

Livonia Prep Athletics In A Tailspin?

By TOM DONOGHUE
Sports Editor

The Livonia high school athletic programs are in a sad tailspin.

Two years ago the four Livonia High Schools—Bentley, Franklin, Stevenson and Stevenson—each school lost assistant coaches in football, wrestling, swimming, track and basketball in addition to one varsity sport which was lost in three of the schools and tennis at Stevenson High.

This junior varsity competition was almost cut to nil.

But at the same time girls' varsity competition was brought into the scene along with hockey, a new varsity sport for boys.

At the same time, the junior high schools suffered the loss of baseball programs but added eighth grade basketball along with girls' volleyball.

Out went 34 coaches. The impact was not felt hard last year.

The assistants for the most part remained without pay but this year it has turned out to be a tune of a different and disheartening song.

The Livonia Coaches Association, 116 members strong, has been formed and wants answers to a lot of questions.

George Lovich, football coach at Franklin High, heads the executive committee of the coaches association.

Why was this committee formed?

"We, meaning the coaches and athletic programs in Livonia, lost so much without any consultation at the start of the 1971-72 school year, that something has to be done."

"Our goal is to re-instate the sports program, playing the role of a bargaining unit."

The organization has met about eight times and sets itself working with the Livonia Education Association.

"We are out to get our coaches back," added Lovich. "Our No. 1 aim is to get our system back in a functioning matter with the No. 2 goal a revamping of the salary schedule."

"We haven't received a raise in three years. Our coaching salary comes out to something like 79 cents an hour. We are hoping to aid the LEA in what they should be bargaining for us."

"We are in no way a reactionary group—just a group of coaches who want the system restored to a functioning way."

Lovich added that by dropping the assistant baseball coach, there are no junior varsity programs now in Livonia.

"The loss of a track assistant has to be a real blow."

"There is no way one man can handle something like 60 to 70 kids in 15 different events. He can manage but not even come close to teaching."

"The wrestling programs have really dropped. Here at Franklin we barely had enough to fill one team. These adverse effects are really going to hit us next year."

"I can't really see how anyone is going to expect the Livonia schools to remain on the same level of competition with systems that have excellent junior varsity programs. There is no way we can compete against them."

Churchill track coach Fred Price has a total participation of 72.

"The school system is asking the impossible" from coaches," explained Price. "How can I really expect myself to coach 72 kids in 14 events, nine of a completely different nature."

"I don't see how anyone who knows anything about sports can let something like this happen."

"If nothing else, from the safety standpoint, instruction is almost impossible. I am losing kids because they feel I am not giving myself to them so why should they give it back."

"I won't coach next year under these circumstances."

The turnout for high school track in Livonia has increased tremendously since the junior high baseball program has been dropped.

Track is the lone sport for the seventh, eighth and ninth graders to go out for in the spring. In their sophomore and junior years their minds have to turn back to track instead of baseball, especially since there is no junior varsity baseball at the high school level.

"Now is the time when something has to be done... added Price. "I have two teachers donating their time to aid me but they won't be back, time donating can only go so far."

"Some kids are losing interest. I heard some saying that it just isn't fun anymore—the coach is never over to help us out."

"That one extra coach means so much in track as in the other sports cut."

Ralph Springfield, athletic director for all 10 junior high schools in Livonia, has an explanation for some of the questions asked by the Livonia Coaches Association.

"When the cuts were being made, we had the choice of knocking out baseball or parts of the football program. We had to look at this exposure at all levels and the decision was made by a combination of several people from the junior high level to the board."

"There were four points that made us decide to cut junior high baseball."

"No. 1 was that baseball is effected tremendously by the weather and we have only a short time to fit in the games."

"No. 2 was that we have only two exceptional ball diamonds for junior high use in Livonia. We just don't have any good diamonds, nobody maintains them."

"No. 3 the price of umpires has sky-rocketed."

