

# Dance: a sport without a jersey

Business



I walk through the door to Broadway Bound Dance Center (BBDC), throw my bag into the cubby and add my shoes to the growing pile. I enter studio A, it's become such a routine to set up the tumbling mats and begin the hour long work out, that I could do it in my sleep. Being routine doesn't make it any less challenging, though.

We start off with the easy stuff: cartwheels, walking on our hands, back extension rolls etc. Then we move on to learning some new tricks which differ depending on the day. When we focus on back tricks, we split into two groups and work on mastering back walk-overs, which then lead to back hand springs. The same goes for the front. But it doesn't stop there. At the end of each class, on top of already working our muscles doing tricks, we spend 10-20 minutes on pure conditioning.

Wall sits, hand stands, push ups, tricep push ups, crunches, squats and more. If a sport is an athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess and of a competitive nature as dictionary.com says, then as a dancer I completely believe that dance is in fact a sport. It's safe to say, most everyone has an idea of how much training football players go through both on and off season in order to stay in shape, but what not as many people know is that for some, that off season training includes dance classes. You wouldn't picture a big, burly man in a dance studio practicing ballet, would you? Well, take Herschel Walker for example.

He played NFL football for 11 years for multiple teams: The Dallas Cowboys, The Minnesota Vikings, The Philadelphia Eagles, and the New York Giants. The New York Times is just one of the many articles to talk about his

participating in ballet. (<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/wal0int-1>) Dance not only helps to strengthen muscles with lifts, jumps, turns and more, it also stretches and works smaller muscles that are more apt for injuries.

Also, the flexibility aspect of dance plays a big part in preventing injuries which is helpful for people in any sports or athletic activities. Although it's true that dance helps athletes in other sports, dancers themselves are athletes. It may be some football players' go-to training when football isn't in season, but that doesn't make dance any less athletically challenging than other sports. There have been many studies that test the athleticism of dancers, especially in comparison to other sports, two of which I found particularly interesting. Toe to Toe is a fundraiser hosted by the University of California. They put dancers up against athletes who play other sports to test everyone's athleticism and to raise money for the sports and dance teams.

The most recent one featured Oberlin Dance Collective and Berkeley athletes. The different tasks and exercises tested things such as strength, speed, agility, and more. The ODC dancers beat Berkeley 129-73. In a more formal study, Doctor Andrew Garrett and Professor Tim Watson of the University of Hertfordshire compared dancers from the Royal Ballet with swimmers from a British national league. When tested in different areas of fitness, the dancers scored higher in 7 out of 10 tasks. ([http://en.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_and_health)

[wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance\\_and\\_health](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_and_health)) Dancers don't get as much credit in fitness as other athletes do, when in reality, the level of strength and fitness needed to excel in dance is just as much, if not more than in other sports.

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It's harder to tell from the cushioned seats of the audience just how physically demanding dance is. This is because it's a dancer's job to make every single move look graceful and easy. Every jump must be landed silently, every lift must be at the right time and perfect height, for every turn the dancer must have perfectly pointed toes and rounded arms.

It's not as easy as it looks. Because of how well dancers project their moves on stage, it most certainly can be considered a form of art. The emotional movements and music, the way that any good choreography can make an audience member feel apart of the performance, the concentration on a dancer's face as they hit every move gracefully and spot on. There's no arguing that it isn't a beautiful thing to watch and be a part of, but simply being called an art is not enough reward and recognition for a dancer, knowing just how much work is put into every routine and piece of choreography. Dancers spend tireless days and nights studying and perfecting each move and getting stronger, in order to do so.

Each move must be perfectly executed, from a triple pirouette to a simple leap across the stage, and the stakes are raised even higher when in front of judges. Sports are supposed to be competitive, right? Well, there are around 200 dance competitions in the US alone. Competition productions typically tour the country and stop in different cities. Competitions range a lot from how many people in a dance to the different types. Choreographers have to follow many different rules in order for their dance to be legal in the competition. Some of these may include: a time limit, certain moves or tricks, age group of the dancers, number of people on stage at one time, and more.

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Not only are there rules going into the competitions, but dancers are then analyzed on their performance by judges who are professionals. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competitive\\_dance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competitive_dance)) Almost all of the serious dance studios or academies are competitive about routines and take their dances to competitions. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, an average professional athlete practices a little over five hours a day where the average professional dancer puts in about eight hours a day of dance and usually starts between the ages of five and ten years old.

(<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos094.htm>) Starting classes at such an early age allows girls and boys a large period of time to increase their skill level and build up their strength. That way, by the age of 17 or so, they are ready to start taking on a more professional career in dance.

The hours of practice put in by athletes doesn't necessarily define what is or isn't a sport, but it sure says something about the dedication and hard work dancers put in, in comparison to training of other sports. Dance: an athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess and of a competitive nature. Sounds about right to me.