

## **Heartland Aquatics Handbook**

The purpose of this handbook is two-fold: to explain to new members just what Heartland Aquatics is about, and to outline various policies that affect all swimmers, year after year.

Each parent and swimmer is responsible for reading and understanding its contents.

### **Team History**

Heartland Aquatics (HLA) was founded in 2000 through the merger of Capital City Aquatics and Great Plains Aquatic Club. Since that time, Heartland Aquatics has established itself as one of the strongest and most stable swimming clubs in the state.

### **General Description and Objective**

Heartland Aquatics is a first-class, year-round swim program. We offer a guided age-group youth program for children age 6 and up, from the beginning swimmer to the most competitive and skilled swimmer.

When a young person becomes a member of Heartland Aquatics, he or she learns the values of sportsmanship and teamwork. Swimming as a member of Heartland Aquatics provides physical, emotional and intellectual skills that will last a lifetime.

### **Mission Statement**

Heartland Aquatics is dedicated to promoting swimming as a lifelong sport. Our goal is to develop young athletes into the best swimmers and individuals they can be.

### **Team Philosophy**

#### ***Good People***

Our job as a youth swim team is to teach our swimmers how to become quality individuals; to be respectful, kind, generous, caring, supportive, encouraging, disciplined, and passionate. Our philosophy is different than many teams, whose main purpose is to produce athletes who simply win the race. Our swimmers will win just as many races (LSCs, State, Zones, Regionals, Nationals, etc.), but we will emphasize that our swimming champions will be champion people as well.

#### ***Well-Rounded Individuals***

Swimming can often be one-sided: yards, Yards, YARDS. But Heartland Aquatics will have a diverse focus: spirit of athletics, technique, goals, teamwork, as well as important issues out of the pool. Young athletes have many demands on their lives, varying from schoolwork to family obligations. Heartland Aquatics coaches will encourage hard work in all areas of life, and do their best to help athletes succeed in them. Balance in the water is important; balance in life is crucial.

## ***Spirit***

Team spirit goes beyond "cheers," and can be felt on the deck and in the water at a good practice. Helping young athletes understand why they are training is just as important as the training itself. The spirit of athletics includes motivation, discipline, enthusiasm, fitness, teamwork, precision, and FUN. Athletes patting each other on the back or trying to encourage each other during practice are examples. Cheers are only a part of team spirit; in fact, team spirit needs to be at its strongest *between* cheers to ensure the success of an organization.

## ***Technique***

We've always used the analogy, "Would you rather take your Mack truck and stomp on the gas until the engine blows up, or would you like to spend some time, build a Ferrari, then go racing?" Technique in swimming is every bit as important as building an aerobic base. It's the piece of the puzzle that makes runners-up into champions; it's what takes kids who lack confidence in the water and puts them in charge of their own swimming. The thrill of stroke refinement is what makes swimming a lifelong sport. Teaching athletes how to best achieve this is Heartland Aquatics coaches' jobs!

## ***FUN***

If you ask athletes from all over the world who have been swimming for five years or more why they stayed with it, the #1 response - BY FAR - will be, "Because it's fun!" Swimming is the hardest sport on the planet; it needs to be fun. Being fun doesn't mean that we play games all day long; rather, it means that we maintain a positive attitude, talk with people, encourage teamwork, and teach all swimmers how to appreciate the most beautiful sport on earth!

## ***Hard Work***

Swimming isn't unlike any other sport or activity; to succeed at it, you need to work hard. Swimming, however, places athletes into a new medium - water. This requires the athletes to focus more intensely, push themselves harder, and to unlearn what their body has learned over years of "land living." Swimming is tough. That's why we love it so much. It allows for a terrific sense of accomplishment when we achieve our goals in it. We appreciate the demands of it, and encourage the athletes to do the same.

## ***Family***

Heartland Aquatics will encourage a strong sense of family. Athletes often spend more time with each other at the pool than they do with any other individual each day. It's important that the swim team act as a supportive unit of caring people who can listen well, give guidance, and simply love the kids involved. The old statement that "it takes a village to raise a child" applies to swimming as well, and with the help of the parents, coaches, and athletes, Heartland Aquatics will be the strongest family around!