"No. 4 was the sport could be bettered and followed up in the summer recreation program."

"So we made a two for one switch; adding eighth grade basketball and girls' volleyball. It was a bad situation but we had to do something at the time."

"Our philosophy is not to act as a feeder system for the high schools. We have to operate on the basis of what is best for us at this time and

I know there are a lot of people who will disagree with this."

"The push for girls, well, I am not giving myself to our programs and that was that."

"Junior high athletics have always been the whipping boy."

"One thing we need to badly at the junior high level is wrestling. Our high schools are getting crucified. The kids are getting the pants taken right off them. We need to have something before the high school level."

You don't have to tell Churchill baseball Coach Roger Frayer that he doesn't have a junior varsity program.

"Unless a kid is super-great, he just isn't going to get a shot at making the team until the 11th grade."

said Frayer. "Unless the junior varsity program is reinstated, we won't be able to compete at the same level with schools we go up against now."

"There is just no way that Little Leagues and summer baseball will get the kids ready for high school competition."

"Last year I had 64 kids out. I kept 23 on the varsity level and my then out coach Jim Neuman continued to work with 21 sophomores. The others had to be dropped."

"Only 35 came out this year, but Neuman wasn't going to work again for no pay, and I can't blame him. He has house payments to make just like you and me."

"He did it last year with the hope of the program being re-instituted and this is about the sole reason why I will be able to field a good team this year. I would hate to think about next year or the year after."

"With ninth grade track swaying all the prospective ballplayers I had only 18 sophomores out this year compared to 40 last season."

"The word gets around on the ins and outs of earning a varsity letter and in which sport a kid will get a chance."

"A lot of the good sophomore baseball players are out for track and I don't really blame them."

"Sometimes I can't really figure out the thinking of the Board. We don't have any home baseball games because we play all our home games at Haggerty Field."

"Thus we are given a sum of \$9 per game for another adult to be attendance for supervision purposes and that comes to about \$180 for the season, 1/3 of the assistant coach's salary and the game is when we need the least supervision."

"It has all boiled down to where the kids have to be more dedicated as there just isn't any time to goof off. Sure the sophomores feel they are being slighted and I don't blame them."

"I guess the short cutback was all wishful thinking," concluded Frayer.

Robert Crumpton, executive director of the LEA, is the middle man between the Livonia Coaches Association and the school board.

"We are in the middle of a two year contract now which expires in August and we just can't negotiate now. This athletic problem is only a share of a piece of a larger piece," explained Crumpton.

"We will consider this problem with all the others."

"The Coaches Association is only one of about 42 that are confronting me now and I am clearly not going to take sides—pro or con."

"Sure it is obvious that we are in dire need of getting these assistants back but the board hasn't recognized the problem, instead they are bringing in girls' sports."

The man and the place where it all boils down to is the Livonia Board of Education and Supervisor Ron Up-ton.

"All-right, first of all about girls' sports," said Up-ton. "At this time the Michigan State Athletic Association has an injunction against it to allow girls to go out for sports and we can't go against an injunction so we give in to the girls all the way."

"Now to the real heart of the problem."

"The City of Livonia has had no additional millage in the last seven years. The people in Livonia for some unknown reason think they are the highest taxed city around, they really believe that but everyone around us pays more."

"The Livonia teachers at the maximum salary level are below Wayne County's medium salary level. All of a sudden the people in Livonia decided they didn't want to pay anyone more."

"I am an old coach. I know what is going on and I don't like it but I have to fight for everyone including sports."

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FENCING CAPTAINS -- Wayne State University sported two sophomore fencing captains in Southfield's Steve Danosi and Jane Goodwin of Henry Ford in leading their teams to 15-0 and 8-1 records respectively. Danosi is WSU's first sophomore captain. He was '72 NCAA All-American in sabre and is the '73 National Under 20 champion. Miss Goodwin captained the first WSU's women's team in history.