

St. Thomas School Athletics Handbook

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I. Goals and Philosophy of St. Thomas School Athletics

The goals of athletics at St. Thomas are:

1. For the student athletes of St. Thomas school and parish to learn some basic skills and rules of their chosen sports.
2. To provide the student athletes of St. Thomas school and parish an opportunity to exercise and increase physical fitness.
3. For the student athletes of St. Thomas school and parish to learn some of life's lessons about setting goals, striving for self and team improvement, and being a reliable teammate. These lessons are taught and learned through faithfully attending practices and participating in competition against other teams as the opportunity arises at the coach's discretion.
4. For the student athletes of St. Thomas school and parish to have fun while demonstrating they are learning these life lessons.

5. For the student athletes of St. Thomas school and parish to be prepared for participation in high school athletics. While at St. Thomas, if a student chooses to be involved in the athletic program, they should leave knowing more about their sport, more about competition, more about conditioning, and more about what it takes to work toward common goals side by side with their teammates. These expectations and others will be present in any high school athletic program.

Our philosophy at St. Thomas school and parish is that living the values of the Catholic Christian faith and excelling in academics should be the most important parts of the total experience for our students. If a student chooses to participate in athletics, it should be an enjoyable learning experience. Sports can be a lifelong form of fitness and fun if there are positive experiences in the early years. Therefore, all students at the school and the parish who wish to participate should be able to do so within practical limits.

Winning or losing a game is one of many indicators of the amount of learning taking place in practice. It also shows the degree to which the team employs successful strategies for working together and competing as a unit toward common goals. But while winning is naturally highly desirable, winning and losing will be kept in its proper perspective. We all must understand and teach the appropriate emphasis placed on winning or losing a contest within the bigger picture of life.

At St. Thomas we strive for the attitude that while we badly want to win and victory is a team goal, winning and losing are much less important than displaying good sportsmanship and playing hard for the love of the contest. Coaches, parents, and administrators involved in St. Thomas athletics must nurture within the students a healthy taste for competition and self-improvement, along with the desire of each individual to behave as a loyal and dependable teammate.

Before the beginning of each athletic season, the St. Thomas athletic director and the coaches will agree to specific goals for the team that will include but not be limited to these:

1. The members of the team, the families, the coaches, and the followers of the team from both inside and outside the St. Thomas community observe and enjoy a positive experience. The season is highlighted with lessons on self-improvement, team loyalty, and dedication to common objectives.
2. Each player on the team grows in knowledge and appreciation of the skills required to be a competent player. They learn the ways to acquire those skills and are motivated to do the work it takes to develop them.
3. Each team member learns and exhibits the effort and commitment it takes by every individual to form a solid, well-prepared, unified team.

4. Practices are crisp and efficient. Each player receives the appropriate mix of instruction, practice, and conditioning to enter each competition well prepared to compete and contribute in a positive fashion.
5. The athletic director, coaches, and students all represent St. Thomas School and the parish, as well as the Ann Arbor community, the way they should be represented. We all model being polite, disciplined, well prepared, gracious (in victory OR defeat), and enthusiastic examples of good sportsmanship.
6. Each player knows that academic success and representing Catholic Christian values is most important. Each player understands that playing for a St. Thomas team is a privilege to be earned and it is not anything to be taken for granted. Each member of the team is fully aware of school, parish, and team rules, and makes every effort to follow the rules faithfully.
7. As a team we enter each game ready to compete strongly. We strive for excellence. Naturally, we all want to win. But at the same time, we all understand that winning is not as important as practicing the habits, behaviors, skills, and attitudes necessary to be at our very best. We demonstrate through actions that we know disciplined preparation and putting forth our best efforts result in us winning our share of games. We understand, though, that if we walk away from each competition knowing we did the best we could to prepare ourselves during practices and to apply what we have learned in practice during the game, then we are winners regardless of the score.

II. Sports Offered and Compliance with MHSAA Rules

St. Thomas School currently offers the following sports:

Sport	Grades	Season
Coed Cross Country	6, 7 and 8	September – November
Girls Volleyball	6, 7 and 8	September – November
Boys Basketball	6, 7 and 8	November - January
Girls Basketball	6, 7 and 8	January – March
Coed Track	6, 7 and 8	March - May

All sports follow the rules and guidelines of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA).

III. Eligibility

A. Academic

Academic eligibility will be checked by the athletic director regularly throughout the season for students who attend St. Thomas school. Provisions will be made to check eligibility status for any St. Thomas parish members on the team who do not attend St.

Thomas school. If students are determined to be ineligible, they may not play the following week (Monday through Sunday) although they are encouraged, but not required, to continue practicing with the team. This is so they can keep up with the rest of the team in learning and conditioning. It is understood that if a player is ineligible, the first priority is to take the steps required to bring their grades up so they are eligible again. This may preclude their need to continue practicing with the team while they are academically ineligible.

