

Dear Prospective Student-Athlete and Parent,

Welcome to VA elite 16's program. I hope you will please take a few minutes to read this letter and attached information about the Virginia Elite 16's team. We seek excellent athletes who have the potential, desire and determination to play college volleyball. If you fit that model, we hope you will consider joining the VA Elite Volleyball Club. Our mission is to provide the highest quality volleyball experience through a program of individual development and guided discovery that produces players capable of competing successfully at the collegiate level. In order to achieve this goal it is necessary for the players to begin the process of advance techniques and tactics. The players are still developing their skill sets and we will work hard to assist them in determining their strengths. The best athletes may not be the best volleyball players on the court today because they may have started playing only recently. We believe that our program will make great athletes into great volleyball players who can play at the collegiate level.

In order to help you determine if VA Elite is the best club for you, let me provide you with some information to consider:

VA Elite is not for everyone. Our club is focused on players who seek to play in college and we specialize in creating opportunities to do so by providing the most intense volleyball program in the region and the best exposure to college recruiters.

While we do not expect 16 year-olds to know where they want to go to school or what they want to study. We do, however, seek players who have a dream to play at the collegiate level and be willing to try and get there.

We seek to offer the most intense volleyball program at the 16's level in the region for those players that want more:

- o **More Practice Time:** We practice 3 times per week. Currently we are scheduled to practice M-TH @ Madeira from 8-10 PM in Week 1, T-TH @ Madeira 8-10 in Week 2, and W @ Hoops from 7-10 every week.
- o **More Playing Time:** We limit the team to 10 players and publish a playing time policy so you know what to expect.
- o **More Correct Touches:** Our practices on the court last for 2-3 hours. We focus our practices on individual and team skill development. We have other opportunities for extra practice time with sister teams.
- o **More Tournaments:** In order to enhance the quality of the play, we seek to enter the required 16's region tournaments of 2 in order to qualify for the open division for regionals in the Chesapeake Region. For the rest of the tournaments, we seek to play at the highest level possible, whether it be a qualifier or many of the Mid-Atlantic Power League (MAPL) events we are seeking the highest quality of competition we can find. Our schedule this season will consist of:
 - National Open Qualifiers:** The highest level of competition outside of Nationals. We compete in the Open Division at Colorado Crossroads (Denver, CO) and the Northeast Qualifier (Baltimore, MD).
 - CHRVA Regional Championships:** The bid tournament for the Chesapeake Region of USA Volleyball.
 - Mid Atlantic Power League:** The premier tournament series East of the Mississippi. We will play four weekends total, one each in Chantilly, VA; Downingtown, PA; Raleigh, NC; and Greensboro, NC.
 - Capitol Hill Classic:** Washington, DC
 - Monument City Classic:** Richmond, VA

Finally, we plan on qualifying for and attending the USA Volleyball Junior Nationals in Reno, NV.

- o **More Coaching:** We have 3 coaches who will be working with the 16's enabling us to provide more individualized instructional as well as additional help from our Club Skill Development Cadre. As you have seen at some of our clinics we make use of video to diagnose and correct skill errors. Because we are a small club with a strong technical director and an extensive coaching development program we offer a progressive program in which each year builds upon the previous year's foundation. We sponsor the USAV CAP coaching certification program for all our coaches.
- o **More Focus on individual skill development:** At 16's the girls will be proficient in as many positions as possible. We will focus on developing a solid foundation of individual skill and well rounded players so that they have options in later years.
- o **More Season:** Our season runs from December to July
- o **More Expensive:** Yes, it is an expensive program. The cost is driven in large measure by the cost of tournaments, hotels and travel. Our program includes the cost of nationals so there are no additional costs to be borne at the end of the season.

Why such an intense program? We want players and parents to determine early in their club careers whether they have the ability and desire to play at the college level. Joining Virginia Elite is a big commitment to being the best volleyball player you can be. We appreciate that and are equally committed to helping our players attain that objective. If that is not your goal, we want you to realize it now than after becoming a VA Elite 16. This kind of program requires more effort from players, parents, and coaches, but we think you will find that it is worth all that you put into it. I encourage you to talk to parents and players who have had the experience.

To help you determine if VA Elite is the right club for you, I have attached my:

- Coaching Philosophy
- Playing Time policy
- Practice Principles

I publish these before you try out so that you will not be surprised by anything after you make your team. You should ask for these items from any team that you are considering. If you have any questions please feel free to talk to me or email me at ejl39@georgetown.edu.

