



## ***Football & Cheer Code of Conduct***

***All parents/guardians and athletes are required to read through this Code of Conduct in its entirety. The expectations and rules are required of our athletes and families and are in place to ensure that we have a safe and successful season.***

***This Code of Conduct shall be effective from July 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup> annually and shall be applicable for all camps, tournaments, clinics, spring/summer leagues, etc.***

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Water-Oak Football & Cheer is a large time commitment from July until end-December. We expect players to attend and be on time to practices, games, and required functions.

1. Texts or communication immediately before practice/game/competition/required function that a child will be late or not attending is unacceptable and will not be excused. Excused absences include contagious illnesses (including COVID-19 protocol) and deaths in the family. All absences should be communicated to your Head Coach as soon as possible to allow for proper planning of practice/game situations.
2. For safety reasons, notification is required prior to practice/games/competition/required functions if your child will be picked up by anyone other than a parent/guardian. You must come see a Coach in order to pick up or drop off your child.
3. No call/no shows and unexcused absences to practice/games will not be tolerated. All children are required to participate in all practices and games for the entirety of the season.
4. After one (1) no call/no show, your child's spot in the next game may be altered due to safety reasons. After three (3) total no calls/no shows or unexcused absences at any point during the season, the child will be removed completely from the roster. For Cheer, three (3) unexcused absences may lead to the cheerleader's spot being changed or removed from the routine.

5. Three (3) tardy arrivals of 15 minutes or more to practice will equal one (1) unexcused absence. Please utilize carpools to practice if you have trouble getting your child to practice on time
6. If a child misses 60% or more of practices within a week, whether it is an excused or unexcused absence, the child will be ineligible to participate in the game/competition that specific week due to health and safety reasons. However, the child will still be required to participate with their team on the sidelines but shall be required to be in regular clothes with their jersey/cheer uniform on (the child will be prohibited from wearing any football related pads during that specific game). Once the child has returned to practice, they will regain game/competition eligibility. Absences shall be considered on a week-to-week basis and not cumulative, except for the Jamboree, which shall be at the discretion of the Head Coach.
7. Leaving a practice/game/competition or arriving late to practice/game/competition due to another sport/activity is unexcused. Water-Oak Football & Cheer must take priority over other sports and activities.
8. Cheerleaders are expected to cheer at all football games (league and regional games), except if there is a Cheer Competition on the same day that our teams are competing in.
9. Absences/tardies due to religious observance or education are excused.

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## **PLANNED VACATIONS OR FAMILY/SCHOOL/RELIGIOUS COMMITMENTS**

We understand that families make vacation plans well in advance. We do give some allowance for these situations during the months of July and August. However, missing the first week of practice significantly sets back both the athlete and their coach. That is the time when conditioning hours are completed before an athlete can fully participate. Outside of that and given it wouldn't be more than a week; we do allow for absences due to vacation plans in the months of July and August. If your athlete has a scheduled family vacation during the months of July or August, please communicate this information accordingly to the Head Coach and Team Mom in writing prior to July 1<sup>st</sup> and said absence shall be excused. Any family vacation that is not communicated in writing to the Head Coach and Team Mom prior to July 1<sup>st</sup> shall be unexcused and subject to our Code of Conduct. If an athlete is unable to practice due to another sport said absence(s) shall be unexcused and subject to our Code of Conduct.

We respect and do not penalize athletes for religious commitments. However, families must provide clear communication regarding any reoccurring or extended absences for religious reasons. Excessive time away from the team may impact the ability to safely and effectively incorporate the athlete into the team plans for game day or competitions. Providing advance clarification allows coaches to set realistic expectations and plan appropriately.

Please notify our organization immediately of any planned vacations or family, school, religious commitments.

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## **CHEER COMPETITIONS**

All members of the team are required and expected to attend all cheer competitions. If your cheerleader is unable to attend any of the season's competitions, you need to notify our organization immediately.

