



# **ATHLETIC HANDBOOK 2023-24**

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## Introduction

Welcome to the athletic department of Great Plains Lutheran High School (GPL). The faculty and coaching staff hope our student-athletes' experience with GPL athletics will be a blessing to them as they grow as a lifelong disciple of Christ. This handbook has been prepared to help you better understand the purpose, policies and procedures of GPL athletics and the important responsibilities of coaches, student-athletes and parents.

## GPL Mission Statement

Great Plains Lutheran High School provides a Christ-centered education to assist families in nurturing students as lifelong disciples of Christ.

## Purpose and Philosophy of Athletics

GPL's athletic programs serve a natural role in nurturing students as lifelong disciples of Christ. Part of this is the physical training and care of our bodies. In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul reminds us of the sanctity of the body: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ... for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). We have a clear directive to take care of God's temple, our bodies. Our athletic program will help train students how to properly take care of their bodies through physical conditioning and other health-conscious behaviors and habits.

Through athletics we can offer opportunities that challenge our students spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically in various settings that cannot be duplicated in a classroom or anywhere else. Within our athletic program it is our goal to provide opportunities for student-athletes to develop Christian character, self-discipline, leadership skills, intrinsic motivation, good sportsmanship, and healthy social interactions. In every aspect of GPL athletics we will strive to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The heart of GPL athletics can be summarized with the **PANTHER WAY** as it relates to our teams and student-athletes:

- Pursue excellence.
- Work hard; work together.
- Lead with Christian character.
- Compete with grit and class.
- Embrace the challenge.
- Live by faith to the glory of God.

These actions benefit our student-athletes both as a part of their sports teams and beyond in the classroom, workplace and many other endeavors in life.

## Expectations of Coaches

Uphold the policies and procedures outlined in the Athletic Handbook, School Handbook and Coaches' Handbook which can be summarized with these standards for coaches:

- Make personal spiritual growth a priority, and strive to let your Christian light and love for Jesus shine brightly in your life and coaching.
- Mindful of GPL's mission, view and use athletics as an important tool in students' Christian education - their growth in their physical, intellectual, spiritual and social-emotional wellbeing.
- Along these lines, approach coaching in a way that is "bigger than" your sport/activity. Striving for excellence in the game itself and preparing our teams to compete well are important, but more so is seizing the opportunities to help your student-athletes grow in their Christian faith/character and a host of skills and attributes that will serve them well in life.
- Lead your team in representing our Savior and school well in all circumstances.
- Strive to build a strong team culture and guide your student-athletes in exemplifying the Panther Way.
- Uphold all school policies that relate to your work, especially those specified in the Student, Athletic and Coaches' Handbooks. This includes encouraging students in their academic growth and holding them accountable for meeting eligibility standards and training rules.
- Strive to proactively and effectively communicate with parents, players and co-workers.
- Publicly be supportive of GPL and its leaders, staff, coaches and students. Defend, speak well of and take others' words and actions in the kindest possible way.
- When conflict arises, be proactive in addressing and resolving it in a professional, Christian manner. Model and encourage others to follow the proper "chain of command"... coach, Athletic Director, Principal, President, Board. Efforts to resolve conflict are often more effective in person or over the phone rather than email or text message.
- In a way that is appropriate with your coaching role, strive to continuously grow in your knowledge of the game/activity and coaching skill.
- Create practice plans that outline your process for helping your team grow and prepare. This includes participating in our schools' year-round PLT4M strength training program.
- Strive to be a good steward of the resources at your disposal (facilities, equipment, uniforms, etc.). Hold yourself, your staff and your student-athletes accountable for putting away equipment, keeping storage areas clean and orderly, etc. Work with the Athletic Director to prepare an annual budget for your sport/activity.
- Strive to enthusiastically support your fellow GPL coaches/teams and the athletic program as a whole.

## **Expectations of Student-Athletes**

Recognizing participation in GPL athletics as a privilege with incredible growth opportunities, student-athletes are expected to:

- Strive to represent their Savior, school, team, family and self by letting their Christian faith shine brightly in everything they do.
- Demonstrate respect for rules, officials, coaches, and all in authority.
- Demonstrate a spirit of sacrifice, cooperation, and teamwork.
- Follow the rules, policies, and procedures outlined in our School Handbook and Athletic Handbook.
- Follow specific team rules as presented by coaches.
- Strive to understand their role(s) on the team and support the goals of the team by being a “star in their role.” This doesn’t mean roles can’t change; it speaks to one’s role at any given time.
- Strive to be a good steward of the resources at their disposal (facilities, equipment, uniforms, etc.). Readily help coaches and managers by putting away equipment, keeping storage areas clean and orderly, etc.
- In summary, strive to exemplify the Panther Way at all times.

