

Canadian school sports

August 2015, Hot House Media online, *Study Travel Magazine*



Many Canadian high schools provide a wide range of sports, from hockey to equestrian programmes, in state-of-the-art facilities at recreational and elite level for their students. **Gillian Evans** finds out more.

Being healthy in the outdoors is a hallmark of Canadian independent school education,” asserts Struan Robertson, Director of Recruitment at in Lakefield, ON. “Canada has wide open spaces and more lakes than all the other countries of the world combined. This allows for a very unique and diverse set of athletic and recreational sport offerings.”

It is certainly the case that when international students choose a Canadian high school in which to study, they are also embarking upon a journey that includes many exciting sports as co-curricular activities. Jessie-May Rowntree, Director of Admission and Marketing at in Newmarket, ON, emphasises the importance of sports in a world where many students are being “over-programmed” academically, as she puts it. “We are lucky at Pickering College because the school believes in the wellbeing of our students and understands that sport is part of the reason we are able to balance the rigours of independent schooling,” she asserts.

Excelling at a sport can also bring with it a university scholarship. At the (BSS) in Toronto, ON, which provides high-level hockey training, many of their students, upon successful completion of high school, are offered hockey scholarships to prestigious universities and colleges in the US. “Our current graduating class has players going to Harvard and Colgate,” reports Jane King, BSS Athletic Director and Head of Physical and Health Education. The possibility of a sports scholarship for university studies can be a big attraction for parents of international students who excel in a particular sport, as Robertson points out. “Having competitive hockey and rowing are good selling points internationally as [these] are sports where athletic scholarships tend to be available from US colleges and universities.”

Another attraction of these sports specialist schools is that they can provide some students with the chance to continue their high-level sports training. At Pickering College, a whole range of sports are offered but the school focuses on equestrian and figure skating. Rowntree says, “Competitive figure skaters from Russia, Spain, Mexico [and] Australia have valued our figure skating programme, and the opportunity to continue to train at an elite level.”

Quebec has developed a network of Sport-Études programmes where student athletes complete the regular Quebec curriculum in 60 per cent of the normal classroom time, with the remainder spent on sport-specific classes or training. Lester B. in Montreal, QC, has been offering a Sport-Études programme since 2002, which accounts for around 10 per cent of their student enrolment. “This programme allows students to attend school in the morning and train with their coaches in the afternoon,” explains Viky Keller, International Student Co-Ordinator. “It provides students with a supportive environment that enables and encourages them to succeed academically, while pursuing their athletic endeavour.”

Similarly, at in Wilcox, SK, Shauna Morrison, Marketing & Communications Assistant, enthuses, “Hockey is in our blood!” The school has earned itself a reputation for being one of the top hockey training schools in the country. “Although Notre Dame offers a number of different athletic programmes, the school has gained a reputation of producing professional caliber hockey players at a remarkable rate,” she reports.

(QMS) in Duncan, BC, offers an integrated equestrian programme, which is a major draw for some international students. “This unique English riding programme is built right into the curriculum timetable and is the only one of its kind in Canada”, says Hayley Picard at the school. According to Picard, international students make up around 34 per cent of their annual student intake, and the equestrian programme is particularly popular with students from Japan and Mexico, owing to “the strong equestrian communities which already exist in these countries”, as well as other countries such as Germany, Australia and the US. “In recent years,” she adds, “students have brought their own horses to board at QMS from Mexico, the Middle East and India.”

Picard believes that offering such a specific specialism helps them to stand out from the crowd. “Schools in Canada move towards specialised programming to differentiate their school brand”, she observes.

Sports on offer

The sports offered by high schools varies but most include a range of choices such as soccer, swimming, track and field athletics, archery, badminton, skiing, sailing, horse riding, ice hockey and basketball.

(UCC) in Toronto, ON, offers 19 different sports, which, according to David McBride, makes it one of the largest athletic programmes of any Canadian independent school. It is mandatory for boarding students at UCC to participate in sports for at least two seasons out of three. “Some sports are obviously more competitive [such as] ice hockey, while some we will take a boy who has never played before and develop him into a player, [for example] American football,” he says.

At the Bishop Strachan School (BSS) in Toronto, ON, Jane King reports that they have a variety of programmes “to promote the growth and development of student-athletes and also support high performance athletes who are training at provincial and national levels”, most notably in track and field, cross country, alpine skiing and hockey. “Hockey is our premier sport,” King relates. “Girls who play hockey at BSS are training with the goal of playing hockey post-secondary in a NCAA Division 1 school.”

Ridley-College in St Catharines, ON, offers specialised “Program Development Sports” in basketball, ice hockey, soccer and rowing, as well as offering students an additional 12 competitive sports. “All students at Ridley are part of our sport programme each day,” says Jay Tredway. “The great thing about having three different terms of sport is that you can take part in a sport that you are comfortable with and then branch out to try new ones as the seasons unfold.”

Source:

<http://www.hothousemedia.com/ltm/ltmbackissues/aug15web/aug15sec2.html>