

To: Minnesota Swimming House of Delegates

From: Van Donkersgoed- Senior Athlete Representative

Re: Final Report to House of Delegates

April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

---

### **2012-2013 Report**

It has been a great year for MSI athletes. We have continued to work with the athlete committee, athlete liaisons, coaches, officials, and volunteers to continue the perpetuation of an athlete centric organization. The athlete committee newsletter was the big addition this year in an effort to engage more athletes. The results of that effort are still to be seen, but the hope is that publication will continue into the future. Ashley Lancey has been a great addition to the BOD. She has been an exceptional and vocal athlete advocate at the BOD meetings and athlete committee meetings. I look forward to watching her step into a more active leadership role next year.

This year has, again, brought about many new changes in an effort to meet the demand created with our continued growth. The LSC still has many things it needs to work out, but I urge all members to be patient as we continue to experience growing pains associated with the large scale growth of our athlete population.

Below, please find my final report to HOD. Thanks for the opportunity to serve the past three years, see you on deck!

#### **Introduction**

When I was first elected to the Board of Directors (“BOD”) in April of 2009 this organization looked remarkably different than it does today. Looking back at how far this organization has come, one will see a fundamental shift in leadership, mission, and vision. Minnesota Swimming (“MSI”) has grown, too. In 2009, MSI had approximately 6,000 athletes; today, MSI has a little over 8,000 athletes. This growth over the last quadrennium stems from the increasing popularity of swimming, a renewed emphasis on outreach, and high retention rates within the LSC. If you look at the amount of television coverage that the US Olympic Trials has received over the years, you will see that swimming has become a topic of conversation and interest in households across the country. The USA Swimming Foundation and the Make-a-Splash program have brought swimming to over a million at-risk youth around the country; MSI has also placed a new emphasis on furthering the USA Swimming Foundation mission through the renewal of the diversity committee. Finally, we see athletes staying in the sport. The surge in membership we see at the end of each quadrennium (subsequent to the Summer Olympic Games) is proving to be a sign of continued and sustained growth throughout the next quadrennium. The sport, USA Swimming, and Minnesota Swimming are continuing to grow and prosper, which casts a positive light on the future of Minnesota Swimming.

This is my final report as an athlete representative for MSI. It has been a ride the past four years, and I feel truly honored to have had the opportunity to serve MSI in the capacity that I have. In this final report, I am going to briefly outline how I envision the mission and vision being furthered in the future. Finally, I will conclude by briefly thanking the board members (past and present), staff, and membership for the impact they’ve had on my life over

the years. MSI has not seen the last of me; I still have an athlete handbook to write this summer, but for now I must step aside and let some fresh blood continue working to make MSI the most athlete centric LSC in the country.

### **Athlete Committee**

The athlete committee had its genesis in a set of bylaw amendments we made subsequent to the hiring of Bob Crunstedt as Executive Director. At that time, MSI was NOT in compliance with the 20% athlete representation requirements, which stem from the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1998 (36 US Code §220501). We needed to add another athlete to the Board of Directors (“BOD”), and we needed to appoint at-large voting members of the (“HOD”). To fix this I worked with Bob, and came up with the idea to resurrect the athlete committee. In doing so, we added another athlete to the BOD: the athlete committee vice-chair; additionally, the 10 members of the committee also became voting members of the HOD. Finally, we now make five additional at-large athlete appointments to the HOD to bring the LSC into the 20% representation requirements.

When I stepped onto the BOD, there was policy in the Redbook that provided for the establishment of an athlete committee. In the first couple of months that I was on the BOD, we unfortunately retired that policy. At that point there was not a bylaw requirement for the athlete committee. So, when we had the opportunity to resurrect the committee, I jumped at the opportunity. I am VERY glad that we now have a standing, bylaw required, athlete committee that has been self-sustaining for the most part.

I have tremendous hope that the athlete committee will continue to be a vital tool for the BOD and the athlete population moving forward. I envision the committee working together in the future to plan athlete events, propose policies and best practices to heighten the competitive atmosphere at our championship meets, actively participate at BOD meetings, and volunteer time to sit on the other standing and ad-hoc committees of MSI. I see the committee being a place for athletes to acquire valuable life skills, grow as leaders, and make lifelong friends. Therefore, it is my hope that the future BOD athletes (Jr, Sr, and athlete committee vice chair), along with the senior MSI leadership, and staff, will vigorously work to continue the athlete committee well into the future.

### **BOD Athlete Representation**

Ashley Lancey has been a great addition to the BOD. I trust that she will dive into her new leadership role as senior athlete representative with an open mind and enthusiasm. With the significant turn over in athlete representatives this year, I also trust that Ashley will be a great mentor to those new additions to the BOD. I hope that the new additions to the BOD bring the same passion, enthusiasm, and work ethic that Ceallach, Ashley, and I have exhibited during our terms.

To the BOD: I hope you continue to perpetuate an inclusive culture of all athletes. It is difficult enough for athlete representatives to be the minority in the room representing the majority, which need not be compounded further with the feeling that their voice does not matter. Take the time to carefully listen to their points, make sure to educate them, and remember that you’re mentors for them as young people. MSI has always done a great job of this, but I would be foolish not to include a sentiment of the sort herein.