## **Expectations of Parents**

Recognizing their role in supporting the GPL athletic program and its student-athletes, parents are expected to:

- Strive to serve as ambassadors of their Savior and GPL at all times.
- In every way possible, be supportive of GPL, its coaches and student-athletes.
- Strive to follow the proper chain of command (coach, athletic director, principal, president, board) and be proactive in directly handling questions and concerns; avoid participating in negative talk (gossip) about anything related to GPL athletics.
- Avoid the temptation to “coach” their children from the sideline during games. Cheering and encouragement should be team-focused and general in nature. Specific instructional comments directed at individual players should be avoided. Players’ attention needs to be solely focused on the game and coach’s instructions.
- In competition settings, support GPL teams and student-athletes with positive, enthusiastic cheering. “Let the coaches coach, let the players play, let the officials officiate and let the spectators be positive.” In summary, always cheer FOR, never AGAINST.
- Encourage and support their student-athlete(s) in understanding their role on the team and fulfilling it to the best of their ability while always striving to grow and improve.
- As able, actively and willingly respond to requests for volunteer service (concession stand, scorer’s table, etc.).

## **Important SDHSAA Policies**

GPL is a member school of the South Dakota High School Athletic Association (SDHSAA). Please visit [SDHSAA.com/athletic-handbook](http://SDHSAA.com/athletic-handbook) for information on various important topics related to participation in high school athletics.

## **GPL Academic Eligibility (from Student Handbook)**

### **Guidelines**

- A student must maintain a 2.0 grade point average and have no F or Unjustified Incomplete grades to remain eligible for co-curricular activities. The grade point average used to determine eligibility will be based on grades reported at each quarter midterm and quarter end.
- The faculty and administration reserve the right to determine special eligibility criteria for students with special needs and for special circumstances.
- The period of ineligibility will be from the posting of the ineligible list to the end of the midterm or quarter.

### **Consequences**

- During the first 10 school days of the period of ineligibility, the student will not be permitted to attend any group or team practices, rehearsals or meetings. During this time, the student will attend Tenth Hour, an after school study hall that runs from 3:35-4:15pm) Monday through Thursday, until grades improve.
- Following the 10 school days of ineligibility and the required improvement of grades, the student is expected to attend all group or team practices, rehearsals, and meetings, unless the season ends before the reinstatement date.
- If a student is in an event which is a single presentation, that student may or may not be allowed to complete that obligation (for example: a drama production).

### **Reinstatement**

- A student identified as ineligible may appeal for full reinstatement after the initial 10 days of ineligibility. This request must be made in writing, and the administrative team will determine eligibility based on the student's academic progress and faculty input.
- Students choosing not to appeal or having an appeal denied will be reinstated at the close of the eligibility term unless grades indicate continued ineligibility according to the procedures set by the administration.
- A student who transfers into Great Plains Lutheran High School and is ineligible according to our standards upon entry will remain ineligible until the end of the eligibility term.
- A student deemed ineligible as a result of fourth quarter grades will be allowed to practice at the start of the fall season for the following school year. A student may be

reinstated for co-curricular and other activities on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of school if grades meet the eligibility criteria.

NOTES: Coaches and directors may have higher eligibility requirements. See individual activity training rules for more information.

## **GPL Code of Conduct**

Refer to the GPL Student Handbook for Code of Conduct policies and consequences. Note that Code of Conduct XVI specifies that coaches and advisors may establish further policies for the effective operation of their activity. These policies also become part of the Code of Conduct.

## **School-Sponsored Athletic Programs**

Fall: girls and boys cross country, boys football, girls volleyball, football cheerleading

Winter: girls basketball, boys basketball, basketball cheerleading

Spring: girls and boys track and field, girls and boys golf

## **Dual-Sport Participation**

For various reasons that include but may not be limited to those listed below, GPL does not permit student-athletes to participate in more than one school-sponsored sport each season.

Rationale:

- With GPL's current enrollment, we are blessed to be able to field teams in every sport without dual-sport participation.
- It is difficult, if not impossible for a student-athlete to experience the full benefit of training and integration into a team with dual-sport participation.
- Dual-sport participation would result in student-athletes missing practice time in one sport while competing in the other which could/would be perceived as unfair by other student-athletes and make practice planning and game preparation difficult for coaches.
- With GPL's academic rigor, students need sufficient time to devote to their school work both in and out of the school day. Dual-sport participation would result in student-athletes missing more school and have less time to devote to their school work outside the school day.

