

# GAME ON:

## The benefits of choosing a private school with a strong athletics program

BY WENDY HELFENBAUM

Student success goes far beyond the classroom: Important life skills such as leadership, discipline, time-management and collaboration are developed on ice rinks, basketball courts and soccer fields. That's why independent schools with comprehensive sports programs, dedicated coaches and high-quality facilities and equipment can be a great option for your child.

Student athletics provides opportunities to challenge themselves, stay fit, make new friends and foster a sense of belonging. Whether your child is a high-level athlete or simply wants to participate in an individual sport to be active and have fun, there are independent schools with the right sports programs on tap.

### PARTICIPATING IN TEAM OR INDIVIDUAL SPORTS BUILDS OVERALL LEARNING

Sports is a microcosm of life where students pick up valuable skills, says Chris Viau, the athletics director at Lower Canada College.

"Our number one goal is to create lifelong learners in athletics

and physical activity, just as we do for academics in the classroom; we're trying to spark an interest that kids will carry through the rest of their lives," says Viau, noting that about 85 per cent of LCC students participate in athletics.

"They learn about leadership and managing all the emotional aspects of sports – the highs, the lows – but also about embracing a role you have on a team. In the workforce now, most things are collaborative, so learning to be a team player is a critical skill."

Getting involved in school sports teaches students that being active should be part of a healthy lifestyle, adds Mike Maurovich, director of physical education and athletics at Selwyn House.

"They learn that athletics leads to good habits like proper nutrition and informed life choices that they take with them as they move forward," says Maurovich.

"We tailor our program to the needs of the student: We guide them, advise them to try things and encourage them to step outside their comfort zone, so students grow and gain confidence."

Beyond the physiological benefits, athletics helps build leadership and confidence in all athletes, not just the most gifted ones, explains Cullen Thiessen, assistant director of athletics at Kuper Academy.

"There's a lot of research indicating that exercise can boost alertness, memory and brain plasticity," says Thiessen.

"Figuring out how you can help push the team to excellence results in lifelong skills that follow athletes in their careers and their relationships as well."

### OPTIONS FOR EVERY INTEREST AND SKILL LEVEL, FROM RECREATIONAL TO ULTRA-COMPETITIVE

Well-known for its hockey program, Kuper's team sports also include soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, hockey, flag football and lacrosse. The school also offers individual sports like cross-country running, swimming, tennis and track.

"We're always adding new sports to the mix," says Thiessen.

"Students bring us a sport of interest, and as long as we can create the space and have enough inter-



Independent schools with comprehensive sports programs, dedicated coaches and high-quality facilities and equipment can be a great option for your child. — PHOTO COURTESY OF LOWER CANADA COLLEGE

est, we will register in that sport as well. We have an 'anybody can try out' policy, with a heavy emphasis on the fact that trying and failing is perfectly fine and a part of life."

Selwyn House offers about 40 sports options over three terms, including elite basketball and hockey, plus many second-level teams. The school runs teams for rugby, flag football, golf and baseball, recreational and competitive tennis, squash and badminton, plus indoor and outdoor soccer, rowing and track.

"If you're a non-athletic person that wants to stay active, there's boot camp, field games, recreational squash and badminton, curling and intramural basketball that's just in-house," says Maurovich.

At LCC, core sports include competitive hockey, basketball, football, flag and contact football, soccer and volleyball, and there are several tiers of teams.

"We try to provide opportunities to everybody, not just elite or competitive athletes, so kids still get to be on a part of a team," explains Viau.

"We also have different programs like yoga, fitness, recreational badminton and tennis and



Athletics helps build leadership and confidence in all athletes.

— PHOTO COURTESY OF KUPER ACADEMY

cross-country running."

### SPORTS HELPS DEVELOP TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS, DISCIPLINE AND SCHOOL SPIRIT

Most school sports hold practices, games and tournaments several times a week, and depending on how high-level your child's team is, more time may be required. Athletics pushes students to be self-motivated and organized to juggle team commitments with study time, says Thiessen, and these learned time-management skills cross over into academics, too.

Student athletics also fosters a sense of belonging and strong connections between teammates, says Viau.

"It's an amazing introduction to the school, with kids meeting across grades, because many of our teams are two grades combined; it's an incredible way to become involved in school life," he says.

"We have alumni basketball and hockey at our school, and a lot of these young men and women that come back still have the relationships they created through their teams at LCC, years and years after they graduate."



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