1. Athletes will remain with the team for the duration of competitions, except when instructed by your head coach (i.e. after performance and before awards to get food, etc.).
2. Athletes will be in full uniform (as instructed by the head coach) for the duration of the competition. No outside shoes, bags, jackets, etc. are to be worn except those approved by Water-Oak Football & Cheer.
3. Athletes will be on time for all meet times on competition day- no exceptions.
4. An athlete's spot may be changed or removed from the competition routine for the following reasons: unexcused absences, excessive absences, failure to listen to/cooperate with coaches or failure to abide by the Water-Oak Cheer Code of Conduct policies.

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## BEHAVIOR POLICY

1. Athletes and parents/guardians will refrain from speaking negatively about coaches, other teammates, other teams, other coaches, referees, or the Water-Oak Football & Cheer program itself. This includes conversations about things both inside and outside of football and cheer.
2. Athletes will maintain a positive attitude throughout all team activities.
3. No foul language will be permitted from athletes or parents while team activities occur.
4. Absolutely no physical violence will be tolerated in any capacity, whether at a function of Water-Oak Football & Cheer or in any school setting.
5. Parents are to remain substance-free while in the presence of other children at team-sanctioned events (practices, games, required functions).
6. All questions and communication will occur directly between parent/guardian and coach, following the chain of command below:
  - a. Head Coach
  - b. Football Commissioner or Cheer Coordinator
  - c. OWYAA President
7. No team or parent groups are permitted without coaching staff included.
8. Cheer Parents are not permitted to attend outdoor or indoor practices for all teams except Junior Warriors.
9. Athletes and parents must maintain courteous, respectful and polite communication and behavior at all times, including in person and other communication channels, including team app and text group chats.
10. Behavioral concerns will have one verbal warning that, with our Executive Board's knowledge and approval, will result in a formal conversation between the Football Commissioner/Cheer Coordinator, Head Coach, parent/guardian, and the athlete. After the first verbal warning, if a second offense occurs, the athlete or parent/guardian in question will be suspended for at minimum one game/competition. After the second offense, if a third one occurs, the athlete in question shall be removed from the program immediately and will be banned for one full season. After one-year probation, if the athlete or parent decides to return, after one additional offense, they will be banned indefinitely from the Water-Oak Football & Cheer program. Water-Oak Football & Cheer is not obliged to return money paid for athletes who are dismissed from the program.
11. Should any coach issues arise, it should be immediately raised to the Football Commissioner or Cheer Coordinator. All disciplinary decisions with coaches shall be at the discretion of the Football Commissioner and the respective subcommittee or the Cheer Coordinator and the respective subcommittee. If a situation arises during a practice or game/competition with an Assistant Coach or Team mom, the Head Coach shall have the right to remove said Assistant Coach or Team Mom from the game/competition. If there is an issue with the Head Coach, the Football Commissioner or Cheer Coordinator shall have the discretion to remove them from the game/competition. At all times, it is imperative that coaches communicate concerns immediately with the Football Commissioner or Cheer Coordinator.

# **ANTI-BULLYING & CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR POLICY**

*Aligned with standards of AYF/AYC*

## **I. Purpose & Commitment**

Water-Oak Football & Cheer is committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all participants. As a Connecticut-based youth football and cheer organization, Water-Oak Football & Cheer recognizes the importance of aligning our behavioral standards with Connecticut's school climate and anti-bullying expectations.

### ***We believe:***

- Athletics should build character, teamwork, and confidence.
- Every child deserves to feel safe and valued.
- Adults must model sportsmanship and emotional regulation.
- Accountability and restoration are equally important.

## **II. Scope**

### ***This policy applies to:***

- All Water-Oak football players and cheerleaders
- Coaches (head and assistant)
- Board members
- Team parents and volunteers
- Parents/guardians
- Spectators and family members

### ***This policy applies during:***

- Practices
- Games and competitions
- Travel to/from events
- Team meetings or events
- Electronic communication related to the team (texts, group chats, social media)

## **III. Definitions**

### **A. Bullying**

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior involving a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior may be repeated or severe enough to cause physical, emotional, or social harm.

***Examples include:***

- Name-calling, taunting, or threats
- Physical aggression
- Exclusion from team activities
- Hazing behaviors
- Social media harassment connected to team participation
- Targeting based on ability, appearance, gender, race, disability, or other personal characteristics

**B. Challenging Behavior**

Challenging behavior includes conduct that negatively impacts team climate, safety, or participation—even if it does not meet the definition of bullying.

