



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

Spirit Coaches Responsibilities

NOTE: The following guidelines have been developed and reviewed to serve as a useful reminder of basic procedures for coaching spirit teams. No such review is a substitute, however, for an ongoing program of education about coaching and safety techniques, or for ongoing attention to the abilities and physical condition of each team member.

1. Spirit teams should be placed under the direction of a knowledgeable coach.
2. The coach should be knowledgeable in first aid techniques and emergency procedures. Coaches must develop an emergency plan for dealing with injuries at practice, games, performances and competitions. Participants must be made aware of these procedures.
3. Coaches should remain up-to-date on all new techniques, progressions and safety regulations by frequently attending conferences, clinics and rules meetings. The coach should also belong to appropriate professional spirit organizations.
4. Placement of spirit teams at athletic events:
 - a. Spirit coaches must coordinate the placement of the spirit team with the school administrator in charge.
 - b. Whenever possible, spirit teams should be at least 3-4 feet from any boundary line. When teams cheer:
 - (1) At a wrestling match, they should be ten feet from the edge of the wrestling mat unless the facility does not permit otherwise.
 - (2) At a volleyball match, they should not stand in any playable area unless the facility does not permit otherwise.
 - (3) Along the end line at a basketball game, they must not stand within the area of the free throw lane extended. (See 2-1-12)
 - c. Spirit teams should be aware of actions occurring within the contest and be prepared to move as play advances. They should be aware of the movement of game officials and not interfere with their game responsibilities.
 - d. No actions by the spirit team should be made to purposely distract the players.
5. Rules and eligibility requirements should be shared with every team member.
6. Coaches should conduct pre- and post-season meetings with parents.
7. The coach or other school approved adult representative must be in attendance and accessible at all practices, games, performances, competitions and other spirit activities.
8. The coach should establish a good line of communication with school administrators, the athletic director, coaches and the band director.
9. All spirit activities should be held in a location suitable for spirit teams, free of obstructions, and away from excessive noise or distractions.
10. Warm up and stretching should precede all spirit team performance activities. Suggestions for stunting warm ups at a basketball game when an alternate area is not available may include:
 - a. Arrive early to warm up stunts before player warm ups begin.
 - b. The coach could enlist others to stand between player warm up and stunting warm ups on the sidelines to deflect balls or individuals.
 - c. Warm up stunts when players return to dressing room after their warm ups.
 - d. Stunting might have to be delayed until after halftime of the first game if halftime is the first time an appropriate warm up area is available.
11. Coaches should recognize a team's particular ability level and limit its activities accordingly. "Ability level" refers to the team's talents as a whole, and to individuals who should not be pressed to perform specific activities nor be limited by the ability level of the team.
12. Coaches should not permit loose, slick, baggy clothes, nylon hose/tights which are not appropriate for the specific activity in which they are participating.
13. Coaches and participants should be trained in proper spotting techniques.
14. Proper progression, spotting techniques and when appropriate, matting should be used until stunts are mastered.
15. The coach should approve all cheers, chants, posters, signs, music, etc., and ensure good sportsmanship. All team activities should be approved by the coach.
16. The coach should inform the team that all new skills must first be reviewed and approved by the coach prior to performing them.
17. Coaches should be aware of how the demands placed on a spirit team member might impact the student athlete's academic achievement.
18. Travel arrangements for participants should be approved by the coach and/or the school administration.
19. When a team member is required to wear an insulin pump/pack or similar device during team activities, it shall be the responsibility of the coach to obtain competent medical advice concerning the protection and safety of that individual and other team members with whom she/he may be performing or stunting.



Organizing an Effective Practice Schedule

All safety rules must be adhered to at every spirit activity including practice. A key element in any spirit program is effective use of practice time in preparation for games, pep rallies and other team appearances.

1. The coach or other school-approved adult representative must be in attendance and accessible at all practices, games, performances, competitions and other spirit activities.
2. Team members must realize that practice is just that - a time for the team to practice and prepare for upcoming events.
3. When appropriate, begin practices by critiquing the last performance and/or game situation. Discuss things that need improvement, were successful or need to be eliminated.
4. A portion of most sessions will include perfection of material for upcoming events. This segment of the practice schedule may be spent reviewing all of the traditional material that the team uses at every game (cheers, chants, dances and especially the material that has an incorporation of any jumps, tumbling, stunts and pyramids). Some of this time may be used to work on new material for crowd involvement.
5. The last segment of practice time might focus on improving individual skills, tumbling, dance, or in whatever area the team needs improvement.

