

IOWA CHEERLEADING COACHES' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



AUGUST 2026

www.iowacheercoaches.org



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As another school year begins, I want to wish each of you an exciting and successful season. There is nothing quite like the energy that comes with the start of fall, meeting new team members, teaching sidelines, learning new choreography, and building the traditions that make your program special. While the season ahead will undoubtedly be busy, I encourage you to pause every now and then to appreciate the moments in between the checklists. The practices, bus rides, Friday night lights, and shared laughter are often the memories that last the longest. Just recently, my assistant coaches and I were laughing about one of those unforgettable moments from last season; our bus had a leak, and I ended up holding an umbrella over my head for the entire ride to an away game because water was cascading directly into my seat! 😊

In addition to pausing to appreciate the specialness of cheer, I have one other challenge for every ICCA member: **Attend/participate in ONE new ICCA event.** If you've never attended one of our clinics, make plans to join us. If you've never brought kids to All-State tryouts or Honor Squad, just do it! If you've never competed at the ICCA State Championships, consider taking that step with your team. And if competing isn't the right fit this year, come experience the excitement by attending as a spectator. I attended the ICCA state competition literally 15 times as a spectator before coaching a competition team myself. Watching the incredible talent from programs across Iowa is inspiring, educational, and a wonderful reminder of how much our cheer community has to offer.

No matter where this season takes you, remember that you don't have to do it alone. ICCA exists to support coaches, athletes, and programs across our state, and we hope you'll take advantage of the opportunities to learn, connect, and grow together. Thank you for the time, passion, and dedication you invest in your athletes every day. Here's to a safe, rewarding, and memorable school year. I can't wait to see you at an ICCA event this season!

Cheers!

Dana Logan

Dana Logan
ICCA President & All-State Director
Ames High Head Fall & Winter Cheerleading Coach

Become an ICCA Member TODAY!

Go to the ICCA website (www.iowacheercoaches.org) and find the **MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION** button on the Home Page.

Remember: If you attended the Spring Coaches Conference in April, your membership is already paid. Membership covers all coaches within your individual school, including head coaches, assistant coaches, and junior high coaches.

SIGN UP for Free Fall Clinics!



- Central District – August 8 @ Gilbert H.S.
- SE District – August 8 @ Washington
- Central District – August 15 @ East Marshall
- NE District – August 15 @ Center Point Urbana
- NW District – August 15 @ Storm Lake H.S.
- SW District – August 15 @ East Union

Remember: Coaches need to be ICCA members to attend. PLUS, you can attend any clinic that works for you!! (Doesn't have to be the District you're assigned to!)

FALL EVENT REGISTRATIONS

**Honor Squad, All State Tryouts,
and State Championships
Opens August 12, 2026
Closes September 20, 2026**

State Championship Scoresheet Updates

~ Jordan Sytsma, Rules Interpreter &
Central District Rep ~

The ICCA Board approved updates to the State Cheer Championships scoresheets at the June Board Meeting. These changes were first presented to coaches at the April ICCA Coaches Conference and are designed to improve clarity and consistency, place a greater emphasis on execution and performance quality, and eliminate overlapping score ranges.

A major focus of the updates is a shift toward execution-based scoring. Many categories have moved from "difficulty" to execution-based scoring, with expanded scoring descriptors and execution ranges now beginning at 1.0 instead of 2.5. Scoresheets are now more consistent across all divisions, with no overlapping score ranges. Multiplier adjustments include motions increasing to 2.0 and tumbling decreasing from 0.50 to 0.25.

In Game Time Spirit and Cheer/Dance, motions and jumps now use fixed difficulty values, while motion technique is evaluated separately as execution. Jump scoring places greater emphasis on approach, landings, synchronization, and technique. Majority participation remains critical. If the majority of athletes do not perform a jump, teams will receive a zero in the difficulty category but may still earn execution points for the jumps that are performed. As always, majority matters.

Routine Composition and Overall Components are now evaluated as execution-based categories, focusing on formations, transitions, crowd effectiveness, and showmanship. Dance follows the same structure, with additional emphasis on musicality, synchronization, and full-team performance.

Updates to stunts, pyramids, and tosses provide clearer definitions of difficulty, including expectations for extended structures, transitions, and synchronization. Partner stunt scoring also includes clearer definitions for body positions and dismounts.

In Stunt Group, approved changes include a required toss and a new "Toss Execution" category. In the Coed Stunt division, dismounts will now be specifically scored for difficulty and execution. Overall Impression scores in both stunt group categories now begin at 1.0 with expanded scoring descriptors.

Scoresheet...Continued on page 3

Information Regarding 8th Grade Participation

~ Kenna Johnson, Executive Director ~

On June 2, 2026, Governor Kim Reynolds signed HF2591 that allows 8th grade students to participate in high school athletics. The bill, which became effective August 1, 2026, did not come with direct guidance; however, on June 18, 2026, the Iowa State Board of Education approved EMERGENCY RULES for HF2591. IHSAA and IGHSAA, in a joint effort, drafted some initial guidance for these Emergency Rules, with the understanding that these rules could still change.

Due to the timing of the bill being signed and the subsequent guidance being issued several weeks later, the ICCA Board of Directors issued the following statement regarding 8th grade participation: **The ICCA Board has voted to allow ONLY 9th-12th grade students to participate in high school sideline or competitive cheer squads for the 2026-2027 school year. This topic will be reevaluated at our October (2026) and January (2027) Board meetings. Any changes to the current policy would be announced following the January meeting, allowing schools adequate time to plan for spring tryouts.**

The decision made by the ICCA Board was determined by a number of factors:

- Many schools had already completed tryouts for the 2026-2027 school year.
- Camps were already lined up and happening.
- Uniforms were ordered.
- Coaches and teams were already working on competition routines.
- Concerns about different buildings, schedules, campuses, along with transportation concerns
- Stunt safety – different NFHS Rules for middle school vs. high school

Much of the decision-making in regards to this bill remains under LOCAL control. As schools head into fall seasons, an overall policy at your school should have been determined. It is important to understand that, as a non-sanctioned activity, HF2591 does not apply to cheer. From the guidance from IHSAA/IGHSAA:

Does HF2591 apply to other activities such as music, speech, debate, dance, cheer, esports, etc.?

No. The law and DE Rules apply only to activities sanctioned by IHSAA and IGHSAA. HF2591 specifically states, "interscholastic athletic contest or competition."

8th Grade...Continued on page 3

What this means for your program: Prioritize clean execution, strong timing, and majority participation across all skills. Coaches are encouraged to review the updated scoresheets and scoring descriptors as they prepare routines for the upcoming season.

The approved scoresheets and supporting resources are available on the ICCA website-iowacheercoaches.org



Make Time for the Free Fall Clinics!

~ Kristen Baker, Trustee ~

It's time for the 2026 Free Fall Clinics! Attending a fall clinic is a great way to start your season and it helps get your cheerleaders in that team mindset. These clinics are FREE for all ICCA member schools. This includes both junior high/middle school programs and high school programs. You can bring all of your cheerleaders or just a few; whatever works best for you.

The fall clinics are designed to get squads together, teach them new material, and work on improving their jumps and motions. We don't stunt at these clinics for insurance reasons, but also because we want you to get a lot of new material for your season!!

Why should you attend a fall clinic?

Your squads will get new material for your fall and winter seasons. Since these are right before the football season, you can get new cheers for your crowds to learn and cheer with you! You will also learn an eight-count dance that you can use with music you choose!

Your cheerleaders will get tips on improving jumps, motion technique, and dance from qualified instructors. They can get feedback from the instructors and can use that feedback to get better!

You and your team will meet other squads from your area. We don't always get to talk to other squads except in a competition situation, so this is a way to just have fun with some new people. They learn cheers together, work on motions, and develop better jumps together. Maybe they will see each other at events throughout the year and can develop relationships with other schools!