## **General Information**

### ***Coaching Staff***

The sport of competitive swimming is one of the few sports that employs professional, trained coaches for all ages and levels of athletes. Each coach of a USA Swimming club must be certified by this national organization in the latest stroke techniques, training methods, and knowledge of current swimming competition rules and regulations. All of our coaches are required to undergo a professional background check and to maintain current CPR, first aid, and safety training certifications.

To see our coaching staff, please visit the HLA website, [www.heartlandaquatics.org](http://www.heartlandaquatics.org).

### ***Club Structure***

Heartland Aquatics is incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. A nine-member board of directors manages the club. Board members serve staggered three-year terms, with officers elected annually. In addition to the board members, other parent volunteers serve vital roles in the business administration of the swim team. For a listing of the current board members and club representatives, please see the HLA website, [www.heartlandaquatics.org](http://www.heartlandaquatics.org).

### ***Communication Methods***

The hotline number, 441-0599, should be called before coming to practice. It will have the latest update on practice and team announcements.

The website, [www.heartlandaquatics.org](http://www.heartlandaquatics.org), has current team news, coach and board contact information, meet information and sign-up capability, links to a swimmer database of times, and a host of other helpful information.

Meet information, meet entries, news, and announcements are periodically distributed via e-mail. To ensure that you receive this information, it is important that we have at least one valid e-mail address on file for you, and that you let us know when it changes.

Some information is occasionally posted in the viewing area at the practice pool, and at times it may be necessary for the coaches to send home printed materials following practice.

### ***Team Suits and Apparel***

Team suits are recommended, but not required. Currently, the team suits are Speedo Aquablades in navy blue.

HLA swim caps are required at meets. Information on ordering caps, as well as other swim apparel, sweatshirts, warm-ups, jackets, etc., can be found on the website, [www.heartlandaquatics.org](http://www.heartlandaquatics.org).

## **Financial Obligations and Payment Structure**

### ***Annual, Seasonal, and Monthly Fees***

The swimming calendar runs from September through August. Annual fees are required for membership in USA Swimming and Heartland Aquatics.

In addition to these annual membership fees, seasonal and/ or monthly practice fees apply. All of these fees are subject to change from year to year. For the current rates, please see the HLA website at [www.heartlandaquatics.org](http://www.heartlandaquatics.org).

### ***USA Swimming***

All swimmers must be registered athlete members of the USA Swimming. This requires completion of registration papers and payment of the annual fee upon joining the club. Returning swimmers will be billed each fall.

New swimmers to Heartland Aquatics may participate in practice for a maximum of two weeks prior to actual registration and payment of the USA Swimming fee. However, registration papers must be completed and a check written before the swimmer enters the water for his or her two-week trial. At the end of the trial period, registration will be completed if the athlete wishes to continue. If not, the check will be returned or destroyed.

### ***Heartland Aquatics membership***

Each family must pay an annual club membership fee. The HLA annual fee may be prorated for swimmers that join later in the year.

### ***Monthly fees***

In addition to the annual fees, a monthly practice fee is due for any month in which the swimmer attends at least one practice. If the swimmer is in the water at any time during the month, the monthly practice fee is due in full and cannot be prorated regardless of the number of times the swimmer attends practice. Please inform the coach and the club treasurer if the swimmer will not be in the water for the entire month. When this occurs, there is no charge for the monthly practice fee.

The amount of the monthly fee is determined by which practice group the swimmer is in. See the HLA website ([www.heartlandaquatics.org](http://www.heartlandaquatics.org)) for current rates. If a swimmer is moved from one group to another, he or she must pay the monthly fee for the highest group in which he or she participates.

Monthly statements will be sent during the first half of each month and are due by the end of that month. Swimmer accounts must be kept current in order to preserve the right of each swimmer to attend practices and meets. Non-payment of swimmer accounts will necessitate non-participation for the swimmer until payment is made.

Any checks returned to Heartland Aquatics for insufficient funds will be subject to a \$25 additional handling fee.

