



**GHSA
SPIRIT AND
SPORTSMANSHIP CHEER/DANCE
MANUAL
REVISED JUNE 2026**

DATES FOR SPIRIT TEAMS:

JULY 27:	1ST PRACTICE
AUGUST 21:	1ST DATE FOR FOOTBALL GAMES
OCTOBER 19:	1ST DATE FOR BASKETBALL PRACTICE
NOVEMBER 6:	1ST DATE FOR BASKETBALL GAMES
FEBRUARY 1-MAY	OPEN FOR 10 DAYS OF TRY OUTS.

IMPORTANT STATEMENT

It is the responsibility of all cheerleading coaches in Georgia to review the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) Constitution and By-Laws. Guidelines for coaching and the eligibility to coach on the high school level in Georgia are located in the GHSA Constitution and By-Laws, in addition to the eligibility requirements for individual athletes to participate. There is also a special section dedicated to cheerleading that all cheer coaches should review and understand.

All cheerleading coaches should also read and review the National Federation Spirit Rules book for rules that apply to basketball and football cheerleading. The National Federation Spirit Rules Book is available online.

The coaching and cheer guidelines in this manual do not intend to take the place of the information and guidelines presented in the National Federation Spirit Rules book or the GHSA Constitution and By-laws. Its purpose, instead, is to draw attention to and emphasize those rules that are most often violated in Georgia, as well as to educate cheer coaches concerning rules that the GHSA has enacted beyond the National Federation Spirit rules book.

SECTION ONE: GENERAL INFORMATION

Reference for these rules and requirements can be found in the GHSA Constitution and By-Laws, Rules 1 & 2 of NFHS Rules book for Cheerleading and Rules 1 & 3 for dance, unless otherwise indicated.

1. The state director for cheerleading is Penny Pitts Mitchell penny@ghsa.net at the GHSA office.
2. Schools may have **only one (1) varsity-level competitive team and only (1) varsity-level competitive Game day team.**
3. All cheerleaders must:
 - a. Be eligible according to academic standards and applicable transfer rules and must be declared eligible by the GHSA office on the **proper eligibility form**. Coaches are responsible for submitting this information to the GHSA office electronically.
 - b. Have a physical exam on file in the school office **before trying out, practicing, or performing.**
4. All coaches must complete **a yearly GHSA Spirit Rules Clinic and pass the yearly GHSA test for competition and spirit (basketball and/or football) coaches.** The GHSA member schools of coaches who do not meet both these requirements will be fined. This requirement also applies to **all community coaches**, regardless of the sport coached.
5. It is mandatory that every coach in each GHSA sport (including Community Coaches, Student Teachers, and Interns) participate in a free, online course on concussion management prepared by the NFHS and available at www.nfhslearn.com **at least every two years** - beginning with the 2013-14 school year. (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws 2.68)
6. Each school **must distribute** to every athlete and his/her parent/guardian an information sheet that includes: the dangers of concussion injuries, the signs/symptoms of concussion, and the concussion management protocol outlined in this by-law. This sheet must be signed by the parent/guardian of each athlete and a copy kept on file at the school. (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws 2.68)
7. Miscellaneous Information:
 - a. Beginning and ending dates for practice and the competition season are located at the front of the GHSA Constitution and By-Laws and on the ghsa.net website.
 - b. Cheerleading teams are allowed to attend camps after the last day of school until July 27.
 - c. During the summer (i.e., between the ending of one school year and the beginning of the next) the only restrictions on practices and competition are that all activities must be strictly voluntary, and the two "Dead Weeks" must be observed, as follows: Schools are prohibited from participating in voluntary workouts, camps and/or clinics, weight training or competitions during the week (Monday-Sunday) in which Memorial Day and the Fourth of July fall each year. (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws 2.69 #3)

d. 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. The tryout period for the selection of **all teams** is limited to a maximum of one period of ten consecutive school days between February 1 and the last day students are in school. The term practice here refers to the time spent within the **ten day only** try-out period allowed by the GHSA. All cheer teams at a school must use the same 10 days.

e. Eligibility for tryouts and participation:

1. Students must be enrolled at the school in order to try out for that school's cheerleading program. A student may be enrolled in only one school at a time.

(Exception: See By-Law #1:45 (g) addressing eighth graders trying out.)

**Upcoming 8th grade students who plan to compete with JV may not try out at this time.*

2. Enrolled migrant students may try out for a cheerleading team, but may not represent the school at the varsity level during that school year until the migratory sit-out period has elapsed. (Reference: GHSA Constitution and By-Laws 1:60)

3. All students trying out for cheerleading must be academically eligible for participation.

8. The GHSA and the NFHS rules state that a student may not cheer with a high school cheerleading team unless he/she is a **bona fide student enrolled at that school**. Specifically, this means that children are prohibited from serving as mascots cheering with or standing with the cheer team. (NFHS Rule 2-1-2) All students participating on a cheer team must be eligible, including students dressed as mascots who entertain the crowd. (Exception to this rule: Exhibitions held during half time, pregame, or postgame periods that have been authorized by the school administration. This type of presentation often involves children who attended cheer camps during the summer or who participated in the local Recreational League cheer program, and then are allowed to cheer or perform prior to the beginning of the high school game or during half-time. Their participation must end by the time the game begins or resumes if they perform during half-time.) Former cheerleaders who have graduated may not cheer during a game.
9. The participation of college teams or special needs teams as exhibitions at a GHSA contest requires approval by the GHSA.