Make Time...Continued on page 4

Some of the key concepts that COULD apply to cheerleading, in the case ICCA adopts the same protocol of following IHSAA rules in the past:

- 8th grade students could enter any level – freshman, sophomore, JV, or varsity.
- 8th grade students cannot participate in BOTH junior high AND high school teams. Once they are named to a team roster, they remain there for the year.
- 6th grade students are not permitted into junior high/middle school programs.
- 8th graders would be required to present a pre-participation physical form.
- 8th grade students would NOT be included in the BEDS documentation, used for ICCA State Cheerleading Championships classifications.
- These rules only apply to interscholastic contests or competitions.

We are not quite there yet. ICCA is in the process of developing guidance for the 2027-2028 school year. Again, for the 26-27 school year, we will maintain only grades 9-12 are allowed to participate in high school sidelines and competitive cheerleading.

In the coming months, the ICCA Board of Directors will be following the happenings with HF2591, along with updates from IHSAA/IGHSAU. The development of this bill is intended to provide opportunities for local schools, and the ICCA Board understands that. ICCA was also encouraged to start slow and start small. Therefore, ICCA is encouraging cheer coaches to take these steps as your seasons begin:

1. Meet with your administration/athletic director and discuss where your school stands in regards to applying HF2591 to your cheerleading program. (Consider what this does to your junior high program, along with uniforms, transportation, and skill levels.)
2. Adopt the same form for athletic physicals as all other sports, if you don't already do so.
3. Keep an eye out for any announcements regarding HF2591. (ICCA will send out email blasts via IHSAA, as well as social media posts.)

ICCA RULES

Got a rules question?

Need a stunt clarified?

Want to report a rules violation?

Email ASKICCARULES@gmail.com!!

You will get to meet other coaches from your district and make connections that you can call on throughout the year. There is an informal coaches' meeting for everyone in attendance and you can get great information from both your district rep and other coaches. There is safety in numbers, and it is sometimes a relief to talk with someone who shares your concerns!

Best of all, you get to spend a great day with your cheerleaders and get ready for that new season!

It is extremely important to sign up with the district rep who is hosting the clinic you would like to attend! You can attend any of the clinics, so if the one in your district doesn't work for you, feel free to go to a different one. Just be sure to let that rep know you are coming! Please be sure to register!

The link to register can be found on the main page of our website: iowacheercoaches.org. Remember, these are **FREE!**

**FALL ONLINE
RULES MEETING**

August 3 - August 28, 2026

All coaches and choreographers must complete the Fall Online Rules Meeting, the NFHS Concussion training, and be registered ICCA members to participate in ICCA Events.

Questions? Contact the Executive Director.

Senior Leadership & Recognition

~ Chastity Darts, Rep Council ~

Every season brings bittersweet emotions. As coaches, we celebrate our seniors' accomplishments and the impact they've made on our programs, but we also know their final season together goes by far too quickly. Creating meaningful memories during their last year can make all the difference—not only for your seniors, but for your entire team. Here are a few simple ways to make your seniors feel celebrated throughout the season.

Senior Leadership...Continued in next column

Start the Season with Special Recognition

One easy way to recognize your seniors is by incorporating special senior bows that they can wear throughout the season. Whether they say Class of 2027, Senior, or feature each athlete's name, these small touches make your seniors feel seen and appreciated. Sometimes the simplest gestures have the biggest impact.

Give Seniors a Voice

Meet with your seniors before the season begins to gather their ideas and feedback. Ask what they enjoy, what they would like to improve, and what traditions or new ideas they'd like to incorporate. Giving them ownership helps build leadership while creating a season that reflects the personalities of your team.

Their ideas might include:

- New warm-up routines
- Team-building activities
- Pep rally themes
- Practice theme days
- Team shirt designs
- Game-day traditions

When seniors feel like their voices matter, they become even more invested in the team's success.

Make Senior Night Extra Special

Senior Night is one of the most memorable moments of the season, so consider adding a few extra touches to make the day unforgettable. Have your seniors wear a special cheer sash throughout the school day and during pregame photos. Then, surprise each senior with a personalized senior basket from the team.

Some thoughtful basket ideas include:

- A megaphone in their favorite color signed by the team
- A framed team photo
- Favorite snacks and drinks
- Handwritten notes sharing favorite memories
- A small gift related to their future plans after graduation

The gifts don't have to be expensive. It's the thought, love, and appreciation behind them that they'll remember for years to come.

Senior Leadership...Continued on page 5

Let Them Lead

Senior year is the perfect opportunity to develop leadership skills.

If your program hosts a junior cheer clinic, allow your seniors to take the lead. Have them create a few cheers and a short dance routine for the younger athletes. After you've approved their material, they can teach the rest of the squad and help lead the clinic.

Watching younger cheerleaders perform something they created together is an incredibly rewarding experience and gives your seniors a lasting sense of pride.

Encourage Special Opportunities

Help your seniors make the most of their final season by encouraging them to participate in ICCA opportunities such as All-State, All-Stars, Honor Squad, and Special Olympics. These experiences allow athletes to grow, represent their programs, build new friendships, and create memories that extend beyond their own team.

Celebrate Them All Season Long

Recognition shouldn't be limited to Senior Night. Look for opportunities throughout the season to make your seniors feel valued.

Consider allowing them to:

- Lead pep rallies
- Call game-day cheers and chants
- Help lead practices
- Create warm-up playlists
- Receive first pick of uniforms
- Be featured in weekly or monthly senior spotlights on social media

No gesture is too big or too small when it comes to celebrating your seniors. The goal isn't simply to recognize their final year—it's to thank them for the leadership, dedication, and heart they've poured into your program.

As coaches, we have the privilege of helping shape some of our athletes' favorite high school memories. Make their final season one they'll never forget. Celebrate them often, let them lead, and remind them just how much they mean to your team. Those are the moments they'll carry with them long after the last game, the final performance, and the final cheer.

Sideline Stunt Safety Reminders

~ Paula Kirkpatrick, SE District Rep & Trustee ~

Football cheerleading means cheering outside in the elements so there are a couple special considerations for safety:

Surface Conditions:

When cheering outdoors, basket tosses can only be thrown on a rubberized track, natural grass or turf. At our school, our track was cinder. So during a time out or break, the cheerleaders would step into the grass to do a basket toss.

Other stunts may be performed on cinder or dirt. Stunts should never be performed on cement.

It is important to assess the conditions of the surface where the team is cheering. If the surface is wet or uneven, it is not safe to stunt. If the surface sticks to the flyers shoes and makes it hard for the bases to grip, it is not safe to stunt. If the space for the cheerleaders is small, close to benches or players or the bleachers, it is not safe to stunt. Coaches should use their best judgement and it is better to be cautious than to risk injury.

Apparel:

ICCA is often asked if cheerleaders can stunt while wearing warm ups. Yes they can. However, warm ups may not be slippery or baggy, jackets or sweatshirts may not have hoods, and cheerleaders may not wear mittens or gloves while stunting. Cheer shoes must be worn at all times, no boots. Again, coaches must use their best judgement about whether it is safe to stunt in the warm ups they have. My team wore warm up pants that were boot cut. I didn't feel they were safe, as the bases couldn't always get a good grip on the flyers ankles. So no stunting in those.

NFHS Rules:

All NFHS rules and ICCA strengthened rules must be followed, whether your team stunts or not. These rules apply during all practices, pep rallies and games. These rules apply to all high cheer teams in Iowa, regardless of ICCA membership. If coaches have a rule question, email askiccarules@gmail.com

CREATIVE TEAM BONDING

~ Andrea Langner, Rep Council ~

Team bonding is a big part of building a strong high school cheer team. While skills and routines matter, what really makes a team successful is how well everyone connects, communicates, and supports each other. Creative bonding activities help teammates get closer in a fun way, which can make a big difference in both performance and team spirit.

High-energy activities like Cheer Olympics or Scavenger Hunts bring excitement and friendly competition to the team. Games like "Hungry Hippo Poms" is one of our favorites. Start by putting poms in the middle of the room & partnering each cheerleader up. One cheerleader holds the legs of the other (wheelbarrow) and they have to all start from a certain point and race to see who can collect the most poms in 30 seconds. This adds energy and teamwork while keeping things fun and active (also a workout). These types of activities help everyone work together and rely on each other without the pressure of a real performance.

