

Double Standard at Istrouma

Unless the school board intervenes, it seems unlikely that Istrouma High School will field any girls' athletic teams this year. Istrouma is the only high school in the parish without at least one girls' team.

The problem is not lack of interest. The girls' physical education teachers have volunteered to coach the teams, and submitted budgets for volleyball, track, tennis and cross-country teams. When they asked their students who would be interested, more than 100 signed up.

Nor would a large capital investment be required to get the teams started. Istrouma already has two sets of multi-purpose girls' jerseys, stopwatches, track shoes, and other equipment.

Principal Marvin Stewart's foot-dragging is the reason the girls have no teams. Stewart says that girl teams simply do not draw large enough crowds to support themselves. If the girls want varsity athletics, Stewart says, they will just have to raise enough money to pay their own way.

Gate receipts for boys' track and boys' baseball at Istrouma do not come close to covering the expenses for those teams, so they are subsidized by the money the school makes on football. (Istrouma has one of the few football teams in the parish actually in the black.) But Stewart says that it would be impossible for girls' teams to be similarly funded.

Tommy McCoin, director of athletics for the school board, says that "it is impossible for them all (varsity athletic teams) to be self-supporting," and that "it does seem that a double standard is being applied" at Istrouma.

McCoin said that he had visited the school and Stewart had assured him that budgets had been submitted and that there was sufficient student interest to justify the teams. "If that's the song he's singing now," McCoin said, "I will just have to make another trip out there.... But again I can't take a gun and force him to do something. We may have to resort to some other means."

Public schools will be required by law to provide comparable athletic opportunities for high school girls and boys when Title IX goes into effect two years from now. McCoin says that the school board encourages schools to begin complying with Title IX before the legal deadline. But Stewart is recalcitrant. As for Title IX, Istrouma's principal said, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."