



# A CHEERLEADING COACH'S GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL COACHING



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## **Chapter One: Introducing Your Team to You**

Once you have soared through tryouts, it will be time to move into a routine with your new squad. You'll find the quicker you meet with the girls and their parents, the easier it will be to establish some guidelines and expectations so no one has any misconceptions.

You want to meet with the entire team and their parents so you can go over a list of team goals, expectations, practice times, game schedules, special appearances (such as parades) and any out of town competitions. As a coach, you should always allow parents time to plan for an out of town competition. Be respectful of the fact parents often need to not only plan for out of town events financially, but often they need to ask for time off at work and many times they have other children to consider. Keeping this in mind will allow you to run your squad effectively enabling the team members to participate in all events, competitions and games.

### **The First Meeting with Your New Squad**

When you first meet with your new squad, you need to look at this as a time to get to know the girls and their parents individually if possible. A good way for you to do this is to set up a meeting in a small, informal, environment so you can mingle with parents and their cheerleader when they first enter the room. Before your initial meeting with your parents, you should have some forms ready for them to sign and you should have copies of everything you want them to know for future reference. For instance, if you plan to use a demerit system for skipped or missed practices, you should provide parents with a copy of the demerit plan along with schedules. Take a look at Appendix A for medical and other release forms you should provide to your parents at the first meeting. There are several forms there which are very important. Besides the obvious medical and other release forms, you should provide forms for ordering uniforms and anything pertaining to any fund raising events you may want to do in order to help cut down on the costs

involved in cheerleading. A lot of coaches will give parents a list of estimated fees for the upcoming season which is also helpful.

At your first meeting, you'll cover a lot of ground with the cheerleaders and their parents which can make it hard to remember exactly what you need to talk to your team about. The following points and expectations should be covered individually. Here, you will find each point followed by an explanation of each.

- Your rules
- Information on schedules
- Expectations for the team
- Uniforms
- Any fund raisers
- Major events and competitions
- Forms
- General information
- Q&A Session

## **Setting down some ground rules**

As a coach, you must establish some ground rules for your team to follow. In order for you to be able to maintain control, order and respect, you must be able to set up your rules and ensure everyone is prepared to follow them. Items which you need to address are as follows:

1. You are the team's coach, you aren't a babysitter. Make sure your parents know when practice is over, practice is over. You will make every effort to close out practice at the scheduled time and expect them to make every effort to pick up their child at the scheduled time.

2. As a cheerleader who projects happiness, enthusiasm, energy and generally optimistic, you don't want to hear anything negative said about one girl to another. Everyone who is on the squad is an important part of a very big team and no one is worth more to the team than the next so let your parents know no one will be permitted to become a cancer to the team and bring destruction to a well balanced squad. This isn't something coaches like to discuss but it is very important you get the point across to your team parents that you have in place a no-tolerance rule for gossip and you intend to brutally enforce it to the point of dismissal if gossip becomes a problem.
3. Let your parents know what you want the girls to wear to practice. Tell them what kind of shoes, socks, shirts and shorts you want your squad to dress out in before they hit your gym floor. If parents know your expectations they will take the responsibility to enforce it even when their children don't. You also need to let parents know you don't expect to hold up practice while a child changes clothes. They should come to practice ready to learn, cheer and have fun.
4. Let your team know you run an orderly practice. No talking in between cheers will be accepted and goofing off is encouraged at break times only. Reinforce the fact you have a lot of cheers, stunts, and tumbling to teach so everyone must be focused on learning quickly and as efficiently as possible.
5. As a coach, you need to go over why it is so important for stunts to be done only under the watchful eye of a coach. You also need to point out if parents hear something from their child before you do in regards to someone being nervous about the stunts, you would like for them to call you.
6. While this can be viewed as very private territory, you must address the personal appearance issue. As a cheerleader, packing on pounds can slow down a cheerleader so you need to let your parents know you expect the girls to be physically fit, in shape and able to maintain their current weight to the best of their ability. This is not necessary for younger teams only middle school teams and higher. You also need to address hair and jewelry issues. Let parents know jewelry isn't wanted on the cheerleader and isn't wanted in your locker room.

- You need to make it clear you take no responsibility for lost jewels. Hair should always be worn up so make sure you let your parents know this as well.
7. Parents, boyfriends, siblings and friends are not welcome at practices and you need to make that clear from the beginning.
  8. Every cheerleader is required to warm-up and stretch before practice. Occasionally, the girls will run or walk before they start practice so let your parents know this too. No one is exempt from warming up.
  9. Let parents know you adhere to the golden rule and you expect the cheerleaders to do the same and be respectful.
  10. No one will be a prima Donna on your team. Make sure you let your parents know you expect egos to be kept in check.

There are a lot of rules your team should follow and in fact, you could reach a list of around 30 rules if you wanted to detail every little rule but the above list will give you a general guideline of where to start and what to expect from your girls. You may also want to incorporate a demerit system but this isn't advisable if you don't have alternate cheerleaders ready to take over should one cheerleader be asked to leave the squad. You should consider alternates for this very reason and if you choose alternates, keep them in the loop. They should attend all meetings and maybe even some practices where the cheers are the focus more than stunts and tumbling.

## **Scheduling Information**

Depending on the ages of the participants on your squad, you will need to decide how many times a week you will practice, when you will practice, and for how long. If the team you coach isn't a school team, you'll need to decide where you will practice also. When you meet with your parents, you should talk to them about practice schedules and see if you are going to have any schedule conflicts. When you coach a middle school or higher team or an all-star team, scheduling should have been discussed during tryouts because this should be considered a priority among the cheerleaders on the team.

However, for the younger pom-pom toting youngsters, you probably should offer some flexibility. It is a bit ridiculous for you to take on a team of eight year olds and incorporate a demerit system at this age for missed practices.

When you meet with parents you may not have a game schedule yet, but you should definitely be able to send them home with a practice schedule. Explain if games or tournaments prevent you from practicing, those practices will be re-scheduled. Mention any upcoming pep rallies which have already been planned as well as any events and competitions.