Trust-building activities also play an important role. Games like telephone drawing, where everyone lines up in a straight line with blank paper on their backs. The first person draws a picture, then next draws the same picture on the person in front of them & so on. This helps teach the importance of clear communication while usually leading to lots of laughs. Activities like blindfold walks or appreciation circles help teammates feel more comfortable and supported. When everyone feels valued, it's easier to perform with confidence.

Simple, creative ideas can also make a big impact. Practice dress-up days—like wearing school colors, dress as your water bottle, themed outfits, or crazy socks—give everyone something to look forward to and boost team spirit. Fun group games like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, Poms" add a playful, competitive element that keeps practices exciting while still building focus and teamwork. Take a Lake Day! The girls LOVE it in the summer when we cut practice a little short & make a beach day out of it. No beach?, go to the pool or have a water party day. Being together is what it's all about!

More meaningful activities, like making a team vision board or doing a "Secret Spirit Sister" program, can help bring the team closer in a different way. Have the kids draw a name, twice a month they find a special

Creative...Continued on page 7

Sportsmanship Starts with Us

~ Desiré Grismore-Jones, SW District Rep ~

One of the greatest responsibilities we have as coaches extends far beyond teaching skills, perfecting routines, or winning competitions. The greatest responsibility we have is the influence we have on the generations of our futures, and how we teach them to win and lose with grace and dignity. This is a direct correlation with sportsmanship and how we show it - it has to begin with us.

Our athletes are always watching. They notice how we react to officials, how we speak about opposing coaches, how we celebrate victories, and how we handle disappointment. If we want respectful, humble, and gracious athletes, we have to model those behaviors ourselves. The example we set with our words and actions becomes the standard our teams follow.

Sportsmanship also shows in how we treat our own athletes. Coaches who lead with respect, accountability, encouragement, and consistency create teams that naturally extend those same qualities to others. The culture we build in practice carries over into competitions, sidelines, locker rooms, and even the student section.

As coaches, we also establish the expectations for how our cheerleaders interact with everyone around them. That includes other cheer squads, opposing athletic teams, officials, fans from visiting schools and even their peers through their own school's hallways. Cheerleaders are ambassadors for their programs and communities. A simple compliment to another team after a performance, helping another squad pick up signs after a game, or congratulating an opponent on a great performance all demonstrate the character we hope to develop in our athletes.

One area where our leadership is especially important is crowd behavior. Cheerleaders should never be the ones to initiate unsportsmanlike chants. Just as importantly, they should never join in when the student section starts them. Our role is to lead school spirit by cheering for our team—not cheering against someone else's. There is a significant difference. Positive school spirit creates an exciting atmosphere while still showing respect for everyone participating.

We should also remember that our influence doesn't stop with our own team. There have been times when

Sportsmanship...Continued on page 7

way to show their Spirit Sister what they mean to them, whether it's with a note or an Alani! Something to lift each other up. These ideas focus on encouragement and shared goals, which helps everyone stay motivated throughout the season.

In the end, team bonding doesn't have to be complicated to be effective. Mixing fun activities with moments of support and encouragement helps create a team that feels connected. When cheerleaders trust each other and enjoy being around one another, it shows in their performance and makes the whole experience more rewarding.



Sportsmanship...Continued from page 6

I've walked over to my school's student section to ask them to stop chants or behavior that crossed the line. Those conversations aren't always comfortable, but protecting the reputation of our school and modeling good sportsmanship is worth it. No school wants to become known for poor behavior, and often all it takes is one adult willing to lead by example.

It's easy to talk about sportsmanship when everything is going well. The true test comes after a difficult call from an official, a close loss, a disappointing performance, or an emotional rivalry game. Those are the moments our athletes remember. Those are the moments when our reactions teach the biggest lessons. These high stress times are also times when our athletes get to practice what they've been taught and what has been modeled for them.

At the end of the day, our goal should be much bigger than trophies or state titles. We want to develop well-rounded student-athletes who understand respect, integrity, humility, and leadership. Success is not winning at any cost. The habits our athletes develop through cheerleading will follow them long after they leave our programs.

As we begin another season, let's challenge ourselves to lead with intention. Celebrate with class. Compete with integrity. Speak with respect. Hold our athletes—and ourselves—to the highest standard. When coaches consistently model outstanding sportsmanship, our teams will follow.

Because sportsmanship doesn't start with the athletes.

It starts with us!

1A/2A Schools Practice Structure

~ Mindy Leinbaugh, Rep Council ~

One of the biggest factors in a successful cheer season is having a purposeful practice plan that works with your athletes' other activities. I coach at a 2A, no-cut program, and those two qualities make our practice structure a little bit different than what larger schools might use.

Because small-school programs often share athletes (and gym spaces) with other sports, our practices must be highly efficient.

A typical practice is divided into 15-minute segments allowing us to learn a ton and keep athletes engaged. As the season progresses we might spend less time on basics and more time preparing for an event or tackling harder skills. Generally, our segments include:

- ▶ Warmup, Strength Building, & Stretching
- ▶ Motions & Cheers
- ▶ Jump Conditioning & Jumps
- ▶ Event Routine/Pyramids/Timeout Plans
- ▶ Stunting & Tumbling
- ▶ Team Notes & Team Building

For the Fall Cheer season, summer is our primary time for learning so we practice more often. Practices take place three times a week and each practice is 90 minutes. I have found that scheduling practices on three consecutive days helps athletes retain material and skills more effectively. Just as importantly, it gives them four consecutive days off so they can maintain a summer job, enjoy time with family, and work in a little fun too!

Once the school year begins, our practice schedule drops to one two-hour practice each week. While the practice structure remains the same, the added time allows us to rehearse game-day scenarios, review the previous week's games, celebrate successes, and address areas for improvement.

We also begin our Competition Cheer practices in August. Because we reduce the amount of sideline practices, athletes participating in both programs can better balance the demands of starting school and other extracurricular activities.

Our Winter Cheer season is a very similar format, but on a shorter timeline. We begin practices in October and have two or three 90-minute practices each week. Once games begin, we transition to one weekly practice lasting 60 minutes.

This practice structure allows us to accomplish our goals while giving athletes the flexibility to participate in other activities. In a small-school program, helping students balance multiple commitments is just as important as being prepared for the cheer season!



Success With Fundraising

~ Kaylee Brugioni, Rep Council ~

When you think of fundraising, you likely think of the traditional methods of going door to door selling items. While this method is beneficial in raising money for a program, what lessons are the cheerleaders learning from it? Is raising a lot of money the only standard to a successful fundraising season?

I believe that a fundraiser can be considered successful for many reasons. As cheer coaches, we are not just teaching athletes how to be a better cheerleader, we are also teaching them life skills to become well rounded adults in the future. We can use fundraising as a way to teach life skills to our athletes while also giving back our time to our community. One method of fundraising, we do at our school, is through a partnership with Hy-Vee. The cheerleaders will spend a few hours at Hy-Vee earning tips by bagging groceries for customers. The goal for this fundraiser is not just to raise money for our program, but to teach the cheerleaders valuable skills. They have to talk with customers, ask them questions, bag their groceries, hold conversations about why they are raising money. This also shows that we are involved in the community we cheer for. At the end of the day we make a difference by bringing a smile to a stranger's face, while also earning some money.

Another fundraiser that many schools utilize are junior cheer clinics. This is always a huge success in bringing in funds, but like Hy-Vee bagging, we see it as a way to teach our cheerleaders life skills. Each cheerleader is put into groups that will focus on a small group of junior cheerleaders of a specific age. We give them the schedule and the cheers to teach and let

Fundraising...Continued on page 9

WHAT IS ALL-STATE? WHO SHOULD I BRING?