Strength and Conditioning

The following is a recommended list of activities that will help participants reach their athletic potential for the demands of the activity.

WARM UP - Warm up should include general activities that warm the body, and are independent of specific skills. Walking, jogging and stretching are examples of warm up activities. A thorough stretching program should follow the general warm up. The stretch should be an organized routine covering all parts of the body.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES - The squad should include specific activities during practice which include flexibility, endurance and muscle strengthening.

Flexibility exercises incorporated in the practice are used to decrease the possibilities of pulled muscles. Endurance training is essential for increasing the efficiency and capacity of the cardiopulmonary system to maintain a high level of performance throughout spirit activities. Participants who incorporate exercises for muscle strengthening in their practices will be less injury prone.

As spirit activities develop more and more into a physical and athletic activity, the participants need to develop as well. As the physical strength of the team members increase, so too must the technical skills of the coach. These are the directions in which the spirit program should be moving.

For questions or concerns regarding specific health and/or medical/orthopedic issues, please refer to the most recent edition of the NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook.

Spotting

The active spotter is an integral part of the safety of a program. The spotter is a person who assists in the building of, or dismounting from, a partner stunt or pyramid. The primary responsibility of a spotter is to watch for safety hazards and be in a position to minimize the potential of injury with special emphasis on the head, neck and shoulder areas. Spotters shall not provide primary support for others in the performance of a stunt.

Characteristics of an Effective Spotter

1. CONSTANT ATTENTION
 - Concentrates on the top person
 - Has a positive attitude of responsibility
2. KNOWLEDGE
 - Understands the capabilities of team members
 - Recognizes positioning for effective safety

Safety Tips for Spotters

1. Primarily focus on the top person's head.
2. Reach upward to assist the descent of the top person keeping the top person's weight as near the spotter as possible.
3. Listen for cues from the designated person.
4. It is better to come down safely from a poorly built stunt than to force it to stay up.



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Progressions:

As with any athletic activity, it is the coach's responsibility to ensure that team members demonstrate proficiency with lower level skills before progressing to more advanced skills.

Just as the prudent football, field hockey or volleyball coach does not allow a player to take the field without adequate skills and preparation, the prudent spirit coach will not allow his/her participants to perform skills for which they are not adequately trained.

These progressions are general in nature, and do not attempt to list every skill. All spirit stunts should be learned according to accepted progressions which means from lower to higher and from easy to more complex.

Partner Stunt Progression:

1. Step-up drills
2. Double-base thigh stand
3. Double-base shoulder stand
4. Single-base shoulder stand
5. Extension prep, step off dismount
6. Cradle drills
7. Extension prep, cradle dismount
8. Press extension, return to shoulders, cradle dismount
9. Press extension, cradle dismount
10. Full extension Step-up Liberty
11. Ground-up Liberty
12. Braced liberty tick-tock
13. Skills to cradles (i.e., toe touches and twists)
14. Basket toss drills ("rides")
15. Basket toss skill execution (i.e., toe touches and twists)

Note: No partner stunt should be attempted until each individual skill in the progression is mastered.

Tumbling Skill Levels

Level 1 - Basic rolls, bridges, handstands, cartwheel, round-off handstand forward roll, back walkover, front walkover

Level 2 - Standing back handspring, round-off back handspring, standing back handspring series, aerial cartwheel

Level 3 - Round-off back handspring series, standing back tuck, round-off back tuck, round-off back handspring back tuck, layouts from round-off back handspring, whip backs, half twists, full twists.

Transitional Stunts:

The area of transitional stunts is one of the fastest evolving and creative areas in modern spirit programs. These stunts involve the transition of one stunt to another. The coach and students must master the individual building block skills before attempting the transition from stunt to stunt. Most transitional stunts are considered advanced stunts and should only be performed by well trained, skillful teams that are taught and supervised by a well qualified coach.

Section 6 permits a greater variety of transitional release stunts. The torso of the top person is no longer required to remain upright, but the top person must not become inverted. The release must also be a continuous up-and-down movement with no pause at the top. The top person cannot lose contact with a bracer during the loss of contact with the base(s).

Training/Safety Equipment

As with other athletics, training aids may be made available to a spirit program. Training aids for spirit programs may include various types of matting, spotting belts, handspring trainers and spring-assisted equipment such as spring floors, mini-trampolines, and springboards. While some of these devices, such as spring-assisted apparatuses, may not be used for competition or performance, they may assist with the learning of a skill or allow for repetitive skill practice with less strain. Regardless of their use, it is the coach's responsibility to ensure that these aids are being used under properly trained supervision and that they are kept in proper condition.