

Dear Junior High Football Players:

I want to reiterate some information I shared at the Oak-Land and Stillwater Junior High visits on June 1. This information can get you off to a great start to the 2012 football season.

Players Entering 7th, 8th, & 9th Grade: Join the 9-12 grade football coaches for the Pony Junior High Camp at Stillwater Area High School. This camp is for students entering 7-9 grade and will provide each participant an opportunity to learn offensive and defensive systems they will use during the season, skills and drills that are integral to the football program, practice with current and future teammates, and an exceptional player-to-coach ratio. The coaches volunteer at this to help raise money to pay additional coaches at all levels in grades 7-12 grade.

Monday, July 30 through Thursday, August 2 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Cost of \$50 includes a shirt – registration through Community Education

https://ssl.dwebsite.com/secure2/ce_stillwater/php/public.php?action=listClasses&categoryId=31&programId=9&from=listCategories

Players Entering 7th and 8th Grade: If no action was taken by our program, our 7th and 8th grade football teams would begin practice one or two weeks after their opponents and VAA football teams (August 27). Most importantly, it is a safety concern to play football with only a few practices prior to a game. Secondly, it is a major competitive disadvantage. To prevent that, in 2011 we initiated the Junior High Preseason Practices. These sessions are free, coached primarily by former VAA coaches and player parents, and will heavily focus on skills, drills, and fundamentals. We provide each player the opportunity to play two offensive and two defensive positions at these practices. The first week will be unpadding and the second week padded. These sessions are in conjunction with the varsity football staff and we strongly suggest taking advantage of them. The only requirement is that the player must be registered for football.

Preseason Practice Dates: August 13, 14, 15, and 16 at Oak-Land Junior High and August 20, 21, and 23 at Stillwater Junior High. All sessions are from 6:00-8:00 PM.

Players Entering 7th and 8th Grade: Finally, let me share with you a change in approach to junior high football in our competitive conference. Our conference includes Hastings, Cottage Grove, Oltman, Lake, Woodbury, and White Bear Lake. This conference has traditionally fielded light and heavyweight teams. A few years ago it attempted A and B teams. The conference went back to light and heavyweight teams after one year. The other avenue for competition is even teams regardless of weight. It is important to realize there are positive and negative aspects to all three methods. To be very clear, I strongly support the even team path. Let me share some reasons why:

- There are no light and heavyweights in 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade. While the maturation process creates disparity in 7th and 8th grade, light and heavyweights significantly change the game for many who have played in grades 3-6.
- The game for a lightweight is not the same. Most of these players will spend one or two years playing positions they likely have not played much and likely will not play in the future. This is not a horrible thing, but it can be unpopular and unproductive.

- The even team method seeks just that, two (possibly more) even teams. Junior high years is way too early to be identifying A and B teams.
- We will work with our junior high coaches to divide size, athleticism, and talent as equally as possible between their teams. We also will reinforce the fact that the youth and junior high programs are too early to identify players. A “stud” at a younger level may stop growing or working while a player labeled as being too small, slow, or non-athletic may grow and work to become an incredible high school player. In my 11 years as a high school football coach, I cannot tell you how frustrating it is to see the athletes or non-athletes that should be playing football who walk the halls. More often than not they tell me they do not play because of a previous football experience. We believe that the change from the light and heavyweight teams to the equal teams approach is a step in the right direction to resolve some of these situations.
- This system preserves the game our boys played in the past and will play in the future by avoiding body weight distinctions. It avoids haves and have nots of an A and B system. Even teams will allow for a high level of competition and will ensure players are in proper positions.
- For families concerned about the size of the player please do not let this be a deterrent. This is *not* an experiment. Programs like Eden Prairie, Wayzata, Minnetonka, Blaine, Eastview, East Ridge, Forest Lake, Mounds View, Woodbury, and dozens more, have discarded the light and heavyweight model. Your son can still have a quality, safe experience playing positions he played in earlier seasons.
- Finally, for what it is worth, as a head football coach I have witnessed all three organization methods. I have debriefed each method with a friend who has coached at the college, high school, and junior high levels. He felt so strongly about this method that we choose to play two even teams despite the fact that the conference went back to light and heavyweights (two heavyweight teams and no lightweight teams).
- Creating a winning culture is a key element to the overall program philosophy of Stillwater Ponies Football. However, not at the expense of losing players along the way. Football is a numbers game. The philosophy for our feeder programs (VAA and Junior High) is to focus on one number – the number of players on their team that come back out next year. Coach football, teach character, ensure fun and growth in the sport and they will be back out!

7th, 8th, and 9th Grade Registration: Seventh through ninth grade football players must register at their junior high. Oak-Land registration is August 8 from 12:00-3:00 PM. Stillwater registration is August 9 from 12:00-3:00 PM. The information and forms you need can be found at the link below.

<http://www.stillwater.k12.mn.us/schools/high-school/stillwater-area-high-school/athletics-activities-clubs-and-fine-arts-0>

Go Ponies!

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