~ Bridget McWhorter, Rep Council ~

The 2026-2027 All-State squad will be the 37th squad put together. All-State is a squad that is made up of a minimum of 20 Iowa cheerleaders that went through the tryout process and were selected for the team by a panel of judges. The All-State squad is a huge honor for Iowa cheerleaders due to the tryout process and the selection process.

All-State tryouts take place one weekend during the month of October. This year tryouts are October 10 and 11, 2026. If you are taking athletes to the tryouts, they will all need to try out on the same day. The cheerleaders will perform a short dance, cheer, single toe touch, double jump, and tumbling if they have tumbling, which is optional and not needed in order to make the squad. ICCA will post the dance to the website in September. The cheerleaders should be learning and practicing the dance before the tryout date because it will only be reviewed at the tryout. All cheerleaders will learn the cheer together on their tryout date. All cheerleaders will be put in a group of 3-4 cheerleaders that will try out together. They are allowed time to practice together before they are called to perform before the judges.

The judges are looking for cheerleaders that have the whole package. You can find the judging rubric on the ICCA website. The judges want to see accurate and sharp motions in the cheer. The dance portion will show the judges that the cheerleader has coordination and technique. They would also like to see the jumps have the correct technique with pointed toes, legs & arms placed in the correct positions and the height of the jumps. If the cheerleader has tumbling, they have the opportunity to perform their best pass during tryouts, but it is not required in order to make the team. All areas that the cheerleaders are being judged on are things that will be put into the final routine, so they want athletes that can perform all aspects of the routine.

As a coach, who should you take to the tryouts? Do you have a cheerleader that you think is almost there with the skills required, but you aren't sure? Take them! They might not make it the first year, but the experience is invaluable. The cheerleaders will learn the process of the All-State tryouts. If they try out more than one year, they will know what to expect and have

All-State...Continued on page 9

them be the leaders. We are teaching them the skills of leadership, organization, time management, and how to work alongside others. At the end of a cheerleader's high school career we want our cheerleaders to be successful young adults.

In the past we have also worked with our town's festivals and local events. The cheerleaders would volunteer for a few hours throughout the summer at one of the many city events. Their duties and tasks included garbage clean up, selling tickets, face painting and other activities with kids, or any other number of tasks needing to be completed at the specific gathering. The host of the event would pay our program for our help, while our cheerleaders learn to be flexible helping in numerous different ways throughout their time.

There are many different ways to raise money for your cheer program. I believe intentionally focusing on teaching our cheerleaders to be amazing young adults in the process qualifies any fundraising as a success!



All-State...Continued from page 8

less nerves the following year(s). They also get to meet other cheerleaders, create friendships, and just enjoy their time getting to know others & what cheer is like at different schools. You will have athletes that check all of the boxes on the rubric, and those athletes should really try out for All-State. I personally encourage you to take more cheerleaders because it is truly an opportunity.

The cheerleaders that make All-State have the pleasure of being involved in a fantastic journey. They will attend 3 Sunday practices in January and February and one more the day before their performance. Cheerleaders learn the routine that will be performed at the boys state basketball games. The All-State cheerleaders get announced at the state cheerleading championships. They all receive a plaque with the team photo and names. During the practices, the cheerleaders not only learn a routine & learn new skills, they also grow relationships with the other squad members. They have the honor of performing at two of the state basketball games. The coaches also get a chance to talk with cheer coaches during the practices and performances as well. The overall experience is definitely worth it for the athletes.

**2026 ICCA STATE
CHAMPIONSHIPS**
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2026

The Culture You Teach is the Culture You Keep

~ Timothy Gibson, Rep Council ~

Every season, we welcome athletes who bring different experiences, different skill levels, and different expectations. Some have competed for years; others are stepping onto a cheer team for the very first time. No matter their background, one thing remains true: They cannot meet the expectations of your program if those expectations have never been clearly defined.

Think back and reflect over your years as a coach or as an athlete and think about a team (cheer, work, etc.) and how successful or dysfunctional it was. A common thread amongst either is likely setting expectations that are more than handing out a "list of rules." Successful teams are intentional about teaching your team's culture from day one.

Here are a few areas worth defining early:

What does commitment look like?

- Attendance and Punctuality
- Communicating conflicts early
- Giving full effort, even on difficult days

What does being a teammate look like?

- Encouraging others
- Accepting feedback with a positive attitude
- Celebrating everyone's successes, not just your own

What does leadership look like?

Many athletes believe leadership belongs only to captains. Remind your teams that leadership is demonstrated through everyday actions:

- Doing the right thing when no one is watching
- Being someone teammates can count on
- Setting the standard through effort and attitude

One of the biggest lessons to learn as a coach is to always explain the "why." <— Most importantly while doing so succinctly and referring to it consistently so if someone asked one of your athletes "Why are you doing this?" They would be able to answer on their own. Athletes are much more likely to buy into expectations when they understand the purpose behind them. Being on time is about respecting everyone's time. Conditioning is about protecting yourself and your teammates from injury. Positive communication creates an environment where athletes feel confident taking risks and growing.

Culture...Continued on page 10

Finally, remember that new athletes are learning your program, not just your routines. They will make mistakes, forget procedures, and need reminders. That does not mean they are not invested nor shouldn't be held accountable or responsible. It means they are still learning. Consistency, patience, and positive reinforcement go much further than assuming they should already know.

Every coach builds their program differently, and that is one of the strengths of our profession. Whatever your expectations may be, make them clear, model them consistently, and revisit them often. The culture you create during those first few weeks will often define the rest of your season.



Beat the Heat: Hydration Tips Every Cheer Coach Should Know

~ Kristi Carew, NW District Rep ~

As coaches, we are excited to be starting a new school year with our new cheer squads, but it's important that right from the start the safety of our cheerleaders always remains a top priority. Since our cheer practices begin in the hottest part of the year, hydration needs to be a focus. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you kick off your fall cheer seasons:

Hydration Starts Before Practice

Cheerleaders should **begin practice already hydrated**—it's too late to "catch up" once practice starts.

Encourage your athletes to:

- Drink water consistently throughout the day.
- Eat regular meals and healthy snacks that contain fluids and electrolytes.
- Avoid arriving to practice thirsty.

During Practice

Cheerleaders lose fluids quickly during stunting, tumbling, conditioning, and outdoor practices.

Coaches should:

- Schedule water breaks every **15-20 minutes**, even if athletes don't ask.
- Encourage athletes to drink small amounts frequently rather than large amounts all at once.

Beat the Heat...Continued in next column

- Never withhold water if a cheerleader asks for a drink break, even in the middle of practicing. Let them get a quick drink and return back to what you are working on.

Water vs. Sports Drinks

For most cheer practices lasting less than one hour, water is the best choice.

Sports drinks may be helpful when:

- Practice lasts longer than 60-90 minutes
- Cheerleaders have multiple practices in one day
- Practices are extremely hot and humid
- Cheerleaders are sweating heavily

Sports drinks replace electrolytes and carbohydrates lost through sweat but shouldn't replace water throughout the day.

Food Helps Hydration Too

Hydration isn't just about beverages.

Encourage athletes to eat foods that provide both water and important nutrients:

- Watermelon
- Oranges
- Grapes
- Strawberries
- Cucumbers
- Yogurt
- Soups

Heat Safety Tips

During August and early September:

- Practice during cooler times whenever possible.
- Gradually increase conditioning as cheerleaders acclimate to the heat.
- Allow extra breaks when temperatures or humidity are high.
- Watch new cheerleaders especially closely, as they often struggle more with heat.

Know the Warning Signs

Stop activity immediately if a cheerleader experiences early signs of heat illness, which require immediate attention:

- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Muscle cramps
- Excessive fatigue
- Confusion
- Chills or goosebumps despite the heat

Beat the Heat...Continued on page 11

- Stumbling or loss of coordination

Coach's Hydration Checklist

1. Remind cheerleaders to hydrate before arriving at practice.
2. Provide water breaks every 15–20 minutes.
3. Encourage cheerleaders to bring a large, labeled water bottle.
4. Use sports drinks only when practices are long or conditions are extreme.
5. Watch for signs of dehydration and heat illness.
6. Never restrict water when cheerleaders ask for a drink.

