

## SPORTS FEATURE

# The Man on the Hot Seat

Yorks new Athletic Events Manager, Rob Martellacci hopes to solve the problem of student apathy toward inter-collegiate athletics. In an interview with *Excalibur* Sports Editor, James Hoggott, Martellacci talked about how he hopes to make the York community more aware of the top calibre athletics here at York. By doing so, Martellacci hopes to fill the stands at York sporting events.

By JAMES HOGGETT

In highschool, Rob Martellacci always dreamed of someday pursuing a hockey career. But when one of his coaches recommended that he not put all his eggs into one basket, Martellacci took heed.

Today, at the age of 26, Martellacci has other things on his mind besides hockey. Just this past fall he has taken on the responsibility of Athletic Events Manager here at York. The position was left vacant after Lisa Britton left last summer after a two-year stay.

As Athletic Events Manager, Martellacci is responsible for providing transportation and accommodation for York's athletic teams, as well as tournaments hosted by York such as the CIAU field hockey championships. Another of Martellacci's responsibilities is the promotion of Inter-Collegiate (Varsity) athletics at York in both the campus community and to the external community. "I've always had an interest for sports," Martellacci said. "I began working part-time in the recreation field with the city of York, first as a rink guard and then eventually as coordinator of the public skating programme."

Upon graduating from grade 13, in 1980, Martellacci came to York and studied economics. "After graduating with my Economics degree,

I really wasn't certain as to what I wanted to do," he explained. "I had the practical experience in recreation but it's tough out there and difficult to find a job."

Martellacci was unemployed for a year before landing a contract with the Participation Challenge organized by the federal government. Here Martellacci was involved with promotional strategies and their implementation. The aim of this programme was to encourage people across Canada to participate in physical fitness for one day.

Martellacci was involved in the programme again the following year. "At that time I became aware of the Sports Administration programme that York offered through a friend of mine," he said. "Upon closer examination of the programme, I was really impressed with the quality of it, so I applied."

Martellacci was a successful candidate and went through the two year programme. In that time, he completed his thesis on the area of sports promotions at the inter-collegiate athletic level. "I became very interested in that area and began working with the hockey team when they started their sportsman programme," he explained. "I became their student manager, and I then became an assistant to Lisa Britton."

Upon graduation, Martellacci moved out of the recreation field with the city of York and landed a contract with Celebration '88, the Olympic Torch Relay, with the federal government. Celebration '88 was aimed at creating an awareness in communities of the torch relay and providing the opportunity to as many Canadians as possible to participate in the spirit of the Olympic Games. Here, Martellacci worked as a communication consultant and was responsible for the south-western Ontario region.

Martellacci went to different communities and conducted presentations; met with mayors, members of city council, and community leaders; and assisted them in developing promotional ideas and events surrounding the lighting of the torch. "I do miss working on the Celebration '88 programme as it was very close to my heart," he said. "But when I found out that Lisa left and they hadn't found a replacement, I thought, 'why not.'"

As Athletic Events Manager, Martellacci hopes to accomplish a great deal. "From a promotional standpoint, I think the challenges are definitely there," Martellacci explained. "However, being a commuter-based university, I find that the awareness in terms of inter-collegiate athletics isn't really there. In the study that I did for my thesis, I found that a larger proportion of resident students attended inter-collegiate sporting events, which I guess makes sense."

"It's logical that students commuting to school are not going to want to stay around till 7:30 in the evening to catch a game. So as a result we're losing a lot of potential spectators."

Martellacci hopes to work on creating a greater awareness by setting up displays. "I understand we have a promotional film that Recreation York developed entitled *Choose To Move*," he said. "In it there is a two-minute segment on inter-collegiate athletics. I'd like to extract that segment and set up a display in Central Square and have some information available on upcoming events."

Recently, Martellacci had York's mascot, Yoeo, handing out pocket schedules in Central Square. "It was amazing to see that people were not aware of who Yoeo was, and understandably so, because he's never been out before, except at sporting events," Martellacci explained. "What I would like to do is get Yoeo out to functions as much as possible, make him available to the community on campus as well as off campus."

Martellacci is also hoping to implement a "Red and White Spirit Challenge," where students who attend games will be awarded a certain number of points for attending a particular game. Students would reg-



Checking the results: York's Athletic Events Manager, Rob Martellacci, goes over some sports results with secretary Betty Running. Martellacci hopes that his aggressive promotion of inter-collegiate athletics will entice people to attend York sporting events.

ister for the Challenge through the Athletic Events office, and at the end of the year, the student with the most points accumulated would be awarded a prize, such as a trip for two to Florida. "Nothing has ever been done in this respect before," Martellacci said. "I think we need to entice the students to come out; awareness is one thing but to draw them is another."

There are many problems which York athletics faces. Martellacci feels, one of them is the lack of proper facilities. "Facility-wise, we could certainly use a football stadium," he said. "I'm sure we'll see one in our lifetime, but as to when I'm not sure."

Playing at the North York Civic Stadium, the Yeomen football team loses many potential spectators, Martellacci stressed, adding that students living on campus would probably be more apt to attend the games if they were played on campus. "We tried offering shuttle-bus service to one of the games," Martellacci explained, "but that didn't draw too well either, which was rather disappointing."

"In terms of the hockey rink," Martellacci continued, "it was originally intended to be a practice rink, but they haven't got around to building the new one, which was to be constructed adjacent to the current ice rink."

To make do with what they had, York modified the practice rink by up-grading the stands and adding heaters. The small lobby area could definitely use expansion but Martellacci does not know when that will take place. "It would be nice if it was soon because it really creates problems when we have a big draw,

such as during the playoffs, where people have to line-up outside," he explained. "This can get rather uncomfortable on a blistery cold winter's night."

Perhaps the biggest battle Martellacci will have to fight is student apathy. He feels that there are many people at York who just attend classes and really couldn't care to get involved in any other aspect of the university. "Even I fell into that category my first couple of years at York," Martellacci said. "But that's because I wasn't going out of my way to become involved."

Once Martellacci became involved in the extra-curricular activities at York, however, he realized how much more students could get out of their stay at university. "It makes your stay much more enjoyable and rewarding, and it gives you a great motivating boost which in turn, makes your academic stream a much more enjoyable and worthwhile experience," he explained.

Martellacci hopes that once the Student Centre is built, it will help in the promotional aspect as well. Commuting students will then have somewhere to go with a pleasant environment that is much more suitable to the students, he feels, which many work as an incentive to remain on campus longer in order to attend a few games. "Sure, you have your dedicated sports fans who come out to all the games," he concluded. "But it's those people who have a mild interest in sports who are not really aware of what's going on that we've got to focus on."

"We want to fill the stands, and ultimately that's where my success will be based. It's going to come down to numbers and that's where the big challenge comes in."



Best of Friends: Rob Martellacci and York mascot Yoeo.

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