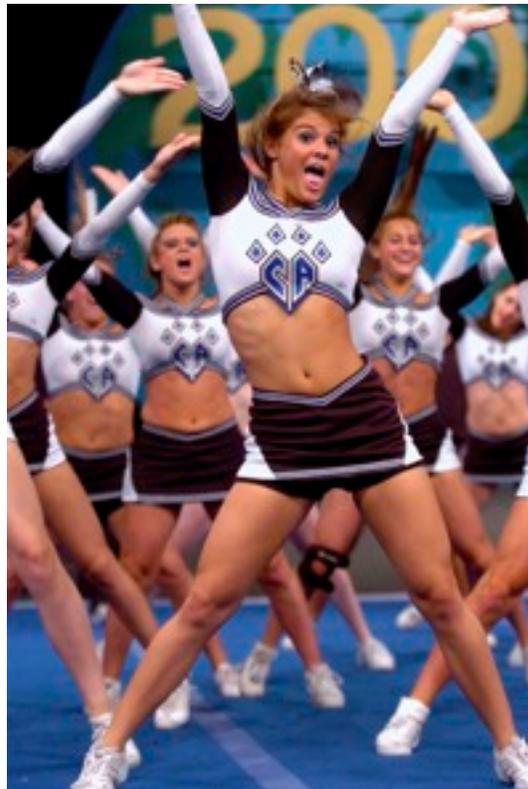


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# All Star Cheerleading Reference Guide

Provided by the staff at Cheer Athletics

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# History of All Star Cheer

## Basic Background of the Sport

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*"Cheerleading" takes on a whole new meaning*



The word "cheerleading" today encompasses many different activities. A century ago, cheerleading was started simply as a way to get the crowd to loudly support their football teams. It quickly spread from college football to sports at all levels, gaining in popularity as more and more young athletes became involved. Cheer soon branched out and now encompasses 3 distinct "branches" that all can lay claim to the word "cheerleading". There is the traditional sideline cheer that most people are familiar with. After that came the professional dance teams (like the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders) who added in their own style and performance elements. Soon after came the athletes and the competitions that make up All-Star Cheerleading.

The sport of All-Star Cheerleading has grown immensely from its roots over 20 years ago. In the 80s and early 90s, teams were typically formed of athletes who were interested in improving their skills so that they would stand a better chance of making their high school or college cheerleading teams. As the sport developed and grew, more and more athletes and their parents viewed All-Star Cheerleading as a viable activity in and of itself. As stronger and stronger athletes began to recognize that All Star provided them a way to focus more on teamwork and athleticism and less on pom poms and decorating lockers, the sport began to separate itself from the traditional stereotypes.

Teams and athletes in All-Star now focus on gymnastic and acrobatic moves. The hybrid sport of today is a combination of gymnastics, acrobatics, athletic dance, and many elements unique to All-Star. Today's All Star athlete can learn exciting skills in a fun, safe environment.

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# Cheerleading Competitions

## Basic Description of How They Work

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### Competitions

The majority of cheer competitions are one of two types: Regional or National. Typically the primary difference between the two is the size and duration of the event. Most often, a “regional” competition will be a one-day event, while “nationals” typically take place over 2-3 days. (More specifically, each team will perform multiple times.)

At most events, there are at least 2 complete spring floors set up. One will be in the main staging area where the judges and the crowd watch the performances. The other will be in an area set aside for warming up the teams. Each team will get anywhere from 8-30 minutes to go through an organized warmup to prepare for their performance. This typically finishes about 15-30 minutes prior to their performance. The warmup area is almost always open only to athletes and coaches.

When a team takes the mat at a competition, they are typically given 30 seconds or so to get prepared and set before the music starts. Once the team is ready, the coach will instruct the officials to start the music and the routine begins.

### Routines

An all star routine is done completely to music. (It used to be 1/2 music and 1/2 “cheer”.) The athletes will perform various skills and maneuvers covering the various categories on the judges scoresheets. There is no set order or even any specific “required” elements for a routine. Nearly every event uses at 54’ wide by 42’ spring floor with clearly marked boundaries. Different events have different rules about boundaries - but generally, you want to stay within the competition surface.

