

Cheerleading "Gymnastics"

What makes cheer gymnastics different?

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In an effort to increase class retention and thereby facility revenue, many gyms offer alternative classes. One of the more popular choices is cheerleading classes for individuals or even "all star" cheerleading teams that perform or compete.



Anyone who has attempted to add a cheerleading class with the idea that cheerleading gymnastics is just like floor exercise gymnastics has had an eye-opening experience. Cheer gymnastics is different.

So, what makes cheer gymnastics so different; what concessions does gymnastics make to cheerleading; and what can it add?



Limited Skill Sets!

One trait of cheerleading gymnastics that should appeal to most coaches is the limited number of skills required by cheerleading. The basic components of cheer tumbling are the round-off, back handspring (standing and in series in or out of a round-off), back tuck (standing and/or in a tumbling series) and layouts. The "elite" skills, which can be added to this, include single and double twisting layouts (dependent on individual competition rules and requirements), front tucks and Arabians.

Where is the "Spring"?

The vast majority of cheerleading competitions are not performed on an enhanced floor. The performing surface consists of a 1 1/2" carpet-bonded foam floor that, generally, is 42' x 42' in dimension. Some competitions for larger teams may expand the floor width by 6' or 12'. (Please take into consideration when practicing skills to be performed at a competition or venue, the floor size which will be used so that the performer will make the transition in both technique and power.)

Arm Position

In cheerleading, most tumbling skills will start and end with the arms at the performer's side. The "arms down" completion is a result of the group nature of the activity and the focus of having everyone in the performing group act in unison. It is easier to have everyone use the same arm level if the arms are at the side rather than in the air.

Timing to Music

Although a floor exercise is performed to music and the gymnast takes their cue as to the skill being performed from the musical cues, cheer routines are set so that every movement is to a specific musical count. Again, the group nature of the activity requires that routine segments be choreographed to the exact musical count for effect and safety.

Synchronization of Multiple Performers

Similar to General Gymnastics and Rhythmic Group Gymnastics, synchronizing the performers is an important score value for cheerleading competitions. As an example, three athletes performing a round-off, back handspring, back tuck would start with their arms in the same position, take the exact same number of steps during the approach, place their hands on the competition or performance area at the same time, pass through the air and land in unison. The further that the performers are from this ideal synchronization, the fewer points the group would receive.

Taller Athletes

Generally, cheerleading teams will consist of various body types and most athletes will be taller than the average gymnast. Combine this with the fact that the cheerleader is not performing on an enhanced floor, there will be a limit to the number of skills which can be performed on a 42' x 42' diagonal.

Cheerleading classes can and will open up a new world in your gymnastics facility. Cheer can provide new sources of revenue as well as being a retention tool for gymnasts who are looking for another outlet for their athletic energies. Make sure, however, that you know the subtle differences in cheer vs. gymnastics to give your athletes the best chance for success.

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