If a student is ineligible two times during a season, he/she may not be allowed to continue being on the team. This will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the athletic director, principal, teacher(s), student and the student's parents.

Students are ineligible if they have:

- Grade averages in two classes less than 72%.
- Grade average in one class less than 62%.
- Demonstrated consistent or gross misbehavior determined by the principal or athletic director with input from the coaches and/or classroom teachers. This includes classroom behavior as well as behavior on the court, track or playing field.

Athletic Eligibility Exception Policy

- Sometimes a student may not be able to keep up with the work of a class for a variety of personal reasons. A faculty member may request an exception to the eligibility policy. The principal and the athletic director will review each case on its individual merit and decide on eligibility in conjunction with the student and the student's parents.
- Guidelines for exceptions:
 - There can be no late or missing assignments.
 - Assignments must demonstrate genuine effort.
 - The student must consistently demonstrate good behavior and adherence to St. Thomas rules.

B. Attendance

Each athlete must be in attendance at school all day on a game day and the morning following a game. An excused absence from school may be allowed if arrangements are made with the athletic director and/or coach prior to the absence. For a St. Thomas parish member who is on the team but does not attend St. Thomas school, we will rely in good faith on the honesty of the parents and student to report any absences from the school in which the parish member is enrolled. Failure to meet this requirement will be dealt with on an individual basis by the athletic director and principal of St. Thomas school.

C. Behavioral

If a teacher, administrator, or coach finds that a student's behavior does not meet the expectations of a St. Thomas student athlete, the coach reserves the right to reduce

participation time for the next contest. If behavior problems are extreme or flagrant, the coach may restrict the student for an entire game. If a student is serving a school suspension (in school or out of school) during the day of a game, the student will not participate on that day. Here again, in the case of a St. Thomas parish member who is a member of the team but is enrolled in another school, we will rely in good faith on the honesty of the parents and the student to report any suspensions. The student may practice on days of in-school restriction, but not out of school suspension. Flagrant or severe behavioral problems may result in partial or complete exclusion from one or all sports participation for a school year, as determined by the athletic director in concert with the principal.

E. Proof of Physical

No St. Thomas student will be allowed to practice or play in a sport until they can show proof of a physical examination given by a licensed physician that has taken place on or after April 15 of the previous school year. The physician can fill out the physical form provided by the school (they are in the office, or you can obtain a form from the athletic director), or otherwise certify that a student is physically able to safely participate.

F. Participation Fee

St. Thomas currently assesses a \$35.00 participation fee for each sport in which the student athlete participates. This fee helps cover the cost of coaches, uniforms, equipment, and game officials.

IV. Expectations

A. Expectations for Coaches and Administrators

The role of the coach is to be a teacher and mentor. It is a position of responsibility, trust, and respect. All coaches are to:

1. Know and teach the proper rules for their sport and show proper respect for the officials.
2. Teach the basic skills and strategies of the sport, allowing for learning and mistakes.
3. Exhibit and teach good sportsmanship and etiquette, putting winning into its proper perspective.
4. Provide opportunities for all eligible players to have a significant amount of playing time in each game for which they are eligible. This does not necessarily mean equal playing time for all players. The coach will make every effort to play players in games who faithfully attend practices and who demonstrate the desire to learn and improve. The amount of playing time in games experienced by individual players will vary, depending on desire, attitude, effort, skill, and game situations. The coach will decide who plays when.
5. Withhold judgment about the future talents and potential of their players.
6. Exercise good judgment and fairness in deciding issues among players.

7. Be available as necessary to assist with game facility setup before contests and cleanup after contests have concluded.
8. Lead the team in a pre-competition prayer if the athletic director is unable to lead the prayer.

The athletic director will organize and oversee schedules, officiating, facilities, and the hiring and performance of coaches. The athletic director will also mediate or settle disputes between players (or parents) and coaches, when absolutely necessary. The athletic director will lead a pre-competition prayer before each game or meet. If this is not possible for the athletic director to do this, the coach will lead the prayer. The principal will act as a point of escalation in the event that parents do not feel satisfied with results from the coach and/or athletic director.

B. Expectations for Student Athletes

1. Maintain academic and behavioral eligibility.
2. Attend all practices and games, unless it is impossible to do so due to illness, family emergency, etc.
3. Treat coaches, officials, and teammates with respect, obeying the rules of the sport and the team.
4. Show positive behavior and good sportsmanship in all practices and games.
5. Communicate with the coach if problems or conflicts arise.
6. Assist with game and practice facility setup before practices and contests, and cleanup after practices and contests have concluded.

