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Raising Funds for Sports

By JOHN DOSER

When some public school administrations discover through the budget vote that taxpayers don't want to pay for interscholastic sports, the inevitable result is door-to-door solicitation by veteran or newly-created booster groups.

Rochester area Catholic high schools have been raising funds for most of their sports budgets by alternative methods since Day One and the granddaddy of them all is Aquinas Institute which has been in business since the 1920s.

Administrators at McQuaid, Bishop Kearney, Cardinal Mooney, DeSales in Geneva etc., all know what it's like to try to keep athletics alive and well at their respective schools.

One of the biggest differences between private and public school fund raising, says Aquinas Principal Father Albert Gaelens, CSB, is pre-game sales, particularly at both Aquinas and McQuaid.

Pre-game ticket sales at both schools run much higher than in public schools and Father Gaelens cites hockey as a good example.

"In hockey, the way the league is set up, whatever pre-game sales are made by the individual schools, that money is kept by the school, while all game gate receipts go into the league's common treasury from which the game ice and the officials, etc. are paid."

If there's any profit at the end of the season from the league, then it's divided equally among all the participating schools.

If the money falls short, Father Gaelens explains, then each participating school receives an equal bill.

Because Aquinas and McQuaid have pushed pre-game sales, both schools have been able to pay for their own hockey programs, he says.

"Public school people don't want to be bothered by this; if there's to be hockey then it's either to be funded strictly by the sports boosters or the taxpayer as a budget item," Father Gaelens explains.

"We're more conscious of having to raise the money and so we encourage the kids to buy their tickets at school."

In hockey there is no "home team" since all games are played at either Lakeshore Rinks or RIT.

There's one common league ticket and any home school can push its own sales, and whatever you do push and sell at your own school is all yours. And even if there is a league deficit, you've taken in a lot of money to be able to help pay it.

Paying for other sports at Catholic schools, particularly at Aquinas, depends on whether the sport in question is a spectator sport or not. Spectator sports pay for themselves, Father Gaelens says.

Basketball and football, through ticket sales, can usually pay for themselves; track, baseball, soccer and swimming are non-spectator sports for the most part, and usually are subsidized by other sports or sources.

Football also provides added revenue through a game program where Aquinas students and "friends" solicit advertising.

"Football pretty much carries itself and some other sports besides," the priest notes.

He admits Aquinas does have to subsidize the total athletic budget through tuition, but the school does not charge students an athletic fee.

Catholic high schools don't have all the athletic programs which public schools are obliged to provide — Aquinas doesn't need a girls' sports program for example and Mooney doesn't have a swimming team.

Water and ice time are expensive propositions for Aquinas, which lacks both a pool and rink, but which fields both a swimming and hockey team.

"I limit the number of times these teams can go to a pool or a rink for practice," Father Gaelens says. "They may even subsidize some of their expenses themselves by skating outdoors for \$15 an hour at Webster Park instead of paying \$50 an hour inside."

"Sometimes you have to do with something less," he says.

The key to a financially successful athletic program is supporting home game sales, which goes hand-in-hand with student spirit and enthusiasm, Father notes.

Schools with weak home gates, whether private or public, will have to expect doing with something less, or possibly nothing at all.



A Smash Hit

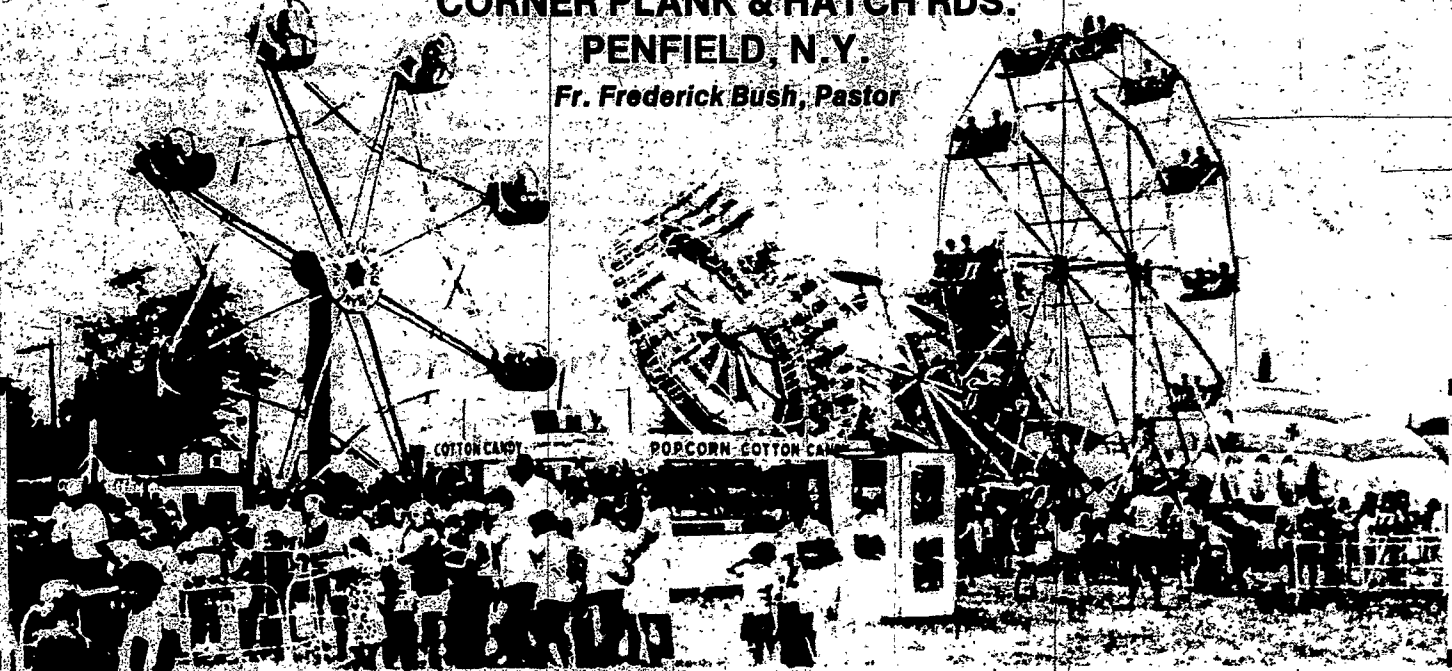
Photo by Susan McKinney

Bishop Kearney's "Jesus Christ, Superstar" was a sellout. Audiences were so enthused with the professionalism of this production that every performance played to a full house. Two command performances were planned and within 24 hours after tickets had gone on sale, they were gone. According to student observers, the halls were packed with ticket buyers and it was noted many people attended two and three showings. As one student exclaimed, "It was unbelievable."

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