

WELCOME TO THE USAAS DEI ATHLETE AMBASSADORS

Please join USAAS in welcoming our new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Ambassadors! Please see below for a few words from the individuals who will be joining us as leaders in this area.

Jade Michalowski: Pennsbury Falconettes - *On one of the DEI Webinars we talked about Allyship, what from that call can you take back to your club and zone?*

"Being a part of the DEI webinars has given me the knowledge to share the importance of ally ship with my team and zone. I will communicate to my team that ally ship is advocating for others that are underrepresented with full support. One of the ways I can help my team practice ally ship is making sure that everyone's voice is heard at practices and meets. I will stand up against inappropriate behaviors and I will support the person being underrepresented. By doing these things I will have a positive influence on my team and help to create an open communication environment."

Colleen Hoyt: New Canaan YMCA Aquianas - *You have been a part of 2 DEI Athlete webinars, would you recommend others to join and why?*

"100%! I would recommend others join as many DEI Athlete webinars as they can! In the DEI Athlete webinars, we discuss an array of topics that are extremely critical points in our artistic swimming community, that affect everyone. The webinars are a chance to voice your opinions and educate yourself on these pressing issues, with other athletes. The webinars are an open place for everyone, and are super informative, so join the next one, I guarantee you'll gain something from them!!"

Temi Oladeji: Pennsbury Falconettes - *As an African athlete, where do you see your role as an Athlete Ambassador for our organization for the Black community?*

"As a black athlete and an ambassador, I feel that my role is to make sure that black people feel welcome. I know from experience that sometimes black people feel like they are outcasts in many places. It's very hard to sometimes go to competitions and see that you are the only black person there. I want to help black people feel like they can come to Artistic Swimming and that it's a safe place for them. They should see that their talents and skills are what makes them special, their skin color shouldn't be what sets them apart from other people. Black people should feel comfortable showing off their natural hair and their skin color. We shouldn't feel like we need to change ourselves to be respected or "fit in". I want to give black people the representation they deserve."

Zoe Tomlinson: MAC Synchro - *With the inclusion of Athletes with Disabilities, how do you think on a local level you as an ambassador can support these athletes?*

"The Athletes with Disabilities (AWD) program is a new, but growing, addition to the Artistic Swimming community. I personally swim at one of two clubs in my state, Oregon, so it is incredibly important that we, as a club, start showing support to AWD EARLY. We can set goals of creating local Artistic Swimming AWD sectors within our state, normalizing athletics in the disabled community as a whole, or solely raising awareness for our sport! Once the program expands, being an ambassador on a local level would mean ensuring an inclusive, but not overwhelming, introduction. Artistic Swimming is so special to me, and my goal as a DEI Ambassador is to provide ALL persons the opportunity to have the same wonderful experience as I have been lucky to have. I am beyond enthusiastic to see the community grow as various implications and expansions are formed in the AWD program. I am so excited to be a part of it!"



Courtney Elhart: Charlottesville Swans - On one of the zoom calls we talked about building community and culture. As an Ambassador, how do you want to help build this?

"It's crucial for any collaborative community to have not only diversity in thought, but diversity in practice. To build off of the already established culture of our sport, we need to engage athletes of all ethnicities and all walks of life in a conversation that pursues growth of inclusivity, and questions aspects of artistic swimming that have become normalized. This is because we, as a national program, now have the ability to recognize and partake in creating a climate where all athletes feel safe, all athletes feel encouraged, and all athletes can feel a sense of belonging instead of being divided by their differences. As Ambassadors we help stimulate this ideal community by representing participants in Webinars, considering and putting into writing the goals of our constituents (through the new USAAS Bill of Rights), and generating fresh ideas that lend to strengthening our sport."

Anya Zhang: Ohio Coralinas Synchronized Swimming Club - What does it mean to you to be appointed as the 1st group of USAAS Athlete Ambassadors of DEI?

