

Cheerleading is a sport

Business



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“ Cheerleading is currently established in 79 countries with over 4. 5 million cheerleaders worldwide” (“ History of Cheerleading”). Although that is where cheerleading is today, it did not start out as a popular past time. “ In 1883, Great Britain started the trend of cheering and chanting in unison at sport games, but the first official cheer [was not] performed until 1884 at Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey” (“ History of Cheerleading”). Many people believe that cheerleading is only the unison chanting that began in Great Britain, not the extensive cheer routines performed today. Cheerleading has clearly evolved from the simple chants in the stands at sport games in these last 100 years, but it is still not recognized as a sport. How can an activity such as cheerleading not be seen as a sport? Although cheerleading is seen as an activity, cheerleading is a sport due to its competitiveness, its physically demanding nature, and its team involvement. Due to its competitive nature, cheerleading has multiple levels of competitions. There are many competitions in the United States alone, ranging from the simple high school nationals to the acclaimed Worlds. Every year The National High School Cheerleading Championship, or NHSCC, brings together multiple high school level cheer teams to compete.” The NHSCC is held at the WaltDisneyWorld Resort in Orlando, Florida, and nationally televised on ESPN and ESPN2 to over 100 million homes and 32 countries nationwide each year” (“ National HS Cheer”). NHSCC holds the most prestigious high school cheerleading competition in the United States alone, pulling teams of various cheerleading levels from all over the country. However, one of the biggest worldwide competitions is Worlds, a common dream for cheerleaders of all ages. The United States All Star Federation

(USASF) hosts an international event that brings more than 9, 000 cheer and 3, 500 dance athletes together to compete for world champion titles. They host The Cheerleading and Dance World Championship that has more than 120 USASF/IASF member event producers across the U.

S. and in over 40 countries around the world qualify top teams at their own premier national champions to compete at Worlds (“ What is Worlds?”). Worlds being one of the largest competitions makes the NHSCC seem small but both are still very competitive. Whether a cheerleader is competing in a high school level competition or a worldwide competition, it is still as competitive as any other sport. In preparation for competition, cheerleading has extensive training all year round.

Most teams begin in the early months of May for a February competition and then carry on training through off season to maintain stamina. For the Freehold, New Jersey Youth All-star Cheer Team, The Twinkles, formal practices take place on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. In addition, the Twinkles cheerleaders also attend private lessons and go to the gym for open tumbling sessions (Friedman). To some people, the training these girls go through seems insane for such a young team of cheerleaders, but they are not the only ones. Cheer Extreme Allstars, another well known cheerleading organization with multiple gyms in North Carolina, holds endless practices for their multiple teams all year.

According to Cheer Extreme co-owner and head coach Courtney Pope, “... they even practice while schools are closed for Christmas break so the girls can maintain fitness and avoid getting hurt” (Almasy, Yager, and Endo).

Cheer might seem like an activity that requires little to no practice, but this truly shows the extensive training put into it. In most cases, cheerleading does not have an off season or optional workout schedule like other sports.

If more people were aware of the extensive training cheerleaders endure, they would not be so quick to judge them by their chants and stereotypes, and would clearly see that it is, indeed, a sport. In order to keep teams and teammates from creating a large chasm between their levels of cheerleading, there are multiple rules in place. These rules are used to not only ensure safety in the dangerous sport, but to also make the playing field fair. For example, UCA, or Universal Cheerleaders Association, splits who competes against who in each competition by multiple criteria. UCA has divisions based on the gender, size, and skill level of the team. This is done in order to make sure that no team is put up against another team twice their size and skill level.

Not only are teams split into divisions to keep the playing field fair, there are rules in place to limit what each team can do as to ensure safety (“National HS Cheer”). For instance, the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches & Administration, in high school cheerleading “the total number of twists in a dismount from a stunt cannot be greater than one and one quarter (1 ¼) rotations” (“American Association”). Rules like this are set in place in order to ensure that teams do not transcend their skill level and put themselves in more danger. Cheerleading has many divisional categories and rules in order to ensure safety. Although many people believe that cheerleading is just simple chants on the sidelines, it is, however, a dangerous sport with multiple sets of restricted rules done to keep order.

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The toll cheerleading takes on one's body makes it physically demanding just like other sports. Cheerleaders suffer from multiple injuries in and out of season. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics released an article containing statistics on cheerleading injuries. In 2003 to 2007, the number of catastrophic injuries related to cheerleading was 4.8 per year. Furthermore, the overall rate for cheerleading injuries is one per 1,000 athletic exposures with 21%-26% of those being to the upper extremities ("Cheerleading Injuries").

This rate may seem low for what is considered such a dangerous sport but that is not the case, "...cheerleading accounts for a disproportionate number — 60 percent to 70 percent — of all catastrophic injuries in girls' high school sports" (LaBella qtd in Mozes). Cheerleading holds a higher number of catastrophic injuries than any other girls' high school sport.

As a guideline to being a sport is to be physically demanding, cheerleading shows that it takes a large toll on the body just through injuries. In order to hit the expectations of a competition routine, cheerleaders must uphold another physically demanding aspect of the activity, being overly flexible. By throwing tumbling passes, cheerleaders test the laws of nature and they must have a flexible enough body to endure it. Cheerleaders extend their legs well past the average person's range of flexibility. Continuously pulling splits and other challenging body extensions, will cause for the muscles' range of motion to increase (Davis).