Some events provide extra “spotters” that will stand behind stunts and pyramids to help catch if the stunts are coming down. Not all teams will choose to use these spotters as they will occasionally accidentally distract or be standing in the way of an athlete going through the routine.

In the event of an injury during a routine, the coach and/or event producer will stop the music to care for the injured individual. The event producers typically allow the team time to re-group and perform again. Usually, the judges will score the first performance up until the injury, then score the remainder of the routine from the second performance. Any deductions, including the mistake that led to the injury are carried over into the final score.

### Scoring

While the scoring process is often similar at the various events we attend, there is no single standard scoring system. Every event we attend has the option of using a different set of criteria for their scores and rankings. They will also have different sets of deductions and even relative weighting of the various elements. On top of that, they will use different scales so that the same routine could score a 8.6 one week, a 87.5 the next, and even a 468 a week later. This can make

it difficult for parents, athletes, and even coaches at times to fully explain or understand the results. (The USASF is undertaking the task of creating a single, standardized scoresheet.)

In general, team scores are a combination of several factors. Some are fairly obvious, like tumbling/stunting difficulty, timing on jumps, etc. However, some are much more technical and are NOT obvious to the “untrained” eye. These include scores for transitions between elements, tumbling technique, variety and precision of formations, etc. Also, there are purely subjective categories like “overall impression” and choreography. Very often, a team that is the “crowd favorite” will have a high level of difficulty or entertaining music, but not necessarily score the highest.

There are “panel judges” whose scoresheets combine to produce a “raw score”. Unlike other sports like gymnastics, this is NOT simply a factor of adding up the difficulty of the various skill elements in a routine. This score includes subjective factors and evaluation of technique. There are usually a separate set of “deduction” judges who look for obvious mistakes and rule violations. They will then give deductions that are taken off of the “raw score” to produce a team’s “final score.”

Very often, mistakes will hurt your raw score AND cause deductions to be taken, essentially penalizing the team twice for the same mistakes. Fair or not, this is simply a part of the sport.

### **NCA All Star Nationals**

NCA is the oldest and most prestigious national championship in cheerleading. In 1987, NCA began having “all-star” divisions at their normal high school championships. By 1995, they separated the all-star teams into their own event. This also happened to be the first national championship that Cheer Athletics ever attended. (Since that time, Cheer Athletics has gone on to win more NCA national titles than any other program of any type.)

### **USASF Worlds**

For our level 5 (or 6) senior and international teams, USASF Worlds has become the primary focus of the season. Athletes on those teams should, for financial planning purposes, assume that they will attend Worlds on an “at large” bid. (“At large” means that you have qualified, but must pay your own way.)

Typical cost for hotel, registration, and flights is around \$700-800. If your team is fortunate enough to receive a “paid” bid, then you will have the majority of your expenses paid. (Paid bid teams may still owe a portion of their expenses if the “paid” portion of the bid does not completely cover all the expenses of the trip. Event producers may now give up to \$650 per athlete to cover their costs.)

All teams rosters are potentially flexible, but this is particularly true of the elite Worlds teams. Simply being on the floor when a team receives a bid is no guarantee that you will also take the floor at Worlds. Particularly for the Worlds trip, please make all reservations and travel arrangements refundable until you get confirmation from a coach that you and/or your team is definitely going.

Athletes who compete at The Cheerleading Worlds must be registered members of the USASF. Please see Angela for more details on how to make sure your athlete is properly registered.

### **What is the USASF?**

With the tremendous growth of all-star cheerleading over the last 2 decades, there arose a need for the industry to adopt standard divisions and levels. Prior to this, different competitions have had different regulations for how teams were to be divided and many had different rules for what stunting and tumbling was allowed. Coaches would have to change the routines from week to week just to meet the various requirements of the competition they were going to that weekend.

The United States All-Star Federation (USASF) was created to help standardize the industry. The USASF took ideas from industry leaders from the competition companies (NCA, UCA, ACA, CheerSport, etc) and from respected all-star gym owners (including CA's) and came up with a logical system of determining the various divisions and levels. These standards have been adopted by the vast majority of competitions that we will attend this season.

At this point, the USASF is primarily responsible for two things: setting the various guidelines for the sport and administering the World Championships. These are done through various committees and panels made up of coaches, event producers, and other experts throughout the industry.