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Head Coach
Virginia Elite 16's
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Coaching Philosophy

Players will play for multiple coaches throughout their career and experience (be subjected to?) several different coaching styles and technical systems. Some will work and help them to become a better player, and some less so. Every player is an amalgam resulting from these experiences. Every coach is as well. My coaching philosophy isn't the same it was five years ago and won't be the same five years from now. What I teach and how I teach it is a selection of new, old, and every thing in between. I'm sure after this season there will be some ideas I discard and some I adopt as I learn and grow. Though a coach's philosophy is always changing, I have core beliefs which I've held onto as long as I've been in this profession. I'll highlight a few of them here.

Hard Work is Expected

I believe having expectations for player performance isn't an effective strategy for developing youth players. However, my staff and I will expect that every player is prepared to work hard every day. There are few things in this life you can control and your level of effort is at the forefront of that short list. There will be days when players had a bad day at school, put a dent in the family car, had a fight with a parent/sibling/friend (usually about the dented car), or just feel overwhelmed. That's fine. Coaches cannot expect top results every time a player sets foot into the gym but we can (and will) expect team members to give their maximum effort. Simply, players will play hard and coaches will coach hard.

Mistakes are Encouraged

We learn by making mistakes, whether it's school, volleyball, household chores, or parallel parking. I failed my first driving test because I drilled a barrel while parallel parking. I didn't dent the family car, but I certainly made sure I learned to parallel park for the next time I took the test. Any player who isn't making mistakes in the gym isn't being challenged enough. When a student achieves perfection in the classroom do you just appreciate the accomplishment or do you bump them up a grade? Players on VA Elite 16s will be challenged every day with new skills and the goal of improving every day. With new pursuits and higher standards, mistakes will be made.

Goals Matter

Following team selection and before our first tournament, we will have a goal-setting session for the team. In that meeting, the players will decide what's important for the team to accomplish in 2009 and 2010. Individuals will meet with the staff throughout the early season to establish individual goals as well. During the year, we will revisit team and individual goals, gauge progress, and determine if any need to be expanded or adjusted.

When a team (or player) establishes their **own** goals rather than having them set by the coaching staff, administration, or parents, they gain a sense of ownership in their endeavor. I have things I want to see players and teams accomplish, but those aren't necessarily important to anyone but me. Players set goals and it is the coaching staff's job to ensure everyone works hard enough doing the right things in order to reach those goals. I want each player to know when they're in a tough drill which demands focus, effort, and determination, they're working to achieve what **they** have decided is important, not what **I** have. The responsibility lies with the staff to create an environment conducive to achieving.

Rules

"Rules are not necessarily sacred, principles are."

-Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States

"The fewer rules a coach has, the fewer rules there are for players to break."

-John Madden, NFL Hall of Fame

I believe if teams can maintain discipline in their practice habits, they will maintain it during matches. Much of how I coach comes down to working hard, and being accountable for your actions. Provided everyone keeps that in mind, I've found most often things work out for the best. However, I have a couple rules which will be followed by all players for VA Elite 16s. **In addition to the VA Elite Code of Conduct:**

Represent yourself, your teammates, and your club with dignity. All **players, coaches, staff, and parents** associated with Virginia Elite 16's will be expected to conduct themselves in a respectful manner. All behavior is a reflection on all our efforts.

If you can be caught doing it, you shouldn't be doing it. Self explanatory, I think.

No drugs, no alcohol.

Take care of business in the classroom. If you aren't doing this, you have the wrong priorities.

Honesty conquers all. This is last on the list but first in my mind. Relationships between coaches, players, and parents are based on trust, and dishonesty breaches that trust. If we can't be honest with players, players with us, and players with each other, then we will not be able to work together. There will be no lying to staff members or teammates.

Oh, and (at least) one more:

NO SWEARING. Players will not hear myself or my staff cuss. Ever. I expect the same from the team. If you think I'm kidding, ask last year's 16's team.

Thanks for your patience; I hope this gives you some insight into how I approach player and team development. As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Practice Philosophy

I believe a coach's effectiveness is measured by the success and improvements the players show during their time together. With that in mind, I keep a strong focus on the practice gym. We'll play as many as 75 or 80 matches this season, but time spent playing in tournaments is dwarfed by our opportunities in practice. Training sessions are the key to improving skills and therefore are paramount to achieving our goals. Good practice habits, like time-management skills or study habits, are of the utmost importance and is expected of the entire team, including the coaches. The success of VA Elite 16s depends on having the right attitude every day. We will focus on winning each individual day. If we can win Today, we're in a great position to win Tomorrow. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for practice procedures.