If you know your squad will be traveling out of town for events, you should make every effort to have information provided for everyone. Include costs involved and the competition schedule as you have it. Remember, out of town events require parents to pre-plan their own personal calendars. Remind your audience that you will pass along information to them as it becomes available.

## **Expectations for the team**

It is important to convey to your parents your expectations for the squad. This should be easy for you to do because you will know more about what your team needs to accomplish, what events your squad will attend and so forth. You will want to let your parents and cheerleaders know exactly what they will be doing. If this is a younger squad, for instance, you may want to inform your parents that the girls will be cheering but not doing stunts or aggressive tumbling. If you are going to be bringing in someone from a local gym to teach gymnastics, then you will need to cover this as well. Basically, when you begin to talk about expectations, you should include what you expect from the team, what the team can expect and what the overall goal of the cheerleading squad really is.

## **Uniforms**

Most of the time, the cost of the uniforms will fall back on the parents. As a coach, if you are going to competitions and decide on expensive uniforms, then you should provide enough time for the parents to come up with the money for the uniforms and you should provide all of the information on ordering as soon as possible. If you have a sample of the uniform to show, that is always helpful and parents appreciate the opportunity to buy two uniforms in case one is ripped or misplaced for whatever reason. Coaches of public school teams should try to choose uniforms with the cost factor in mind so uniforms aren't a financial burden. Just remember to look at all options when you begin to shop uniforms.

## **Fundraisers**

When you meet with your parents, you'll need to discuss any planned fundraisers if you plan to have them. However, many parents prefer to make a donation rather than peddle donuts so this too, is something to consider. You can take a vote on this or you can simply appoint one person to take over the fundraising efforts for you and step out of this grey area altogether. It is entirely up to you. If you know through looking at the Beemers and Mercedes in the parking lot at the private school where you coach, you may simply just want to impose a fee to cover any funds you would need to raise at a fundraiser. Again, it is up to you.

## **Major Events and Competitions**

Coaches who are planning to attend major events and competitions need to talk to parents about transportation issues, lodging and other topics of interest surrounding these major events. When you discuss these events, mention practices are very much mandatory prior to these events and attendance is required for the competitions.

If you have any literature to provide on the event, that would also be very helpful. If not, past experiences and war stories would be fun to illustrate to parents what they can expect at these events.

Even if you don't have a game schedule, try to let the group know about how many games they can expect to attend during the season. You should also let the parents know about any cheerleading camps you would like for your cheerleaders to attend. Often, there are clinics and camps during the summer and even on weekends in your local area.

## **Forms**

As you begin to start wrapping things up, casually mention the permission forms and health forms which are in the appendix. Be prepared to hand out copies of each and casually go over each of these independently. Don't borrow trouble by going into too many sidebars about why you need these. Simply go over these and ask for them to be returned as soon as possible.

## **General Information and Q&A**

After you pass out all of the forms, go ahead and cover anything you forgot to mention and open the floor up for questions. Remind the group of the first practice and dismiss.

Congratulations you are now well on your way to your first practice with your new team! Get ready for some fun and excitement because you are going to have a fantastic squad!

## Chapter Two: Planning Practices

When you finally reach day one of your first practice with your new squad, you need to be fully prepared to conduct practice. This chapter is full of practice ideas to help you move your practices along smoothly. One thing to keep in mind, cheerleading practices are a bit different than conducting any other sports practices because of the different skills involved in being a well-rounded cheerleader. Also, cheerleaders aren't playing one particular position as is the case in football or baseball.

Keeping in mind cheerleading is a sport but different than any other sport, it is important to recognize the talents of your squad and use those talents to make your cheers and stunts that much more effective. You want to run a successful practice and running a successful practice means planning ahead to run a *cheerleading* practice more than a *sports* practice and there's a difference.

Some of the most successful practices ran by all-star teams could be the model for conducting all cheerleading practices. For starters, these teams are very well rounded in their skills and coaches understand in order for the girls to learn to capitalize on their talents, they have to take one component at a time and teach it in groups. Secondly, cheerleading coaches are in a unique position when it comes to capitalizing on the talent they have on their team. They can build stunts and plan routines around the already existing talent.

When you begin to plan your practices, you should probably start by dividing girls into groups. Try to separate all buddies so your team is able to practice cheers, chants, stunts and tumbling in an environment where they are more able to learn. Basically, you are going to need to divide the girls up into 2 groups. If you have a coach who will help you then you can oversee one group and she can oversee one of the groups. If you are coaching alone, then you will want to introduce cheers and motions to both groups and then send group one on their way to practice what they have learned. See the following:

- Group One: Cheer Drills

When dividing into groups, you will be able to give the girls a list of cheers, have past cheerleaders on the squad demonstrate the cheers and movements and leave the girls to practice the cheers. You will want to observe from a distance while you are working with group 2 to ensure everyone seems to be catching on and working toward one common goal of learning the cheers, chants and movements.

- Group Two: Stunt and Tumbling Drills

When working with this group, you will likely go over portions of stunts you want the group to learn and then watch intensely to be sure safety is practiced and the girls aren't doing something wrong which could cause an accident.

Depending on the age group and what you want to accomplish, both tumbling and stunts may be very basic to a more advanced level. You will need to determine what it is you want to accomplish and then you will want to instruct the group on how to develop these skills. Not everyone will be able to do all of the stunts and drills and not everyone will want to participate in some of the stunts. One word of caution for all coaches to keep in mind, if you have a child who is scared of being at the top of the pyramid, don't put her there. It serves no purpose to make someone do something they are afraid to do it. Flyers and bases in stunts should enthusiastically be willing to participate and spotters must want to be a spotter.

Ideally, you will have these two groups work at their skills before rotating the groups and then later on, you will conduct your practice with everyone pulled together. Breaking up into even smaller groups is advisable when you are working on cheers and chants alone because then you can float from group to group and help the people who are struggling with movements and cheers.

