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Front Page

January 16, 2008

Districts discuss future of high school girls hockey

by PATRICK J. NAGY Reporter

Could girls' ice hockey be a reality in the Amherst Central School District?

Six female club hockey players and four parents asked the Amherst Central School District at last Tuesday's board meeting to authorize a girls' ice hockey team for the 2008-09 school year.

Parent Isabell Posner listed several reasons why it's the right time to organize the effort.

Posner said Amherst Girls Hockey's house program has increased its numbers over the last four years from 70 to 150 players, and that doesn't include the girls who play on the boys teams. There are twice as many boys' winter sports offered in the district than the girls. It's also the 35th anniversary of Title IX.

A proposed girls' hockey team in Williamsville for the 2008-09 school year was the biggest reason for a push in Amherst, but Williamsville recently dropped its funding for the plan because schools as far away as Munroe County were not interested.

"(Williamsville Superintendent) Howard Smith sent letters out to see if other schools were getting girls' hockey, and they are not at this point," said Superintendent Laura Chabe. "He's as frustrated as I am because there is a desire to play girls' hockey."

Amherst Athletics Director Nancy Riccio said the plan is on hold.

Several girls who play ice hockey on boys' teams voiced their support of an all-girls team at Amherst.

Abby Posner, who plays goalie for the Amherst boys JV hockey team, said girls' hockey is totally different than boys' hockey.

"There's checking, and the guys seem to not be as supportive as the girls," she said. "When I play on a boys' team, I have to change in my own locker room, and I miss out on the camaraderie with the other players."

"Boys' hockey is more aggressive than girls' hockey," added player Sara O'Brien. "I think girls' hockey gives teams an opportunity to play for a growing sport."

Pat Mallon, whose daughter, Missy, plays on a boys' Pee Wee team, said when girl hockey players get to age 16 or 17, there are very few options for girls to play unless it's with the boys.

"It would be nice for her to have a girls' team at Amherst to play on," he said.

Isabell Posner said if Amherst got a team in place, it's possible it could merge with Sweet Home for the first year.

Chabe said the district would continue to investigate the issue.

Williamsville pulls funding

While the Amherst School Board was hearing from supporters, the Williamsville Central School Board was across town on the same night discussing the decision to remove funding for its proposed team.

Smith said he took the initiative to call the four schools in Monroe County and learned they weren't expecting to start girls' hockey teams.

"Initially we had \$25,000 with the hopes of starting girls' hockey, but that was contingent on local competition," he said. "There isn't any within 75 miles, I can't really recommend the funding in the budget."

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The district had listed the funding in its major impact items for the 2008-09 budget, but as it moves closer to releasing a preliminary budget in February, the item was removed from that list.

Smith said if interest in surrounding counties increases, the district could reconsider. He added that he felt it would be irresponsible to budget for a team that didn't have anyone to play.

(Editor's note: Associate Editor Jessica L. Finch contributed to this article.)

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