***Examples include:***

- Disrespect toward coaches or teammates
- Persistent negative sideline behavior
- Unsportsmanlike conduct
- Refusal to follow team expectations
- Disruptive behavior during practice
- Inappropriate group chat or online comments

## **IV. Prevention & Expectations**

Water Oak Football & Cheer will:

***1. Require signed Codes of Conduct from:***

- Athletes
- Parents/Guardians
- Coaches

***2. Provide annual preseason review of:***

- Team expectations
- Bullying definitions
- Reporting procedures
- Sportsmanship standards

***3. Provide coach training in:***

- Positive coaching techniques
- De-escalation strategies
- Team climate building
- Conflict resolution

***4. Promote sportsmanship expectations at all events.***

## V. Reporting Procedures

### ***Reports may be made by:***

- Athletes
- Parents
- Coaches
- Spectators
- Volunteers

### ***Reports may be submitted:***

- Verbally to a Head Coach
- In writing to the President
- Via email to the Water-Oak Football & Cheer Board of Directors

Anonymous reports may be reviewed but may limit investigation.

**All reports will be taken seriously.**

## VI. Investigation Process

1. The President or designee will review the report within 48 hours.
2. An impartial fact-finding review will occur, including:
  - Interviews with parties involved
  - Parent notification when minors are involved
  - Review of relevant communications (if applicable)
3. Documentation will be maintained confidentially by the Board of Directors.

*The goal is fairness, safety, and resolution—not punishment alone.*

## VII. Restorative & Disciplinary Responses

### ***When appropriate and safe, Water-Oak Football & Cheer will prioritize restorative responses such as:***

- Facilitated team discussions
- Accountability conversations
- Behavioral reflection assignments
- Written apologies
- Behavioral agreements

### ***If behavior continues or is severe, consequences may include:***

- Verbal warning
- Written warning

- Suspension from practice
- Game suspension
- Removal from team
- Removal of spectator from event
- Board of Directors review for further action

***Zero tolerance applies to:***

- Physical violence
- Threats of harm
- Harassment targeting protected characteristics

## **VIII. Parent & Spectator Conduct**

***Parents and spectators are expected to:***

- Model positive sportsmanship.
- Support all athletes.
- Refrain from coaching from the sidelines.
- Avoid negative comments toward officials, coaches, or children.
- Address concerns through proper channels—not at practice or during games/competitions.

***Failure to comply may result in:***

- Warning
- Removal from event
- Suspension from attending future events

## **IX. Collaboration with Schools & Community**

If conduct in the Water-Oak Football & Cheer program overlaps with school-based concerns, the Board of Directors may collaborate with local school administrators to support youth appropriately and maintain consistent behavioral expectations.

## **X. Annual Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Water Oak Football & Cheer Board of Directors to ensure alignment with:

- Connecticut legislative updates
- AYF/AYC national guidance
- Community needs

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## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Social media, such as Facebook, Snap Chat, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and others are powerful tools of communication that can have a significant impact on personal reputation, as well as Water-Oak Football & Cheer. If utilizing social media for purposes of communicating about Water-Oak Football & Cheer, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Be respectful and thoughtful.
2. Refrain from speaking negatively about coaches, other teammates, other teams, other coaches, referees, or the Water-Oak Football & Cheer program itself. This includes conversations about things both inside and outside of football.
3. Cyber bullying will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
4. There will be no posts about our plays for any upcoming games nor any posts of our routines (either portions or in full) in any capacity until after the final competition of the season.
5. There shall be no posts of our cheer uniforms, bow, practice wear, warm-up suits, etc. until after our first game for game wear or first competition for competition wear. Please seek approval from your coach if there are any questions on this matter.
6. Think twice before posting! Privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Consider what would happen if the post became widely known, and the consequences that can arise.

Social media concerns will have one verbal warning that, with our Executive Board's knowledge and approval, will result in formal conversation between the Football Commissioner/Cheer Coordinator, Head Coach, a parent/guardian, and the athlete. After the first verbal warning, if a second offense occurs, the athlete or parent/guardian in question will be removed from the program immediately and then will be banned for one full season. After one-year probation, if the athlete or parent decides to return, after one offense they will be banned indefinitely from the Water-Oak Football & Cheer program.

