

Making the grade as a student-athlete

By Mark Lidbetter

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Photo: rotoprofessor.com

Pointe Claire's Anthony Duclair of the NHL's Arizona Coyotes attended John Rennie High School when he was playing with the midget Lac St. Louis Lions.

The term student-athlete is one that has become synonymous with Sport-études programs offered throughout Quebec. There are more than 450 programs active in the province that are geared to youth who have athletic and academic abilities and are recognized by their sporting federation. Local boards, such as the Lester B. Pearson and the English Montreal School Board offer Sport-Études through schools like Lester B. Pearson High School in St. Leonard and Pointe Claire's John Rennie High School, respectively.

The program covers a wide range of sports in team and individual disciplines as the academic side is the constant, while the sport can differ. The participants need to be categorized as an 'Espoir', 'Relève', 'Élite' or 'Excellence' level athlete.

Taking part in Sport-Études is no easy task but there are methods in place to help the student-athlete succeed on both the academic and athletic side of the equation. Pointe Claire's Anthony Duclair of the National Hockey League's Arizona Coyotes attended John Rennie when he was playing with the midget AAA Lac St. Louis Lions.

"It was very important," said the 21-year-old. "It requires a level of maturity at a young age and that is exactly what you need for a high-performance athlete who wants to be serious in life. It (Sport-Études) helps you organize and balance the work between the sport and school in a short time."

Through a personalized daily schedule, daily study hall and tutorials, the students are provided the necessary time to train for and compete in their sport — provided the athlete performs to the academic standards set out for them. That means meeting the requirements for a Secondary School Diploma in 75 per cent of the designated time, leaving the remaining 25 per cent of the time

dedicated to their athletic pursuits. The schedule must allow for the student athlete to cover all the required subjects and they must go through the same evaluation process as all other students, like the provincial and school board examinations.

The onus is on the student-athletes to maintain an average to above-average success rate in each subject and they are given pedagogical support whenever necessary through study hall and tutorials to help accomplish that. Add to the mix that teachers are flexible with deadlines to allow for make-up tests or assignments to be completed. And thanks to technology, they will work with the students when travel to competitions has them away from the school.

On the sports side, the athletes benefit from weight training, physiotherapy consultations, nutrition and sports medicine sessions, as well input and motivation from guest speakers. Helping to keep the student-athlete on course is the program coordinator who supervises academic progress, contacts parents if there is a need to and deals with the different sports federations.

“For me it was homework, training and playing — plus the extra work that would get hard at times,” said Duclair. “But the support we were given in our schooling and sport helped me to succeed.”

A good student and a good athlete share similar traits: discipline, time management, a desire to improve and to work at an individual and team level — skills that will serve them in their educational or career goals.

“You have the best of both worlds so you might as well press yourself to the limit whether it’s in sports or school,” he added. “It’s tough to make it to the highest level in any sport and if it doesn’t happen you have schooling to balance that out.”

To find out more about Sport-études programs visit the Lester B. Pearson School Board’s website at www.lbpsb.qc.ca or the English Montreal School Board site at www.emsb.qc.ca