

Cheerleading is a [sport](#) that uses organized routines made from elements of [tumbling](#), [dance](#), and [stunting](#) to direct the event's spectators to cheer on sports teams at games and matches and/or compete at cheerleading competitions. The athlete involved is called a cheerleader. With an estimated 1.5 million participants in allstar cheerleading (not including the millions more in high school, college or little league participants) in the [United States](#) alone, cheerleading is, according to [Newsweek's](#) Arian Campo-Flores, "the most quintessential of [American](#) sports." The growing presentation of the sport to a global audience has been led by the 1997 start of broadcasts of cheerleading competition by [ESPN](#) International and the worldwide release of the 2000 film [Bring it On](#). Due in part to this recent exposure, there are now an estimated 100,000 participants scattered around the rest of the world in countries including [Australia](#), [China](#), [Colombia](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Japan](#), the [Netherlands](#), [New Zealand](#), the United Kingdom and Italy by FISAC.

History



 [Minnesota Gopher](#) cheerleader Johnny Campbell

Cheerleading first appeared in the United States in the late 1880s with the crowd chanting as a way to encourage school spirit at athletic events. The first organized, recorded cheer was yelled "Ray, Ray' Ray! TIGER, TIGER, SIS, SIS, SIS! BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! Aaaaah! PRINCETON, PRINCETON, PRINCETON!" at [Princeton University](#) in [1884](#). A few years later, Princeton graduate, [Thomas Peebles](#) introduced the idea of organized crowd cheering at football games to the [University of Minnesota](#). However, it was not until 1898 that [University of Minnesota](#) student Johnny Campbell directed a crowd in cheering "Rah, Rah, Rah! Sku-u-mar, Hoo-Rah! Hoo-Rah! Varsity! Varsity! Varsity, Minn-e-So-Tah!", making Campbell the very first cheerleader and [November 2, 1898](#) the official birth date of organized cheerleading. Soon after, the [University of Minnesota](#) organized a "yell leader" squad of 6 male students, who still use Campbell's original cheer today. In 1903 the first cheerleading [fraternity](#), Gamma Sigma was founded. Cheerleading started out as an all-male activity, but females began participating in 1923, due to limited availability of female collegiate sports. At this time, gymnastics, tumbling, and megaphones were incorporated into popular cheers. Today it is estimated that 97% of cheerleading participants are female, but males still makeup 50% of collegiate cheering squads.




 [Cornell University](#) cheerleader on a 1906 postcard

In 1948, Lawrence "Herkie" Herkimer, of Dallas, TX and a former cheerleader at [Southern Methodist University](#) formed the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) as a way to hold cheerleading clinics. In 1949, The NCA held its first clinic in Huntsville, TX with 52 girls in attendance. "Herkie" contributed many "firsts" to the sport including the founding of Cheerleader & Danz Team uniform supply company, inventing the [herkie](#), (where one leg is bent towards the ground and the other is out to the side as high as it will stretch in the toe touch position) and creating the "Spirit Stick". By the 1960s, college cheerleaders began hosting workshops across the nation, teaching fundamental cheer skills to eager high school age girls. In 1965, Fred Gastoff invented the vinyl [pom-pom](#) and it was introduced into competitions by the International Cheerleading Foundation (now the World Cheerleading Association or WCA). Organized cheerleading competitions began to pop up with the first ranking of the "Top Ten College Cheerleading Squads" and "Cheerleader All America" awards given out by the International Cheerleading Foundation in 1967. In 1978, America was introduced to competitive cheerleading by the first broadcast of [Collegiate Cheerleading Championships](#) on [CBS](#)

In the 1960's [National Football League](#) (NFL) teams began to organize professional cheerleading teams. The [Baltimore Colts](#) (now the [Indianapolis Colts](#)) was the first NFL team to have an organized cheerleading squad. It was the [Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders](#) who gained the spotlight with their revealing outfits and sophisticated dance moves, which debuted in the 1972-1973 season, but were first seen widely in [Super Bowl X](#) (1976). This caused the image of cheerleaders to permanently change, with many other NFL teams emulating them. Most of the professional teams' cheerleading squads would more accurately be described as dance teams by today's standards; as they rarely, if ever, actively encourage crowd noise or perform modern cheerleading moves.



