



November 1, 2011

Dear Prospective Player and Parents;

I hope you will take a few minutes to read this letter and the attached information about the Virginia Elite 17s Team, so that you can determine if we are a good fit for you. We seek excellent athletes who have the potential the desire, and the determination to play college volleyball. If you fit that model, we hope you will consider joining the Virginia Elite Volleyball Club. Our mission is to provide the highest quality volleyball experience through a program of individual development that produces players capable of competing successfully at the next level. I want to emphasize that we seek the best athletes. The best athletes may not be the best volleyball players on the court today, because they may have started playing volleyball only recently. We believe that our program will make great athletes into great volleyball players.

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 at their highest potential 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 don't expect every 17 year old player to know exactly where they want to go to school or what they want to study, we do seek those players who have the dream to play at the collegiate level and are willing to try to get there.
- We seek to offer the most intense volleyball program at the 17s level in the region, for those players who want more:
 - **More Practice:** We practice 3 times per week. Currently we are scheduled to practice at Madeira School and Hoop Magic, both secure, high quality facilities. We expect to practice Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 8:00-10:00PM at the Madeira School. Wednesday's practice will be group training, also it will be expected that players that are available to train on Saturday's (when the team does not travel) to come in for an hour or two of training.
 - **More playing time:** We limit team to 10 players, and publish a playing time policy (below) so you know what to expect.
 - **More touches:** Our practices are at least 2 hours. We focus practices on individual and team skill development.
 - **More Tournaments:** In order to enhance the quality of play, we have decided to not participate in the Chesapeake Region tournaments. We seek to play at the highest level possible, whether it is at a qualifier or many of the Mid-Atlantic Power League events we are seeking the highest quality of competition we can find.

Jan- Monument (MLK Weekend), MAPL 1 (2/5-2/6)

Feb- Omaha Invitational (President's Day)

Mar – Colorado Crossroads (3/4– 3/5), MAPL 2 (3/11-3/12)

Apr – Big South and at the end of April I hope the team will elect to do another qualifier but that is not required

May – Will be light as athletes take the SAT but we will train

June – We have MAPL invitational and if there is desire to travel to Chicago I would be open to that.

To culminate the season, our team will go to Nationals, if we qualify. If we don't qualify for Nationals, we will attend an end of season tournament AAU championships.

- **More Coaching:** We currently have 2 coaches who will be coaching the 17s team, enabling us to provide more individualized instruction as well as additional help of 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 sponsor a number of Coaching certifications for all of our coaches), we offer a progressive program in which each year builds on the previous year's foundation.
- **More focus on individual skill development:** At 17s we still focus on developing a solid foundation of individual skills and well-rounded players, so that they have options in later years. But team tactics and proficiency is expected.
- **More Season:** Our season runs from December to July.
- **More expensive:** Yes, it is an expensive program. The cost for 17s this year will be \$7600. The program cost is driven in large measure by the cost of tournaments. 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 highest level they can achieve. 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 to attain that objective. If that is not your goal, we want you to realize it now than after becoming a VA Elite 17. 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 attach the following, below:

- 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 the team. **You should ask for these items from any team you are considering.** If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at 571-244-5114 or email me at Tom.lowrey@vaelite.com.

Sincerely,

Tom Lowrey
Head Coach, Virginia Elite 17s



Coaching Philosophy Virginia Elite 17s

The central tenet of my coaching philosophy is, “**desire and hard work pays off.**” I believe that this is true in life and in volleyball. Players should be given the opportunity to play to the limit of their physical ability and coaches should assist the player in improving skills to the limits of the player’s desire, effort, and physical talents. My goal is for each player to do the best with what they have and to discover that they have more than they think they do.

Also my belief is that most people think that being the 17s coach is more about winning than teaching the volleyball skills. My hope is that is not the case with VA Elite 17s, my hope is that the girls first and foremost are doing this because of their love for the game and because it is fun. The word fun in many people’s minds conjures up images of laughing and giggling and not being serious, for me fun is about hard work, being pushed and ultimately learning. So I think it very possible for young athletes to be pushed and to be developed and for the experience to be fun.