(SIDE NOTE - Multiple CA coaches serve in influential positions within the USASF, including the National Advisory Board, the Rules Committee, and the 13-member Board of Directors.)

### **Competition Divisions**

Teams are typically broken down in 4 different ways: age, level, total number of athletes, and number of males. At some competitions, depending on the number of teams competing at the event, some divisions may be combined. There are strict guidelines put forth by the USASF which dictate when and how this may occur.

Age divisions are now determined purely by birthdate. What grade you are in (or even if you are still in school) has absolutely no bearing on eligibility. To avoid an athlete's eligibility changing during the year, there is a cutoff date. How old you are on AUGUST 31 will determine your "competition age" for that entire season. In other words, if you are 14 on August 31, you compete as a "14 year old" for that entire season, even if you turn 15 on September 1. Here are the current age divisions:

- International - 14 and up
- Senior - 12-18 \*\*
- Junior - 14 and under
- Youth - 11 and under
- Mini - 8 and under
- Tiny - 5 and under

\*\* there is a unique division - "Senior Open 5" - that has different tumbling restrictions and no age floor.

Teams are also divided, at some age levels and divisions, by the number of athletes on the team. Typically, 20 or fewer athletes is a "small" team and 21-36 is a "large" team. Also, at some age or ability levels, there are further divisions between teams based upon how many males are on the team. At the senior age level, typically 1-4 males are "limited" coed, 5-12 or more is "semi-limited" coed, and 13+ is "unlimited". At the junior age level, 1 or more males would be "coed". At youth age and below (and at Level 2 and below), there is no distinction made for gender.

There are currently 6 competition levels. The "level" refers to the type and difficulty of stunts, pyramids, tosses, and tumbling that a team is allowed to perform in their competition routine. They are numbered from 1 to 6, in increasing difficulty. (Level 6 is rarely used and is exclusive to college-aged athletes. For all practical purposes, Level 5 represents the highest difficulty level in which most gyms will field teams.) The level is determined solely by the coaching staff. There has been a steady upward trend within the levels over the past few years. The best teams at every level are MUCH stronger now than they used to be. A team that would have easily won a Level 4 division a couple of years ago could be below average at that level now. To achieve high scores, the vast majority of the athletes on a team must be able to do all the hardest skills allowed at their level with great technique. This essentially means that the standards for determining when an athlete will move "up" a level are much higher than they have been in the past.

## Commonly Used Cheer Terms (from USASF)

**Awesome** - A stunt where a top person has both feet together in the hand(s) of the base(s).  
Also referred to as a "Cupie."

**Back Walkover** - A non-aerial tumbling skill where one moves backward into an arched position, with the hands making contact with the ground first, then rotates the hips over the head and lands on one foot/leg at a time.

**Basket Toss** - A toss with no more than 4 bases, 2 of which use their hands to interlock wrists.

**Brace** - A physical connection that helps to provide stability to a top person. A top person's hair and/or uniform is not an appropriate or legal body part to use while bracing a pyramid or pyramid transition.

**Cartwheel** - A non-aerial gymnastic skill where one supports the weight of the body with the arm(s)

**Cradle** - A release move in which catchers, with palms up, catch the top person by placing one arm under the back and the other under the thighs of the top person. The top person must land face up in a pike position.

**Dismount** - The movement from a stunt or pyramid to a cradle or the performing surface. The movement from a cradle to the performing surface is not considered to be a dismount.

**Downward Inversion** - A stunt or pyramid in which an inverted top person's center of gravity is moving toward the performing surface

**Extended Stunt** - When the entire body of the top person is extended in an upright position over the base(s). (Examples of stunts that are not considered "extended stunts": Chairs, torches, flat backs, arm-n-arms and straddle lifts. These are stunts where the bases arms are extended overhead, but are NOT considered to be "extended stunts" since the height of the body of the top person is similar to a shoulder/prep level stunt.) (Clarification: If the primary bases go to their knees and extend their arms, the stunt would be considered extended.)

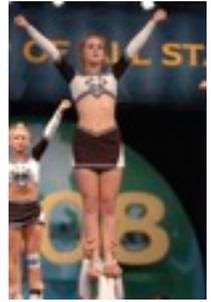
**Extension Prep / Prep / "Half"** - When the top person is being held at shoulder level by the base(s).