To me, being a part of the first group of USAAS DEI Athlete Ambassadors is just phenomenal. It means that artistic swimming is taking significant steps in making sure all swimmers feel included, accepted, and celebrated - inside and outside the pool. As the first group of Athlete Ambassadors, it's our job to have set the tone in the fight for improved equality and have a positive impact on the rest of the artistic swimming community. I've always been passionate about inclusion and breaking stereotypes, so it's an honor to be a part of the DEI movement and a role model in forging change. Artistic swimming has always been my safe space, and I want to help make artistic swimming that safe space for my fellow athletes from across the country, no matter their ethnicity, body shape, religion, or gender. I've heard many swimmers share their encounters with discrimination and exclusion, and while this is heartbreaking, these stories show that we are beginning to acknowledge inequality and taking great strides to make USAAS more inclusive. This is just the tip of the iceberg, and I am excited to see what DEI will accomplish in the future."

Gabriela Perez: Palm Beach Coralytes - As a Latina in a heavily populated Hispanic area, how do you feel your role as a DEI Athlete Ambassador will impact and embrace other people of color?

South Florida is heavily populated with a variety of ethnicities and cultures and I truly believe it makes us all the better. I have interacted with many Hispanic swimmers and have had amazing experiences in my swimming career because of the diversity that comes with it, but I have also seen discrimination along with other issues occur in our sport. As a Latin DEI Athlete Ambassador, role model for younger girls on my team, and someone with first-hand experience of these issues, I feel my background helps me have a broader view of how I can not only better my own swim community, but also that of USA Artistic Swimming. Bringing up issues that matter and fixing them accordingly within our sport is a way to embrace everyone and make girls and boys feel welcome and excited about every aspect of the sport. My voice as an ambassador will aim to reflect the ideas of many. I am so excited to be a part of this change and new chapter for the USA Artistic Swimming Community.

Ryan Lewis: Walnut Creek Aquanauts - As a DEI Athlete Ambassador, what are you looking forward to in your new role?

As a DEI ambassador I'm really looking forward to finding ways we can make the sport and the community more inclusive and welcoming to all people regardless of race, gender, ability, or sexuality. I'm so happy to be able to work with such a hardworking group and committed leaders. I've always been so passionate about equality and social justice for all people and I can't wait to see what changes and results we can make!

Katherine Moss: *When finding out there's a new little boy at his 1st association meet, how do you make a welcoming, supportive and motivating competition experience when you meet him as a DEI Athlete Ambassador?*

"Bringing more male athletes into synchro is something I believe to be incredibly important for our sport's growth. At a young swimmer's first synchro meet, I would ensure he understands what he is supposed to do and feels safe on the pool deck and in the locker rooms. I think the most important thing for young boys in our sport is to make sure that they are being treated fairly both by teammates coaches and parents, but also by judges. There's potential for a male swimmer to be marked down solely because of his gender, and nobody deserves to be treated unfairly over something that they cannot control. Artistic swimming is for everybody, and everybody deserves to have a fun, positive experience at competitions."

Sarah Levaro: Houston SynchroStars: *How do you think you can use your voice and your new appointment on social media as a positive ally to support all the underrepresented in USAAS?*

Being part of a generation that has been raised alongside the rapidly expanding business of social media has given me the opportunity to witness what a difference one can make online. As a DEI rep, I can use my position to reach out to others online and build a community that thrives not on a certain location but on a certain ideal, an ideal that will keep us united at heart, no matter the circumstance. Platforms like Instagram provide space for me and the other ambassadors to spread a message of ally ship and create a safe space by making informative posts and live-streaming to reach out to as many people as possible. The important thing to remember is that this is only the beginning— ally ship starts with each and every one of us so in my time as an ambassador, I know exactly where to start in aiding USAAS's allyship journey.

Megan Tappe: New Canaan YMCA Aquianas: *You are so passionate on women's rights and plan to study this topic in College, how can your new DEI position prepare you for college?*

I believe that my new DEI position will help me prepare for college in numerous ways. I will now be able to educate myself further on social injustices in Artistic Swimming, as well as any concerns swimmers may have. In doing so, I can help spread awareness on these topics to not just the synchro community, but in society as well. While I will be dealing with issues arising in the sport, I truly believe this position will grant me a broader perspective on Women and Gender rights and will remain relevant as I continue educating myself on solutions in college. I feel as if I am getting a head start on my journey of combating social injustices, and there is no better place to start. The synchro community means so much to me, and I know we can move towards a future where all swimmers feel comfortable and united regardless of differences.