## **Awards**

GPL's athletic department recognizes qualified athletic performance with varsity letters and pins, special individual and team awards, and career awards. It is our intent to recognize student-athletes' use of their God-given talents as well as to recognize the hard work and dedication they demonstrate in representing our Savior and school through athletic competition.

## General Policy

Awards will be given to student-athletes participating in GPL-sponsored athletic programs.

In order to be eligible for any GPL athletic award, the student-athlete must finish the season “in good standing” (minimal code of conduct or training rule violations) with the team. Injuries or other similar hardships do not compromise the “in good standing” status.

## Explanation of Awards

GPL acknowledges student-athletes with the following awards:

- Participation – Participation in a sport will be recognized with a certificate.
- Letter – Lettering will be recognized with a school-issued “GP” chenille for the first varsity letter and the sport-specific pin for the first and subsequent varsity letters.
- Special awards
  - Team Awards (MVP, most-improved, newcomer, etc.) will be the responsibility of the head coach of each activity.
  - Panther Award (the player who encouraged others, was coachable, had a good attitude, worked hard, was a strong leader, let their Christian light shine, exemplified the Panther Way) will be the responsibility of the head coach of each activity.
  - Panther Career Athlete Award will be the responsibility of the athletic director, coaching staff, and faculty.
  - Other Awards – all-conference, all-state, and other awards will be presented as selected by various entities.

## Varsity Lettering Requirements

- **Basketball**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Play in a minimum of 60% of the quarters throughout the season (20 games = 80 quarters; 60% of 80 = 48 quarters needed)
- **Cheerleading**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Cheer in 90% of the games throughout the season
- **Cross Country**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Qualify for the state meet as an individual or
  - Qualify for the state meet as a scoring team member or
  - Medal in four meets
- **Football**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Play in a minimum of 60% of the quarters throughout a season (8 games = 32 quarters; 60% of 32 = 20 quarters needed)



- **Golf**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Compete in 60% of the varsity matches
- **Track**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Qualify for state meet as an individual or
  - Earn approximately 3 points per meet or
  - Be a top performer in his/her event(s) at GPL
- **Volleyball**
  - Complete the season “in good standing” and
  - Play a minimum of 60% of matches throughout the season

### **Elastic Clause**

The head coach has the authority to determine if a student-athlete may letter even if he or she has NOT met the requirements of the written policy.

The head coach (in consultation with the athletic director) has the authority to determine if a student athlete may NOT letter even if he or she has met the requirements of the written policy.

### **Levels of Competition**

#### **Sub-Varsity (C, JV)**

GPL offers sub-varsity level competition for many sports. Emphasis at this level is very much on development of skills, knowledge, and decision making. Sub-varsity coaches will strive to embrace the process of teaching the game to student-athletes and helping them grow. Coaches are encouraged to award playing time based on student-athletes’ abilities, preparation in practice, and commitment to team goals and expectations. While there should be no expectation of equal playing time, efforts will be made to provide playing time for all players.

#### **Varsity**

GPL also offers varsity level competition. Coaches will select athletes that are prepared for this highest level of high school athletic competition. While all the benefits of participating in sports will continue at the varsity level, emphasis will include putting the best possible team together with the goal of achieving victory. Striving to achieve victory is an appropriate part of pursuing excellence to the glory of God, and with it comes many important learning opportunities and life lessons.

#### **Playing Time**

As the talent/skill and level of commitment of student-athletes differ, so does the amount of playing time they will be awarded. With the previously stated goals of sub-varsity and varsity competition in mind, the coach has the responsibility of giving every student-athlete an appropriate level of playing time. GPL coaches are mindful of their responsibilities and strive to

live up to them. Depending on the level of competition and situation, team-focused student-athletes need to accept their role on the team (how they are best able to help the team achieve its goals and be its best) and sacrifice their own desires for the good of the team. It is entirely possible that a player on a varsity team may not experience playing time in every game.

## **Progression of Communication**

*“My dear brothers take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19).*

GPL encourages student participation in co-curricular activities as a means of providing opportunities for personal and spiritual growth, skill development, socialization, creative expression, and competitive experience. The value of athletic programs is recognized as important to the total educational process.

