

Sparks Swimming & Diving 2024

Team Handbook

Coaching Staff

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About the Handbook

This document contains information pertinent to our season. Take special notice of our rules, expectations, and policies. Note any questions you may have, and feel free to ask them during our pre-season team meeting on August 5th. There is a page at the end requiring a signature from both the athlete and a parent, acknowledging they have read the handbook and agree to these rules, expectations, and policies. ***Both signatures must be turned in to me, either digitally or physically, no later than Friday, August 16th.***

Program Expectations & Policies

Eligibility

In order to swim and dive for the Highland Park/St. Paul Academy co-op, an athlete must complete and turn in the proper paperwork from the athletic office. An athlete cannot practice if they have not completed registration.

An athlete's eligibility to swim for the Sparks is also dependent on the following:

- The athlete adheres to MSHSL rules at all times. The MSHSL handbook can be found on their website.
- The athlete and their parents/guardians read the handbook, sign the acknowledgement form and return it to Coach Max (either physically or electronically) by August 16th, 2024.

For questions, feel free to reach out to your school's athletic director:

- Pat Auran, Highland Park High School AD - patrick.auran@spps.org // (651) 744-3486
- Randy Comfort, St. Paul Academy AD - rcomfort@spa.edu // (651) 696-1447

For more information, see the MSHSL website for Girl's Swimming & Diving:

- <https://www.mshsl.org/sports-and-activities/swimming-diving-girls>

General Expectations

An athlete that competes for Sparks Swim & Dive understands the following is required to hold a spot on the team:

- Each swimmer must be able to swim a minimum of 100 yards freestyle continuously, consecutively.
- An athlete must attend all practices.
- An athlete must be making academic progress towards graduation. The coaching staff will cooperate with the school and the athlete's parents/guardians to ensure that an athlete meets the academic standards expected of them.
- An athlete must make the coaching staff aware of any injury. Athletes understand they will need clearance from the athletic trainer or by a licensed medical professional to return to practice for pre-existing injuries, injuries occurring outside of practice, and injuries during practice.
- An athlete commits to the full season, which concludes on the date of either the Junior Varsity Conference meet, or the Sectionals meet for the Varsity team.

Understand that the Sparks is not a "learn-to-swim" program. As a team, the Sparks will have the time to familiarize ourselves with basic training and technique standards, but not to teach entirely new concepts. The coaching staff recommends that an athlete who joins the program can meet the following standards:

- A swimmer can demonstrate a proper start from the block
- A swimmer can demonstrate a proper flip turn and open turn
- A diver can complete a front dive with and without a somersault

Attendance

Consistency is the primary factor on which success is dependent. Athletes are expected to attend every practice and meet, unless directed otherwise by the coaching staff.

The coaching staff understands that there may be circumstances outside of an athlete's control which prevent them from attending a practice or meet. Athletes are expected to communicate these circumstances to the coaching staff a week in advance, if possible.

Regardless of the amount of time with which prior notice was given, the following reasons for missing practice require a note from a parent/guardian or a teacher to be excused:

- Illness, injury, medical appointments, religious observations, school-sponsored events, arriving to practice late, leaving practice early

Depending on the circumstances and the prior notice given, the coaching staff will determine whether the absence is excused or unexcused. An absence is always an absence, the difference being an unexcused absence is a violation (see “Violating Expectations & Policies” below).

What may qualify as an unexcused absence is described below:

- Homework, social life, work, extracurricular activities not administered by the school, missing practice without giving proper notice

More rules regarding attendance:

- If an athlete is absent from school they will be unable to participate in that day’s practice or meet. Some exceptions to this policy are: Another school activity, medical appointment (requires verification by the school office), funeral or family medical leave/emergency (requires parental notice).
- An athlete that misses the practice the day before a meet, for any reason, will not be able to participate in the meet.
- If two or more practices are missed within a week, they will be unable to participate in the next meet.
- If an athlete has a regular commitment or injury that prevents them from being present at practice, a plan needs to be made with the head coach.

The coaching staff may determine at any time that an athlete’s attendance reflects an inability to meaningfully train and participate on the team, prompting a meeting with the head coach about a plan for their participation moving forward.

