

# Four-down football tackled for loss

## HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS: Teams to switch to three-down game in fall

Posted By **BERNIE PUCHALSKI**, STANDARD STAFF

Four-down high school football is on its way to being a thing of the past in Niagara.

At a meeting of the Niagara Region High School Athletic Association's newly formed football sport advisory committee Friday, a decision was made to recommend all levels of high school football in Niagara play the three-down variety. For the past several years, the Premier League has played three-down football and the Varsity 1 and Varsity 2 leagues have played four downs.

"It was 100% unanimous. There was no arguing about anything," said Rina Rode, co-ordinator of secondary school athletics. "The discussion was that for too many years, there have been too many issues and too many agendas and it was time we became consistent within the province.

"Everyone else switched to three-down football about 10-12 years ago when OFSAA (the Ontario Federation of Schools Athletic Association) first introduced it," said Rina Rode, the coordinator of secondary school athletics.

Longtime local football coach Pete Mitchell, who coached Grimsby last season, agreed with the move to three-down football.

"As far as Canadian kids go, that's what we play and I think that's what we should be playing," he said.

Peter Partridge, head coach of the Varsity 1 champion Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs, also applauded the move.

"I'm pleased that they are finally aligning the leagues. If the rest of Ontario is playing three down, then we should be as well. It will certainly be a steep learning curve after playing four-down for so many years, however, we look forward to the challenge."

Other changes recommended are: to put a motion a motion at the Southern Ontario Secondary Schools Association to create an A/ AA SOSSA football championship with the hope in the future that OFSAA will create A/AA bowls; to have athletic therapists at every game, paid for by the host school; and to create a junior development league for a couple of years for schools who haven't run junior programs, with the teams eventually joining the existing junior football league.

The recommendations of the committee, which included two athletic designates, will be brought forward for approval at the NRHSAA meeting in April.

"Honestly, I can't see it not passing," Rode said. "The athletic designates really want to make all these football issues that have existed for so many years to go away.

"And these guys were amazing today."

Making up the committee were Eastdale's Brad Desson, Stamford's Brad Martin, St. Mike's Brian

Carter, Lakeshore Catholic's Terry Lehne, Sir Winston Churchill's Jim Thibodeau, Governor Simcoe's Jamie Brophy, Beamsville's John Pellow, St. Francis' Gord Barber and South Lincoln's Chris Freure.

As a result of a decision made by the NRHSAA in November, the teams will be divided into two leagues: A/AA and AAA/AAAA. Schools with populations more than 900 will play in the higher league and schools with a lower population will play in the lower league.

"It will be awesome to renew an old rivalry with DM (Denis Morris) and we look forward to playing some of the other teams as well." Partridge said. "The prospect of competing for a bowl game is something that I'm sure the kids would really look forward to."

Teams can opt to play at a higher level, but not at a lower level.

The ruling will force a school like Grimsby to play Lakeshore Catholic, no doubt producing some ugly blowouts.

"It could very well be, but ultimately, it's happening in every sport," Rode said. "Did you know there was a girls hockey game that a team lost 26-0?"

"Our hope is that Grimsby starts to develop the football team again that it used to have."

Mitchell, who doesn't plan to be head coach at Grimsby this year, isn't that thrilled with leagues based on population.

"It's never a set situation," he said. "You're always in flux and it's difficult to deal with the fluidity of who you will be playing next year."

"And does the competition appear to be equal? That's the issue."

"Based on population doesn't take into account the success you've had in the past or the program that is in operation."