Participation in co-curricular activities is a privilege with accompanying responsibilities, roles, and expectations. These responsibilities, roles, and expectations can possibly lead to misunderstanding. Gossip and all negative approaches to a question, concern or problem make it more difficult to solve. An important part of the solution needs to be proactive and direct communication between student-athletes, coaches and parents.

Regular, open communication with players is an essential part of effective coaching. Players need to feel free to communicate with coaches and trust that coaches will not mistreat them for expressing themselves. If a player has a question or concern, he or she is encouraged to directly discuss the matter with the coach before discussing it with anyone else. Parents can promote a healthy communication process by encouraging it in their children, being supportive of all student-athletes and coaches, and being positive role models as parent spectators. To facilitate a healthy and effective communication process, the following guidelines are in place:

- Coaches will operate with an “open door” policy where they will receive and strive to appropriately respond to questions and concerns from student-athletes and parents. If a question or concern is expressed via email or phone message, they will strive to provide an initial response within 24 hours of receiving the message.
- If a player has a question or concern, he or she should bring the matter directly to the coach before discussing it with anyone else. One of the learning and maturing opportunities that athletic involvement provides a young person is seeking to solve problems directly instead of relying on a parent or a friend to solve them. This approach is consistent with what God tells us in Matthew 18.
- If a parent wishes to discuss a question or concern with a coach, the following procedure should be followed:
  - Contact with the coach should be made at an appropriate time. It should not happen immediately following a contest or late into the same evening. Please wait until the next day to address the coach. This gives both parties the opportunity to reflect on the situation.

- Communication by all parties will be done in a spirit of Christian love. If the discussion cannot be carried out in a rational, calm, and mature manner the meeting will be immediately suspended. Please understand the inherent difficulty in discussing topics such as playing time, strategy, and decision-making. The head coach has the ultimate and final responsibility for the strategy of the game and the use of personnel in accomplishing that strategy.
- Consider connecting with the coach in person or over the phone. There is much more room for misunderstanding emails and other forms of one-way communication.
- In the majority of cases, we are confident the parties involved will arrive at an amicable solution to the question or concern.
- If the student-athlete, parent, or coach cannot mutually agree upon a satisfactory solution, the subject should then be brought to the athletic director (first) and then to the principal for mediation.

## **Practices**

As a general rule, GPL athletic practices are closed to the general public and to nonparticipating students. This policy is in place to promote safety and prevent distractions. Members of the GPL family are welcome to observe practices in a way that does not interfere. Anyone who wishes to observe a practice should clear it with the coach ahead of time. Coaches reserve the right to close practices at their discretion.

## **Transportation**

GPL arranges transportation for student-athletes to all off campus contests. Under normal circumstances, the team travels to and from games in a school vehicle. Under special circumstances, players may leave from the contest site with their parents, guardians, or another adult (18+ years old and a high school graduate) as long as parental consent has been furnished to the coach or vehicle driver. Please use the "Transportation Permission Form" located at GPLHS.org. This form needs to be filled out for each occurrence; it is not a year-long permission form. It is helpful when parents fill out the form and communicate with the head coach ahead of time rather than requesting a form from the coach or driver at the athletic contest.

## **School Work/Denial of Participation**

The student-athlete is responsible for all schoolwork he or she may miss due to athletic events. Schoolwork should normally be submitted before the student leaves for the contest. If a student-athlete is delinquent in his or her school work responsibilities, the teacher, in conjunction with the coach and school administration, may deny athletic participation until the matter is resolved.

## **Medical Examinations and Forms**

Our current policy states that ALL students (not only student-athletes) attending GPL should have a physical examination every two years. The “normal” schedule for most students would be to have a physical examination prior to their freshmen and junior years. Transfer students’ examinations also need to fall within a two-year time period. Student-athletes are required to submit specific forms each year.

Please note:

- Students will NOT be allowed to participate in athletic activities (including practices) until the necessary forms are completed and returned to the GPL office per SDHSAA policy.
- There are specific forms for concussions. All our students who receive a concussion during the school year will be cleared to return to play by medical personnel using impact testing.
- Doctors of Chiropractic are eligible to conduct physical examinations.
- Physical examinations completed after April 1 count toward the next two years.
- Deadlines:
  - Students participating in fall sports (FB, VB, XC) must return forms before the first scheduled practice.
  - All other students must return forms by the first day of school. We would appreciate them as soon as possible.
- Please feel free to speak with the athletic director or school office with any physical examination or form questions.

