

Alton's goal: Lift its status within SWC

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A concerned group of Alton and Godfrey residents are attempting to supply the AHS athletics program with a booster shot and better life.

They should be applauded for their interest because the more people care, the better the opportunities for improvement. Passion has plenty of rewards. Little interest and small stimulation have no chance in achieving anything except staying the current course and doing the same things.

And that's not good enough.

I'll be the first to tell you that the Redbirds are intently interested on improving their status in the eight-school Southwestern Conference. They don't want to finish seventh again.

Actually, director of athletics Scott Harper will be the first to acknowledge the need for a spike in success. That's why he's doing his duty to give the Redbirds the best bet to succeed.

What will it take?

First, everybody needs to get pointed in the right direction. Pointing fingers is the easy way out. A clear vision for the future is foremost and that may require an attitude adjustment.

Problems need solutions, not more troubling accusations I don't have any handy answers, but it's obvious AHS needs improvement in all areas.

Just check the records. Here's the way SWC schools finished in the 2008-09 All-sports standings:

Edwardsville 128.5 points
Belleville West 115
O'Fallon 111
Belleville East 104
Collinsville 77
Granite City 66.5
Alton 61
East St. Louis 51

The Flyers finished last because they were eighth in eight sports. East St. Louis also doesn't have girls golf or boys and girls soccer.

Edwardsville's Tigers prevailed thanks to nine first-place finishes: boys basketball, boys soccer, boys golf, girls volleyball, boys cross country, boys tennis, softball, baseball and wrestling.

In addition, the Tigers had only one sport - bowling (boys fifth and girls seventh) - that wasn't in the upper half of the league log. Football and girls track finished fourth, while the remaining sports were either second or third.

And Alton?

Not having a winner in any sport cost the Redbirds. There weren't any second-place finish, either.

Their best efforts were third in girls golf and third in boys bowling. Girls and boys tennis were fourth each, but in every other sport, the Redbirds landed in the lower half of the SWC.

So they earned their 61 points, which accounted for 22 in the fall, 19 in the winter and 20 in the spring. Alton was the only SWC school failing to produce at least one team champ.

When you consider it, the Redbirds haven't featured a conference team champion since 2006-07, when they shared the boys' basketball championship with East St. Louis. Boys basketball also was a co-champ in 1985-86 and 1983-84.

Alton hasn't won the league basketball title outright since 1979-80. Football goes all the way back to 1970. Thus, conference championships are few and far between for the Redbirds.

The past year, they were last in boys cross country and boys track, seventh in football, girls cross country and boys golf, sixth in boys basketball, boys soccer, softball, girls track and girls bowling and fifth in girls basketball, girls volleyball, baseball, girls soccer and wrestling.

It's a chart that's begging for improvement. Saying it and getting it done don't have to be separate ideas or issues. Whether it's more of this or better of that, the Redbirds need to renew their mission.

Seventh place doesn't get it done.