 Cheerleaders warming up for competition

The 1980s saw the onset of modern cheerleading with more difficult stunt sequences and Gymnastics being incorporated into routines. ESPN first broadcasted the National High School Cheerleading Competition nationwide in 1983. Cheerleading organizations such as the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA) started applying universal safety standards to decrease the number of injuries and prevent dangerous stunts, pyramids and tumbling passes from being included in routines. In 2003, the National Council for Spirit Safety and Education (NCSSE) was formed to offer safety training for youth, school, all star and college coaches. The NCAA requires college cheer coaches to successfully complete a nationally recognized safety-training program. The NCSSE or AACCA certification programs are both recognized by the NCAA.

Today, cheerleading is most closely associated with [American football](#) and [basketball](#). Sports such as [soccer](#), [ice hockey](#), [volleyball](#), [baseball](#), and [wrestling](#) sometimes sponsor cheerleading squads. The ICC Twenty20 Cricket World Cup in South Africa in 2007 was the first international cricket event to have cheerleaders. The [Florida Marlins](#) were the first [Major League Baseball](#) team to have cheerleaders. Debuting in 2003, the "Marlin Mermaids" gained national exposure and have influenced other MLB teams to develop their own cheer/dance squads.



 [Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets](#) cheerleaders at a [college basketball](#) game.

Most American high schools and colleges have organized cheerleading squads made up solely of students. Several colleges that compete at cheerleading competitions offer cheerleading scholarships.

Youth League

Many organisations that sponsor youth league [football](#) or [basketball](#) sponsor cheerleading squads as well. [Pop Warner](#) organizations are an example of this.

All Star Cheerleading

In the early 1980s, cheerleading squads not associated with a schools or sports leagues, whose main objective was competition, began to emerge. The first organization to call themselves all stars and go to competitions were the Q94 Rockers from [Richmond, Virginia](#), founded in 1982 by Hilda McDaniel. All-star teams competing prior to 1987 were placed into the same divisions as teams that represented schools and sports leagues. In 1986 National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) decided to address this situation by creating a separate division for these teams lacking a sponsoring school or athletic association, calling it the 'All-Star Division' and debuting it at their 1987 competitions. As the popularity of these types of teams grew, more and more of them were formed, attending competitions sponsored by many different types of organizations and companies, all using their own

set of rules, regulations and divisions. This situation became one of the chief concerns of gym owners. These inconsistencies caused coaches to keep their routines in a constant state of flux, detracting from time that should be utilized to develop skills and provide personal attention to their athletes. More importantly, because the various companies were constantly vying for the competitive edge, safety standards had becoming more and more lax. In some cases, unqualified coaches and inexperienced squads are attempting dangerous stunts as a result of these “expanded” sets of rules.

The USASF was formed in 2003 by these various competition companies to act as the national governing body for all star cheerleading and to create a standard set of rules and judging standards to be followed by all competitions sanctioned by the Federation and ultimately leading to the Cheerleading Worlds. The USASF hosted the first Cheerleading Worlds on Saturday, April 24, 2004. At the same time, cheerleading coaches from all over the country organize themselves for the same rule making purpose, calling themselves the National All Star Cheerleading Coaches Congress (NACCC). In 2005, the NACCC was absorbed by the USASF to become their rule making body. By late 2006, the [USASF](#) was ready to expand its reach even further, by facilitating the creation of the International All-Star Federation (IASF), the first international governing body for the sport of cheerleading.



Millcreek Spirits Starz at the Final Destination/Worlds Best.

Currently all-star cheerleading as sanctioned by the USASF involves a squad of 6-36 females and/or males. The squad prepares year-round for many different competition appearances, but they only actually perform for up to 2½ minutes during their routines. The numbers of competitions a team participates in varies from team to team, but generally, most teams tend to participate in eight-ten competitions a year. During a competition routine, a squad performs carefully choreographed stunting, tumbling, jumping and dancing to their own custom music. Teams create their routines to an eight-count system and apply that to the music so the team members execute the elements with precise timing and synchronization.

Judges at the competition watch for illegal moves from the group or any individual member. Here, an illegal move is something that is not allowed in that division due to difficulty and safety restrictions. More generally, judges look at the difficulty and execution of jumps, stunts and tumbling, synchronization, creativity, the sharpness of the motions, showmanship, and overall routine execution.

All-star cheerleaders are placed into divisions, which are grouped based upon age, size of the team, gender of participants, and ability level. The age levels vary from under 4 year of age to 18 years and over. The divisions used by the [USASF/IASF](#) are currently Tiny, Mini, Youth, Junior, Junior International, Junior Coed, Senior, Senior coed, Open International and Open.

If a team places high enough at selected [USASF/IASF](#) sanctioned national competitions, they could be included in the [Cheerleading Worlds](#) and compete against teams from all over the world. Also they could get money for placing.