C. Expectations for Parents

The attitude of young athletes toward sports is often shaped by the attitude of parents. It is important for parents to be positive role models and supporters of their children by doing the following:

1. Arrange for proper physical examination and payment of participation fees.
2. Attend games whenever possible.
3. Be available to provide transportation to and from practices and games.
4. Model respect for coaches and officials. Exhibit proper sportsmanship and etiquette during games.
5. Abide by the decisions of the coach concerning player position placement and playing time.
6. Support your child in winning and losing, and help provide the proper perspective.
7. Be available to assist with game requirements such as collecting money at the gate, working at the concession stand, and helping with scoring and time keeping. In order for our program to succeed, parents must volunteer their time and talents as part of all that it takes to support their children in their role as student athletes. St. Thomas has a rich tradition of parents pitching in and doing whatever it takes to help out. This support is much appreciated by the school and coaching staff.

V. Practices

Team members should attend all scheduled practices unless there is an extenuating circumstance that has been communicated with the coaching staff in advance. Practices will be held at regular times and the practice schedule will be communicated in advance so everyone knows when they are to be at practices.

We realize the students and their families are extremely active and there will be times during the season when there are conflicts that prevent 100% attendance at team practices. This is permissible, but the student athlete just needs to let the coaches know before hand. Also be aware that missing practices could possibly mean the student athlete will have less playing time during the game(s).

On days when there is no school, practice will not be held unless announced by the coach.

VI. Games

The number of games in any given season will be equal to or less than the maximum allowed by the MHSAA. Athletes are expected to attend games unless there is an illness or family emergency. While games on weekends are rare, they are sometimes necessary due to tournaments. If an athlete has a conflict, they must communicate the conflict to the coach as soon as possible so the coach is aware of it as soon as possible.

VII. Issues Between Athletes and Coaches

If a conflict arises between an athlete or parent and coach, the following steps are to be taken:

1. The student athlete or parent should speak privately with the coach at a time other than during a game. Coaches are asked not to discuss conflicting issues with parents immediately before, during, or after a game. This is to avoid conversations taking place in the heat of competition. The best time and way for an athlete or parent to approach a coach is before or after practice, in private, with respect and an open mind. This is also the way coaches are expected to approach potentially difficult discussions with athletes or parents.
2. If the athlete or parent does not feel they have achieved a satisfactory resolution after speaking with the coach, they should contact the athletic director. If necessary, the athletic director will confer with the principal.
3. If the athlete or parent still does not feel they have achieved satisfactory resolution after they have spoken with the coach and the athletic director, then they are welcome to take the issue to the principal.

Please respect these lines of communication. We want everyone to enjoy a positive experience and we will work as a team to make sure athletes and parents are heard. Input from parents will always be respectfully considered. Honoring these lines of communication will keep the process orderly. Our desire is that, in the event of some sort of dispute, this process will contribute to a cordial and positive outcome for everyone concerned.

VIII. Miscellaneous

A. Team Selection, Organization, and Playing Time

St. Thomas has a “no cut” policy for its athletic teams. If a student wants to be on the team, they must be enrolled at St. Thomas school or be a practicing member of the St. Thomas parish in good standing and attending Religion Education. If the student is in these categories, then they must keep themselves eligible, attend practices, and show sincere effort to learn and improve at the sport. If a student athlete is and does all of these things, then they are on the team. If the enrollment at St. Thomas school along with the number of parishioners who wish to play ever grows to the point that we have more than enough players required to field a viable team, we may institute a selection process for our sports teams. For the foreseeable future, we will maintain a “no cut” policy.

As with other schools/teams against which St. Thomas competes, our teams are competitive level teams. The coach will decide which positions players will play, the playing strategies utilized, and the amount of playing time each player will get in order for St. Thomas to compete well. Playing time in games is an athlete’s reward for skill development, excellent participation in practices, attitude, leadership, and team spirit. While not everyone gets to play the same amount, coaches will try to give all players playing time throughout the course of the season. The coach’s decision is final and must be respected by athletes and parents.

The Ann Arbor Recreation Department has leagues for several different sports where equal playing time is emphasized, if that is what families are looking for. If an athlete or parent has an issue with a coach’s decisions, there is a process to be followed which is explained above in this handbook.

B. Transportation

Transportation to all events and home from all practices will be provided by parent drivers. Parents should make every effort to know the practice and game schedules so they are available to transport their student athlete to and from any events at the appropriate times.

C. Uniforms

Uniforms for games will be issued to all team members. These uniforms are the property of St. Thomas, and they are to be cleaned and cared for properly. Students will be charged for any loss or damage to uniforms. Students are not to wear uniforms during regular school days unless approved by the principal and/or athletic director.

D. Behavior

Student athletes are representatives of St. Thomas School and the parish. Inappropriate behavior during, before, or after practices or games may result in disciplinary action. The coaches will inform the athletic director of any inappropriate behavior, and the athletic director will speak to the athlete, the parents, and the principal as necessary to resolve any behavioral issues.