

## NEW FOOTBALL LEAGUE HOPES TO NUTURE NEXT WAVE OF PLAYERS

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SAINT JOHN - The first tangible goal is 60 athletes. Lisa Harlow, Football New Brunswick's director of female football, says a new league for high school aged girls will give them a place to play football after they graduate from the Fundy Minor Football system.

That's what organizers of a new football league for high school aged girls want in order to form the next wave of development for a sport that's gaining a foothold in southern New Brunswick.

If those in charge can attract four teams of 15 players for a season or two of modified games, then maybe, just maybe, the sport will have cemented a positive base to build upon.

For now, though, the immediate game plan is simple.

"It is not focused around competitiveness," said Lisa Harlow, the lead organizer and the Football New Brunswick's director of female football.

"It is focused on development and that is what it will take to become successful."

The Saint John initiative gets going Sunday at noon at Forest Hills School with a two-hour information, orientation session for interested players and parents.

The loop could bridge the gap between those girls who do play at the youth levels but drop the sport in the bantam (14-15 year old) and higher classes.

If the league takes strength, it will be a perfect developmental ground for the provincial senior women's football league, which just completed its fifth season.

Harlow is a key part of that league as an organizer and all-star player for the Maritime champion Saint John Storm.

"The big decision to do this is to help filter players through to our women's league which plays in the summer," Harlow said. "It gives these players somewhere to play for a number of years and it will help that program stay alive."

The organization will begin with high school workouts on Sundays in order to avoid conflict with other high school sports, such as field hockey and soccer.

It is not affiliated with the New Brunswick Interscholastic Athletic Association but the league will target the high school age group.

"We need to make this program work around their other activities," Harlow explained.

Because the concept is new, most of the first month will be spent on basics before the players graduate to games that feature six-on-six action.

While there is development programs planned for Saint John, Fredericton and Moncton, there will not be any provincial championships for several seasons.

"It is not at that stage yet," she said. "We need to develop the game with these girls. I would say 98 per cent of the girls have not played football before."

While male coaches will be involved, each team will also have a female coach and Harlow expects many players in the Maritime women's football league will assist in the development.

"I definitely think we can get 60 girls but I hope we can get more," Harlow said.