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## FUNDRAISING POLICY

Water-Oak Football & Cheer is a non-profit organization and operates on fundraisers and support from our community. The program recognizes the cost of being an athlete and understands the importance of raising funds for football.

1. All fundraising for Water-Oak Football & Cheer will be done through the Fundraising Committee.
2. All Fundraisers will be submitted to Water-Oak Football & Cheer for payout to the athlete.
3. There will be no personal fundraisers through GoFundMe, or those of the like, without approval via the Fundraising Committee and the Water-Oak Executive Board.
4. You may **NOT** opt out of our beginning of the season raffle fundraiser, this is mandatory.
5. Fundraisers are made up of three (3) types, which are disclosed prior to running the fundraiser:
  - a. Program Funding – goes to overall costs such as program fees, bills, supplies, etc.
  - b. Program Wide – all funds raised are put together and distributed equally amongst the football and cheer programs.
  - c. Personal – any funds raised by an athlete, go directly back to that athlete.
6. If you choose to opt out of National’s fundraising or opt out of going to Nationals, you will need to sign an Opt-Out Fundraising Form. By signing said agreement, you acknowledge that you will cover the expenses of Nationals on your own and will receive no part of any funds raised, should any of your athletes qualify. Please contact your Head Coach and/or the Cheer Coordinator if you need to complete said form.
7. Participation in fundraising must be documented. Athletes must be registered for each fundraiser in advance. Simply showing up will not count towards participation.
8. If an athlete participates in fundraising but fails to meet attendance or injury-policy requirements, they will forfeit eligibility for any fundraising funds if the team qualifies for Nationals.

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## **MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS**

### **Potty Training Requirements**

1. All athletes shall be required to be potty trained in order to participate in Water-Oak Football & Cheer.

### **Injury Requirements**

1. Any injury that requires an athlete to miss practices, games, and/or competitions must be documented with a doctor's note.
2. Athletes diagnosed with a concussion must provide written medical clearance before returning to practice or competition.
3. If an injury prevents an athlete from participating in practices, games, and/or competitions, a clear medical timeline must be provided.
4. For Cheer, injured athletes who attend practices and competitions may sit with the coaches during competitions, if they are in full uniform. For Football, injured athletes should be on the sidelines with the team during games while wearing the game jersey in the opposite color that the team is wearing during that game.

### **Competition/Game Participation Awards**

1. Any athlete who does not attend a competition for any reason will not receive competition awards (i.e. rings, jackets, medals, etc.). Awards are distributed only to athletes who are present and competing. However, ultimately participation awards are subject to the league distribution policies.

### **Roster & Position Changes**

1. Athlete positions and/or spots may be adjusted at any time for safety and/or team needs.

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## EQUIPMENT POLICY

Our organization provides each of our football athletes with the following equipment each season at a scheduled Equipment Hand-Out event and none of these items are to be altered in any way (i.e. cutting jersey, additional stickers/decals on helmet, etc.):

- Helmet
- Guardian Cap / Xenith Loop (for U6 Flag)
- Shoulder pads
- Game Jerseys
- Game Pants (with integrated pads)
- Practice Jersey
- Games Socks (provided prior to first game)
- Mouthguard (made available)

At the conclusion of each football season, our organization schedules an Equipment Hand-In event where the following items are **required** to be returned on that scheduled date/time:

- Helmet
- Guardian Cap / Xenith Loop (for U6 Flag)
- Shoulder pads
- Game Jerseys
- Game Pants (with integrated pads)
- Practice Jersey

Please note that failure to return these items or returning an item that has been altered in any way will result in our organization issuing you an invoice to pay for those respective items at the following price points and restricting your ability to register your athlete for the following season:

- |                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| ▪ Helmet          | \$300 |
| ▪ Guardian Cap    | \$125 |
| ▪ Xenith Loop     | \$75  |
| ▪ Shoulder pads   | \$125 |
| ▪ Game Jerseys    | \$125 |
| ▪ Game Pants      | \$125 |
| ▪ Practice Jersey | \$25  |