To this end we follow these principles:

- **Sportsmanship matters.** In the end, life lessons learned on the team will be more important than technique lessons. We seek to develop players into leaders and good people. We want them to think of the team, not just themselves. To be humble in victory, and gracious in defeat. To represent themselves, their family, their club in a positive manner.
- **Develop competitors.** One of the biggest benefits your daughter can gain from their VA Elite experience is to develop a competitive, winning spirit. By working hard and playing to our limits, we will win matches – but not every match. We seek to develop competitors and if excellence is our goal, success will follow. To me the real win is not how many tournament medals we collect; it is seeing players become women we can be proud of.
- **Everyone gets an opportunity to play.** We presume that every player wants to play volleyball or they would not be on the team. Every player that demonstrates they want to play will play. The amount of playing time will be based on performance and effort. If a person works hard, then they will perform better and will play more (See playing time policy attached).
- **Players play like they practice.** If practices are not challenging then players will not be ready to respond to challenging matches. We will work to ensure players touch the ball a lot and in as many game like situations as we can because the more repetitions a player receives the more likely they are to perfect the skills required to excel. Practices are for improving volleyball skills not social skills. We will have some team building opportunities, but we build a team at practice by working hard together. If a player’s technique is poor they will not get better by playing more. There are variations in specific techniques but principles don’t vary and we will teach and expect players to use solid technique.

- **Players Don't Try to Lose.** We have never seen a player actually try to hit the ball out-of-bounds or serve into the net, but for some reason We see coaches scream at players, to "hit the ball in," or "don't make a service fault." Players will make errors; that is why we practice. Coaches are there to identify and help correct errors, and to prevent them by demanding rigorous execution of skills. You can expect coaches to correct errors during matches. I tell players what they need to do to succeed so that they focus on how to improve, rather than the error they just made. You will hear coaches use our key terms (e.g., feet to ball, square up to target) to focus players on the correction rather than yell, "hit it in".
- **Have a goal.** You must have a goal and a plan to attain your goal. We will set team and individual goals and measure ourselves as we go. My goal for every practice is for players to work hard so they become fit, learn something so they become more skilled, and enjoy the sport so they come back.
- **Excellence requires extra effort.** Players will be expected to train outside of practice. This also a corner stone of helping prepare them for the next level and for them to develop the necessary time management skills needed to play in college and for the rest of their lives.
- **Focus on the fundamentals.** The primary focus of player development at this level is to ensure that players have a strong sense of fundamentals especially in the skills of serving, passing, blocking, hitting, and digging. I also want the players to understand how to teach themselves and how they can start to refine their already developed games to be even more impressive.
- **Explore position capabilities.** At this age the players are being picked to play specific positions, but it has been my experience that it is beneficial for the players to experience and have the opportunity to play some other position. This also allows the team to continue to push even if there are injuries or something where someone cannot play. So during the course of the season I will be looking for opportunities to expose the girls to different opportunities of play.
- **Conditioning matters.** Fitness is an important life attribute and is vital to success on the court. Players will be expected to condition outside of practice and performance will be measured. We will use the court for skills training because net time is precious.



Playing Time Philosophy Virginia Elite 17s

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 serious 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. Parents don't come to tournaments and pay club fees to watch their daughter sit on the bench. 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 not play someone because they cry, because they can't see the ball adequately through their tears. I do not play someone because they whine because I do not want to reinforce that behavior. I do not play someone because they are nice to me. 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.

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 taken up with me.

Bottom Line: I want every player to play and I assume that every player wants to play. So I will do my best to enable players who demonstrate desire, to play. Each player selected for the team deserves to be on the team and deserves to play.

Recruiting: The emphasis of the 17s is to not only prepare the girls to play on their High School teams but also to facilitate playing time opportunities in college, whether on scholarship or not. It is my belief that every girl

needs to be seen but also needs to be seen playing good competition, so I will endeavor to balance who is on the court such that players are in a position to be challenged and to perform well.

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 play-offs will be on team success.

NEQ 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.



Practice Principles 2012 Season

Purpose

As much as possible, everything we do at practice should contribute to development of volleyball skills and ability. We seek to maximize the number of correct touches on the ball at each practice. A correct touch improves our game; an incorrect touch sets us back. In order to achieve this goal we will need to make best possible use of the very limited time that we have at practice.

Everything we do at practice has a purpose and is designed to improve players' skills, motivation, and competitiveness. If you as a player or parent do not understand why we are doing something or anything at practice, ASK me about it. Your questions cause me to evaluate what we are doing and if I cannot articulate its purpose, then we should, and will change the activity.

Practice Preparation

An important component of what we do is to teach players personal responsibility. Players are expected to bring the following items to every practice and tournament.