One thing you want to accomplish at all of your cheerleading practices is a general feel of optimism. You need to be positive and upbeat. Remember, enthusiasm is catching and if you will be enthusiastic, your team will be enthusiastic. Make practices a very positive

experience for your girls and they will look forward to practice. If you are negative and overly demanding or worse, demeaning, no one will want to be on your squad.

Since you are going to be practicing your squad on a consistent basis, it is important to get on a schedule and maintain the schedule from day one as much as possible. Some coaches disagree but it depends on if you want a lot of wasted time or not. If you are going to be working in individual groups as well as one big group, you'll need very little variety outside of breaking down your group to work. Since you will be going to competitions and ballgames as a group, it is important to make use of the time you spend practicing as a group because after all, this team will be running onto the field as a group. They will be cheering as a group and they will be practicing ongoing as a group.

If you will look in Appendix B, you will have a detailed guide as to how to run your practices smoothly and effectively. The ideal is to always follow some sort of schedule regardless of which plan you choose to use and stick to the general idea of having dedicated team time and then having dedicated time with individual groups. Another idea to use when you have some of your team struggling with team cheers and movements is to split the team in pairs. Have someone who needs help to work with someone who clearly has it.

Every so often you need to plan to meet with your girls one on one for five minutes or so and bring their attention to areas where they can use some improvements. Make suggestions on what they can do to improve their overall abilities and compliment them on the areas where they are showing a lot of strength.

Make your practices productive and fun and you'll have a great season watching your team develop into a cheerleading squad ready to gain some attention and recognition!

## Chapter Three: Cheerleading Drills

When you first bring your team together, you will quickly discover which girls are loud and which ones aren't, you'll see which ones are able to learn the cheers quickly and which girls will probably struggle with the cheers for a while. While you can't necessarily *teach* enthusiasm, you can be enthusiastic and with that enthusiasm, hope that it will be contagious.

When you divide your team up into smaller groups, you want to teach cheers and chants to one group. It is always a good idea to send a list of cheers home with your team at the parent's meeting so they can begin to learn the words to the cheers. In the appendix, you'll find some very basic cheers you can start with if you don't have any cheers of your own. The cheers listed can be used with girls of all ages. You can simply make a copy of these cheers and pass them out the first time you meet with the girls and their parents.

Part of running a disciplined squad is for you, the coach, to remember to put deadlines on anything you want the cheerleaders to learn. This ensures your cheerleaders know what you want them to know when you need them to know it. Very soon after you put the list of cheers into the hands of your squad members you want to start coaching them on the motions too.

Ideally, before you break your girls up into groups, you will have time to run through all of the new cheers and motions. If you have past cheerleaders who can run through all of the cheers with your new group then that's the best way to teach the cheers. Also, if you can recruit ongoing help from previous captains and co-captains that always works well too. The older cheerleaders like to help the up and coming new cheerleaders.

If you are able to recruit a number of cheerleaders to help you with your practices, you can then divide the girls up into smaller groups during group time which will help you offer more individualized attention to your team. Whether you can imagine it or not, you

need to believe there will be some people you pick for your team who will really need help learning just about everything. However, don't be distressed over it. These are very often the girls which make the team interesting and they end up doing better than anyone else because they know they have to work harder to succeed.

When you are running cheerleading drills, you need to remember, some of the girls in your group may not have the first clue about what they are doing. Perhaps they've never even cheered before. Identify the people who haven't cheered as well as the girls who have little to no gymnastic experience and see if you can't offer them extra encouragement and help by allowing them individual time with past team members. The ideal is to make everyone feel comfortable on your squad while making sure everyone learns all they can as quickly as they can.

When you break up into small groups and begin to focus on running your cheerleading drills, you may need to teach standard motions to the girls so they will know what you mean when you say "touchdown" or something like an "L" sign. On day one of practice you should go over the following motions and teach the cheerleaders the following motions. This list is also in the appendix so you can easily refer to it and then send a copy home with your cheerleaders. The clip art is free to use and was found at a public domain to illustrate some of the movements better.

- **The Bucket:** Arms in front of you – your wrists need to be downward as if you were holding two buckets of water.
- **Candle Sticks:** Arms in front of you—fists are pointed inward toward each other as if you were walking with two lit candles.
- **Touchdown:** The arms are straight above the head as if you are a referee indicating a touchdown in a football game.



Touchdown

- High V: This is one many cheerleaders learn at age five and love it best because it is simple. Both arms are locked above the head with straight arms and thumbs facing the audience. Your arms are slightly out in a V above your head.



High V

- “K” Motion: This is called a diagonal motion still in some areas. One arm is a high V and this arm has the thumb toward the audience. The other arm will come across the body in a downward motion and the pinkie will face the crowd.

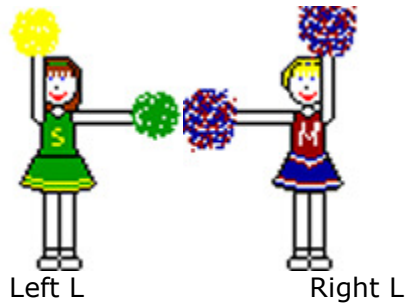


Left K



Right K

- “L” Motion: Use the arms to form a “L” shape. The arm extended up will have the pinkie towards the audience and the side arm will have the thumb facing the audience. Everyone loves the “L” because you can switch it from the left or to the right for variation as a “L” or a backwards “L”.



It is important for your cheerleaders to try and follow some guidelines when they are going through the motions so you will have an overall good presentation for your group. The following guidelines are important to encourage.

- Always smile
- Imagine that you are locking your arms when you need to show crisp, sharp movements but try not to look way too stiff in the movements
- Never have floppy wrists –they should always be in line with your arms and firm
- Practice makes perfect so if you are having problems with motions, practice until you get it right and if you can’t get it right, ask for help
- Rhythm matters in cheerleading so it is important for you to stay in rhythm with the cheers and chants that you are doing
- If you are dragging your cheers—don’t. Remember make the cheers quick and snappy as well as sharp and loud
- Don’t be lazy with your motions—think about kickboxing routines you have seen for the upper body because this is the kind of strength you need in your cheerleading motions

- The best way to get it right when it comes down to learning your motions is to practice in front of a mirror without distractions so you can see what you need to change

As the coach, as you are working with your groups separately, you should browse around the room and see who is using quick and precise motions and who isn't. Go to the participants who are slouchy with the motions and walk them through it. You may have to take their arms and position their arms precisely so they will know what the exact way feels like when it is done correctly. Make sure your team does get the firm and snappy motions because it can make a big difference for you and your team in competitions.