Hydrated athletes are safer athletes. Proper hydration improves energy, focus, reaction time, endurance, and overall performance—helping cheerleaders stay healthy while learning new skills and preparing for a successful season. To read more you can check out the article *"Healthy Hydration for Young Athletes"* by Heather Mangierei, RDN, CSSD, shared with me by the Waldorf University athletic trainers.

Have a safe, healthy, and hydrated cheer season!

Online Rules Meeting + Concussion Training on NFHSLEARN.org

You must SAVE the completion certificate PDFs and upload them during ICCA event registration.

Scholarship Update!!
ICCA offers 2 annual scholarships: 1. Academic Scholarship & 2. Jean Ehn Spirit of Excellence Scholarship. Each is for \$1,000!! NEW Deadline March 5, 2027. Apply online!!

Tips for First Year Coaches

~ Franci McClenathan, ICCA Special Olympics Director ~

So, you've signed that contract to coach this crazy, but amazing, sport of cheer! Now what? Where do you begin? Joining the ICCA is a great start, with so many resources available to you and your team. I will say there is not a 'one size fits all' method to coaching cheer. You must find what works best for you and your team and build from there. But I will share some basics that could be a good foundation for you.

1. **Determine Your Why:** Create your personal focus motto statement based on your passion and write it down where you see it often. There may be days when coaching is a challenge, and on those less than lovely days you will need a positive reminder on why you're coaching to help you reset.
2. **Get Educated:** You should be knowledgeable in all aspects of cheer before teaching your kids. Team safety should be your main priority. Know the NFHS spirit rules and the ICCA strengthened rules and enforce them at all times. Learn both motion and jump technique and drills. Follow the progressions for stunting, and remember each progression must be solid before moving on to the next. Put the ICCA spring conference on your April calendar now!
3. **Get Organized:** Whether you choose a physical coach's binder or a digital google drive folder, have a place to keep all your documents together. Things to put in your binder could include: each cheerleader's contract and profile with their sizes and all contact info, ICCA medical release form, your practice plan, your practice/game calendar, your safety/emergency plan, your uniform check-out spreadsheet, your team's skills progression checklist, and your team's cheer list.
4. **Communicate:** Open communication with your athletic director, administration, other coaches, your team and their parents is key to having a successful cheer season! You should hold a pre-season parent meeting to share your expectations, consequences, and goals for the year. Then during the season, it is recommended to use a public group platform like the Band app or Google classroom when sharing info and reminders with your team and parents. Another part of good communication is being willing to listen. Allowing your cheerleaders some input in theme days or choreography, helps provide them ownership in your program.
5. **Be Generous with Patience:** Establish authority by demanding respect and providing positive

Tips...Continued on page 12

reinforcement, but remember they are teenagers and their drama seems real at the moment. You need to love your kids and do your best to create a safe, family-type environment. Be supportive and build relationships. Plan a few team building activities outside of practice, like a movie night, or painting pumpkins. I have found at my small school where we have a no-cut policy, there are many times these kids need cheer more than cheer needs them. They are not all going to be all-stars, some of them just need a place where they feel they belong and someone who cares. So along with teaching motions and stunts, you will also find yourself teaching them life lessons like responsibility, dealing with personality differences, and being kind and respectful.

6. Be Adaptable: While consistency is extremely important, be open to change. You should always celebrate successes, even the smallest ones, but have a growth mindset and realize when things need to be adjusted. At the end of your season, review your program and make notes of what needs some extra work to be even better.
7. Build your village: Include your assistant coaches, other coaches in your conference or in surrounding communities, your ICCA district rep, and the ICCA board of directors for bouncing new ideas, answers to your questions, and guidance throughout your season.

The high school cheer world is a special place to belong and we want you to know you are never alone in your coaching journey. Please reach out to any of us because no question is ever too silly! At one time we all were a first year coach and we are here to help you have a great, long-term coaching experience.

**2026 ICCA State
Championships**
Saturday, November 7, 2026

REMINDER! REMINDER!

**Make a date for the ICCA
Online Rules Meeting!!
August 3 through August 28!!**

3A/4A School: Practice Structure

~ Lauren Stadtmueller, Rep Council ~

A structured cheer practice plays a part in a successful cheer season. Whether preparing for gameday or practicing for state, an organized practice plan ensures that your practice runs smoothly and effectively. Practices can consist of many different parts and can vary in length. In a 3A or a 4A school, depending on facilities or the length allowed for practice, practices may go from 1.5 to 2 hours. The amount of days practice is held may depend on the events happening that week. Practice may happen 3-4 times a week depending on games or any additional practices (state) that are needed throughout the week. What you do during this time depends on what you have happening that week. A 3A or 4A practice schedule may look like this:

1. Warm Ups and Dynamic Stretching

Start off with a well-structured and dynamic stretching routine which helps athletes prepare both physically but also mentally for practice. Begin your practice by completing a warm up routine across the floor. Include different stretches and movements such as butt kicks, teeter totters, inchworms, and more. Completing warm ups prior to exercise gradually increases your heart rate, increases your oxygen flow, and prepares your muscles for activity. Dynamic Stretching includes controlled continuous movements that prepare cheerleaders' bodies by taking their joints and muscles through a full range of motions. Dynamic Stretching may include alternating lunges, arm circles, leg swings, or torso twists.

2. Jumps

After warming up and getting their body moving, transition to jumps. When working on jumps, change up the different activities you use to practice jumps. Some jump activities include jump ladders (get into lines, start at 1 toe touch and move up to 3 while everyone jogs in place), practicing state jumps, jump rotations (frog jump, kick the paper, sitting toe touches), jumps connected to tumbling, or engage in sitting stretches such as straddle lifts, sitting toe touches, straddle v-ups.

3. Cheers

Throughout the season you may gradually teach cheers to all members of the cheer team. Introducing cheers should be done in small sections as it allows cheerleaders to learn proper motions, words,

3A/4A...Continued on page 13

memorization and confidence. Each day, teach 4-5 cheers with a review of all the cheers at the end. Instead of teaching the cheers yourself, invite veteran cheerleaders or upperclassmen to teach the cheers. These cheerleaders can demonstrate proper technique and answer questions that younger cheerleaders may have about the cheer.

4. Team Time

Finally, if you have multiple squads like a varsity and JV, break into those specific teams. Take this time to focus on any upcoming game days and routines that may need to be planned. You can also use this time to work on stunt progressions or any gameday stunts. This is also the perfect time to do any team bonding activities.

More Than Bring It On: Homecoming Through a Cheer Coach's Eyes

~ Sarah Nolan, Rep Council ~



Homecoming is one of the most exciting—and busiest—weeks of the year. Between extra practices, spirit events, game-day performances, and

community celebrations, it's easy to get caught up in the schedule and feel overwhelmed. While every program has its own traditions, there are a few key priorities that can help every cheer coach lead a successful and memorable homecoming week.

Build School Spirit Beyond the Sidelines

Remember that cheerleaders are ambassadors for the entire school. Encourage your athletes to participate in dress-up days, pep rallies, hall decorating, and community events. Homecoming is about creating connections across the school. At my school, we paint the school windows and chalk the sidewalks around the school! And as a warm up for practice, we run around the school and place feathers for our J-Hawk mascot for the Elementary students to find in the mornings.

Practice Homecoming Day Schedule

Don't just rehearse routines – Walk and talk through the entire Homecoming day schedule so athletes know what to expect. Have a plan and a schedule for the day. I print out a schedule for the athletes and then our group leaders have a laminated schedule.

