

The two faces of cheerleading

Sport & Tourism



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When most people think about cheerleading, they most likely think about football games, pom-poms, and girls doing motions as they shout into the crowd. This, however, is not the only variety of cheerleading. In the newly released Netflix docu-series, *Cheer* explores the world of collegiate competition cheerleading, also known as all-star cheerleading. The show's increasing popularity has drawn heaps of attention to the lesser-known sport. Those who are not committed followers may be unaware of what goes on once these athletes hit the stage, let alone the differences between the two types.

Sideline cheer is typically what comes to mind when people think of cheerleading. We can find these athletes on any football track or gym sideline. During the season, they use practices for learning and executing new pyramids and stunts that they perform at games and other sporting events. The overall goal is to keep the crowd and the players hyped up during the entire game. To achieve this, they entertain and engage by doing cheers, chants, various stunts, and possibly band dances.

Sideline cheerleaders normally do not travel remarkably far, the farthest being sports games at other schools or cheer camps. Sideline cheer can be found from recreational age teams up to junior varsity and varsity age teams. These cheerleaders do not compete and are not judged against other teams. The season for a sideline cheerleader can start in the summer and is as long as the sports they cheer for.

Rather than cheering for a high school, all-star cheer teams are affiliated with local gyms that may also teach gymnastics and dance. They can

represent anywhere from twenty to two-hundred athletes who are split into teams based on increasing age and skill level. Unlike sideline cheer, there are no pom-poms and surely no yelling. Instead of working on multiple cheers and pyramids during practices, a team only learns one routine that is changed and perfected as the season advances. The two-minute thirty-second routine consists of standing and running tumbling, stunting, jumps, and occasional dance features.

In many cases, skills performed by all-star cheerleaders are much more difficult than sideline. All-star cheerleaders generally travel farther and more often than sideline cheerleaders. They take their routine to cheer competitions that can be local, regional, national and even worldwide. At these competitions, hundreds of teams of boys and girls perform their routine on a 42' by 54' spring floor.

A panel of judges then score the routines based on difficulty, technique, and execution. The goal of an all-star team is to offer their best performance and get the highest score to win first place for their designated divisions. An all-star cheer season ordinarily lasts year long. Members of the team can come from different schools and areas, while sideline cheerleaders are required to cheer for the school they attend.