Should a swimmer decide to discontinue membership in Heartland Aquatics, the monthly dues for the month of which he or she swims any portion thereof and any outstanding entry fees are considered an obligation to Heartland Aquatics, and are payable upon termination of participation.

Neither the HLA club membership fee nor the USA Swimming annual registration fee are refundable.

**Club Mailing Address:**

Payments and all business correspondence should be mailed to:

Heartland Aquatics  
P.O. Box 67206  
Lincoln NE 68506

***Discounts***

Heartland Aquatics offers certain discounts to our membership. These discount programs are subject to change, but the following are long-standing financial discounts that the club has traditionally offered.

**Short-course pre-payment:** Seven months (September-March) for the price of six; full payment is due by the end of September.

**Multiple-child discount:** Regular monthly fee for the first swimmer, then a discount for each additional swimmer in the family. The HLA annual fee for additional swimmers is also prorated to ease the financial burden on families with multiple swimmers. See the HLA website for details.

Specific questions regarding any of the above club fees and discounts can be directed to the club treasurer via email at [treasurer@heartlandaquatics.org](mailto:treasurer@heartlandaquatics.org).

***Fundraising***

The club participates in fundraising activities as its needs require. Examples of some of these activities include hosting swim meets, participating in the USA Swimming Swim-A-Thon<sup>®</sup>, merchandise sales, and restaurant dining opportunities. Proceeds from these activities go directly toward offsetting the costs of operating our swim club.

The club is, of course, always appreciative of tax-deductible donations made directly by its members.

## **Competition**

### ***Meet Schedule and Entries***

The current season's meet schedule is posted on our website. Competition and swimming in meets is not mandatory; however, it is strongly encouraged. The schedule is such that each level of swimmer will have an opportunity to attend a meet every three or four weeks.

Meet information is available online. We strongly encourage signing up for meets using the HLA website; however, you can also have a coach assist you in this process.

Please note the meet entry deadline for each meet. Late entries will not be accepted.

### ***Payment***

You will be billed for meet fees on your monthly statement. For any meet, there will be a Midwestern Swimming splash fee, plus individual and relay event fees. Please note that once the meet sign-up deadline has passed, fees are not refundable if a swimmer scratches an event or has to miss a meet due to illness or another obligation.

### ***Travel***

Parents are responsible for arranging transportation and lodging for out-of-town meets. If a team travel event is planned, the club may reserve blocks of hotel rooms and organize team dinners and activities.

Parents are responsible for supervising their swimmers or making arrangements with another parent or adult to provide supervision. A coach has too many responsibilities to the entire team to accept responsibility for an individual swimmer. Please do not ask a coach to provide transportation or to serve as a chaperone.

## **Practice**

### ***Times and Locations***

Practice times and locations are posted on the HLA website. There are times, however, when facility conflicts, pool problems, coach availability and/ or inclement weather may require practice to be cancelled, rescheduled, or changed to an alternate location. Swimmers and parents should ALWAYS check the hotline (441-0599) before coming to practice.

### ***Short Course season (September - May)***

Team practices are offered Monday-Friday afternoons and evenings at LPS high school pools, with the particular pool locations set at the beginning of each season. Heartland Aquatics rents this space from Lincoln Public Schools at considerable expense to the team. We are fortunate to have practice facilities like this available to accommodate the large size of the team. The high schools have priority in scheduling of the facilities, so occasionally practice times and locations may change.

### **Long Course season (June - July)**

In the summer, the team trains in the 50-meter Woods Pool located at 33rd and L Streets. Evening practices may be offered to certain practice groups at LPS high school pools in the afternoon or evening.

### ***Practice Policies***

The following guidelines are to inform parents and swimmers of club and coaches' policies regarding practice. These policies help ensure a safe and productive swimming environment for all of our swimmers.

Each training group has specific attendance recommendations appropriate for the objectives of that group. As a general rule, the least possible interruption in the training schedule will produce the greatest amount of success. The club does, however, encourage younger swimmers to participate in other activities in addition to swimming. The expectation level of the coaches to attend practices increases as swimmers move to higher groups.