Practice Participation

The following expectations are held to each athlete as we undergo training:

- Athletes are expected to be on deck 10 minutes before the published practice time, with the gear required to participate in practice, and to begin stretching while waiting for coach direction.
- If practice begins with dryland, athletes are expected to have their training suit on under their dryland clothes.
- Athletes are expected to use the restroom before practice. There will always be one brief opportunity to use the restroom during practice.
- Stopping in the middle of a repetition or a set is never allowed, unless you are letting someone pass (at the wall only) or given direction to do so by a coach.
- If you are experiencing a critical issue, you may get out of the pool and talk to a coach.

- Athletes are expected to maintain a positive attitude, if not for themselves, then for the benefit of their teammates.

An athlete who is having difficulty completing practice and must sit out for multiple instances or an extended period of time will be asked to leave for the day. If this occurs regularly, the athlete may be asked to see the trainer prior to returning to practice to ensure injuries/physical concerns are being addressed, or may be dismissed from the team.

Meet Participation

The following expectations are held to each athlete when we compete, at home or away:

- Athletes are expected to be on the bus 5 minutes before departure time. If athletes drive separately to the meet (at the direction of the coaching staff only), they are expected to be on deck 15 minutes prior to warm-up.
- Athletes remain on deck, at all meets, until each meet is concluded. There is no sitting with the spectators.
- All athletes help with setup and takedown at the direction of the coaching staff and/or team captains.
- While their teammates are racing, athletes are expected to stand up, watch and cheer with their phones away.
- While divers are competing, athletes may sit, but are expected to watch and participate in the "dive clap" for their teammates.
- Athletes are expected to display excellent sportsmanship during competition.
- Athletes are expected to maintain a positive attitude, if not for themselves, then for the benefit of their teammates.

The coaching staff may need to place athletes into events they may not normally swim for strategic purposes. An athlete isn't guaranteed to swim in the Varsity portion of the meet, regardless of their standing. The coaching staff will do their best to maximize the opportunities available for each athlete to race at every meet.

Electronics

No electronic devices are allowed on the pool deck or in the locker rooms. If an athlete needs to use their device, they should speak with a coach to make a plan for use.

Locker Rooms

Athletes are expected to follow all rules regarding locker room care and behavior. Respect the space and those who use it with you. Incidents reported from the locker will result in the appropriate disciplinary action.

Academics

All athletes are expected to maintain an acceptable academic standing. Failure to maintain an acceptable academic standing will result in suspension from the team (in accordance to your respective school's policy). Any athlete that is not making adequate academic progress will not participate on the team until their academic standing improves.

Travel

All athletes are expected to ride the team bus to and from away meets. All athletes are expected to represent their school with pride while traveling to and from meets. Appropriate dress and behavior is required. Any inappropriate behavior while traveling or competing will result in possible suspension from the team.

Apparel, Training & Competition Gear

Athletes are expected to have the following gear ready and available as shown below. While we have equipment available at the pool, understand that there isn't an excuse for not having the required gear at practice, should the pool equipment not be available for any reason.

For any equipment you may not already have, our team apparel and equipment store will be open in the second half of August. Reach out to the head coach with any questions.

- Practice gear includes: water bottle, cap, goggles, mesh bag, training suit, fins (short-blade preferred), paddles, pull buoy, snorkel (optional), kickboard
- Dryland gear includes: water bottle, running shoes, athletic clothing
- Meet gear includes: water bottle, team uniform, team cap, team suit, goggles, snacks

Keep in mind that the team suit is not meant for practice, and team caps can only be replaced a limited number of times.

Team Expectations

Conduct & Behavior

Athletes are expected to demonstrate exemplary behavior at all times. Inappropriate behavior as witnessed or reported by teachers, coaches, parents, administrators or fellow students may lead to suspension from the team. Demonstrate your pride to be Spark by representing the program positively.

All athletes are expected to treat teammates, coaches, other teams, other coaches and officials with respect at all times, through both words and actions. An athlete is expected to be considerate of their surroundings and the people they are with. There is no place for prejudice or inequality of any kind on this team.

An athlete understands that social media use, public or private, presents an inherent risk. An athlete, online or offline, should be mindful of what they say and understand the real effect rumors, gossip, and general negativity can have on others.

