “In the beginning, there was a lot of talk about what is the role of the league?” says Simpson. “Is it about having a champion? Or is it about having participation? In our mind it’s about both.”

With the numbers involved, the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division invests to maintain their sports programs, paying their fair share for awards, medals, referees, banners, and coaching clinics. Their choice to do so reflects their commitment to getting everyone active. It’s part of the P4A aim to meet the needs and purposes of different participants, and they want to

support excellence as much as general participation. But the P4A stops short of running year-round training and specialization in any one sport.

“We believe in multisport approach,” says Simpson. “We don’t like to play anything year round, so there are defined seasons for each sport with a start and finish. We would frown on someone playing basketball or volleyball all year round.”

“You can’t do it if you don’t have the money or if you don’t have the organization,” says Simpson. “Our school division has been highly supportive – money for travel costs and money for the P4A association.” If you would like to contact Bill Simpson to learn more, you can email him at bsimpson@srsd119.ca.

How it came together...

As principal of Carlton High School in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan during the early 2000’s, Bill Simpson, Superintendent John Kuzbik and other interested teachers were involved in the implementation of an interschool sports program called P4A (Prince Albert and Area Athletic Association). P4A was supported financially by the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division and the Prince Albert Roman Catholic School Division and a Commissioner, former teacher Ron Stewart, was hired. Organizing inter-school leagues for grades 6-10 in track and field, cross country, volleyball, basketball, curling, and badminton.