## **Learning formations**

There's no point in learning formations in smaller groups because you will need to learn these together with your whole squad because the formation is how you will be placing your girls at ballgames and especially in competitions where they tend to be very important. It is important to remember that an ordinary routine can be made into an extraordinary routine if you start with a good formation. It really is true. Add in a bunch of enthusiastic cheerleaders with a lot of good, sharp motions and you will have a strong routine deserving of attention.

As you begin to teach your group formations, you will want to notice who can stand out in a crowd and follow precise instructions. Later, you may want these cheerleaders to form a formation within a formation which works really well for teams which like to do something a little differently. This can add an almost 3-D effect to your routine depending on what you choose for your routines.

If you are taking your team to a competition, you should probably spend a lot of time discussing formations with your team. Try to think up your own different formations. Stage presence is very important in competitions and so is the wow-factor. You want to

wow your audience. Use the stage and the space you have when you go to competitions to light up your performance. Try to find ways to appeal to the judges because when you face a competition, you're going to need a lot of help in the wow-factor because many of the judges in most of these competitions have been around for awhile! They've been a cheerleader, a coach and a judge so it takes a lot to *wow* them!

Remember, formations can be worked on with your entire team. Cheers, chants, and motions can be worked on individually and should be worked on together with the whole team as well.



## Chapter Four: Stunt Drills

Stunts can be one of the greatest challenges for a coach because not only are stunts just plain difficult but they can also be very dangerous and if you have one mistake, it can be an injury-producing mistake. Everyone who participates in stunts should be reminded of the following basic rules:

- No stunts are to be practiced without coach supervision
- Stunts shouldn't be practiced at home
- Stunts shouldn't be taken lightly which means it is not a time to goof off and it isn't a time to close off your ears either! Open eyes and open ears for stunts is mandatory.
- Stunts aren't for everyone but most of the time, if you have everyone involved it enables more flexibility in the stunts the team can do. As a coach, you should explain to your team if they don't feel comfortable with their part of the stunt they should let you know and if they don't want to do one at all, you need to know how you wish to address this too.
- Reiterate it over and over again---the team must pay attention when learning to do stunts and when they are doing them six months down the road. Everyone must focus because the safety of all parties involved is at risk.

There are so many stunts you can do with your team. You really need to take a look at the build of each team member and determine which stunts will be most suited for your team. Below, we are going to look at the various roles in stunts and you will begin to understand the importance of each. Later, in the appendix, you will see a few drill samples you can run for effective stunt drills.

### Practicing Stunts

Most people who aren't familiar with cheerleading don't realize there are certain positions assigned for stunts. There are not only stunt positions but everyone has a critical part of the stunt in order for it to go smoothly from start to finish. Bases, flyers and spots each have a responsibility in the stunt. Once you have decided what stunts you want to do, you should then divide everyone up for consideration for bases, flyers and spotters. Once you have your stunts laid out, you still need to go over some general rules and expectations for each position within the stunt. Below, you will be able to look at the different components of the stunt and explain each portion to your team.

## **The Importance of Basing**

The base is one of the people who is positioned as a base to help raise the flyer into the air or in some cases, toss them up as high as possible. Considered the bottom or the foundation of all stunts, the base is a critical position. Many people think the flyer is the most difficult position to have in a stunt. In fact, basing is far more difficult. Flyers deal with a trust issue and are sometimes frightened by flying particularly if they have had a past accident. However, the toughest part of a stunt seems to be the position of the base.

As a coach, you need to be aware of the athletic ability on your team and choose your bases based on what you notice. Since bases need to use their legs more than their arms for lifting, the bases need to have strength in their legs. Many coaches who travel with all-star teams recommend running to their bases so they can build up their legs. You will find this can be very helpful to your team and stunts.

Things you should go over with your bases so they will know what you expect from them and so they can plan for success are as follows:

- Remind the bases that their position is a very important position in the stunt and encourage them to step up to the plate with confidence and enthusiasm. If one

base seems unsteady or lacks confidence, it can make it harder on other team members and your bases should recognize this.

- Remind the bases to use their legs because their strength will be in their legs.
- As with any stunt, cheerleading stunts require everyone to be in perfect timing when they perform the stunts. This includes knowing when and how to help the spotter with the flyer so the flyer never endures an injury which could have been prevented. Remind this to everyone who is positioned as a base.
- Distractions at practice will be less than what you will find in competitions or at ballgames. Learn to avoid and ignore distractions because the flyer and the other bases are depending on you to stay focused. Remind your bases of this continually.
- Remind your bases to take care of their backs and to use their legs rather than bending when possible. Also show them how positioning their feet can help them later on with easy maneuvering.

Coaches should remind the bases to have a good attitude and to think positive about what they are doing. Talking should be kept to a minimum during stunts and preferably not at all while you are teaching your team how to perform a stunt. Remind your bases you are not open to mistakes and the responsibility of keeping everyone safe lies on their shoulders, literally.

## **Flyers**

Called a floater or mounter, the flyer is going to hold a very important position in your stunts too. The flyer is the one who is thrown through the air or tossed up for simple stunts. Explain this position to your girls and see first who is interested in the position. This position is the position so many young girls dream of owning from little league cheerleading on up because usually it is the positioned to be considered as most dangerous and the absolute most fun. As a coach looking for your flyers, you will need to consider the height and weight of each girl on the team. You'll want to make sure these

are the girls who are not just after the ego of being the center of attention as the flyer but are genuinely interested in being a flyer.

