

Working together to Earn those Points!

By Tracie Jones

Owner CA Star Cheer & Tumble | Owings, MD

January 1, 2018

After many years and conversations with parents, as a parent, coach, and gym owner I must admit it, all star cheer [and dance] are confusing and confounding sports!

I totally understand why the public at large, along with most athletes and parents don't understand it. I've been doing this for over twenty years and I oftentimes, don't get it. There are lots of "whys" that we get asked. Why didn't we win? We were perfect! No falls, no bobbles, the most tumbling, so-n-so said our routine was a "HIT" etc. Why is Susie the point dancer, the flyer, the jumper, in the last pass, etc.?

Cheer [and dance] are unlike any other sports. We don't score goals, baskets, knock outs, or points. Or do we?

The short answer would be YES.

Let me try to explain. With this explanation it is my hope that we will all come away with a better understanding of why we do what we do, the way we do.

Points are the score that it all comes down to. Easy enough right? In football when a touchdown is scored, a team is awarded 6 points, a field goal equals 3 points and an extra point equals 1. (I won't get into safeties or two-point conversions). In basketball a basket is worth 1, 2 or 3 points depending upon how/when/why the points were scored. This is slightly confusing if it's your first game or two.

In gymnastics, specific skills have specific point values, as do skills in figure skating, and diving. I could go on to list each sport individually, but I think you probably get the idea.

Some sports are officiated or abide by a set of rules and points scored are enforced or awarded by referees. Some are judged whereas points are awarded or earned based upon a rubric system. Cheerleading [and dance] has neither and both at the same time. We have safety judges (referees) who take away points for violations and we have judges who award points based upon the performance of specific skill sets in areas, for cheer, such as dance, stunts, pyramids, tosses, tumbling, performance, and creativity. Note that some of these skill sets have sub-sets for difficulty, technique, and quantity. Cheer differs from every other sport as cheer [usually] does not have a set point value (i.e. a liberty is worth 2.5 point for difficulty) for any one skill set. Although we do have point ranges (2.0 – 5.0), judges are tasked with the responsibility of determining which item is worth what [range and] point value that given day, compared (in both difficulty and technique) to the other teams performing similar skill sets. Judges are free to award points down to the tenth of a point. Note that a hundredth of a point is possible but we haven't seen that yet.



Image courtesy of CA Star Cheer & Tumble®

Based on the teams in my program, individual and team competitors are making amazing progress. We are "in the hunt" where each team has finished each event in a respectable position within a few points of the first place team and most times within less than 1 point out of the top spots. These differences are usually due to the "easy" (really not so easy) points.

Parents are equally important to the success of the team. We believe it is the parents' responsibility to support and encourage their athletes and support their coaches in implementing needed changes for the benefit of their athlete and team.

Tracie Jones

This is why this time of year, we as coaches "double down" on the "little things" or the "easy" things. Those include items such as, if legs are pointed in back walkovers? If not that is a deduction of 0.5 points from technique. If jumps or leaps are technically flawed, expect another 0.5 points in deductions. Are the athletes playing to the crowd/judges and smiling? If not, that could net 1.5 points away for showmanship? Are tumbling passes together? What if an athlete doesn't throw their tumbling pass? These little, "easy" things add up and when the difference between first and last is 1.5 points or more, those smiles and pointed toes matters.

As we proceed through the season, we receive feedback from USASF, in the form of changes and clarification to rules which often come well after we have choreographed and attended our first events, received score sheets and/or critiques, and observations by other coaching professionals. It is our responsibility as coaches to implement the necessary changes and improvements according to the feedback

we receive. It is the athletes' responsibility to implement and be accepting of the changes made by the coaches so that they may improve as individuals and as teams. Parents are equally important to the success of the team. We believe it is the parents' responsibility to support and encourage their athletes and support their coaches in implementing the needed changes for the benefit of their athlete and team.

Is it repetitive? Yes! Boring? You Bet'cha! Is it necessary so that each athlete and team is adequately prepared in order to reach the goals they have set for themselves? Yes!

As we prepare to attend the remaining competitions of the season, as gym owners and coaches, we are asking for your support and encouragement. Please make sure your athlete gets to every practice, on time and ready to do their part. Remind your athlete to practice their routine, to stretch daily, eat right, get enough rest, and schedule their time so that their educational pursuits come first (student-athlete not athlete-student). Communicate any questions or concerns to your coaches or program director. Working together, we can and we will "CA Star" in every athlete & family! ■