For the swimmers' protection, they should arrive on the school grounds no earlier than 15 minutes prior to their workout time. They should also be picked up no later than 15 minutes after their practice is over. We strongly recommend that parents escort their children to and from the pool rather than simply dropping off and picking up curbside. Heartland Aquatics is one of many groups using the high school facilities and our swimmers are not supervised until they reach the pool itself.

Swimmers are to enter the building through the doors nearest the pool and go directly to the pool area. A swimmer found in any other part of the building could damage our relationship with the High School.

Upon arrival at practice, swimmers are to get their swimming gear on and wait in the stretching area prior to the start of practice or dry-land activities. Use this time to stretch and talk to your teammates.

All swimmers are expected to enter the water and participate in dry-land as a group on the coach's instruction. If you happen to show up late, please make sure you are making your best effort to enter the water or begin dry-land in a timely manner.

Plan to stay the entire practice whenever possible. The last part of practice is very often the most important.

Occasionally, most of a practice group may be attending a meet, in which case the HLA website and the hotline will have information regarding cancellation or changes to the practice schedule.

The club has an obligation to act as guests while in the high school (both swimmers and parents). Every member of the club needs to do everything possible to respect this privilege. Any damages to school property may result in financial liability for the swimmer's parents. Any damage may also result in the swimmer being asked to leave the team permanently.

Parents are not allowed on the pool deck during practice unless it is an emergency. The presence of a non-USA registered coach member or club representative on deck invalidates the club's USA insurance liability coverage. To speak with a coach, please make arrangements via phone or email.

Parents are allowed to observe practice from the swimming bleachers/ stands. Please be considerate and keep conversations at a low volume level. Do not try to communicate with any swimmer from the observation area. This is not only distracting to the swimmer, but can also be distracting to the entire team as well as the coach.

### ***Practice Levels***

Heartland Aquatics uses a progressive age group program designed to develop the child physically, mentally and emotionally in a systematic fashion. A well-defined, long-term approach of gradually increasing degrees of commitment is essential to reach peak performance levels during a swimmer's physiological prime. The emphasis in the early stages of participation must be placed on developing technical skills and a love for the sport. In the later years, a more demanding physical and psychological challenge must be introduced to the training program. In this respect, "too much too soon" is more often the cause of failure to achieve maximum potential in senior swimming than the reverse situation.

In addition to emphasizing long-term rather than short-term results, it is also important that we establish training groups of swimmers who are compatible in respect to abilities, commitment levels and goals.

At each level, the goals and objectives are specific and directed toward meeting the needs of the swimmer. The long-term goal of total excellence is always in mind. Each child will progress at his or her own rate. The coaching staff recognizes this fact by making team assignments based on a swimmer's physical, mental, and emotional development.

Please note that the specifications of each practice group are determined by the coaching staff. Coaches reserve the right to make changes in order to balance the groups based on swimmer numbers and skill levels within each group, or based on other circumstances that are in the best interest of the swimmer and group as a whole.

In all practice groups, the most important requirement is a positive attitude and work ethic that is conducive to consistent and productive training for the future.

**National Team:** 13-and-older swimmers competing at the regional and national level, including meets such as Midwest Sectionals, All-Stars, Grand Prix Meets, US Open, Junior & Senior Nationals Championships, and Olympic Trials.

Expectations for this group begin with a 90% water and dry-land practice attendance requirement, participation in a minimum of one meet per month, and travel to one regional or national meet per season.

**Senior Team:** 13-and-older swimmers who are not yet at the national level, but are training year-round, with goals to reach D1 times and high-level regional and National Team meets.

Practice expectations are 4-5 workouts per week. Participation in at least one meet per month is suggested but not mandatory.

**High School Pre-Season:** Swimmers during the school year who are preparing for the high school season or looking to earn a spot on their high school team.

Attendance recommendations are 60% of all practices. There are no meet participation requirements, but all are certainly encouraged to swim at least one meet before the high school season starts.

