

Parents increasingly part of problem

By THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO -- Schoolchildren may soon be free of their teachers, but parents shouldn't assume it'll be all fun and games for youngsters playing outside and at camp.

It's up to adults to not only protect children from the bullying that can go hand-in-hand with sports, but to also recognize adults can be part of the problem, an anti-bullying conference heard yesterday.

"Sports is more than a game, but less than a war," said Samantha Yamada, a researcher for Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence (PREVNet).

"Coaches might teach their players to bend the rules, so they have an advantage."

That's when the line between competition and aggression blurs, she said. It means that while sports can be valuable in a child's development, they also present opportunities for victimization that are often invisible to adults.

"A coach may not pick up on signals young people give each other," said PREVNet co-director Debra Pepler. "Once established, it simply takes a stare to reinforce."

More than a decade ago, Pepler wired children and recorded them with a video camera at play. In one case, she found a child called names and had a tennis ball whipped at him was victimized a second time when the real bully tattled to a teacher that he swore. As punishment, the boy was forced to stand against a wall, while the bully gained more power.