For the cheer season, all athletes registering for U6 and older, there will be a \$300 registration fee and a \$150 uniform fee. This covers a game uniform (top and bottom), sneakers, socks and bows. For Junior Warriors, there will be a \$150 registration fee and a \$100 uniform fee. This does not include sneakers; however, parents have the option to purchase sneakers for an additional cost. Uniform fees will be due in full at uniform sizing. We accept payment via cash, check or Zeffy. Uniforms cannot be ordered without payment in full. All athletes will receive a competition uniform. This item ***must*** be returned at the end of the season. Failure to return this item will result in being charged for the full amount. Failure to return the item or pay in full will result in your athlete being unable to register for the next year.

Our organization provides each of our cheer athletes with a competition uniform each year and failure to return it at the end of the season will result in our organization issuing you an invoice to pay for this item and restricting your ability to register your athlete for the following season at a cost of \$400.

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## GENERAL RELEASE & LIABILITY WAIVER FOR GUARDIAN CAP / LOOP HEAD BAND (for 6U Flag)

Water-Oak Football & Cheer has made the investment, with the help of an extremely generous donation from Connect Physical Therapy to outfit every athlete with a Guardian Cap for our tackle football athletes and with a Loop Head Band for our 6U – Flag Football athletes.

For those unfamiliar with the Guardian Cap, it is a soft cover add-on that fits over a football helmet hard shell to cushion a hit and reduce the risk of concussion. The waffle-designed cover has density, stiffness, and energy-absorbing properties to reduce impact. It's a reusable piece of equipment that can be used for years if it fits well over the helmet.



The original Guardian Cap debuted in 2010. Since then, product changes have improved its safety and effectiveness, and it has continued to gain support. Today it is used by youth football programs, schools, colleges, and NFL teams. In 2020, the NFL began requiring some players to wear the Guardian Cap during any contact practices. In 2023, the requirements expanded from preseason practices to the entire season, with more player positions required to wear the caps.

Statistics show the added cushion of Guardian Caps reduces head injury in players from kids to pros. Youth athletes have an average of 33% reduction in concussion with the caps. Research has shows that the Guardian Caps reduce the occurrence and impact of concussions.

The Guardian/Xenith Loop Head Band is top-rated in safety and the most comfortable non-tackle headgear on the market, as well as having been rigorously lab and field tested.



**Player safety** is our **top priority!** The extra helmet padding of the Guardian Caps and Loop Head Band goes a long way towards reducing the force of impact and risk of injury during practices and thus is the reason that the Guardian Cap will be required during all Water-Oak Football practices. To be transparent, the Guardian Caps and Loop Head Bands don't prevent all concussions, but we know they will help significantly reduce the occurrence and severity of injury and that is enough to support their use during all practices.

In consideration of utilizing concussion headgear made available by the Water-Oak Football & Cheer organization while participating in football practices, related events and activities, the undersigned acknowledges, appreciates, and agrees that:

- I understand that football is a physical and dangerous sport and there are inherent risks involved in playing football, including my participation in the Water-Oak Football & Cheer organization, which may include the risk of serious physical injury and death. In participating in Water-Oak Football, I fully assume all such risks associated with the sport, including, but not limited to engaging in intense physical activity and exertion, and the causation or aggravation of a physical injury or medical condition, which may be caused by getting tackled, being tackled, and other elements of the game of football.
- I agree to return the Guardian Cap in the same condition as it was issued by Water-Oak Football & Cheer organization. I understand and agree that I may be charged if the equipment is lost, stolen, damaged, or not returned to Water-Oak Football & Cheer organization immediately upon the conclusion of the season. Upon return, the equipment will be inspected for damages, etc. I agree that my signature attests that I have read, understand, and agree to the terms and conditions of this agreement.
- I hereby release, waive liability, discharge, hold harmless, indemnify, and covenant not to sue, the Water-Oak Football & Cheer organization, their associated Board of Directors, administrators, officers, managers, employees, coaches, trainers, volunteers, sponsors and advertisers, and other agents, estates or executors, from any and all liability incurred in the conduct of, and my participation in, their football programs while utilizing the Guardian Caps made available by Water-Oak Football & Cheer organization. I assume all risks and hazards associated with my participation in this sport while utilizing the Guardian Cap. Additionally, this release is for any and all liability for personal injuries and property losses or damage in connection with the possession or use of this specific equipment.
- I have completely read this document and fully understand its contents. I acknowledge that I have given up substantial rights by accepting this document and that I do so voluntarily. My signature attests to this on behalf of myself and my executors, personal representatives, administrators, heirs, next-of-kin, successors, and assigns.