Without stretching and gaining flexibility, the muscles' range of motion would not increase and, therefore, the body would not be able to hit

unnatural motions easily. Not only does a cheerleader need flexibility when pulling body extensions but also when executing tumbling passes or jumps. “The bodies of [cheerleaders] are subjected to significant flexion/extension movements in a number of joints, as well as being subjected to forces from running, tumbling, and landing repeatedly” (“Cheerleading”). Bodies that do not have that range of flexibility, exert more energy into pulling those stretches and passes. This results in cheerleading being even more physically demanding. Even though flexibility seems like a useless tool, it is a physically demanding component of a cheerleading routine, that many must practice rigorously in order to be successful.

Cheerleading requires a physically demanding amount of strength and endurance to complete a two and a half minute routine. The higher level of cheerleading one does, increases the amount of strength and endurance one needs. The Twinkles, a youth All-star Cheerleading team based in Freehold, New Jersey, who were previously mentioned, go to practice three days a week at their World Cup Gym. There, they do a roundoff-back handspring-back tuck seven times then walk across the mat and do a back handspring-back handspring-back handspring-back tuck seven times just as a warm-up (Friedman). Doing tumbling skills repetitively requires an exorbitant amount of strength and endurance, but makes the execution of the skill easier in competition. By building up this strength and endurance during training, performing a two and a half minute routine will be easier later on.

Not only do cheerleaders build their strength and endurance through multiple repetitions, they also build it through continuous practices, both in and out of the gym. Mikayla Raleigh, a cheerleader for Cheer Extreme All-

stars in Raleigh, North Carolina, keeps track of all of her workouts since the previous year's world championships in a log book. She has done 224 practices and at-home sessions since then (Almasy, Yager, and Endo). By doing that many work-out sessions in around six months, she has built up a large amount of strength and endurance needed in her hardcore cheerleading routines. Cheerleaders, like other athletes, spend an immense amount of time strength training and building up endurance in order to perform short routines in front of an audience. Team involvement in cheerleading is just as important as it is in other sports.

Without team involvement, cheerleaders would not gain the self-confidence other athletes possess. For instance, Sarah Richards, an eighth grade student, expresses how cheerleading pulled her out of her shell and made her into a self-confident girl. She retells the story of her middle school cheerleading squad, where she first began cheerleading not knowing anyone and ends her time there as captain of the cheer team (Richards).

Cheerleading allowed a shy middle schooler to expand her network of friends and build the self-confidence one lacks at the same time. Sarah Richards is not the only cheerleader to gain self-confidence through the sport.

According to the Healthline website, cheerleading helps kids to develop their self-confidence by providing a team to support and rely on ("The Benefits of Cheerleading"). On a team, cheerleaders support one another, boosting self-confidence in each and every cheerleader. Sports develop self-confidence in a participant just as cheerleading does for cheerleaders. Teamwork skills are used not only in sports like cheerleading but also in everyday life. These

skills are developed through team involvement needed in cheerleading.

According to Ryan Martin, a former cheerleader and college student,”.

.. the only way a team or a group can succeed is if we put aside our individual glory and focus on [what is] best for the team” (Martin). The teamwork skills one learns in cheerleading prepares one for the real world. Individual thoughts are pushed aside on a cheerleading team, and what is best for the team is the main thought which is the same as any other team sport.

Not only are these skills developed and used in cheerleading, but they are used in the real world. Robert Arambula, a male cheerleader and Coast Guard law enforcement officer, explains how the teamwork skills he learned in his competitive cheerleading team transferred straight over to his Coast Guard team of seven. Cheerleading taught him that in order to perform a perfect routine, his team needed to work together as a team. (Ninemire). This revelation is used in anything else involving team activities, including occupations like the Coast Guard. Cheerleaders learn the same teamwork skills as any other sport that are beneficial to everyday life.

Leaders are developed in cheerleading through team involvement.

Leadership skills are not exclusive to captains and co-captains in cheerleading, but rather used for the whole team. “ Being a leader not only on the sidelines, but in the classroom and community as well is a vital component of [a cheerleader’s] role” (“ Cheerleaders as Leaders”). This means that the minute one becomes a cheerleader, one is judged everywhere by everyone. Little girls especially look up to cheerleaders to be

good role models for them. Not only are cheerleaders expected to be good leaders, they are awarded for it.

United States All Star Federation created the Sportsmanship award that is given to cheerleaders that show great leadership skills (“American Association”). By creating this award, cheerleaders are awarded for what they are expected to do. Now all cheerleaders, not just captains and co-captains, are becoming positive leaders in the community. Just like other athletes, cheerleaders take on the role of leadership in the community, and are looked up to as role models. The controversy of whether cheerleading is a sport or not has been around for several years. Although cheerleading shows clear signs of being a sport, high school athletic associations nationwide do not consider cheerleading to be a sport.

Therefore, cheerleading is only seen as an activity/club in high schools. Should cheerleading be considered a sport in high schools and be given the same funding and regulations as other high school sports? Or should cheerleaders continue to pay for all of their expenses and endure unsafe practices? Due to being competitive and physically demanding cheerleading possesses the requirements to being a sport along with its extensive team involvement.