**Junior Team:** 14-and-under swimmers who are focused on swimming and looking to move on towards our Senior and National Level Teams. Swimmers will already have a grasp of watching the pace clock, swimming language and drills. Goals of making D1 times, the All-Star Team, Zones, MW Sectionals and beyond are expected, but secondary to overall swimming ability.

Practice expectations are 3-4 practices per week. Participation in at least one meet per month is encouraged, but not mandatory.

**Age Group:** 14-and-under swimmers who are early in their career and need more time to develop an aerobic base and solid technique before they move up in the groups. They will begin to learn the basics of watching the clock for repeat sendoffs, swimming practice language and drills.

Practice expectations are 3 practices per week. Participation in one meet per month is suggested but not required.

**Developmental (Thunder Sharks):** 6-10 year-old swimmers who have just begun their competitive swimming careers. With a focus on having fun and learning technique, this group is getting ready for the next levels with basic technique work in all four strokes.

There are no practice expectations, but to receive the most benefit of the technique work, 3 or more practices per week would be ideal.

## **Coaching**

Nothing has a greater influence on the quality of children's sports than the excellence of the coach. Heartland Aquatics staff consists of professionally trained coaches. Our coaching staff provides the assurances that the time your children spend in swimming will be quality time. Heartland Aquatics strives to maintain positive coach-to-swimmer ratios in order to provide instruction, coaching and attention to ALL of our swimmers.

### ***Coaches' Responsibilities***

The coaches' job is to supervise the entire competitive swim program. The Heartland Aquatics coaching staff is dedicated to providing a program for youngsters that will enable them to learn the value of striving to improve oneself. Therefore, the coaches must be in total control in matters affecting training and competition.

The coaches are responsible for placing youngsters in practice groups. This is based on the age and ability level of each individual. When it is in the best interest of a swimmer, he/she will be placed in a more challenging training group by the coach.

Sole responsibility for stroke instruction and the training regimen rests with Heartland Aquatics coaching staff. Each group's practices are based on sound scientific principles and are geared to the specific goals of that group.

The coaching staff will make the final decision concerning which meets Heartland Aquatics swimmers may attend. The coaching staff also makes the final decision concerning which events a swimmer is entered into.

At meets, the coaching staff will conduct and supervise warm-up procedures for the team. Before and after each race, the coaches will offer encouragement and advice regarding the upcoming event and constructive criticism following the swimmer's performance.

The building of a relay team is the sole responsibility of the coaching staff.

### ***Coach/ Parent Communication***

Some parents seem to feel more comfortable in discussing their disagreements over coaching philosophy with other parents rather than taking them directly to the coach. Not only is the problem never resolved that way, but in fact this approach often results in new problems being created. Listed below are some helpful parent-coach communication guidelines:

- Try to keep foremost in your mind that you and the coach have the best interests of your child at heart. If you trust that the coach's goals match yours, even though his or her approach may be different, you are more likely to enjoy good rapport and a constructive dialogue.

- Keep in mind that the coach must balance your perspective of what is best for your child with the needs of the team or a training group that can range in size from 20-40 members. On occasion, an individual child's interest may need to be subordinate to the interests of the group, but in the long run the benefits of membership in the group compensate for occasional short-term inconvenience.
- If your child swims for an assistant coach, always discuss the matter first with that coach, following the same guidelines noted above. If the assistant coach cannot satisfactorily resolve your concern, then ask that the head age group coach or head coach join the dialogue as a third party.

Similarly, if your child swims for the head coach, and he or she cannot satisfactorily resolve your concern, then ask that another coach or club representative join the dialogue as a third party.

- If another parent uses you as a sounding board for complaints about the coach's performance or policies, listen empathetically, but encourage the other parent to speak directly to the coach. He or she is the only one who can resolve the problem.

## **Parental Responsibilities**

To have a successful program there must be understanding and cooperation among parents, swimmers, and coaches. The progress your child makes depends to a great extent on this triangular relationship.

The following guidelines will help you keep your child's development in the proper perspective and help your child reach his or her full potential as an athlete.