Things to remind your flyers are as follows:

- Your flyers will need to have a lot of confidence and they will need to trust the bases and the spotter. Before you get too far into practicing stunts, talk to your flyers and see if they are truly comfortable with being tossed into the air and be sure they understand the risks involved should something go wrong.
- Understand your bases must be able to be tossed up like a rocket without a lot of movement. If all of your bases are struggling with one particular flyer, take a look at the flyer and see if they are doing something wrong. It is possible you have a flyer that is a wiggle-worm.
- Timing is as important for the bases as the flyer and the flyer needs to have a perfect count with the bases so she can know what to expect. Discuss this with bases and flyers.
- A fear of heights and flyers don't mix and you can't change this if it presents itself as a problem.
- Flyers have to trust all of their teammates. If you are working with a group of older girls where there's a lot of animosity, pull your flyers aside and make sure nothing has changed in the support the flyer receives from other teammates. It is a known fact, girls have run into accidents when they have angered the wrong unstable cheerleader.
- Remind your flyer to have fun and smile. After all, it isn't everyday someone gets to fly through the air.

Flyers can be dare devils and you must enforce some rules if you see some showmanship qualities which begin to scare you a bit. It is important for the flyers to stay team-focused so everyone remains safe and has a good time.

## Spotters

As a coach, you will quickly discover you don't have a lot of people eager to be the spotter. A spotter will realize how great their responsibility really is when they scoop a flyer that is just a moment away from a crash landing. When you choose the spotters for your stunts you need to recognize the spotter as someone who is usually taller than average. Coaches need to find spotters who think quickly and independently. The following guidelines are things to remind your spotters:

- Teach your spotters ( and your bases for that matter) how to catch a falling flyer. Teach the spotter to look for ways to grab the flyers head and neck first before the flyer is able to hit the ground even if they can't get positioned to save the fall.
- Teach spotters to catch the flyer as soon as they can reach her to help ensure the flyer's safety and to help slow down a potential fall.
- Spotters are supposed to know how to protect the flyers and save the performance should the stunt go south so to speak. A good spotter can save scores in competitions if they know what to look for and are quickly thinking on their feet should something start to go wrong.
- A good spotter is absolutely trusted by the designated flyer and as the coach, you need to teach your spotter to be trust-worthy.
- A spotter always has to be in rhythm with the whole stunt otherwise everything can go wrong. It is very important for the spotter to plan ahead because anything can happen.
- As a spotter, all grips should be tight at all times when the stunt calls for grips. You should explain this to your spotter.
- A good spotter's eyes never leave the flyer.

Bases, spotters and flyers all have their important position on the team. If you allow your team to lose their focus or if you notice the girls are not maintaining a team focus, then you could experience stunt problems which can and will cause injuries.

As you begin to build stunts, you should be careful to notice any flaws and avoid any stunts which your team doesn't appear to be comfortable in doing.

## **Common Mistakes to Avoid**

Often when an accident occurs, you will hear someone ask, "why didn't you do this or that" and commonly the answer is "because no one told me". Remember as a coach, it is your responsibility to put your thoughts into words and tell your cheerleaders what you expect from them. If you don't and accidents occur, you can blame yourself in many incidences. Since you don't want to blame yourself and since you are more interested in progressing into stunts without any problems, it is important to keep the following tips in mind. Try to avoid costly mistakes and remember the following:

- Never assume any age group knows exactly what to do in a stunt
- Never assume any position is fully understood, explain it thoroughly
- Always assume accidents can and do happen
- Always take as many steps necessary to avoid accidents
- Make sure your spotter or whoever is calling the stunts, is loud and can be heard clearly by all participants
- Start with easy stunts and master those stunts before you move your team into more difficult stunts

If you are coaching an all-star team, you may want to keep in mind stunts and how many stunts you will be able to do with a smaller group of girls versus a larger group of girls on your team. If you are planning on winning competitions, then you need to keep this in mind.

## **Cheerleading Formations**

Before you get into stunts too far, you may want to stop and talk about several formations which can help your bases prepare and move into a stunts easier and naturally. Try to find formations which will help your bases move from one cheer immediately into a stunt. You'll like the smooth transition and it gives your team a sharper look. Remember, a formation is never really considered a good formation unless you can do less than an 8-count to get everyone in position for another one. Often some of the formations are easier to move into than others when you are switching it up.

Today, formations are primarily used in high school, college and all-star teams. However, some middle school teams with aggressive coaches are using formations too. Planned formations are smart to implement because whether you realize it or not, when your cheerleaders hit the field, they are going to be in some sort of formation. Why not plan for a formation which is workable for everyone and makes your team look more polished? Following is a sample ten-person formation you can use for placing your cheerleaders in position for cheering which will work for you easily as you move into stunts.

### **Sample Ten Person Formation**

X X X  
X X X X  
X X X

This formation is a standard formation used in cheerleading with three people in the front row, four in the middle row and three in the back.

Another standard formation used with great frequency is the following:

### **Sample Ten Person Formation**

X X X X X

## X X X X X

Both of these formations appear well for cheering, movement into stunts and even some ease in breaking out to tumble. For larger teams, the above formation with 2 single file lines is perfect. For example, a 20-person team can easily make a statement on the sidelines with this formation.

Find what you like and what looks best for your team and just stick with easy formations. The more difficult the formation, the harder it is to slide right into a stunt. Furthermore, if something works and it works well, don't complicate things just by testing your team with a more difficult formation. Save your challenges for something bigger than basic formations.

## Chapter Five: Tumbling Drills

As a coach, one thing you will quickly discover is who can tumble and who can not. There won't be any question about it when you conduct your tryouts. Remember, even if you don't incorporate tumbling into your tryouts, the people who can tumble will find a way to show-off when appropriate so you will stand up and take notice of their superb tumbling skills. During tryouts, you will be able to see who has been in gymnastics since the age of three and who has never even considered turning a cartwheel.

You need to decide how important tumbling is to your squad. If you are coaching an all-stars team, it is probably very important. Some coaches send their cheerleaders to a local gym once a week to brush up on the tumbling in a facility well-equipped to teach tumbling. This is of course, up to you.