Leave it at the Door

The moment everyone (players, staff, and parents) steps foot into the gym, all other considerations, worries, issues, and problems get dropped in the hallway. I promise, they'll be waiting for you when we're done. Don't let them bother you for the short time we share together.

Be Ready to Do Work

Practice is going to be fun and it's going to be hard. Every training session will be designed to challenge a player's physical **and** mental abilities. That being said, the goal of practice is not to "tear down" players but rather to develop the ability to execute skills in an intense environment.

Have an Open Mind

I guarantee there will come a time this season where each and every player will be asked to try a new skill, a new strategy, or a different technique. Try it and try hard doing it. We're not crazy, I swear. If it doesn't work, we'll try something else. Throughout the season players will be introduced to ideas used throughout the world of volleyball from NCAA Division I, the Olympics, and elsewhere.

Have Fun

Remember, this is supposed to be enjoyable! I can't promise you're going to love every practice or every drill, but I like high-energy training sessions where we can work, get better, and have fun in the process. I enjoy what I do, otherwise I wouldn't be here. I want you to enjoy it, too.

Playing Time Guidelines

Playing Time Philosophy

Virginia Elite 16s

In the years that I have coached, playing time has always been the biggest issue that causes friction between, players, coaches and parents. So I have tried to outline my specific parameters in writing for you to view before committing to the team. I don't believe that this will alleviate all issues that can arise or that you won't have concerns but I hope that this being as transparent as possible you will know how seriously I take the playing time issue.

Balanced Approach

I presume that players want to play volleyball. Playing is the payoff for hard work at practice and at home. At the same time everyone wants to be on a winning team and I seek to develop girls into winners. Our playing time philosophy attempts to balance these interests.

Every player plays

Every player will play if they have demonstrated that they have a desire to play through hard work at practice. Every player will be treated fairly when it becomes time to play. If a player is absent from practice for being sick, another sport, a family event, etc...It would not be fair to the other players to have equal playing time, BUT everyone will play. The coaching staff will assess each situation case by case.

Performance Pays

I make playing time decisions based on performance, as outlined above. I do not play someone because they ask, because I know they want to play or they would not be on the team. I do hope to put the girls in challenging positions and opportunities to learn, but will also make use of subs if performance warrants it. If the team is winning, that leads to more opportunities to play at a higher competition level. I am solely responsible for playing time decisions. I will continually be asking the assistants for their input but at the end of the day the decisions will be mine and any concerns or frustrations should be addressed directly with me. In all situations, **playing time will be decided solely at the discretion of the head coach.**

Special cases:

Post-Pool Play/Playoffs

In my experience, when we get to playoffs or into deciding sets of a match (if we are in

match play), the players really want to win. If the team advances to the playoffs in a tournament, or we are in a deciding set, I will play the players that have performed the best on the court that day, to give us the best chance to win. I will endeavor to get every player in the match so they can contribute, but the focus in playoffs will be on team success.

NEQ, Crossroads, and Regional Tournament

I reserve the right to organize the team and playing time so as to offer us the best chance to win, as these tournaments are qualifiers for Nationals. I will try to ensure that each player will play in every match, but not necessarily a whole game.

Academics

I believe our role as teachers extends outside the court. If a student-athlete does not demonstrate the ability to balance the demands of Virginia Elite with academic progress, I reserve the right to balance for them, up to and including limiting practice and playing time. If a student-athlete finds themselves academically ineligible for varsity athletic competition, they will be consequently ineligible for Virginia Elite competition.

From the Virginia Elite Player/Parent Handbook:

Players must maintain eligibility to be able to play in tournaments. Player eligibility is determined by:

- Regular practice attendance. Absences must be excused by parents and should be based on illness or academic considerations.
- Abidance by the player Code of Conduct.
- Demonstration of the effort expected from a VA Elite player during all practices and competitions.
- Demonstration of respect for coaches, officials, opponents (sportsmanship), and teammates.
- Is not in arrears in payment of player fees.
- Punctuality for practice and tournament activities (being late can be expected to affect playing time in the current match).