### **Parental Role**

The coach's job is to motivate and constructively criticize the swimmer's performance. It is the parent's responsibility to supply love, recognition, and encouragement regardless of the level of performance achieved. It is also important for a parent to stress the value of hard work in practice, and to foster an environment of respect for and trust in the coaching staff.

### **Young Swimmers**

Young swimmers are the most inconsistent swimmers, and this can be frustrating for parents, coaches, and the swimmer alike! Parents and coaches must be patient and permit these youngsters to learn to love the sport. When a young swimmer first joins Heartland Aquatics, there may be a brief period in which he/ she appears to slow down. This is a result of the added concentration on stroke technique, but this will soon lead to much faster swims for the individual.

## **Advanced Swimmers**

Even the very best swimmers will have meets where they do not achieve their best times. These "plateaus" are a normal part of swimming. Over the course of a season times should improve. Please be supportive of these "poor" meets. The older swimmers may have only two or three meets a year for which they will be rested and tapered.

## **Coach/ Swimmer Relationship**

The coach is the coach! A good relationship between coach and swimmer produces the best results. When parents interfere with opinions as to how the swimmer should swim or train, it causes considerable, and oftentimes insurmountable, confusion as to whom the swimmer should listen. If you have a problem, concern, question, or complaint, please contact the coach to arrange a time to meet privately.

## **USA Swimming**

### **General Information** *(Parts reprinted from "A Tradition of Excellence" by USA Swimming)*

USA Swimming, America's largest program of guided fitness activity for children, is the National Governing Body for amateur competitive swimming in the United States. USA Swimming staff interact with 59 Local Swimming Committees (LSCs), athletes, coaches and volunteers at all levels to provide a variety of services to 220,000 registered athletes, 20,000 non-athletes and 2,500 swim clubs.

USA Swimming is the ruling body of sanctioned swimming meets in the United States. USA Swimming meets are designed to protect the swimmer, provide fair and equitable conditions of competition, and promote uniformity in the sport so that no swimmer shall obtain an unfair advantage over another.

As the national governing body for the sport, USA Swimming is charged with the responsibility to formulate rules, conduct national championships, disseminate safety and sports medicine information, select competitors to represent this country in international competition, and insure the development of its member clubs and age group swimmers.

### **USA Swimming Insurance**

Heartland Aquatics is a club member of USA Swimming. Clubs joining USA Swimming have liability insurance coverage for approved insured activities. In addition, all HLA swimmers are required to have a current USA Swimming membership. This membership not only supports swimming throughout the country, it also provides very important accident and medical insurance for every swimmer and club.

USA Swimming has adopted two major insurance programs: Excess Accident Medical Protection, and Liability Insurance Program. Each swimmer is covered by USA Swimming insurance at any organized practice of Heartland Aquatics and every competition that is USA Swimming sanctioned.

A summary of the coverage is listed below. If you wish to see the whole insurance summary pamphlet, please contact a member of the HLA board of directors.

**Excess Accident Medical Insurance summary**

*Policyholder:* USA Swimming, Inc.

*Carrier:* Reliastar Life Insurance Company

*Insured Persons:* Registered athlete members of USA Swimming, Inc.

*Registered USA Swimming members are covered during:*

- Participation in competitions, meets or events sponsored, sanctioned or approved by the USA Swimming
- Participation in organized practice sessions
- Organized, supervised travel to and from sponsored and sanctioned events or organized, supervised practice session.

*Deductible:* This program is excess to other primary insurance in place through the member's employment, school, or family. The deductible is the total of other collectible benefits from primary insurance sources applicable to the injury or \$100 of medical expense where there is no primary insurance.

*Benefits:*

- Maximum \$25,000 per occurrence for medical or dental expense
- \$5,000 for accidental death, dismemberment and loss of sight
- Maximum \$1,000 per occurrence for Chiropractic or Physical Therapy treatment
- The amount payable is limited to medical or dental expenses which are medically necessary; and which are usual and customary for such service; and which are incurred within one year of the date of the accident: and which amount exceeds the deductible amount, if applicable.

*Covered Charges:* Covered charges must be a direct result of an accident-related injury and must first occur within 90 days of the accident and be incurred within one year from the date of the accident.