## **Athletic Trainer Services**

Big Stone Therapies (BST) provides regular athletic training services. Properly trained personnel visit GPL at least weekly to check injured student-athletes. BST personnel are on duty at all home varsity football, volleyball and basketball games to provide care for injured players.

## **Insurance**

GPL has catastrophic insurance through SDHSAA that covers all students while involved in school-sponsored activities on and off campus. This coverage is secondary to any health/accident coverage retained by parents or guardians. If an accident or injury occurs, the claim for coverage should first be made with any applicable family insurance. A claim for any remaining balance can then be filed with the school’s coverage.

## **Facility**

The Lord has richly blessed GPL with first class facilities and equipment to carry out its mission. Everyone plays an important role in the proper maintenance and care for our facility. This includes but is not limited to putting equipment in its proper place when not in use and trash in

designated receptacles. Anyone using the gyms should wear non-marking athletic shoes designated for indoor use. GPL personnel will manage the control of lights, backboards, bleachers, and other equipment.

## **Training Rules**

Each sport will have specific training rules that need to be understood, signed and upheld by all student-athletes. Training rules will generally cover the following topics: conduct and appearance guidelines, practice procedures, eligibility rules, sport-specific procedures, curfew times, etc.

## **Conference Affiliation**

GPLHS is a member of the Eastern Coteau Conference (ECC) which includes the following schools: full membership - Britton-Hecla, Florence-Henry, GPL, Tri-State, Waubay-Summit, Waverly-South Shore, Wilmot; football-only membership - Clark-Willow Lake, Deuel, Webster

## **Grade School (St. Martin's) Participation**

Rationale for allowing St. Martin's students to participate in GPL activities:

- The SDHSAA recognizes St. Martin's and GPL as a "common opponent" (connected junior high and high school program) with regard to participation in its sanctioned activities.
- It is common in SDHSAA member schools for junior high students to participate in high school activities when they are needed and able to contribute.
- There are circumstances where GPL activities and students benefit from participation of St. Martin's students.
- St. Martin's students generally benefit from the experience of participating in GPL activities.

Overarching guidelines:

- GPL activities are primarily for GPL students. Decisions regarding participation of St. Martin's students need to be made carefully with this in mind. For example, what does this mean for postseason competition? There will be unique circumstances in every situation that need to be considered. In general, preference will be given to qualifying GPL students.
- Participating students will uphold St. Martin's policies related to activity participation.
- Participating students will uphold expectations of GPL activities such as team training rules.
- Participating students are expected to attend GPL practices and games/meets/matches when there is not a conflict with a St. Martin's activity. Under normal circumstances, GPL games/meets/matches should take precedence over St. Martin's practices.
- Participation in some activities may be determined with tryouts/cuts. If high school students are cut based on numbers, St. Martin's students will not be invited to participate. An exception could be a senior who gets cut from the Varsity team but

additional players are needed for the C-level or JV team. The equal opportunity for St. Martin's students will be the invitation for all interested students to try out.

- In order to participate in a GPL activity, St. Martin's students need to participate in the same activity at St. Martin's if it is offered.
- St. Martin's students will pay a \$25 fee for each activity in which they participate each school year. This will contribute to coach compensation, equipment and uniform use, transportation, etc.

Sport-specific guidelines:

- Cross country, track & field, golf: Participation is open to 7th and 8th graders, and they may participate at the Varsity level at the coach's discretion. Postseason participation needs to be carefully considered.
- Football: Participation on the GPL junior high team is open to 7th and 8th graders, and they may participate on the Junior Varsity team at the coach's discretion with careful consideration to what their participation means for high school students' playing time and development. Under normal circumstances, they may not participate at the Varsity level.
- Volleyball and basketball: Eighth graders may be invited to participate if there is need. Need is foremost determined by creating ideal practice circumstances, not improving the quality of GPL teams. If such need is determined, the invitation to participate will be extended to all eighth graders. If more eighth graders desire to participate than there is need, a tryout may be used to select players. Under normal circumstances, eighth graders may not participate at the Varsity level. They will ideally participate in C-level games. They may participate in Junior Varsity games at the coach's discretion with careful consideration to what their participation means for high school students' playing time and development. In an effort to give lower skill C-level high school players optimal practice opportunities, eighth graders may be invited to practice but not participate in games.
- Cheer: Eighth graders may be invited to participate if there is need. To be eligible to participate in GPL cheer, students may not participate in St. Martin's basketball. If such need is determined, the invitation to participate will be extended to all eighth graders. If more students desire to participate than there is need, a tryout may be used to select team members.