Homecoming...Continued in next column

Our typical Friday Schedule is as follows:

- * 7:30 am – Work the Booster Club Blue Friday Sale – put on tattoos, help work the register and sell items
- * 8:00 am – Parade through the Hallways with the Band, and meet in front of the Elementary and put on a mini pep rally for the Elementary Students with Cheers
- * 8:30 am – Experiences – We have experience time with the Elementary where our sports and fine arts interact with the students. Volleyball will bring out volleyballs to play, Football has footballs and is down with the kids, Cross Country does fun running games, Cheer does little cheers, and the Band lets the students bang on buckets
- * 10:30 am – Teaching Cheers in Elementary Classrooms and Jay the mascot visits classrooms
- * 12:00 pm – Lunch and Check In's as a cheer team
- * 12:45 pm – Warm Up and Run through Pep Rally
- * 1:15 pm – Pep Rally
- * 2:15 pm – Parade

Communicate Early and Often

Have clear communication between the school administration, coaches of others sports, the band director, and your athletic director. Send schedules, arrival times, uniform reminders, and expectations to athletes and parents well before game day. Clear communication reduces stress for everyone.

Prepare for the Unexpected

Weather changes, schedule delays, or last-minute adjustments happen. Have backup plans ready and model flexibility for your team. Athletes will often mirror their coach's attitude, stay positive! It will all work out.

Remember the "Why" and Enjoy the Moments

Homecoming isn't just another football game. It's an opportunity to create memories, strengthen traditions, and build school pride. Keep the focus on relationships, leadership, and community. Have the cheer team do fun themed practices, sneak in a quick team bonding activity before or after school, do a team meal on Thursday night, and take lots of pictures!

Coach's Reflection

After the excitement has ended, take a few minutes to reflect:

- What went well this week?
- What challenged your team?
- Which athlete showed unexpected leadership?
- What can you improve for next year's homecoming?
- Did your athletes leave feeling successful, supported, and proud?

Homecoming...Continued on page 14

The routines and performances will eventually fade from memory, but the lessons learned during homecoming can stay with athletes for years. As coaches, our greatest accomplishment isn't simply preparing teams for Friday night—it's preparing young people to become confident leaders who know how to serve their team, school, and community with pride.

Happy Homecoming, Cheer Coaches! May your week be full of school spirit, teamwork, laughter, and memories your athletes will carry long after the season ends. After Homecoming week, be sure to take time for yourself too, even if it means wearing jammies the rest of the weekend and sleeping for two days straight!

HANDLING CONFLICT BEFORE IT BECOMES A PROBLEM

~ Angie Damman, Central District Representative ~

No matter how positive your team culture is, every cheer coach will face conflict at some point during the season. Personalities clash, emotions run high, and misunderstandings happen. The goal isn't to eliminate conflict—it's to address it early, before it grows into something that affects your entire team.

One of the best ways to prevent conflict is by setting clear expectations from the very beginning. Every cheer program should have a cheer conduct policy or team contract that outlines expectations for behavior, attendance, communication, social media, sportsmanship, and commitment. Reviewing these expectations with both cheerleaders and parents before the season begins creates a shared understanding and provides a solid foundation when issues arise. It's equally important that your school's student-athlete handbook is reviewed and referenced throughout the season. When team expectations align with school policies, coaches have a consistent framework for making decisions and addressing concerns.

It's also important to document concerns and conversations as they happen. Keeping simple notes about behavior, attendance, or discussions with cheerleaders and parents can help you identify patterns, stay consistent in your decision-making, and provide clarity if questions arise later. Documentation isn't about expecting the worst—it's about ensuring fairness, maintaining consistency, and protecting everyone involved.

Handling Conflict...Continued on page 15

ALL ABOUT HONOR SQUAD

~ Michelle McCann, Honor Squad Director &
NE District Rep ~

Happy fall season, coaches! As we gear up for the upcoming seasons, there are many great opportunities offered throughout the year to Iowa cheerleaders through the Iowa Cheer Coaches Association. One event that is offered by ICCA in connection with the Iowa High School Athletic Association is the Iowa Cheer Honor Squad. As the newly appointed Honor Squad director, I'm excited to help coaches understand what it is and why your cheerleaders should participate!

- **What is Honor Squad?** Honor Squad consists of cheerleaders around the state that come together for 3 practices learning a full cheer/dance style routine that gets performed at 2 Iowa High School state football games at the UNI Dome in Cedar Falls in November. There are generally around an average of 250 cheerleaders that participate in the event each year.
- **Who can do Honor Squad?** Any school that is an ICCA member can submit up to 3 cheerleaders within their program that are academically juniors and/or seniors and in good standing in their program and school.
- **What are the requirements?** Technically, no skills are required for cheerleaders to participate. However, if there are cheerleaders that have solid stunting or tumbling skills, there is an option for coaches to submit a skills form for those cheerleaders, and there is the possibility they will be selected to be a part of the stunting portion of the routine or be placed in tumbling passes in the routine. Note: Skills forms should be submitted for cheerleaders ONLY if their stunting/tumbling skills are solid and they can hit the skill 8-10 out of 10 times. If a cheerleader has a skills form filled out for them, they are also not guaranteed to be selected to perform their skills. If no skills forms are filled out, specifically for stunting skills, cheerleaders will be in a dance and cheer only portion of the routine.
- **What is the time commitment?** There are 3 total practices of the routine. A Sunday practice in Ankeny that runs from 9:00-4:00, a Thursday practice in Cedar Falls that runs from 10:00-4:00, and a practice at the UNI Dome on the Friday morning of performance day from 7:30-9:00. The performances happen at the UNI Dome during halftime of the 10:00 and 1:00 football games, respectively. You can see this year's specific dates on the ICCA website.

Honor Squad...Continued on page 15

Perhaps the most important investment you can make is in your relationships with your cheerleaders. Take time to learn about their lives outside of cheer, celebrate their successes, and check in when something seems off. When cheerleaders know they are valued as individuals—not just for what they contribute on the mat—they are more likely to trust your leadership and respond positively to feedback. One of the best reminders for coaches is, **"You have to connect before you can correct."** That connection builds the trust needed to have difficult conversations, resolve conflicts, and help cheerleaders grow.

Strong teams aren't built because they never experience conflict—they're built because coaches create a culture of trust, accountability, and open communication. By establishing clear expectations, utilizing a team contract, reinforcing your school's student-athlete handbook, documenting concerns consistently, and investing in meaningful relationships, you'll create an environment where small issues are addressed before they become major problems—and where your cheerleaders can thrive both on and off the sidelines.

P.S. Don't ever be afraid to reach out to other cheer coaches for advice, guidance, and cheer materials like cheer contracts that maybe they are using for their programs.

5 Ways to Increase Crowd Engagement at Football Games

~ Beth Brink, Vice President & All Stars Director ~

One of the best parts of game day is hearing the crowd cheer alongside your squad. When fans are actively participating, it creates a more exciting atmosphere for everyone—players, cheerleaders, and spectators alike. So how do you get your crowd out of their seats and involved in the action? Here are five strategies that have worked for my team.

1. Keep It Simple

The easier your cheers are to follow, the more likely your crowd is to join in. Review your cheer list each season and identify which cheers consistently get a response. If some cheers rarely catch on, consider replacing them with fresh material you learn at camp or clinics.

It may feel repetitive to use the same cheers every

Increase Crowd Engagement...Continued on page 16

- **What is the cost?** There is a non-refundable \$50 fee for each participating cheerleader. Each cheerleader that participates receives an Honor Squad t-shirt, Honor Squad bow, an Honor Squad certificate, and an Honor Squad medal included in their registration.
- **Why should you participate?** Honor Squad is a fantastic opportunity for multiple reasons. One of my favorite things about Honor Squad is seeing the bonds cheerleaders make with each other. I love seeing the cheerleaders make friends with each other, and I've seen so many coaches bond and make friends with each other as well! I have former cheerleaders from multiple years ago that are still friends with people they met at Honor Squad. It's an event that's not overly expensive, and not the biggest time commitment. It looks great on cheerleaders' resumes and transcripts, and there are also scholarships offered to participants as well! Lastly - it's fun! The routine is always fun and energetic, and it's such a cool experience to be able to perform at the UNI Dome. It provides great bonding experiences for coaches and cheerleaders alike within each other and other schools as well.