It's really easy to teach basic tumbling but if unless you want to spend a good portion of your practice working on tumbling, leave it to the professionals. Basically, in cheerleading, you will see the following and you should be able to find a couple of people on your team who have mastered one or more of the following:

- Cartwheels
- Round-offs
- Back Handsprings
- The Back Tuck
- Arial Cartwheel
- Front Handsprings

If you have a couple of people who can do some of these gymnastics, then you can incorporate their skills into your routines when you decide it is time to pep things up a bit. In the meantime, you are going to have to plan to incorporate tumbling into your

stunts and just like the stunts, this will work best on the beginning in a small group format. Later, you can have practices which brings both of your small groups together to work on the performance routines, competitions and the overall field routines for the squad.

## **Learning Skills through Drills**

You will have to teach the skills you want your girls to know or hire someone to do it for you. Whether you teach the tumbling drills yourself or do hire an outside source, the following list will help you decide what you want your team to learn.

One of the reasons many coaches prefer to just meet once a week at a local gym is because of the flooring typically found in most gymnastics gyms. Usually the floor is 42 by 42 or 40 by 40 with a spring built in the floor for better tumbling. This provides the best flooring possible for tumbling. There are several components you will want to have your girls work on developing and these include:

- Cartwheels
- Handstands
- Handstand forward roll
- Aerial Cartwheel
- Round-off
- Back Walkover
- Back Handspring
- Front Handspring
- Front Walkover

Often during tumbling, you will want to work on jumps too such as some of the following:

- Banana
- Double Hook
- Hurkey
- Hurdler
- Pike
- Spread Eagle or Jump Split
- Table Top
- Toe Touch

Some of these jumps your girls will already know how to do and some of them they won't know at all. During tumbling sessions is the only appropriate time to practice the jumps. Just so you know, not every girl on your squad will be able to do a split but if you will have the girls practice their splits, some of them may be able to do them by the end of the season. It just doesn't come naturally for every one so some of your participants will need to practice this as well as the jumps.

Some coaches don't want to work with their girls in groups and prefer to keep cheerleading sessions group-oriented as one large squad rather than break it up into skill and drill training groups. Often, even if the coach doesn't send the cheerleaders to a nearby gym to practice, they will still work one day per week on tumbling skills. This is very effective for the girls who need the extra work but of course, the better facility will be at a designated gym for gymnastics instruction.

Check the appendix for a sample tumbling oriented drill which is suggested for cheerleading practices and for tumbling-specific classes. You should find a plan which will work well for you. The drill sample you find in the appendix includes all of the skills you should ever need to worry about in the area of tumbling unless of course, you are coaching an all-stars team and then, as you know, different expectations may be necessary.

## Chapter Six: Bringing it All Together

When you are working with your girls at the beginning of your new season, it's important to remember the things you liked about each individual from the beginning. What was it that made you choose her for the squad? What attributes did you think she would bring to the table? If you were in question about what her abilities were at the time of your tryouts, have you been able to clear up those apprehensions?

Once you've had a chance to work with your girls in a team format, you need to go back and look at your score cards and then take a good hard look at your team when they are practicing. You want to be able to start planning your formations based on what you discover when you watch your team in action.

Remember, play on the strengths of your individual cheerleaders and showcase their abilities and hide their flaws as much as possible. Using your new notes from observations of one of your practices and using your checklist which you used when you judged your tryouts, consider the following to start planning your positioning for formations.

- The girls with the best motions you want to place on the front if at all possible. If you can't place the girls on the front, then place them on the ends where they are more visible.
- Appearance is important and if you have one or two who really stand out for their appearance, place them in the center of the formations when possible.
- If you have divided groups on cheer mastery and vocal inflections, stagger your girls throughout the formation so it isn't noticeable.
- Obviously, your strongest girls with the best motions who also know the cheers best should be on the front but consider placing the most enthusiastic cheerleaders where they can be seen too. Remember, it's contagious!

When it is all said and done, you want to have a team you are really proud to take to any competition and to coach through any ballgame. With this in mind, plan your formations, your cheers, your stunts and tumbling with this team in mind. Build on their strengths to help build their confidence and to help them really stand out.

Once you feel comfortable with what you have taught your team, it is time to bring your team together to lay out their routine. Depending on where your team will be performing makes a difference in the routines, formations, stunts and tumbling you will use. If you have a team which will primarily be a sideline team at ballgames, then you are in good shape for planning easy routines and formations. People who attend ballgames want peppy cheerleaders with some great cheers but they aren't really interested in whether or not your squad is winning competitions.

If your squad is going to be going to competitions, then you need to plan your routine around stunts, tumbling and cheering and you may even need a good dance routine, in fact you probably will need one or two dance routines. In regards to the dance routines, you should probably check with your school on half time shows and see which schools like to have the cheerleaders perform dance routines as part of a half-time show or as part of a pre-game show. Often, this isn't necessary in high schools because there's a designated dance team.

When you are bringing everything together, you will also need a pep rally routine to follow too. Simple tumbling and few stunts will be part of this routine because the ideal is to get everyone in the crowd excited about an upcoming ballgame. Pep rallies can be a fun time for cheerleaders to showcase what they've learned. Often, this is the first public performance your team will have.

You've made your team of newbies into a great team, now it's time for you to let them spread their wings and fly. You'll be proud to know they really do owe it all to you!

## Appendix A

On the following pages, you will find generic sample permission forms for your use. These forms can be used for any squad. If you don't use these forms, it is highly recommended you find forms which will suit your needs for your squad. Remember, the better you protect your team and yourself, the more peace of mind you will find should anything happen to warrant the need of these forms. The forms provided are provided without introduction so you can simply copy these for your team and provide these forms for your parents at the initial parent meeting.

The following forms are available:

1. Sample Permission Form
2. Medical Release Form
3. Health and Medication Form

The following three pages are forms which you should hand out at your initial parent meeting and if at all possible, have them signed and filled out during the initial meeting so you don't have to chase the forms down at a later date. You should have a hard copy of these three forms on every cheerleader with you at every ballgame, event or competition in case you need them immediately.

