

# SHARK WEEK



## **Nick Rancilio's 'Tough, But Fair' Coaching Style Propels GPS Sharks Swim Team to Unprecedented Success**

If [Nick Rancilio](#) has his way, every week will be Shark Week this summer in the Village of Grosse Pointe Shores.

No, Rancilio is not referring to the [Discovery channel's popular week-long television special on sharks](#). Rather, he's imploring the community to show up at each Wednesday's Sharks swim meet to support and inspire the [Grosse Pointe Shores Sharks](#) youth swim team to dive into first place this summer. The team finished in second place the past three summers. This is the highest the team has finished in the history of the six-team Lakefront Swimming Association, which includes the St. Clair Shores Sea Serpents, City of Grosse Pointe Norbs, Grosse Pointe Park Mutants, Grosse Pointe Woods Warriors and Grosse Pointe Farms Barracudas.



Rancilio, who took over as the Sharks head coach in 2021, credits his willingness to adapt to each swimmer's learning style, his three smart and dedicated assistant coaches, a supportive and active group of parents and engaged young swimmers who are willing to put in the work — and have fun along the way — to succeed. He describes his coaching style as tough, but fair, open minded, caring and effective communication.

"I adapt to the learning style of each swimmer," he said. "How do you learn best? I'm always open to listening and communicating. I enjoy feedback and I highly value open communication. I'm not perfect. I want to engage with people. It's always an open conversation."

## **Closer to the Heart**

GPS parents notice Rancilio's hands-on, caring coaching style and are appreciative.

"Nick has a way of challenging the kids to swim better while making it fun," said Lora Ivanaj, the Sharks team treasurer. "Summer swim is something the kids and parents always look forward to."

Sophia Melhem, who handles the Sharks swim team merchandise, says Rancilio's dedication to the Sharks swim team comes from the heart.

“His focus is on working with each swimmer to reach their potential in a fun environment, while creating lasting summer memories,” she said.

GPS Pool Director Jen Serra is equally impressed.

“Nick is a knowledgeable coach who is passionate about helping kids grow into skilled and dedicated swimmers,” she said. “He strives to make connections with each member of the Sharks swim team, and is consistently looking for ways to keep the program growing.

“In just a few years, Coach Nick has moved the Sharks from middle of the pack to league contenders. His ability to consistently write a competitive line-up is remarkable. And he knows how to get the best out of each of his swimmers.”

## **In the Nick of Time**

Rancilio says he is passionate about developing tailored training programs that enhance swimming technique, endurance, and race performance while fostering a positive and supportive team environment.

His detailed coaching approach started working immediately.

The Sharks’ tipping point during this historical run came early in his tenure when the team swam past perennial power GPF Barracudas in 2021, leading to an uplifting 3-2 finish.

“I’m impressed with our team over the past three years,” Rancilio said. “The key is to keep it fun. Focus on the things you need to work on, but learn new things and enjoy yourself. Focus on improvement and not the scores.”

## **Sharks Registration**

The Sharks swim team is open to all GPS residents between the ages of 5-17. The 2024 season runs from June 19-July 24. Prelims are July 22-23. Finals are July 24. Meets occur every Wednesday. Registration is open on April 1 and practices begin May 28. Sharks tryouts will be held the first week of practice. Click [HERE](#) to register.

Rancilio says the best part of his job is to inspire young swimmers to build their confidence, have fun and achieve their goals.

“They are stronger than they think they are,” he said. “Summer swimming is all about fun. What I learned is you have to keep a sport fun and enjoyable.”

## **One Door Closes . . .**

Growing up in St. Clair Shores, Rancilio began his swimming career with the SCS Sea Serpents team at age 10. He quickly grew to six-feet tall as a sixth grader, which helped improve his athleticism and led to swimming success. He continued swimming at De La Salle Collegiate High School, where he earned Freshman of the Year, All American and All State Academic honors and set the school’s medley relay record in 2012. Unfortunately, he was



diagnosed with mononucleosis in his junior year. Although this halted his swimming career, it gave him an opportunity to view swimming from a different perspective.

“I love coaching,” he said. “There is a misconception swimming is a simple sport. It’s an allegory for life. The work you put in you will get out of life.”

## **Building Lifelong Swimmers**

His first coaching job was with the SCS Sea Serpents from 2014-2016. In 2017, he moved to the Grosse Pointe Woods Warriors swim team as the 12 and Under age group coach. During those three years, the Woods Warriors finished in third place in 2017 and second place in 2018 and 2019 in the Lakefront League Finals. The Woods’ 12 and Under finals team earned the High Point Age Group trophy three years in a row and broke Lakefront League Finals records in the Girls 200 Freestyle Relay in 2018 and Girls 50 Butterfly in 2019.

Rancilio, who attended Macomb Community College and Michigan State University, has also served as an assistant coach at Grosse Pointe South and Grosse Pointe North high schools and as the head coach of Brownell Middle School. He has a proven track record of mentoring swimmers to achieve their personal bests and advance to higher competitive levels, including Junior Olympic and State Qualifying Times.

Coaching improved his outlook on swimming.

“I enjoy swimming a lot more these days,” said Rancilio, who plans to return to MSU to study elementary education and become a teacher and an administrator. “My goal is to build lifelong swimmers. Let’s be competitive. Let’s enjoy swimming as much as we can and have fun. I want them to enjoy swimming for the rest of their lives. Swimming helps improve our health and enjoyment.”

## **Marvel Buff**

Rancilio is a Marvel movie superfan. He attends anime conventions and makes his own costumes. His favorite character is Thor.

“I love anime,” he said.

Who knows: Maybe this superhero coach will do what no one has ever done before.

After three consecutive second-place finishes, will this finally be the year for the Sharks?

“It’s possible for us to earn first place this summer,” Rancilio said. “I look forward to another year of swimming fast, being competitive and having fun. My message to our swimmers is to continue to be positive and work hard. My message to the community is to make every week Shark Week in Grosse Pointe Shores.”