

Group floats plan for prep rowing



Jason DeProspero/The Dominion Post

Monongahela Rowing Association president John Duarte works out. He hopes to have a club team assembled by early September.

Seeks youths interested in forming club

BY ERIC HANLON

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A new high school sport could be bobbing up in the area soon. The Monongahela Rowing Association is trying to establish high school club teams.

"We've had a few kids that are interested, some with prior rowing experience on competitive teams," said John Duarte, president of the Mon Rowing Association. "So we're trying to spread the message and see what kind of response we get."

The plan is to have at least part of a team assembled by the first week of September. But because it's a new project, how quickly the program gets off the ground depends on the number of athletes willing to participate.

MONONGAHELA Rowing Association high school team info: e-mail info@monrowing.org, visit the MRA website at monrowing.org or call John Duarte, 304-282-6523.

"Right now, the most important thing is to spread the word that it's available in Morgantown and that kids of high school age can get involved if they want to," Duarte said.

Duarte needs at least five athletes to have a team for a four-person boat (or nine for an eight-person boat). He said it's important to have one additional floater in case of sickness or injury, just as it's important for a football team to have a backup quarterback.

Morgantown High athletic director Dan Erenrich said he'd be happy to help Duarte reach that number.

"Mr. Duarte met with me before and we said we were very much interested in helping him as much as we could," Erenrich said.

Four students — two boys and two girls — have expressed inter-

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est but have yet to commit. One is from Morgantown, one is from University and two are home-schooled.

Duarte expects the first part of the program will only involve training. Competitions would begin next spring.

"This will be a year of building up," he said. "We're going to start as a club sport under the Mon Rowing Association and, hopefully, become an active program."

Like hockey, lacrosse and rugby before it, rowing in the state of West Virginia is a club sport that has yet to catch on statewide. The only state school with a team is Parkersburg.

"If it's a club sport for the community, we'd gladly support it," Erenrich said. "We do that for rugby and hockey. Anything they want us to publicize, we put out there."

Erenrich said he believes

rowing fills a sports gap. "I like to support those kinds of things because it's important to kids," he said. "Not everyone fits into the sports we have here."

Because it's a club sport, though, Duarte plans on sharing equipment with the WVU men's team and facilities and a boat house with the WVU women's team.

This is not the first attempt to bring the sport to the Morgantown area.

"Mon Rowing has been here since 1975 and there was a high school team in 1989, but it didn't really go anywhere," Duarte said. "For years we've been trying to get it going again."

Other than Parkersburg, the Mon Rowing team would most likely travel to face teams in Marietta, Ohio, and in Pittsburgh.

Duarte said a \$20 to \$50 fee will be asked from those interested in competing the first year.