As the parent and natural guardian or legal guardian of the participant, I hereby agree to the foregoing Waiver of Liability and Release for, and on behalf of, the participant (player/minor) named above. I hereby bind myself, the minor, and all other assigns to the terms of the Waiver of Liability and Release. I represent and certify that I have the legal capacity and the authority to act for, and on behalf of, the minor in the execution of this Waiver of Liability and Release.

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## **QUITTING POLICY**

Once a season commences, quitting becomes a serious matter. We strongly encourage any athlete who feels it necessary to quit the team to discuss his/her feelings with the head coach prior to quitting. If the athlete decides to quit, he/she must immediately turn in all issued equipment and all uniforms to the Head Coach, Team Parent, or the Football Commissioner/Cheer Coordinator. Failure to do so shall result in being billed for said equipment in accordance with the fees outlined in the Code of Conduct.

Effective immediately, any athlete who quits after being placed on a team and subsequently registers to play football/cheer the season immediately following shall automatically be placed on the *Wait List* after any waived athletes for that age eligible team, in accordance with the National Age Based Matrix. Said athlete shall not bump or take any precedence of any other athlete, including any potential waived athletes, out of a spot on the team, which shall remain the case even if said athlete's parent or guardian are acting as an Authorized Team Personnel member (i.e. Head Coach, Assistant Coach, Team Parent, Team Manager, etc.). If at the end of registration there remains openings on the team, said athlete shall be allowed to register and be part of the team with no consequences whatsoever by the organization, Authorized Team Personnel, and teammates, or be treated differently in any way (including no bullying).

This policy may be appealed to the Football Commissioner/Cheer Coordinator and/or President based upon extenuating circumstances.

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## **REGISTRATION POLICY FOR FOOTBALL – ONE TEAM PER AGE GROUP**

Effective immediately, Water-Oak Football will be fielding only one (1) team per age group. As a result, there will be a maximum number of athletes accepted on a team, which shall be set as follows:

- **U6 (Flag) – 14 athletes**
- **U7 (Rookie Tackle) – 14 athletes**
- **U9 – 36 athletes**
- **U11 – 36 athletes**
- **U13 – 36 athletes**

Due to these changes, specifically the limited number of athletes per team, as noted above, registration will be handled differently, taking into consideration several different items. We will continue to accept registration on a first-come first-served basis. However, any athlete that quits in the preceding year after being placed on a team shall immediately be placed at the bottom of the *Wait List*. Additionally, any athlete that resides in a town, city, borough, etc. which offers AYF Football and thus requires a Waiver, shall immediately be placed on the *Wait List*, including any athlete that has played for Water-Oak Football in previous seasons. This shall remain the case even if the athlete's parents or guardian are acting as an Authorized Team Personnel member (i.e. Head Coach, Assistant Coach, Team Parent, Team Manager, etc.). If at the end of registration there remains openings on the team, said athlete(s) shall be allowed to register and be part of the team based on the order of the wait list, if Waivers are available and signed by the respective Presidents of the Leagues.

We recognize that change is difficult and that some may not agree with this new Registration Policy, however, we do ask that you respect this policy. Inevitably and unfortunately, this new policy will result in some athletes not having the ability to compete for the Water-Oak Warriors organization and potentially having to play for a neighboring program. Please recognize that Registration is on a year-by-year basis and thus nothing precludes an athlete from returning to play for our organization in future seasons, if the circumstances are different (i.e. one of the first to register, no longer needs a Waiver, etc.). We hope and trust that you understand that these decisions were not easy to make, but this policy was necessitated due to unforeseen circumstances.

**End of Code of Conduct**