CHEERLEADING

GENERAL INFORMATION - SUPPORT/SPIRIT AND COMPETITIVE:

A. Schools may have only one (1) varsity competitive team. Schools may choose to have any number of support/spirit squad(s) that do(es) not compete.
B. All cheerleaders (competitive and non-competitive) must be eligible according to academic standards and the transfer rule and must be declared eligible by the GHSA office on the proper eligibility forms. Non-students are not allowed to be part of a sideline cheerleading group either as mascot or “junior cheerleader.”
C. All cheerleaders (competitive and non-competitive) must have a physical examination on file in the school office before they may try out, practice, or perform.
D. All cheer coaches (competitive and non-competitive) must complete a GHSA Rules Clinic or the school will be fined.
E. At basketball games, support/spirit squads may perform stunts and/or tumbling that are allowed by NFHS Spirit rules without mats. NOTE: National Federation rules dealing with safety are to be followed in any cheerleading practice or performance.
F. No “stomping” of any kind is allowed in the stands or seating area of the gymnasium. Stomping is restricted to the floor of the gymnasium.
G. Taunting of any kind will not be tolerated. Aggressive cheers should not be performed under any circumstances.
H. Cheerleading apparel is restricted as follows:
    1. Male uniform for competition cheerleading will be uniform pants and a top which counterparts those worn by the female teammates. Sideline male cheerleaders may include shorts in place of the pants. Tank tops will not be permitted.
    2. Female cheerleaders (sideline & competition) must wear a uniform (skirt or dress) that fully covers the athlete’s entire torso. The skirt or dress should cover the briefs, bloomers or any spandex material. Bows should be in school colors.
    3. All athletes on the same team must wear the same uniform when performing at a game or competition. Hair must be secured and must NOT extend below the waist.
I. MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:
    1. Beginning and ending dates for practice and competition can be found at the front of this publication.
    2. Cheerleading teams are allowed to attend camps after the last day of school until July 27th.
    3. Spirit Cheerleading season ends after the last day of basketball season at each respective school. Other activities for cheerleaders after this date can be allowed with a waiver from the GHSA office.
    4. Out-of-season practices may be held in preparation for tryouts only. Once tryouts are complete, no practices may be held until school is out. Practices for tryouts are limited to a maximum of ten (10) consecutive school days per school between February 1 and the last day students are in school. (NOTE: All a school’s different level teams must use the same 10-day period.)
    5. Eligibility for try-outs:
        a. Students must be enrolled at a school in order to try out for that school's cheerleading team. A student may be enrolled in only one school at a time. EXCEPTION: See By-Law #1.45 (g)
        b. Enrolled migrant students may try out for a cheerleading team, but may not represent the school at the varsity level during the school year until the migratory sit-out period has ended.
        c. Students must meet academic eligibility requirements in order to try out.

COMPETITION RULES:

A. Cheerleading is a state championship sport in each classification for All-Girl teams.
    1. Schools are aligned on a regional basis for classes 2A through 7A.
    2. Class A will compete at a sectional to determine the top 8 to advance to finals.
    3. Private schools in 2A-4A will compete at a sectional to determine the top 8 to advance to finals.
    4. An open division (all classifications) will be held for coed competition.
    5. All schools are allowed to have only one varsity competition team.
    6. The term “all-girl” refers to all-female teams throughout this section.
B. All cheerleading competitions must be conducted according to the rules of the “National Federation Spirit Rules Book” and the “GHSA Competitive Cheerleading Manual.” The GHSA cheerleading manuals are posted on the GHSA web site. The NFHS Spirit Rules Book may be purchased from the GHSA office. Video review will be allowed at the **state championship only.**
    1. ***An Ipad will be located at the top of the judge's table.***
    2. ***Two judges will manage the video-tap to start and end.***
    3. ***Review will take place if a judge sees what he/she thinks may be a deduction in the case of (but, not limited to):***

1. ***Illegal hand placement on a stunt***
2. ***Illegal stunt execution***
3. ***Tumbling questions***
4. ***Timing review***
5. ***Illegal basket execution***
6. ***Out of bounds seen by 1 or more judges***
7. ***Verification on legality calls on stunts and/or tumbling***

4. ***The video will not be used:***
    1. ***To make a call after the competition is over.***
    2. ***For DoD questions in stunts or tumbling***
    3. ***For coaches to view before the competition is over.***

