

Extracurriculars Bill Passes House, Ball Lobbed Back to Senate

by Howard Richman

[This article first appeared in Issue 92 (Fall, 2005) of the PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS® newsletter.]

Currently about half of Pennsylvania's school districts allow homeschoolers into their school sports and extra-curricular programs. Now a bill promoted for years by Allentown homeschool parent Peter Hrycenko is poised for passage, mandating that districts devise policies to allow full participation. In the last issue of this newsletter, we reported that Senate Bill 361 had just passed its long-time hurdle, the Senate Education Committee. Since then it has passed both the Senate and the House. Now it is back in the Senate awaiting a concurrence vote on the slight changes in language made by the House. If it passes the Senate, next step is the Governor's desk, to be either signed or vetoed. *The first indication is that Gov. Rendell may plan to veto it.* If you want to encourage Governor Rendell to sign it, attend our Homeschool Excellence Day rally on Oct. 19 and/or write to: Gov. Edward G. Rendell, 225 Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg PA 17120, and/or call (717) 787-2500. The final language of Senate Bill 361 reads:

(f.1) The school district shall permit a child who is enrolled in a home education program to have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, including, but not limited to, clubs, musical ensembles, sports and theatrical productions.

(f.2) (1) All school districts by July 1, 2006, shall adopt a policy for the participation of resident students enrolled in a home education program in the extracurricular activities of the school district of residence.

(2) The policy shall include, but not be limited to:

(i) provisions that outline how the students of home education programs can meet the same eligibility guidelines for participation in the school district's extracurricular activities as the students attending the district's public schools.

(ii) provisions that indicate the eligibility of student participation based on age, location of residence within the district and grade level or its equivalent.

(iii) requirements that participating home education students meet the same eligibility and try-out criteria for positions on teams or in organizations as students attending the district's public schools.

(f.3) Students enrolled in a home education program who wish to participate in the extracurricular activities of the school district of residence shall comply with the extracurricular policy, with the directions and requirements of all coaches, advisors, leaders or administrators involved with the extracurricular activity.

Home education students shall also comply with all participation policies and regulations of the governing organizations of extracurricular activities, including, but not limited to, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA), the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) and the Pennsylvania High School Speech League (PHSSL).

(f.4) School districts shall publish, in a publication of general circulation in the school district or its internet website, the dates and times for any physical examination or medical test required for participation.

(f.5) For purposes of this section, the term " extracurricular activity" shall mean any activity covered by the provisions of section 511 which meets the following requirements:

(1) is sponsored or approved by the board of school directors.

(2) is not offered for credit toward graduation.

(3) is conducted partially or entirely outside the regular instructional day schedule.

(4) is available to any student who voluntarily elects to participate and be subject to the eligibility requirements of the activity. A school district' s program of interscholastic athletics, including varsity sports, shall be deemed to be extracurricular in nature and cover all activities related to competitive sports contests, games, events or exhibitions involving individual students or teams of students of the school district whenever such activities occur between schools within the district or schools outside the district.

For most team-sport athletes, high school sports are the best way to improve in skills and prepare for athletic scholarships or a sports career. For example, Miami Dolphins defensive end Jason Taylor, who homeschooled in high school in the Pittsburgh suburbs, got noticed by the University of Akron while playing sports on the Woodland Hills High School team. Similarly, one of the current top high school basketball prospects in the country, Mike Beasley of Upper Marlboro MD, homeschools with private tutors and ABeka for 2½ hours each day, while working out with a trainer and playing basketball on a very competitive Christian school team. Already approaching 7 feet tall, he may jump directly from high school to the NBA.

However, a few homeschooled athletes have been able to attract college recruiter attention without playing school sports. For example, Chauncey Duke graduated from homeschool and American Athletic Union (AAU) basketball teams to a Division I scholarship from Duquesne University. (AAU provides very competitive summer basketball leagues that attract the best high school players.) Russell Monroe graduated from a homeschool basketball team to Division I Liberty University without ever playing school or AAU sports.