I highly encourage coaches to look into having their cheerleaders be a part of this amazing event. As the director, please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions you might have! I hope to work with you all soon! Have a great fall! :)



FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS: GAME DAY TIPS & TRADITIONS

~ Emma Bruce, Rep Council ~

Football Friday nights can look different for everyone. Maybe you have your own field and it's right by the high school. Maybe your field is in the next town so you are only there on game days. Maybe you have every practice on the track/field. Maybe you field-share with another school. Whatever your situation, there are still so many ways to make your Friday Night Lights special.

Traditions are one way to keep the fun and school spirit high at games. Some schools have long-standing traditions that have been around for decades, and some might be looking to shake things up or try out some fresh ideas. Those traditions can stem from always starting or ending the game with the same cheer, having a run-through banner or bows to match

Friday Night Lights...Continued on page 16

game, but repetition builds familiarity. My team keeps a core list of 10 offense, 10 defense, and 10 general sideline cheers. Each year, we evaluate which ones are still effective and update the list as needed.

For sideline cheers between plays, shorter is better. Stick to one or two lines that repeat. Long cheers can leave the crowd unsure of when to participate, while short, repetitive cheers make it easy for everyone to join in.

2. Use Your Props Purposefully

Your props should reinforce your message, not confuse it. If you want the crowd to yell "Blue," don't hold up a red pom. Use your props intentionally to provide clear visual cues about what you want fans to do.

Signs can be just as effective, but only if they're easy to read from a distance. Hold them up long enough for spectators to read and process the message before it's time for them to respond.

Megaphones are also a great tool for encouraging participation. Use them for prompts like "Yell it!", "Come on!", or "Louder!" to keep the energy high and let the crowd know it's their turn to get involved.

3. Pay Attention to Timing

Remember why most people are in the stands—they came to watch a football game. If you're expecting crowd participation, avoid cheering while the ball is in play.

I give my cheerleaders these general guidelines:

- Perform offense, defense, and general sideline cheers between plays.
- Save fun participation cheers, stunt sequences, and interactive crowd cheers for timeouts, quarter breaks, and other game stoppages.

Choosing the right moments makes it much more likely that fans will hear you, respond, and stay engaged.

4. Work Together

Creating an exciting game-day atmosphere is a team effort. Coordinate with your marching band, dance team, student council, or other student organizations to create opportunities for shared participation throughout the game.

Increase Crowd Engagement...Continued on page 17

each Student Section theme, or wearing your uniforms for school. Here is how you can engage in some old traditions or inspiration for new traditions.

- 1. Game Day Traditions!** What are your game day musts? Team huddle before you line up for kickoff? Routine during halftime of homecoming? How about a special routine for the very first game? We always perform a short routine with both of our junior high and high school teams at the first home game. It gets junior high excited about cheering in high school and showcases the hard work that both teams put in over the summer.
- 2. Dressing up!** Wear uniforms to school on home game days or team shirts and jeans/warmups on away game days. You can also let your captains choose the attire for the game days.
- 3. Paint run-through banners!** You can match the student section theme, or if you have a reusable run-through banner, you could save the special, painted ones for Homecoming or Senior Night! Painting the banner can be a fun team bonding activity after practices.
- 4. Team Dinner!** My school has team dinner on Fridays right before the game. Parents sign up to bring a meal to all Friday games. Home games can be chili, pizza, walking tacos, or pasta. Whereas away games can be something quick and easy to eat on the road. It's a fun bonding time and a great way to make sure your kiddos eat before the long night ahead. You can even reach out to local businesses and restaurants. They might be willing to donate or sponsor a meal.
- 5. Snack Baskets for visiting teams!** A fun part of the season is meeting the cheerleaders from the other schools in your conference and across the state when they visit your school. One way to make them feel welcome is to put together a basket of snacks and goodies (hair ties, bobby pins, & other fun gifts) for them. My kids also like to include encouragement notes in the box for them to read as well!
- 6. Pep Rallies!** Whether your school does them every home game, every game, or just for special events, keep the ENERGY high!! Teach a new cheer to the student section. Host a jump off and have the students do their best toe touch. Vote for the student with the best school spirit! Always make an effort to put on a special performance. An engaging crowd cheer with stunts, levels, and lots of excitement and crowd participation is a plus! And don't forget your school fight song! If your pep band isn't there to play it, make sure to have a recording cued up.

Friday Night Lights...Continued on page 17

Just as importantly, support their performances, too. Cheer during the dance team's routines and recognize the marching band at halftime. When school organizations support one another, the energy becomes contagious, and that enthusiasm spreads throughout the crowd.

5. Give Them a Reason to Participate

Everyone loves a free giveaway! If your athletic department has promotional items, use them to encourage crowd involvement.

Our football team provides T-shirts for us to toss into the stands during games, which always gets fans excited. Other inexpensive options include mini footballs, rally towels, beads, or small megaphones. Giveaways create excitement, get people on their feet, and help build a louder, more engaged student section.

Crowd engagement doesn't happen by accident—it takes planning, consistency, and enthusiasm. By keeping your cheers simple, using props effectively, choosing the right timing, partnering with other school groups, and adding a few fun incentives, you can create an atmosphere where your crowd feels like an important part of the game. When fans are engaged, everyone wins.



Friday Night Lights...Continued from page 16

7. School Fight Song (or other pep band music)!

Does your school have a fight song? Do your cheerleaders have a routine and participate when it plays? If not, they should! It doesn't have to be anything complicated, just fun and engaging. And if your song has words, encourage them to learn them and to sing along. Talk with your band director about playing it at the start of every game, before halftime is over, and after each time your team scores! And if there are any other fun pep band songs that get the crowd going, choreograph some easy 8-counts for the cheerleaders to do along with those songs as well!

8. Bows! One way to participate in student section themes is to have bows that match them. Even though cheerleaders can't wear costumes like the student section can, this is one way to stay included. Another example is Senior bows. Our seniors always get special bows their senior year as a gift that they can wear in place of their regular bows for games. They always look forward to this!

Friday Night Lights...Continued in next column

9. Face Tattoos or Player Numbers! Another fun tradition is wearing a temporary tattoo of your mascot, school initials, or even eye black at the games. You can even use face paint markers to write player numbers on their cheeks too.

10. Getting ready together! Does your team get ready at the school together or do they get ready at home and arrive just in time to warm up? Maybe plan a day where the team can bond and help each other get ready for the game. Everyone has the chance to hang out and help out. Then your hair experts can help the kids with lumpy, crooked ponytails. And your future makeup artists can help the kids who manage to get lipstick on their forehead, their uniform, and anywhere except their lips.

Here are some tips for implementing or adjusting your Friday Night Lights traditions!

1. Honor old traditions, but embrace new ones!

It might be exciting to incorporate new traditions or retire old ones, but make sure to communicate with the school about any changes and make sure to respect any longstanding school or community traditions. Sometimes change can be a good thing, but start with little tweaks first before you overhaul everything. Even making big changes to team traditions can be a challenge as well, but keep in mind what works best for you, your team, the school, and your community.

2. Get feedback! Sometimes the best ideas come from the people around you. Feedback from the team can be good, since they are the ones doing it. Plus, they may help you realize there are some team traditions they are ready to retire or give ideas to start new ones. Reach out to alumni. There might be traditions that have gotten lost along the way that are missed. Talk to the school or your AD. They may have ideas or even have the means to assist you with school-wide traditions. Reach out to other cheer coaches and get ideas from them. Some of our favorite traditions came from other cheer friends in our area.

3. Keep it FUN! Traditions are meant to keep the school spirit alive. It's what sparks excitement for each game, each season, and it is what keeps the spirit and nostalgia alive in current students, athletes, alumni and the community. Don't let yourself get bogged down by too many moving parts, logistics, or details that it distracts from what is most important...the fun and excitement of game days!! And don't be afraid to ask for help! Parents, the school, the kids. Coaches shouldn't have to... and don't need to do it all themselves. Game days should be fun for everyone!