C. The maximum number of competitions for a varsity cheerleading team is six (6), plus region/sectional and state competitions. In order to be eligible to compete in Region/Sectional/State, a team must compete in at least three (3) sanctioned competitions during the competitive regular season in the division they declare (All-girl or Coed).
    1. All competitions must be sanctioned by the GHSA by June 1.
    2. GHSA sanctioned Cheerleading competitions may include member schools only or schools from other states who are members of their state association. This excludes non-member high schools and all middle schools.
    3. Cheerleading exhibitions are not allowed at any GHSA sanctioned invitational tournament.
    4. Cheerleading coaches, certified teachers and Community Coaches may not be involved in any way during the school year with a competition not sanctioned by GHSA that involves cheerleaders on their school's team.
    5. Only coaches who meet the criteria of By-Law 2.50 are eligible to assist teams in the competitive setting. Any others assisting a team in any manner at a GHSA competition will be guilty of illegal coaching.
    6. Groups that are not members of the GHSA may NOT perform at any time before, during, or after the competition without approval from the GHSA office.
    7. Officials will be paid for a minimum of twelve (12) high school teams. (See Appendix F for fee schedule).

D. Deadlines for the competitive season are as follows:
    1. Request Sanction of Regular Season Invitational Tournament - June 1
    2. Declaration of All-Girl and Coed - October 1
    3. Register to enter Regular Season Invitational Tournaments - August 1
    4. Cancellation of tournaments that do not make - August 10
    5. Confirmation of tournaments submitted with list of teams competing - August 20
    6. Submit rosters electronically on app.ghsa.net - October 1

E. A competitive cheerleading team is comprised of a maximum of sixteen (16) performers.
    1. A team mascot (if used) is included as one of the 16 performers.
    2. A school may have a roster greater than 16 performers, and may use any combination of eligible cheerleaders in any competition in each specific division.
    3. All team members must be dressed in the appropriate adopted school uniform that displays the school identification (i.e., letter, monogram, mascot symbol, etc.) NOTE: The mascot is exempt from this uniform rule.

F. The competitive area is a 42’x42’ blue cheerleading mat, and the routine must be performed within the boundaries of the competitive area. Mats must have a minimum thickness of 1 3/8 inches.
    1. A full set of cheerleading mats (42’x42’) must be used in all competitions including invitationals, regional, and state competitions. (Directions for proper placement of mats can be found in the GHSA Cheerleading Manual).
    2. Only approved GHSA coaches, competitors and officials are allowed in the competitive area.
    3. Only team members may act as spotters.
    4. Non-competitors (i.e., alternates, coaches) may not assist during the routine.
    5. All mats should be placed on the floor horizontally facing the judges. Center of the mat should be marked with tape. The floor will be considered out-of-bounds.
    6. It is recommended, but not mandatory, that cheerleaders practice stunting on one or more 6'x42' cheerleading mats prior to performing stunts in a team routine.
    7. Middle school and high school events must be considered separate events. Middle schools may not be placed in rotation with high school teams. The arena should be cleared between the two events and reopened for the sale of tickets prior to the beginning of the high school competition.

G. The competitive routine must include both cheer and dance.
    1. Tumbling skills are permitted only within the body of the routine.
    2. Tumbling skills may not be performed as a part of the entrance to or exit from the competitive area.
    3. Poms are the only props allowed in a competitive routine.

H. The length of the routine shall be a maximum of two minutes and thirty seconds (2:30), timed by an official timer.
    1. The routine must begin within thirty (30) seconds of the head judge's signal. Failure to do so shall result in a five-point deduction for delay of the meet.
    2. Teams may begin from any position inbounds, and the time of the routine will begin with the first word, musical sound, or movement of any team member.
    3. The routine ends on the last word, musical sound, or movement of any team member.

4. If the routine ends with a pyramid, the final dismount is not timed.
5. There is no minimum/maximum time limit for music in the routine.
6. If the routine is longer than the allotted time, a deduction of five (5) points for every ten (10) second period or portion thereof will be assessed.

I. Each school is responsible for the preparation and presentation of the music in its routine, and for complying with all copyright laws (NOTE: music must be submitted in the ClicknClear portal.)
   1. The principal must review the music to be used in the school's routine, and must stipulate that the music is in good taste for high school students and acceptable for the morals of their community.
   2. Each school must furnish a high-quality version of their music.
   3. The coach or team representative is responsible for starting and stopping the music during the competition.
   4. Schools are responsible for furnishing their own equipment and music for use in the practice/warm-up area.

J. Winners in the competitions will be determined by the highest point total from the judges. The rules for breaking ties are explained in detail in the Competitive Cheerleading Guide. Ties will be broken by culminating the scores of jumps, tumbling, stunts and pyramids and subtracting the deductions.

K. Prior to any disqualification for a rules violation, the Head Judge must call a conference at the conclusion of competition, and the majority of the judges must agree the violation occurred. Video review may be used for this purpose.

L. Judges' decisions are final.

M. In all competitions, all judges must be registered with the GHSA and must have completed the GHSA training program.
   1. A minimum of five judges and two safety judges will be used at all competitions, plus scorers and timer.
   2. Judges must be secured by the GHSA office.

