AAU Nationals Guide

The central theme of our travel to AAU Nationals is staying together as much as possible. The girls have poured in a ton of time, effort, and energy to get to this point. We do all meals, film study, travel, and bonding together for the time we are there. Team parents should begin coordinating meals and agendas by mid-May and can finalize schedules as the tournament brackets come out.

1. Travel To Convention Center
    a. While some teams choose to rent a team van, that is not required or expected with prices. However please work to combine the girls as much as possible into the cars. One it's expensive to park, but two then the girls arrive closer together. It's very hard to warm-up and wait for girls when they arrive one by one. The location of drop-off will be determined each morning or afternoon. Typically, the team will all meet in the lobby and then head to the court all together.
2. Parking
    a. Parking at the convention center can be tricky. Plan to have cash always. Prices typically are about $20/day. The best lot we've found theover our years is the Watson Parking Lot, as shown on Google Maps. It's on the west side of the Orange County Convention Center on Convention Way. This lot is typically cash, but at the 2025 AAU nationals, it was card only. It's quicker parking and easy access to the center. You can then bypass a lot of the traffic coming off the highway as the right two lanes will all be trying to park in the main lots.
3. Meals
    a. We try to do two meals together, mainly breakfast and dinner. Lunch is tricky as you'll be playing. Some bring lunches and some buy food at the center. There are plenty of options. Breakfast is typically some fruit, bars, eggs, bagels, and things that are quick. Mainly need some protein and carbs to get ready for the day. We know it's early sometimes, but the girls must eat anyway, so meet together in someone's room, and can always be a grab-and-go breakfast. Even if ending late, the girls still need to eat to prep for the next day. Many families will plan out the meals for the time – please have team parents plan out an agenda for all meals, whether eating out or cooking.

b. Everyone must eat something at meals, whether they like it or not, they are spending a lot of energy over four days of play.
c. Typically, after the final day of play, the teams will go out for a nice meal and celebrate the season. Booking early is key, it's very hard to get reservations. Downtown Disney has been becoming a challenge. Celebration, Florida has had some great options for meals and pictures.
d. The last piece is as the next waves come in, please don't buy a ton of food. We will make a list and share out with the next waves of all food to pass along. We typically have a lot of extra food, cups, bags, etc. that is extra and brand new to pass. Helps save for the next round of families.

4. Sun/Pool
    a. This is a policy we take seriously. No pool time during peak sun hours in Florida, typically after 8:30 a.m. and until 6 p.m. The cap is no more than 30 minutes as well. Tanning is a no as well. Can't even begin to share the number of stories over the years of girls swimming for hours and tanning for hours and then being exhausted by day 2 of play. If arriving early, please watch the amount of sun and drink lots of water. Give at least a full day of no sun before play to recover. Then during the four play days, we monitor a lot but help us enforce it. The teams with the most success are willing to sacrifice for four to five days. To us this isn't a vacation, this is the culmination of all their time and effort, and blowing it for some pool and tanning time is hard to stomach.
5. Hydration
    a. The girls should be significantly upping their water intake as June begins. Along with what they drink for playing, they should be drinking close to a gallon per day. Starting before Florida is key, so their bodies become used to that amount of water.
6. Bonding Activities/Film
    a. In the past families have tried planning tons of additional activities for the girls to do after playing. 99% of the time it's always been a bust. The girls are exhausted after playing and just want to go back, eat, hang out for a bit, and then sleep. Coaches will do team bonding activities with the girls and there will be daily film sessions for all teams. Either breaking down the day or scouting the next matches. That will minimum be an hour to two hours of time coaches need before or after play with the team each day.

While we can enforce a lot of these policies, we do need everyone on the same page for the national run. In our first season, we got 6 teams to gold challenge matches, and we want to see teams making it into Gold. This style of running nationals has gotten Jon and I to a 2nd place and two 5th places overall. It works and we know it requires sacrifice. Days 3 and 4 are the most critical days for having peak energy, so all the pre-work to be fueled and recovered for those days is critical. If you need any further help or have questions speak with your coaches or Jon and Patrick.