

# Teamwork needed

■ As the school district seeks more funding help from athletic boosters, the groups themselves face a question of whether to pool their resources.

Editor's Note: Second of three parts

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Jonathan Propper is an Octorara Area School District administrator who gracefully balances six administrative jobs during 11- and 12-hour days.

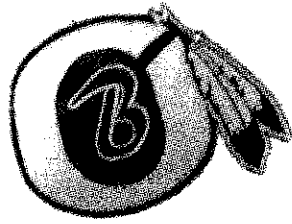
He is high school assistant principal, district athletic director, director of alternative education for high school students, district transportation liaison, facilities scheduling director and district mobilizer for Octorara Communities that Care.

This personable guy even ran interference between the ferris wheel and sports fair booths last month to help pull off the school district's first fall festival, which brought in \$5,000 in revenue. Proceeds were split between the athletic budget and OCTC charitable work.

Even though Propper has taken on more administrative responsibilities in his six years at Octorara, he has not had a pay increase in three years because of budget constraints and an administrative pay freeze.

The athletic director title has been a new responsibility this fall, since the formerly full-time athletic director's job was eliminated during budget cuts. Propper, however, is moving forward — speaking admiringly of student athletes

## CHANGING THE GAME PLAN



and booster parents — and offering a clear picture of sports funding at an economic crossroads.

"Our kids support one another and they're great kids," Propper said. "Sports is another venue for students to shine."

However, Propper said he worries about the load carried by Octorara athletes, because they are facing athletes in the Ches-Mont League, whose sports teams have not faced the budget cuts which, at Octorara, are an event as regular as spring training in baseball.

"We are facing bigger districts and we've had budget cuts and teacher layoffs two and three years before they have," Propper said. "We do well against schools our own size, but we play in a really tough league."

"If I'm athletic director, I have to be an advocate for sports. Booster parents are doing all this work to provide for their kids to play sports. When I was a kid I just had to buy cleats for football and baseball. Everything else was taken care of."

"It's a shame. I'm worried about the state of sports."

According to Propper, Octorara School Board members, facing increasing costs, decreasing state

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and federal revenue and complaints about high property taxes, would like all sports to be totally self-funded within the next few years.

"That would be a tragedy for kids," Propper said.

It also could be an accounting challenge for the school district.

Superintendent Tom Newcome has encouraged Propper to move sports boosters into the Octorara All Sports Boosters, which Propper said currently has just \$300 in its account.

According to Ellen Brown of Atglen, a blogger and parent booster, most booster groups are "stand-alone organizations." Some, she said, are informally organized while others are incorporated into 501(c)3 organizations.

"I honestly cannot tell you how much money the soccer or football boosters, for example, have," Propper said.

According to Propper, the 2005 school board policy on booster organizations states that by each Sept. 1, booster organizations must provide to the athletic director their bylaws, budget and a statement saying their books for the previous school year were audited. They are not permitted to purchase uniforms or equipment for teams.

"What the policy says and what has been happening are two different things," Propper said.

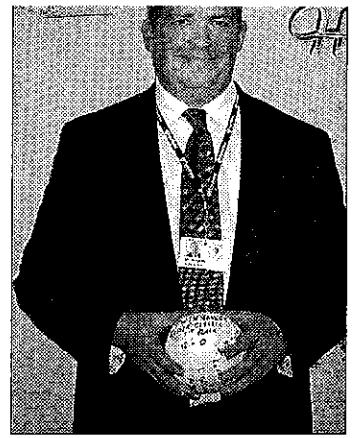
He said that the entire boys' lacrosse program has been self-funded for years, and football boosters have paid for "a ton" of needs, including uniforms and equipment.

"It's the same with soccer," Propper said. "(The booster groups) are really facing it," he said of sports budget cuts.

"It's so sad to me (that) we've also taken away all awards and conferences coaches could go to," Propper said.

According to Brown, booster groups also work to fund some of the nice "extras" for athletes, such as jackets and game snacks.

Fundraisers for the various sports have included a cookbook; candy, cookie dough and pizza sales; basket bingos; restaurant coupon events; car washes; a dance at Twin Brook Winery; dinners; and cross-country races. Lacrosse once received



**Jonathan Propper, who wears many hats for the Octorara School District, fears that, due to budgetary cuts, sports in his district could be self-funded in just a few years.**

university grant funding, and Masons and businesses have made direct contributions.

With sports boosters competing with each other for money so their children can play, some boosters are very quiet about their sources of funding.

"The headaches of this are all very evident in the community," Propper said.

Brown said that parent boosters tend to focus on their own child's sport and are wary of an all-sports booster organization.

"They are focusing on their sport because they've heard from the school board they have to fund their sport," Brown said.

"We have a wide range of fundraising efforts," Atglen parent Paul Solomon said of Octorara's football boosters. "We do have a good amount in the bank. We're trying to pay for a field, and develop the program. We feel we want to hold onto our bank account because we don't know where the school district is going to go with funding."

Brown said she thinks one all-sports booster organization could work, if approached the right way. She said it also would be wonderful if some non-affiliated groups could step up and help all sports.

"They have to take it in stages," Brown said. "You can't say in May you have to fund sports in the fall."

Propper agrees. "Diplomacy will have to happen," he said. "It's the only way we're going to survive."

Friday: The hidden costs of self-funding.