There are a half-dozen homeschool boys or girls basketball teams playing Christian schools (and sometimes each other) in Pennsylvania and there are dozens of co-ed homeschool

volleyball teams participating in homeschool tournaments (see the calendar on page 32). The following teams are just getting started and are actively seeking out more players:

- Nate Hartman (724-846-2764; natehartman@ncsaa.org) is currently starting a girls' homeschool basketball team in the Beaver Falls area.
- Karna Hoffman (717-432-5185; RKHOFFMAN@paonline.com) is starting co-ed volleyball teams for homeschoolers in the Harrisburg (West Shore) area. Beginners are welcome.
- Camp Men-O-Lan of Quakertown is starting a co-ed volleyball team for homeschooled boys and girls aged 15 to 18. The team will meet for 8 weeks, from 11 to noon on Tuesdays beginning September 13, in preparation for the November 4 tournament in Downingtown. Cost is \$46 paid to Camp Men-O-Lan plus there will be additional costs of about \$35 per player to join AAU and register for the November tournament. Contact Laurie Brubaker (215-723-2386; BRUBAKERTEL@aol.com) if you are interested. Beginners are welcome.

Ironically, at the same time that homeschoolers are seeking access to school sports teams, many of the very best athletes are leaving schools to be homeschooled. If the 1944 movie *National Velvet* were made today, it is likely that Velvet Brown would be homeschooled. Velvet, played by 11-year-old Elizabeth Taylor, aspired to race her horse in the *Grand National Sweepstakes*, the top horse racing event in England. Her modern-day counterpart, Maggie Carter, started homeschooling at about age 14 to give her more time to prepare to get a jockey license. Now, at about 22, she is the top jockey of both sexes at the Los Alamitos track in California.

If you watch the next Olympics and see the short biographies of the American stars, you will find that many of them were homeschooled, at least during high school. You might see Natasha Kelley, now 15, who just won the USA Gymnastics all-around floor championship with an exciting come-back win. Her father posted on our message board that she has been homeschooling using the A Beka program.

Or you might see Rebecca Dusault, who at about age 23 is currently America's top female cross-country skier. She is the only woman on the women's cross-country circuit to travel the world with her husband and her child. She and her husband got to know each other when they were being homeschooled together.

Or you might see always-homeschooled Will Viana who at age 13 gets out of bed at 4 each morning to swim for an hour as part of his 20-hour-per-week practice schedule. In a *USA Today* article his mother noted, "Will really doesn't have time for both (regular school) and swimming."

And it's not just athletes who are homeschooling to give them more time and flexibility to hone their talents. Many aspiring actors and actresses are also doing so. Shane Haboucha, an actor in a TV miniseries (*Desperation*) homeschools in order to have the necessary time for his career. He told a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*: "I'd be missing so many classes, and my teachers didn't really understand what was going on. They didn't understand the significance of what I was doing and how important it was to me. It was awful for me to go to school. I dreaded it, because I couldn't take the pressure of knowing how behind I was."

Two of the top teen movie actresses, Lindsay Lohan and Evan Rachel Wood, were homeschooled in high school. Ironically, Woods reports that she began homeschooling in order to get away from the sexually-charged junior high school teen culture that she was portraying in the movie, *Thirteen*. She told a reporter from the New York, "I did that movie and I was like, 'Wait a minute. I am going through that right now. This is opening my eyes, this girl is hitting rock bottom and I am totally going to that place!' I wasn't doing acid or anything, but I knew I had to get out. After that, my life changed."

Here in Pennsylvania, Katelyn Pippy, daughter of State Senator John Pippy, has begun a promising acting career including opera productions, local theater productions, a short movie and a TV episode. Homeschooling gives her the time to travel to New York for auditions.

Even if Senate Bill 361 passes, many athletes, and even some top athletes, will choose not to play in school sports. Even so, it is nice for homeschoolers to have the choice.

PA Homeschoolers will lobby for Senate Bill 361 (as well as a bill that would limit superintendent oversight) at our Homeschool Excellence Day rally in Harrisburg Oct. 19, 2005 (see facing page). Please join us at the fair and rally!