

August 18, 2020

Dear Prospective SHS Swimmers and Parents,

I hope this finds you and your family well, in the midst of some very uncertain times. Please take a few moments to read carefully about the 2020 swimming season.

1. The FHSAA has voted to allow Fall sports. High school swimming in Seminole County will begin on August 31. The swimming that we are currently doing afterschool and on Saturdays is club-only. My Senior club group is at maximum capacity, and I cannot take any more swimmers at this point.
2. Before you can practice with our high school team, you must first be cleared by the Athletic Department at SHS. Every form is now to be uploaded online by the families. No paperwork is turned in to me. Please go to this link: <http://www.seminolehs.scps.k12.fl.us/core/fileparse.php/5849/urlt/SHS-Athletics-Online-Sports-Physical-Clearance-Directions.pdf> Act quickly on this. It has been sent out several times throughout the summer to our club swimmers.
3. COVID is having a big effect on how our team operates this season.
 - a) Due to social distancing and safety concerns for all of our athletes, we can no longer accommodate the large practices (70 to 80 swimmers, on average) that we had in the past. We are likely going to have one group of 40 to 45 swimmers practicing in the afternoons, and the remaining swimmers will have practice in the mornings, three days a week, at 5:30 am. Obviously, there are potential issues with this, as indoor showering on site is forbidden due to COVID concerns.
 - b) We are slated to attend just two dual meets, the Brantley Invitational, the SAC Championships, and the qualifying-only State Series (District-Region-State). For student-athlete safety, I will only be taking limited numbers to these events. That means, unfortunately, that only the fastest swimmers will likely be competing at all this year.
 - c) Our facility can no longer accommodate swimmers waiting for rides when we get rained out. Now, when lightning causes us to exit the pool, the entire facility must be cleared---no waiting in the pool bathrooms or breezeway. For this reason, if a swimmer does not drive him/herself to practice every day, that student must either have a parent waiting in the parking lot on all potentially inclement days, or not even attend practice on those days. We cannot risk people becoming sick needlessly.
 - d) There is no temporary or permanent personal equipment storage at the pool anymore. If my son and daughter were still swimming on the team now, I'd advise that they pack extremely light in their school backpack with the rest of their things—just a suit, goggles, a chamois (takes up less space), a protein bar/snack, and most importantly, a plastic trash bag (to cover the backpack in case of rain). There's no need for a large, additional, swim bag.

We are doing everything we can to safeguard the safety of the student-athlete in our program. We will be taking temperatures prior to practice---an imperfect thing, as it will not identify an asymptomatic swimmer, but it can identify a student who is beginning to run a fever---as well as keeping the swimmers socially distanced while in the water and on the pool deck. Our facility also requires masks to be worn into the facility breezeway, and we have the swimmers exit via a different route, so as not to be contacting the age-groupers coming to practice at 5 pm each day.

Finally, and this may be the most important thing I can tell you:

There was considerable debate about whether or not a swim season would even take place. Thankfully, we are moving ahead, but we are on extremely thin ice. A positive test on just one swimmer will likely result in several more being quarantined. And in a shortened season, that could jeopardize our entire team.

Swimmers, YOU are responsible for keeping yourself, and your teammates as safe as possible. Wear a mask. Stay away from others. Wash your hands. Cough into your arm. Stay home if you don't feel well. And call out your teammates that aren't doing these things; they're risking YOUR season.

And parents, YOU are responsible for modeling these behaviors for your kids. If you don't take it seriously, why would your kids? If you want your kids to swim at the State meet this year, your best play is to do everything you can to make sure your kids are following these guidelines at school, at home, everywhere. Mark my words: If the virus numbers shoot up, I believe the schools will suspend classes, and shut down sports. It happened with water polo, and it will happen with swimming. The good news is, we have control over this, if we take this seriously.

I just got off the phone with a good friend of mine, a swimming and water polo coach in the state. He never took this stuff all that seriously before. Well, his mother now has COVID, with pneumonia in both lungs, and although she appears to be recovering, she's not out of the woods by any means. You'd better believe he takes it seriously now.

As always, stay safe, stay well, and stay tuned for more info.

Tony Ackerson
Head Swimming Coach
Seminole High School
swimseminole@hotmail.com