## Cheerleading Permission Form

My child, \_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to participate as a squad member of the \_\_\_\_\_ cheerleading squad. I have read any and all information provided to me concerning the rules and regulations of this particular squad.

I understand my child will be required to travel to certain events and I will provide transportation for my child so he/she may attend and follow through on their commitment to this squad.

As a parent, I understand if my child is injured as a participant of this squad, I will have no legal recourse because by signing this permission form, I agree to let my child participate in cheerleading at his or her own risk. This is signed with the understanding the coaches will take every precaution to avoid accidents and injury. I understand that the \_\_\_\_\_ cheerleading squad assumes no financial obligation should an accident occur and result in injury.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed By \_\_\_\_\_

## Medical Release Form

My child \_\_\_\_\_ is a participant with the  
\_\_\_\_\_ cheerleading squad. In the even of an  
emergency, I authorize immediate care of my child at a medical facility  
using the following health insurance information.

Provider \_\_\_\_\_

Subscriber ID \_\_\_\_\_

Group Number \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Number \_\_\_\_\_

The following four emergency contact names and numbers include in order  
how I should be reached in the case of an emergency.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Number \_\_\_\_\_

This is signed with my child's best interest in mind.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_

## Health Form for Cheerleader

My child is participating as a cheerleader with the  
\_\_\_\_\_ cheerleading squad. She/he has the  
following medical problems:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and takes  
the following  
medications \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

She/he has had the following  
surgeries \_\_\_\_\_.

This information is true and can be provided to the right health  
provider should this be necessary.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Parent of \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

When it comes time to practice your squad, who has time for planning? This appendix is designed to help you have some pull out plans to just grab and go when you are ready to start practicing your squads! You'll also find some suggestions for running drills and you'll find cheers galore to help you start your season off just right!

Just run copies and you're ready to go. This Appendix contains the following forms:

1. Formations
2. Practice Plan One
3. Practice Plan Two
4. Cheers
5. Tumbling Drills
6. Stunt Drills
7. Cheerleading Handouts for learning the Cheer Motions

## Formations

The following formations are great ideas for formations which you can later use to easily go into stunts and tumbling exercises. These formations are excellent sideline formations.

### Straight Lines

```
X X X X X X X X
X X X X X X X X
```

The idea with this formation is to line everyone up on the front and back rows evenly.  
If you have an uneven amount of people, then try a different formation.

### Three Groups

```
  X   X   X
X X  X X  X X
  X   X   X
```

This formation works well for the stunt-oriented team and works well when you plan to incorporate a lot of tumbling into your routine

### 3-4-5

```
  X   X   X
  X   X   X   X
X   X   X   X   X
```

This is a fun formation to use when you are going to be building a lot of pyramids.

### 22 is Workable

```
X X X X X X X X
  X X X X X X
X X X X X X X X
```

Coaches find this is a good formation for a large group because it is a good formation for going into quick and easy pyramids and stunts.

## Practice Plan One

3:00-3:15 Warm Up using stretching, jogging in place and if you have a track available, send the girls for a lap around the track or even the gym.

3:15-3:30 Review any new cheers, chants or stunts you will be working on when you break down into your groups.

3:30-4:15 Start the individual group practices. Make sure each group understands what it is they are working on for the day. Reinforce new skills and watch for flaws in movements, cheers, stunts and tumbling so you can correct them immediately. If you notice someone is struggling with one component, pull them aside and help them to get it right.

4:15-4:25 Break for ten minutes and encourage the participants to sit, rest and drink fluids and be ready to go in ten minutes.

4:25-5:10 Have the girls rotate groups and begin working on the next focus. Ideally, the stunts and tumbling drills will be practiced on floor mats in the beginning stages so this will help each group identify with where they are supposed to be.

5:15-5:45 Organize into one big group and practice everything you have learned together as a group. Routines are generally worked on at this point.

5:45-5:50 Dismiss

## Practice Plan Two

3:00-3:15 Warm-up with stretches, walking, jogging

3:15-3:30 Go over everything new and demonstrate new cheers, stunts, and any tumbling you are going to add. If you are introducing a new dance for halftime or anything routine-related you can do that during this time too.

3:30-4:30 Stay as a large group and work on cheers, chants, tumbling and stunts. Work on your half-time routine or pre-game presentation. Focus on your overall team appearance.

4:30-4:40 Break for ten minutes

4:40-5:10 Begin your group focuses and divide your teams into groups to start this

5:10-5:45 Swap groups and have the groups continue with drills and practices

5:45-5:50 Dismiss

# Cheers

1. G-O Let me hear you say GO! (GO)  
That's Right, Unite, let me hear you say Fight! (Fight)  
W-I-N Let me hear you way win! (Win)  
Together again GO, FIGHT, WIN!  
GO, FIGHT WIN! Hey! (stomp, stomp, clap, stomp-stomp, clap and on the last clap yell GO!) Repeat the stomp and clap and then say FIGHT! Then do the same again and yell WIN!  
GO! FIGHT! WIN! HEY! (one last stomp and clap)
2. Ready OK!  
We're Fired Up, we're sizzling  
We're Turning up the heat  
When it comes to our team, we simply can't be beat!
3. We're Din-o-mite  
We're Dyn-o-mite  
We're tick, tick, tick BOOM Dynamite! BOOM Dynamite!  
( Repeat several times)
4. Come on Crowd let's get loud  
Cheer the Eagles to Victory  
Yell Go-Fight-Win  
That's right, do it again  
GO-FIGHT-WIN
5. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm an Eagles fan  
I like the Eagles cause they like to score touchdowns!

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm an Eagles fan

I like the Eagles cause they can carry that ball around!

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm an Eagles fan

I like the Eagles cause they just like to get down! ( Rest of the girls cheer 'uh-huh they like to get down') Then repeat until all introductions are complete

6. How funky is your chicken? ( How funky is your chicken?)  
How loose is your goose? ( How loose is your goose?)  
So come on all you Eagles fans ( so come on all you Eagles Fans)  
And shake your caboose ( and shake your caboose)
  
7. This is how we do,  
Shoot that ball right through the hoop,  
This is how we score,  
C'mon give us 2 points more!
  
8. We've got spirit yes we do, we've got spirit how about you? ( We've got spirit yes we do, we've got spirit how about you?) Repeat.
  