Finally, I will continue to be a resource if the new or returning athlete representatives need advice or have questions. I am only a phone call, email, or text away!

### **Political and Financial Thoughts**

I will keep my remarks very brief in this section, but I thought it was appropriate to include some discussion about my hopes for the future of the organization from a structural (political) and fiscal (financial) standpoint.

MSI has been fortunate to see sustained financial growth, with balance sheets running a sustained surplus for the past several years. In addition, we have made significant steps to invest and/or spend down that surplus; however, there is going to be a time when we need to reinvest in the MSI community in tangible ways. The tangible investment efforts would hopefully directly stimulate the community, through further grant opportunities, subsidization, and meet fee reductions.

Additionally, MSI needs to continue working with clubs, private investors, the state legislatures, cities, parks and recreation departments, and other public and private entities not mentioned above that have a vested interest in the development of more pools. The shortage of facility space seems to be the biggest barrier to meeting the increased demand caused by the athlete population growth. If we're not providing the BEST quality meets possible for our athletes, we need to identify solutions to directly solve this problem.

Finally, politically, the organization needs to remain athlete centric. Yes, we're here to serve the community, including athletes and non-athletes, but the majority of the community population is athletes, and thus where we need to always be directing efforts towards the betterment of the athlete experience. Again, MSI has done an excellent job of this, but my hope is that the organization does not lose sight of that.

### **Athlete Protection**

Athlete protection certainly has been the most pervasive issue to hit this sport in my short time involved in the sport. Athlete protection continues to be the focal point of USA Swimming, and slowly, the LSC's are feeling more of the burden. The adoption of the new Safe Sport committee and Safe Sport officer will bring more athlete protection burden upon the LSC's. I want to emphasize the importance of protecting MSI athletes, but at the same time protecting other MSI members. While incorporating and developing the new Safe Sport initiatives within the LSC, great care should be given to not only protecting athletes, but also protecting the rights and privileges of non-athlete members.

I want to draw your attention to the new athlete protection training for athletes that was released this month. This new training will provide athletes with information about sexual abuse prevention, how to identify inappropriate behavior, and how to report concerns. Susan and her Safe Sport team at USA Swimming have put a lot of work into this program not only to teach athletes how to protect themselves, but to protect non-athlete members from false allegations and misunderstandings. The training can be found at [www.usaswimming.org/protect](http://www.usaswimming.org/protect)

### **Thank you to MSI**

Finally, I want to take a moment to thank the members of MSI for giving me the opportunity to serve them over the past four years. I am truly humbled and honored to have been entrusted representing the nearly 9000 athlete members of MSI, and I feel truly fortunate for the impact MSI has had on my life. The experiences that I have had working with the incredible people within MSI will be experiences that I will carry with me and draw upon for wisdom my entire life. The many mentors I have had over the years are numerous, but I'd like to specifically mention a few:

- Natalie Kuramoto has and always been one of the most level headed people I know. Her example, wisdom, and enthusiasm for this sport are absolutely contagious. Her leadership over my terms has been phenomenal, and I cannot thank her enough for her mentorship.
- Cassy Shapley was the first person I spoke with at the MSI governance level. Cassy has been my go-to person since day one. She has been patient with me, answered my questions, and told me when I was flat out wrong. Cassy and Sheryl keep this organization afloat, and I greatly respect them both as human beings and passionate advocates for the sport.
- Sheryl McGuire has been another tremendous resource throughout my time on the BOD. Much like Cassy, Sheryl possesses a historical knowledge of the organization that predates my birth, which has always been helpful in understanding how things have and should be done in MSI.
- Bob Crunstedt has been a sounding board for my crazy ideas, has kept my focus narrow when it needed to be, and has been an incredible mentor. Bob's leadership has been admirable, and I hope that one day I can follow his example while working in a non-profit.
- Jim Hanton is probably the nicest lawyer that I know. A kind, patient, and articulate leader, Jim was such an amazing person to work under my first two years on the BOD. I learned so much from Jim about dealing with people and how to problem solve, which are two skills that I will carry with me forever. His mentorship, along with Bob's, are what led me to find great interest in non-profit management, and have been instrumental in steering my current education and career path.
- Finally a thank you to Paul Lundsten, Jack Campbell, Michael Bougie, John Bradley, and Mark Vininski

The final thing I want to emphasize is the opportunities that athlete representatives have. The list below is only a few of the skills, tools, and experiences that I have attained while working within MSI. I sincerely mean it when I say that my experience working with MSI has been life changing, for which I will be forever grateful!

- Gain exposure to non-profit organization structure.
- Learn how to interact with a wide demographic of people.
- Develop opportunities to sit on national committees, go to convention, and travel around the country to committee meetings, which give exposure to an even larger organizational structure.
- Develop relationships with mentors and role models.
- Cultivate opportunities for personal growth and learning.
- Develop oral and written skills.
- Gain exposure to possible career opportunities.
- Obtain impressive items to include on your college application and eventually your resume.

[For one last time...]

Respectfully Submitted,

Van Donkersgoed  
Senior Athlete Representative