

Presents

A Balanced Diet: Setting Kids on the Multi

Thirty youngsters in Antigonish have a unique opportunity this year. Rather than playing one sport all winter long, they'll have a chance to try ten different sports as part of the same program between now and June.

The multisport pilot project, open this year to five- and six-year-olds, is a partnership three years in the works between the town and county of Antigonish, Sport Nova Scotia, Health and Wellness, the St. Francis Xavier University athletics department and local community sport organizations.

With the Canadian Sport for Life push to increase physical literacy and help kids develop a healthy balance of skills, the multisport pilot was a logical next step, says Marlene Melanson.

"It aligns perfectly with the (Sport

for Life) model – introduce children to a variety at a young age so they're learning the basics as opposed to picking one (sport) and really focusing," says Melanson, recreation director for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish. "It gives them an opportunity not only to try different sports, but to develop a variety of skills."

The kids involved will have a chance to try basketball, tennis and badminton, hockey, swimming, volleyball, gymnastics, the Run Jump Throw Wheel program (athletics), baseball and softball, soccer and taekwondo.

"We really want to make sure we're developing the whole child," says Stephanie Spencer, community sport



coordinator for Antigonish. "At five, six years of age it's really hard to decide what you want to play and what you might be good at down the road. This allows children to develop the skills and confidence to try different sports."

The pilot will also expose kids to sports they might not try otherwise, Spencer says.

"One parent said it would never have crossed their mind to sign their kid up for badminton or taekwondo, but wouldn't it be great if that's what they were good at?"

As the partners gathered, they realized how hard it is for parents to fit in everything. The pilot program will run in a similar time and place every week, at the sport facilities at St. F.X., so families don't have to run all over the place to give their kids a varied experience.

"We wanted to make it as easy and accessible as possible for parents, to remove barriers (to participation)," Spencer says.

Community sport organizations are also excited about the program.

For one, it got them all around a table together for the first time, says Chris Dunlap, a project partner with Antigonish Minor Hockey. It also provides an affordable way to let kids try out a sport without a full-year commitment.

"It's another avenue we can use to introduce children to different sports in a fun environment," Dunlap says.

"Being a parent myself, I look at it and think I can take my kid to the same program with the same people for 10 months. If I'm trying to run my kid around to 10 different programs, not only does it become hectic in our busy lives, but it certainly affects the pocketbook as well."

Recreation staff will coordinate the program while sport organizations will take turns showcasing their sport for three weeks at a time, two hours a week. The full program is 35 weeks.

The university is also playing a key role. Along with hosting sessions, St. F.X. athletes will serve as role models and a professor in the human kinetics department will evaluate the program.

Dunlap says it has been refreshing



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to see so many sport partners work together on a great project.

"The response from the community has been tremendous," he says. "It's exciting to be pioneering this type of thing."

Parents and kids also seem keen on the concept, says Spencer. As of press time, she expected all 30 spots to be full when the project opened in September.

"What we're doing is outside the box, but the feedback has been fantastic," she says. "It seems like there's a real want for programming like this."

All the partners will watch closely to see how things unfold this year, but they ultimately hope to expand the program—both to more participants and a broader age range.

"I'd like to see it build and expand

into the outlying communities," Melanson says. "Once this is solid, maybe we can do something for the next age group as well. Canadian Sport for Life recommends not specializing or training specifically (for one sport) until kids reach a certain age, so maybe we can build on the seven-to-nine age group in future years."

Lots of people will be watching over the next ten months, but in some ways the project is already a winner, Melanson says.

"I'm really pleased the way it has worked out. It's a true community project." **SQ**

To find out more, look for Antigonish Multisport Pilot on Facebook or visit highlandconnect.ca/sport

Look Out World, Here We Come

Nova Scotian athletes played a big role in helping Canada place second overall in the medal standings at the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games held in Toronto in July and August.

Halifax gymnast Ellie Black led all Canadians with five medals, winning gold in women's all-around, beam and floor. She claimed bronze in vault and helped Canada earn silver in team competition.

Mark De Jonge paddled to gold in the men's 200-metre kayak and teamed with Pierre-Luc Poivin for bronze in the K2 200m. Dartmouth's Ben Russell teamed with Gabriel Beauchesne-Sevigny for gold in the C-2 1000m.

Michelle Russell took silver in the women's K1 200 and 500 metres while joining fellow Nova Scotian Hannah Vaughan for gold in the K4 500m with Emilie Fournel and KC Fraser. Jason McCoombs also struck silver on the water in the C1 200m.

Durham's Jason Sanford won gold with the men's softball team, while Brittany Fraser of New Glasgow helped the Canadian dressage team take silver.

Nova Scotian coaches helped lead podium performances as well. David Kikuchi coached Ellie Black's stellar showing, while Mark Smith guided the women's softball squad to gold and former Acadia coach Stephen

Baur is on the staff of the gold-winning women's basketball team.

In Parapan Am competition, swimmer Devin Gotell claimed gold in men's 400-metre freestyle and silver in the 100m backstroke and 200m individual medley in his classification. Bedford's Danial Murphy swam to bronze in his class in the 50m fly.

Pam LeJean claimed gold in women's shot put and bronze in javelin in her classification. Ian Kent won bronze in table tennis singles, while he and Curtis Caron were part of the silver medal-winning table tennis team.

Jamey Jewells helped Canada to silver in

wheelchair basketball and Jill MacSween contributed to a bronze-medal finish in goalball. **SQ**



Ellie Black competes at the 2015 Pan Am Games (credit: Canadian Olympic Committee)



Ben Russell, left, and Gabriel Beauchesne-Sevigny paddled to gold at the 2015 Pan Am Games (credit: Canadian Olympic Committee)