9. You might be good at football  
You might be good at track  
But when it comes to basketball,  
You might as well step back!
  
10. Who rocks the house?  
They say the Eagles rock the house.  
And when the Eagles rock the house,  
They rock it all the way down.  
( Get down and slap the floor)
  
11. Hey team, what's the scoop? Put that ball right through the hoop.

- Put it up and in, put it up and in. Shoot 2 –come on let's win!
12. Pennies, Quarters, Nickels and Dimes  
We've got spirit all of the time. Go Eagles!
13. The Eagles are here to welcome you,  
Our blue and white pride will shine right through,  
We're here to play.  
We play to win. So come on Cowboys let's begin!
14. We ain't bad and we ain't mean  
We're just going to run over you  
Like a plowing machine
15. We're Big B-I-G  
We're Bad B-A-D  
And we're Boss B-O-S-S, B-O-S-S BOSS!
16. Let's get a little bit Rowdy  
R-O-W-D-Y ( Starts the chant as soft spoken and ends extremely loud!)
17. Green and white's our colors  
Eagles is the name  
Spirit is the reason  
Why we are going to win this game  
So bears watch out!  
The Eagles are out to  
W-I-N. Let's go for a win  
W-I-N Let's get a Touchdown Again!
18. Fantastic! Dynamic! We're sure to pass the test!

We are exploding with lots of spirit—better than the rest!  
Hey! Get Ready for the best you've ever seen!  
Blue, Red and White are back again tonight!  
Startling the nation, we're the team that you can't beat!  
The Pride of our mothers, we've come out to fight!  
We're going to hypnotize you and mesmerize you! Right before your eyes!  
The best you've ever seen, this team just can't be beat!  
Believe it, we know you can see it, We're the best there can be!  
Fantastic, Dynamic! Just you wait and see!

19. Hey, You Out in the Crowd, It's Time We

Get Busy and Shout Out Loud

GO BIG BLUE (I CAN'T HEAR YOU)

GO BIG BLUE!

Hey! You! Out in the crowd if you want to yell and scream,

Do it now!

GO BIG BLUE!

(Repeat cheer several times)

# Tumbling Drills

The following tumbling drills are recommended for coaches who are incorporating tumbling drills once a week instead of incorporating it with regular practice.

8:00-8:15 Warm-up and stretch—while the girls are stretching, explain to them how the groups will work for the tumbling drills. Group one will be working on cartwheels, aerials, and round-offs. Group two will be working on Handstands and handsprings while Group three will work on back handsprings

8:15-9:00 First Group Rotation

9:15-10:00 Second Group Rotation

10:15-11:00 Third Group Rotation

This three hour rotation of tumbling will include teaching the following skills:

**Group One:** Cartwheels, Aerials and Round-offs

**Cartwheels:** A basic gymnastic skill which will be easy to teach as a basic gymnastic skill. Hip over head in rotation is used in this maneuver.

**Aerials:** This is a cartwheel without the hands touching the surface of the floor.

**Round-offs:** A repetitive cartwheel where the flips are consistent and rapid. This is a skill which can later help the development of handsprings.

**Group Two:** Handstands and Handsprings

Handstands: Hands are placed on the ground and body is perpendicular to the surface. Most of the time, the instructors should encourage these to be done with the help of an interior wall.

Handsprings: Going in rapid motion from your feet to your hands to your feet again. This is easy for the cheerleader to master who is comfortable with the round-off.

Group Three:

Back Handsprings: Same as a handspring only backwards. Also called a flip-flop.

## Stunt Drills

The following stunt drills are stunts you can practice with your team to see which ones suit your team best:

- **General Partner Stunts**

For partner stunts, you only need a flyer and a base. The most common stunts are the Shoulder sit and the chair which is easily explained by photographs you will see on the internet. These two simple stunts should be practiced and used often to build upon for future team stunts and as practice for exciting things to come.

- **8 People Laying Hitch**

Requires 2 flyers, 5 bases and 1 back spotter for this stunt

Front group starts with flyer with one foot on the surface and one leg straight out behind. Flyer is facing the side with arms straight out parallel with shoulders and then folded like an Indian. One base holds the flyer under her arm pits, one has the flyer's hips and one has the leg which is extended. When the count is reached, the flyer will bend the leg on the surface and jump. The base people will be in position and will bend and then thrust the flyer above their heads so she will then be in a straight out position. When she is in this position, the flyer would be laying face down back toward the bases. Knees should be bent so the soles of the flyer's feet are pointed toward the ceiling. Group 2 then goes up to a hitch and the hitch flyer will then take the hitch foot and place it on the feet of the flyer lying down. If you have a large team and you want to make a stronger presentation, you can put an elevator or an extension in the middle.

- **5 People Basket-Toss**

Requires 1 flyer and 4 bases

The four bases toss the flyer into the air where the flyer will do a particular pre-planned movement—often just turn or flip over and then land in a basket of arms

below. A very common stunt among high school teams and some middle school teams.

## Cheerleading Handout for Motions

- The Bucket: Arms in front of you – your wrists need to be downward as if you were holding two buckets of water.
- Candle Sticks: Arms in front of you—fists are pointed inward toward each other as if you were walking with two lit candles.
- Touchdown: The arms are straight above the head as if you are a referee indicating a touchdown in a football game.
- High V: This is one many cheerleaders learn at age five and love it best because it is simple. Both arms are locked above the head with straight arms and thumbs facing the audience. Your arms are slightly out in a V above your head.
- “K” Motion: This is called a diagonal motion still in some areas. One arm is a high V and this arm has the thumb toward the audience. The other arm will come across the body in a downward motion and the pinkie will face the crowd.
- “L” Motion: Use the arms to form a “L” shape. The arm extended up will have the pinkie towards the audience and the side arm will have the thumb facing the audience. Everyone loves the “L” because you can switch it from the left or to the right for variation as a “L” or a backwards “L”.

