

# Cheerleading is a Sport

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The New York Times states that cheerleading is the fastest growing girls' sport, yet more than half of Americans do not believe it qualifies as one. In addition, they fail to distinguish between sideline cheerleaders and competitive ones. Sideline cheerleaders' main goal is to entertain the crowd and lead them with team cheers, which should not be considered a sport. On the other hand, competitive cheerleading is a sport.

A sport, according to the Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors, is a "physical activity [competition] against/with an opponent, governed by rules and conditions under which a winner is declared, and primary purpose of the competition is a comparison of the relative skills of the participants." Because cheerleading follows these guidelines, it is a sport.

Competitive cheerleading includes lots of physical activity. Like gymnasts, cheerleaders must learn to tumble. They perform standing back flips, round flip flops, and full layout twists. Cheerleaders also perform lifts and tosses. This is where the "fliers" are thrown in the air, held by "bases" in different positions that require strength and cooperation with other teammates.

Just as basketball and football have guidelines for competitive play, so does competitive cheerleading. The whole routine has to be completed in less than three minutes and 15 seconds and the cheerleaders are required to stay within a certain pre-marked area.

Competitive cheerleaders' goal is to be the best. Just like gymnasts, they are awarded points for difficulty, technique, creativity and sharpness. The more difficult a mount or a stunt, the sharper and more in-sync the motions, the better the score. Cheerleading is a team sport so without cooperation and synchronization, first place is out of reach.

According to the National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research, cheerleading is the number-one cause of serious sports injuries to women. Emergency room visits for cheerleading are five times the number than for any other sport, partially because they do not wear protective gear. While many athletes are equipped with hip pads, knee pads, shin guards or helmets, smiling cheerleaders are tossed into the air and spiral down into the arms of trusted teammates. The fliers must remain tight at all times so that their bases can catch them safely. Also, because cheerleading is not yet recognized as a sport by many schools, neither proper matting nor high enough ceilings are provided to ensure safety. Instead, the girls use whatever space is available. More recognition of competitive cheerleading as a sport would decrease the number of injuries.

So why do many Americans not think cheerleading is a sport? It shouldn't be because cheerleaders do not use balls or manipulate objects (if you are not counting megaphones, pompoms and signs as objects). Wrestling, swimming, diving, track, cross-country, gymnastics, ice-skating and boxing are recognized sports that do not use balls. Some people argue that cheerleaders are just "flirts in skirts" with their only job to entertain the crowd, but cheerleaders today compete against other squads and work just as hard as any other athlete.

Competitive cheerleading is a sport. It is a physical activity that is governed by rules under which a winner can be declared and its primary purpose is to compare the skills of participants. Hopefully, cheerleading will become as well-known a sport as football and basketball, and even appear in the Olympics since cheerleaders are just as athletic and physically fit as those involved in the more accepted sports.