CONDITIONING DRILL SPOTLIGHT

~ Veronica Cox, Rep Council ~

One of the most common questions I hear from athletes is, "Coach, what should I work on to improve and take my skills to the next level?" My answer is almost always the same: jumps.

With countless jump drills available online, it can be difficult to determine which ones truly make a difference. After spending time researching drills from coaching resources, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, I combined the most effective exercises into a structured workout that our team now uses weekly. The routine has become one of the cornerstones of our conditioning program and has consistently produced noticeable improvements.

We begin with the fundamentals: seated leg lifts and leg circles. These classic exercises remain some of the best for building hip flexor strength. Early in the season, athletes complete two sets of 10 repetitions on each side before gradually progressing to three sets of 20. Emphasis is placed on controlling both the lift and the lowering of the leg to maximize strength and stability. We perform these drills in both a seated straddle and a kneeling hurdler position to strengthen the muscles through multiple ranges of motion.

Next, we focus on explosiveness through plyometric exercises. Athletes complete two sets of 10 box jumps before progressing to frog jumps, emphasizing heels together while driving upward through bent knees. One of our favorite drills is Twinkle Toes Tuck Jump. Athletes rapidly "twinkle" their feet by running in place before exploding into a tuck jump on count. We finish this section with counted T jumps. Together, these drills develop lower-body power and strengthen the quadriceps while reinforcing proper jump mechanics.

The third phase targets core strength and hip flexors in a standing position. During snap downs, athletes begin in a clean position, kick sharply on count, and quickly return to a tight finish with their feet and ankles together. We follow with slow kicks, where the kick is performed explosively while the lowering phase is controlled over a five-count. These drills are especially effective for developing the fast "snap together" that can make the difference between an average jump and an exceptional one.

The final strength component combines kicks and jumps. Athletes perform side and front kicks on

Conditioning...Continued in next column

Conditioning...Continued from previous column

both legs before completing three repetitions each of toe touches, hurdlers, pikes, double jumps, and triple jumps. This progression reinforces proper technique while allowing athletes to apply the strength and explosiveness developed throughout the workout.

Every session concludes with stretching to improve flexibility and aid recovery after taxing the hip flexors and lower body.

This conditioning sequence has become a staple of our program because it develops the strength, explosiveness, control, and flexibility required for stronger jumps. While no single drill creates great jumpers, consistently training these elements together has helped our athletes improve their jump technique and performance season after season.

STUNT PROGRESSIONS COURSE

Sunday, Sept 13th 1-3pm

@ Gilbert High School

\$15 per Coach+Stunt Group

[REGISTER HERE](#)

ALL-STATE TRYOUTS

October 10th & 11th

@ Roland-Story High School

*"Registration fees now \$30/athlete
due to rising expenses"*

STATE TIME LIMIT

Deduction Update: Going over time
by up to 5.0 seconds = .25 penalty.

5.1-19.9 seconds = 1.0 penalty.

20+ seconds overtime = DQ.

**ICCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
Bertha Bartlett Public Library, Story City Iowa
Sunday June 7, 2026 — Minutes**

Meeting called to order at 9:30am. Present: Dana Logan, Paula Kirkpatrick, Bethany Brink, Kenna Johnson, Sandy Norby, Kristi Carew, Angie Damman, Desire Grismore-Jones, Michelle McCann, Betty Lou Jones, Kristen Baker, Jordan Sytsma, Franci McClenathan, Cindy Byrne.

Absent: JoEllen Wesselmann.

Minutes from the January 2026 meeting were reviewed. Motion to accept the minutes made by Franci and seconded by Sandy. Motion passed.

Jordan moved and Michelle seconded to have paid membership run from July 1 to June 30. Motion passed.

Membership:

Schools: 109

Coaches: 236

Financials:

Checking: \$85,677.23

Savings: \$25,464.09

CD: \$29,307.74

Investment: \$19,840.06

Executive Directors Report:

Conference was discussed

Dates are set at Hilton Garden Inn through 2028

A specific name wasn't chosen for 2027 but we will be going with a beach theme.

State Championships were discussed

Bag tags were discussed to give to each athlete. Jordan made a motion and Kristi seconded to purchase them. Motion passed.

Rules Books were discussed these will be going to DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION ONLY, per IHSA.

Website will be updated which will allow coaches to nominate for the awards we offer. Policies & Procedures (slush fund segment) our memorial gift allowance for spouses and children is set at \$50 we want to increase the amount to \$75. Motion made by Kenna and seconded by Kristen. Motion passed.

Financial Committee Report

Financial manager: Franci moved and Bethany seconded we appoint Kenna as financial manager. Motion passed.

Executive director proposed a 3% raise, currently pay \$24,720, that would increase to \$25,461.60.

Financial manager requests a 3% raise. She currently is paid \$3,375.70 and the increase would be to \$3,477.02. Combined salary for Kenna would be \$28,938.62.

Financial committee recommends giving Kenna the 3% raise.

Jordan, as safety director, will begin her salary on July 1 she will be paid \$1,500.

Paula moved to approve financial committee recommendation in regards to raises, Sandy seconded. Motion passed.

Betty Lou made a motion to appoint Sandy to the financial committee and Angie seconded. Motion passed.

Board Meeting...Continued on page 20

Rules:

- Sweatbands were discussed and it is considered jewelry there for it is not allowed.
- Online rules meeting is being prepared.
- A state championship handbook is being developed.

Rep Council: First meeting took place at Conference.

Director's reports:

All Stars: 61 plus 2 alternates. Don our liaison, has passed away, will await to see if any changes are made moving forward. Lodging and uniforms were discussed. There will be a new hotel in Grimes by next year for All Stars we will look into different lodging. School uniforms vs shorts and T shirts were discussed.

All-State: October 10-11 for tryouts. Tentatively will be held at Roland Story. Discussion about increasing fee from \$25 to \$30. Motion made by Kenna to raise All-State fee to \$30 seconded by Sandy. Motion carried. Michelle Barlas will be choreographer.

Honor Squad: Sunday practice will be held at Ankeny Centennial, where two gyms will be available. Angie will make bows for the event, she will be paid for doing so. Website will be updated with current information. Medals will be ordered.

Scholarship: Discussed was held whether to increase the amount of the Jeanne Ehn scholarship from \$500 to \$1000. Motion made by Cindy and seconded by Paula to increase Jeanne Ehn scholarship to \$1000.

Motion carried. Deadline to apply is currently April 1. Deadline will be moved to March 5.
Motion made by Kristen seconded by Desire. Motion passed.

Special Olympics: 35 athletes, 15 schools participated.

District Reps Free Fall Clinic

- Central—Aug 8 @ Gilbert Grandview
- Central—Aug 15 @ EMHS in LeGrand Bethany
- NE—Aug 15 @ CPU M & M
- NW—Aug 15 @ Storm Lake M & M
- SE—Aug 8 @ Washington Bethany
- SW—Aug 15 @ East Union Indian Hills CC

New Business:

- House file 2591 in regards to 8th graders playing at the high school level was discussed. Currently we will stay with our middle school policy, not allowing 8th graders to cheer at the high school level. This will be revisited in January 2027.

State Rubrics

- Jordan presented possible changes and much discussion took place.
- Jordan made a motion to change time deduction to: 1-5 seconds over in time will result in a .25 deduction and anything exceeding 5 seconds over time will result in a 1.0 deduction; Kenna seconded. Motion passed.
- Motion was made by Jordan to adapt the number chart, for number of participants to meet majority (stunt) and the number of structures to meet majority (pyramid) and seconded by Michelle. Motion passed.
- Motion was made by Kristen to adopt the revised score sheets and seconded by Desire. Motion passed.

Old Business:

Work will continue on the trustee policy

Job Descriptions: each person/director will make changes as necessary and update the documents.

Motion made by Kenna to adjourn at 2:07pm, seconded by Bethany. Motion passed.

Next meeting will be Sunday, October 4 in Story City.



2026-2027 ICCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Executive Director

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