



# ST PETER'S GIRLS PREP SCHOOL

105 Witkoppen Road, Paulshof  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
PO Box 37, Rivonia 2128  
Tel +27 (0)11 367 6631  
Email [girlsreception@stpeters.co.za](mailto:girlsreception@stpeters.co.za)  
[www.stpeters.co.za](http://www.stpeters.co.za)

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## COMPETITIVE SPORT

Dear Grade 3 Parents

Welcome to the world of competitive sport! For those of you who are experiencing it for the first time – it's not for the faint-hearted. 😊

As a point of departure, it is important to clarify our sporting philosophy – as briefly mentioned by Mrs Liz Ashmore in a recent newsletter. First and foremost, girls need to be encouraged to play sport, to take regular exercise and ultimately lead a healthy lifestyle. This is the main reason we have a compulsory sports programme and I sincerely hope we are able to maintain this approach as we continue to grow. With this ultimate objective in mind, we (teachers and parents) need to make sure we make sport as enjoyable as possible - not only in terms of how we coach and teach, but also in terms of pressure from parents and teachers to win or be in an 'A' Team.

In the JP, we focus primarily on developing ball skills and core strength. We employed Mrs Leanne Fleming, to work with Miss Tshego Mashabela, at the beginning of this year to drive this process. In the SP, we continue with the skills development and core strength, but then add physical fitness to the programme. We employed our first biokineticist, Miss Badenhorst, this year to aid this process in the SP.

When we compete, we want our girls to give everything they have with an objective to win. If they don't win however, we need to know what to say and how to say it, to ensure that winning doesn't become the *only* objective.

Our compulsory sports programme requires us to give every girl an opportunity to play in a match. This process is extremely difficult to implement because very few schools have a compulsory sporting programme or are too small to offer us more than two or three teams per age group. Despite this challenge, our incredible Sports Department manages to find an opportunity for most of the girls to play, in at least one match, every season. It does, however, mean that some girls won't play every week or in every game at a festival. This process is more around taking turns, than not being good enough to make a team. These festivals also enable us to give girls opportunities to play in different positions.

Up until this point in Grade 3, our girls have competed in objective team selections. In other words, in swimming, a girl's time determines whether or not she swims in the A50, A25, B or C teams. In tennis, if she challenges and beats a girl in the team, she is automatically in the team.

However, in netball and hockey, we need to rely on the subjective opinion of our sports teachers and coaches to select teams to represent our school in weekly inter-schools fixtures or festivals. This is nowhere near a perfect science! (In my opinion, Mauricio Pochettino, gets the Spurs selection wrong almost every game and he's a paid professional!)

At the beginning of every netball and hockey season, all the girls get to play internal matches, during practice, for a few weeks. These internal matches are the initial trials. During this time, our teachers and coaches watch the girls and divide them up into ability groupings or colours. (The 'colours' in netball, is a grouping mandate from the Girls' School Sports Association).

In Grade 3, this is the first time many of these teachers and coaches are watching the girls. Hence, there is very little chance that the selections will be correct right first time round. (In fact, I would suggest that the only time we start to get it right would be towards the end of the respective season. Then a year passes, they grow and develop talent in different areas - and the process starts again the next season!)

Every week at practice, the girls are carefully monitored and if a girl in a certain team (or colour) is showing particular talent, she will be moved up or down accordingly.

This is where we need your support and understanding of the process. Being dropped from a team or not being selected for the initial team is bad enough for an adult to handle, but it's devastating for an 8-year old! The main reason for this devastation is that they feel as though they have let you down! This is where the opportunity to teach resilience comes into play. Essentially, they have two choices: to give up or to keep trying.

Over the years that I have been at St Peter's, our Sports Department has worked very hard to ensure that there is always movement between netball and hockey teams, dispelling the myth that once you are in an A Team at Under 9 level, you are there for the rest of time at Prep School. Many girls can attest to this.

As teachers, we are also well aware that sport teams selections and associated perceptions often exacerbate the scenario of the 'queen bee' and her respective 'lieutenants' in social constructs during the school day. Not only does this mean that we have to ensure constant movement between teams, but it also means that we need to counsel girls accordingly.

On the other side of the coin, we cannot create an environment where girls are terrified to make a mistake in fear of being dropped at every practice and a coach cannot develop a functional sports team, with well-drilled moves and strategies, if their team changes week in and week out.

So, as with all things in life, we need to find a balance between the two.

For the faint-hearted, I sincerely hope that this explanation has helped your understanding of our sporting process and procedures as well as the challenges we face in getting this right.

Apologies for not getting this explanation to you sooner! Please feel free to come and chat further if you have any ideas or suggestions to improve on our current process.

Kind Regards



Darrel Webb  
Headmaster