N. Five percent (5%) of the gross receipts from all invitational competitions shall be paid to the GHSA office.

REGION/SECTIONAL COMPETITION:

A. Each school is allowed to enter one team in the region competition for the all-girl division. There are no region competitions in Class A, nor in the coed division.
   1. Entry notification and roster must be sent to the Region Secretary (or GHSA Office for Class A and Coed) according to deadline dates.
   2. All rosters must be submitted to the GHSA office electronically. NOTE: Substitutions may be made at any time after the roster has been submitted until the last regular season competition.
   3. The principal must approve the music being used.

B. Teams will advance to the state competition as follows:
   1. All teams (2A through 7A) will attend Sectionals in combination with the region competition. The top sixteen (16) teams will advance to the finals.
   2. Depending on the number of private schools in Classes 2A-4A, a private school division may be added.
   3. Class A teams will compete at sectionals which will determine the top 8 teams to advance to finals.

C. A panel of judges to be used at invitationals, region, sectional, and state competitions will consist of seven (7) judges to make up three (3) panels. More than one set of judges may be used if necessary.

D. Twelve percent (12%) of the gross receipts from the region/sectional competition must be paid to the GHSA office.

E. Region/Sectional competitions will be held on Saturday, November 7, 2026. The region secretaries involved with each region shall determine the procedures for finances, awards, number of judges, etc. The school who will determine trophies and competition order for Class A will be determined by the GHSA office. The sites can be found on the GHSA web site.

COED COMPETITION:

A. There will be a separate Open Meet competition (all classifications) for Coed teams.
   1. Having one or more males constitutes a coed team.
   2. Once a team has declared the Coed division of competition, they will not be able to switch to another division without approval from the GHSA.
   3. Coed teams and All-girl teams may not compete against one another in the regular season.
   4. The Coed Sectionals will be held on Saturday, November 7, 2026, at High School. The top sixteen (16) teams will advance to the State Championship.
   5. The Coed State Championship will be held on Saturday, November 11, 2026, at the Macon Centreplex. NOTE: The GHSA office has the authority to make adjustments in the Coed format depending on the number of teams who have declared Coed.

STATE COMPETITION:

A. The Cheerleading State Championships will take place November 13-14, 2026, at the Macon Centreplex. There will be two sessions per day and the arena will be cleared and cleaned between sessions. If attending, please make sure your ticket is for the correct session. The exact schedules for the two days will be published on the Cheerleading page of the GHSA web site (www.ghsa.net) prior to the beginning of the event.

B. Flash photography of any kind (cameras, cell phones, iPads, etc.) will not be allowed during the competition.
C. Video review will be allowed during competition.
D. Finances: Net receipts will be divided with the GHSA receiving 40% and 60% divided among the participating schools. Each participating team will be allowed free admission for a maximum of 20 cheerleaders, two coaches and one music person.

GAME DAY COMPETITION RULES

A. Game day cheerleading is a coed state championship sport with championships in classifications A-7A. Schools are allowed to have one (1) varsity team in this competition. The State Championship will be held on December 10-11, 2026 at the Macon Centreplex. Exact information will be published on the GHSA web site (www.ghsa.net) prior to the event.
B. The Game Day competition team can be comprised of any combination current sideline and competition cheerleaders at that school, or any eligible student attending that school.
C. The maximum number of Game Day competitions is three (3) in addition to the State Game day competition in February.
    1. All Game day competitions must be sanctioned by the GHSA by July 1.
    2. Judges will be contracted through Varsity and the GHSA Booking agent for Game Day, Kelly Fields.
    3. Cheerleading coaches, certified teachers and Community Coaches may not be involved in any way during the school year with a competition not sanctioned by the GHSA.
D. A team should have a minimum of seven (7) and a maximum of 24 participants.
E. Traditional game day uniform is required.
F. The use of signs, poms, flags, and megaphones are allowed and encouraged for performances. The use of additional props is not permitted.
G. Music
    1. Schools must use recorded marching band music for the fight song and Band Chant categories.
    2. All use of music must by compliant with U.S. Copyright Laws.
    3. Neither The GHSA nor Varsity Spirit is responsible for obtaining any necessary permission or licensing of the recorded music used by a school team during the course of the GHSA Game Day Invitational.
    4. Fight Song /Band Music
        a. If a high school marching band records their school's original fight song, they will need to get the school's permission to use the song and recording.
        b. If a team legally acquires a recording of a band playing a popular recording from an authorized provider (iTunes, Amazon, etc.), the song can be used as long as no edits are made to the music (other than for timing purposes).
        c. A team cannot use a recording of their band playing a popular song (a cover) or other music without the proper permissions or the band becoming a preferred provider.
H. Schools will be judged in the following categories:
    1. Band chant
    2. Situational response
    3. Crowd Leading
    4. Fight Song