Finally, this team is a cooperative between two schools—it is vital to our success that we not only respect each other, but cooperate across differences. Older team members are expected to include and set a good example for younger team members. Team members from different schools are expected to interact and work well together.

Harassment, Bullying & Hazing

Actions taken to exclude, disparage, discriminate, humiliate, belittle, or otherwise negatively influence a member, or members, of the team are not tolerated in any way, shape or form. This goes for online and offline spaces. Hazing falls under this umbrella. Hazing in any way, shape or form will not be tolerated, regardless of an athlete's willingness to participate.

Depending on the severity of these actions, the perpetrator(s) will be disciplined as the coaching staff sees fit, which may result in a punishment as severe as being immediately dismissed from the team.

Communication with the Coaching Staff

All athletes are expected to communicate respectfully with the coaching staff, and the coaching staff will be held to this expectation, in turn. Directly disobeying the direction of the coaching staff will not be tolerated.

An athlete always has the right to discuss perceived issues with their experience and the team's experience, with the coaching staff. The coaching staff is expected to listen and respond appropriately. An athlete understands that there is an appropriate time and place to raise concerns, and that a coach can determine when that is.

Creating a Meaningful Experience

Athletes are expected to put their best foot forward in every scenario—it's okay to have an off day, it's okay to be uncertain, it's okay to be in a less-than-ideal mood, and it's okay to be outside of your comfort zone. The coaching staff will understand, and also expects you to exhibit self-control and appropriate decision making skills in any scenario.

All team members are expected to support each other and serve the program. The program will only improve if it has athletes, coaches, and parents work to make it so. By putting effort into the team, and remaining conscious of the places it could improve, the culture grows stronger.

Lettering Policy

Athletes who meet the following standards will earn a letter upon the conclusion of season, given the approval of the coaching staff. An athlete must maintain the eligibility requirements outlined by the MSHSL, and maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher to earn a letter.

Athletes must earn 65 letter points for the season to earn a letter. Letter points will be awarded as follows:

- Each athlete earns points according to the following attendance scale:

0-69% (0 pts.)

70-75% (5 pts.)

76-81% (10 pts.)

82-87% (15 pts.)

88-93% (20 pts.)

94-99% (25 pts.)

100% (30 pts.)

- Each athlete must make a positive contribution to the team through attitude, effort, commitment, and sportsmanship. The coaching staff will award these points, keeping an athlete's ability to adhere to the guidelines of this handbook in mind (25 letter points).
- Each athlete must qualify for the section meet (25 letter points). Alternatively, an athlete in the 9th grade or higher must complete their third, fourth, fifth, or sixth season of satisfactory service to Sparks Swim & Dive (25 letter points).

Violating Expectations & Policies

A violation of policy occurs if a member of the team displays an inability to adhere to the expectations and policies outlined in this handbook.

All violations of the team standards—as the coaching staff interprets them—will be met with consequences, based on the severity and the frequency of the violation. The coaching staff may choose to give an athlete a warning, a strike, or an immediate consequence. One warning is given before a strike, and three strikes result in a consequence. Said consequence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Removal from an invitational, dual, or end-of-season meet
- The inability to letter for the season
- Suspension or dismissal from the team

If at any point an athlete or their family feels as though application of standards and policy has been unfair or inequitable, they are welcome to discuss this concern with the coaching staff.

Higher Administration

Violations of MSHSL, school district, or school policy will result in consequences as described by those governing bodies. This handbook defers to their ruling, and the coaching staff reserves the right to provide additional consequences as is appropriate.

For more information, see the MSHSL website for Girl's Swimming & Diving:

- <https://www.mshsl.org/sports-and-activities/swimming-diving-girls>

Acknowledgement Form

I confirm that I have read this handbook in its entirety. I understand and agree to all the expectations and policies outlined therein. I understand and agree that if I am to retain my position on this team, I will adhere to these expectations and policies. I also understand and agree that the content of this handbook may be altered by the coaching staff at any time to meet the needs of the program, and that I have the right to access the most updated version of this handbook before new expectations and policies apply.

Athlete signature: _____

Parent/Guardian signature: _____

Date: _____