**Flip** - An aerial skill that involves hip-over-head rotation without contact with the performing surface as the body passes through the inverted position.

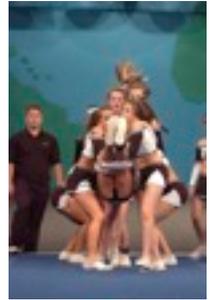
**Full** - A 360 degree twisting rotation.

**Handspring / Flip Flop** - Springing off the hands by putting the weight on the arms and using a strong push from the shoulders; can be done either forward or backward.

**Inversion** - When the athlete's shoulders are below her/his waist and at least one foot is above her/his head. Arch-back dismounts to a cradle are not considered inverted.



**Awesome**



**Cradle**



**Extended**



**Ext. Prep**



**Inversion**

**Original Base** - A base which is in contact with the top person during the initiation of the stunt.

**Pike** - Body bent forward at the hips while the legs are kept straight.

**Pyramid** - A grouping of connected stunts. Individuals standing at ground level may be incorporated into the grouping.

**Release Move** - When the base(s) and top person become free of contact with each other and the top person comes back to the original set of bases. This interpretation applies to "stunts" only, not "pyramids."

**Round Off** - The tumbler, with a push-off on one leg, plants hand(s) on floor while swinging the legs upward in a fast cartwheel motion. The feet snap down together landing at the same time to the performing surface.

**Running Tumbling** - Tumbling that is performed with a running start and/or involves a step or a hurdle (etc.) used to gain momentum as an entry to another skill. Any type of forward momentum/movement prior to execution of the tumbling skill(s) is defined as "running tumbling."

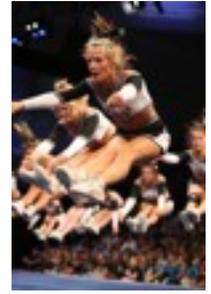
**Spotter** - A person whose primary responsibility is the protection of the head and shoulders area of a top person during the performance of a stunt/toss. (Many specific details beyond this.)

**Standing Tumbling** - A tumbling skill (series of skills) performed from a standing position without any previous forward momentum. Any number of steps backward prior to execution of tumbling skill(s) is defined as "standing tumbling."

**Stunt** - Any skill in which a top person is supported above the performance surface by one or more persons. Also referred to as a "mount."

**Tic Tock** - A stunt that is held in a static position on one leg, base(s) take a downward dip and release top person in an upward fashion, as the top person switches their weight to the other leg and lands in a static position on their opposite leg. The dip may or may not pass through prep level before release.

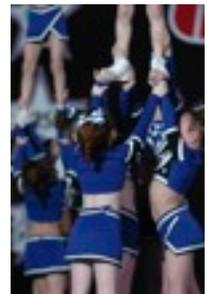
**Toss** - An airborne stunt where base(s) execute throwing motion from waist level to increase height of top person. Top person becomes free from all bases. Top person is free from performing surface when toss is initiated (ex: basket toss or sponge toss). Note: Toss to hands, toss to extended stunts and toss chair are NOT included in this category. (See Release Moves)



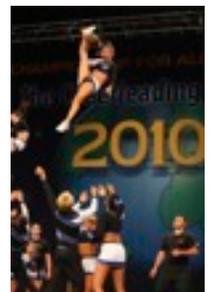
**Pike**



**Pyramid**



**Stunt**



**Toss**

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# Body Positions (Stunts)

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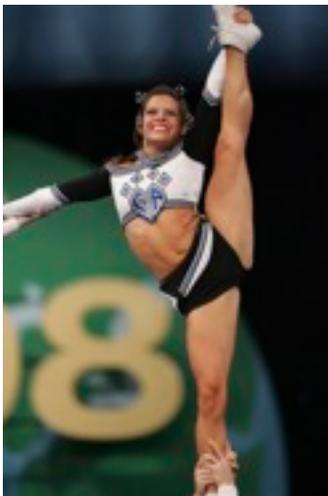
**Arabesque**



**Awesome / Cupie**



**Overstretch / Bow & Arrow**



**Stretch / Heel Stretch**



**Scale**



**Scorpion**