- Kneepads: Players may not scrimmage without kneepads
- Water Bottle w/ water (at least 24 oz)
- Towel
- Dress in athletic clothing for a hard workout (T-Shirt, spandex, kneepads, socks and court shoes. No running shoes, as they lack lateral stability).
- No jewelry. We practice like we play. Coaches do not hold jewelry for players. If you value it, leave it at home.
- Tournaments: Bring all game jerseys as we may change colors during a long tournament.

What to do when you arrive:

- Line bags up against wall out of the way of play. Put warm-ups in bag.
- Put water bottles full of water at the end of court for easy access.
- Be in proper attire, with knee pads on, hair tied back, when practice starts. No jewelry.

Practice Activities

You will play like you practice. If you practice with intensity and focus, and you push yourself at each practice, you will play with intensity and focus, and you will improve more quickly. Practices are designed to push players hard. We seek to stretch players mentally and physically.

- **Hustle:** When you step on the court you need to hustle. This means you don't walk on the volleyball court. You shuffle or run.
- **If you do not understand something, ask:** There are dumb questions (like asking what you are supposed to be doing because you were not paying attention to instructions) but it is better to ask even a dumb question rather than be unable to perform a drill or benefit from an activity because you do not know what to do or how to do it. When players have problems in execution coaches will take them aside for additional instruction, so the drill can continue. This is not a punishment. It is intended to give additional help where needed. You will all need it at one time or another, and should seek it out. We will also pull players out in rotation for individual instruction. Having more than one coach at a practice enable us to give this kind of individual attention.
- **"Corner up":** Team lines up at the corner of the service line and sideline facing in to the court. If told to have a ball, each player will hold a ball in the correct setting position at waist level. Eyes on the coach and mouths closed to hear instruction.
- **Water Breaks:** When water break is called, run immediately to your water and drink. Water breaks are short. At the end of a water break, execute the water break exercise established at the beginning of each practice. Then we will normally "corner up" to start a new drill. If you need water during a drill, go get it and return immediately so as not to disrupt the drill. You don't need to ask permission to run and get some water. We will sweat. You will need to drink water during practice. Drink some before practice but don't fill your stomach with a lot of water just before practice because you will be carrying extra weight and could become ill.
- **Call the Ball:** The volleyball court is a crowded place. Good communication is vital to good teamwork. Whenever you touch the ball on the court yell "mine" as soon as you see that it is coming to you, well before you touch it. All players will call the ball before touching, to include setters.
- **Coaches Coach, Players Play:** Players should communicate, but it is not the players' role to correct teammates on their form, players can correct court positioning if a teammate is out of rotation. Feel free to encourage, but players don't criticize their fellow players on the court (or off it). You can rely on coaches to correct a player's problems.
- **Focus:** When you are on the court your eyes should always be on the ball in play or the ball about to be played. After a point, or contact, keep your eyes and head in the game. When you are told to move off the court you run off the court so you don't clog the drill or the play.
- **Drills:** Everyone has a role in a drill, not just the player touching the ball. You are handling the ball, shagging, watching and learning, handing ball to coach, or serving as target. Seek to use every role to get better. When you are target, call the ball and catch the ball with proper passing or setting technique. When you shag, call the ball and seek to use proper technique to catch it. When shagging, run after the ball and bounce pass the ball to the ball cart player or coach. When you are watching, you are trying to learn from others' successes and mistakes. Therefore you are not discussing school, boys, or your favorite music group.
- **When you call the ball, you take it:** If you call the ball first, you own it, so play the ball. So don't call balls you can't play. You will make mistakes by being too aggressive but you will get better faster by pushing yourself. When you call the ball do it loudly so your teammates can hear you. **ABOVE ALL, don't let a ball hit the floor.**

- **Nothing hits the floor:** To be successful in volleyball we have to play the ball aggressively. A ball should never touch the floor without someone getting a hand, a foot, or some other body part on the ball. Obviously we seek to play the ball, not just touch it, but that can't happen if we are not getting to the ball. There may be some times that a ball is "shanked" so badly that no one can get a body part on it but that will be the exception. If a ball hits the floor in a drill all players who had any chance to play the ball will "hit the floor" (immediately sprawl or roll) or perform some other remedial exercise, and players not in the drill take their place. Message: Nothing hits the floor!
- **Challenges:** We seek to make each player a strong competitor. If you want to play at the highest level you must learn to compete. At most practices we will conduct challenges (groups competing against each other, e.g., servers vs. receivers. The goal is to promote competition and have some fun. We will determine what the challenge exercise is and the winners will drink water while the losers perform the challenge exercise. Message: It pays to win!