SECTION TWO: COACHING FOR SAFETY

A guide to understanding the liabilities, duties,
and responsibilities of coaching

COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Recognize that risks exist
2. Identify the possible risks
3. Prepare or plan for risks and plan ways to lower risks
4. Evaluate risks when they occur
5. Supervise the program to control risks
6. Remind participants of their role in controlling risks
7. Remain vigilant in managing the program
8. Review the program when necessary
9. Ask for assistance as needed
10. Educate yourself and your athletes
11. Care about the welfare of your athletes
12. Use common sense

NINE LEGAL DUTIES OF COACHES

1. Properly plan the activity
 - a. Sequence activities
 - b. Know the progressions of safety, keep records, and follow the progressions
 - c. Have a master plan for practice
2. Provide proper instruction
 - a. Inform athletes of your expectations
 - b. Provide proper training and instruction for all activities
 - c. Explain the rules and make sure athletes understand them
3. Provide a safe physical environment
 - a. Inspect sites (gym, field, performance surface) to make sure it is appropriate
 - b. Use the appropriate surface as expected (floor, grass, mats, field, concrete, etc.)
 - c. Provide a place safe from hazard
4. Provide adequate and proper equipment
 - a. Inventory at the end of season and replace equipment as needed
 - b. Make sure equipment is set up appropriately
5. Match the athlete to his/her ability
 - a. Watch for size, weight, age, maturity, and mental state when selecting positions for athletes
 - b. Be realistic when setting expectations for athletes
6. Evaluate your athletes for injury and the ability to participate
 - a. Have CPR and First Aid Training for emergencies
 - b. Be able to evaluate an injury and determine the immediate needs of the athlete
 - c. Have an **EMERGENCY PLAN** in place and review the plan with team members

7. Supervise all activities closely
 - a. Be present
 - b. Be attentive
 - c. Be where you can control the situation
8. Warn all athletes of inherent risk
 - a. Provide information for both parents and athletes
 - b. Use **INHERENT RISK FORMS****
 - c. Review the inherent risk form with both athletes and parents and obtain signatures stating both the athlete and parent understand the information presented.
 - d. Make sure parents and athletes understand the rules and the risk
9. Provide emergency assistance
 - a. Know First Aid and CPR
 - b. Be ready to respond and prepare others to also respond
 - c. Keep a list of contacts and phone numbers posted
 - d. Have a plan

**Good coaches know their legal duties, implement their legal duties,
and seek assistance when in doubt.**

NOTE: The nine legal duties listed above apply to all coaches, regardless of sport. These nine legal duties are a vital part of athletic risk management and the prevention of injuries. It is acknowledged that regardless of the excellence of any risk management program, injuries cannot be totally eliminated. The coach must be a trained individual who is committed to the safety of each and every individual athlete, to consistency in the program, and to competent and appropriate management of the team. Coaches are obligated to follow the nine legal duties of coaching.

SECTION THREE: SPORTSMANSHIP

It is the responsibility of the basketball/football (sideline) cheerleading/dance coach to ensure that his/her school's athletes adhere to and practice the following guidelines which promote good sportsmanship and proper behavior in the gym and at the football field. At no point should any coach place the value of winning above the importance of instilling the highest ideals of character in the athletes with whom he/she works. Spirit coaches should share the following guidelines with athletes, parents, and fans so as to promote positive cheers and activities.

The following rules of good sportsmanship are reviewed here for the purpose of emphasizing the GHSA and NFHS expectations regarding proper behavior of cheerleaders in the basketball gym.

1. Taunting is defined as to degrade in a sarcastic, insulting or jeering manner; to mock for the purpose of embarrassing an opponent. Taunting, and similar acts are example of poor sportsmanship. The GHSA Constitution and By-Laws state: "It shall be the responsibility of a member school to use every means at its disposal to impress upon faculty, students, team members,

coaches and spectators the values of sportsmanship in preparation for the management of interscholastic contests. Contest officials have the authority to have any and all individuals removed from the confines of the contest whose behavior has become a distraction and/or a hindrance to the administration of the event. This may include, but is not limited to, verbal and visual gestures.” (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws, Sec 2.70) NFHS 1-2-1.

2. Spirit teams should cheer in a positive manner in support of their team, not “against” or “at” the opposing team or opposing cheerleaders in an aggressive manner. (Examples: “Miss it, miss it!” or “Oh yea, you walked, you walked....”)
3. Cheers which solicit an aggressive response are inappropriate. (Example: “We got spirit, how about you?”; “Air Ball, Air Ball”; “Tick Tock, Look at the clock!”, “You traveled, you traveled, you got caught!”).
4. It is strongly recommended that basketball cheerleaders or dancers be positioned at opposite ends of the gym to eliminate face-to-face cheering and to avoid the perception of one squad cheering “against” the other.
5. Cheerleaders and dancers should not point to, laugh at, or cheer “at” the opposing team, cheerleaders or fans, but instead, should lead their fans in cheers of support for their own team.
6. When a free throw is in progress cheerleaders should be quiet – no cheering, no stomping, and no kicking the bleachers in an attempt to distract the player of an opposing team.
7. Cheerleading and dance teams should neither draw attention to the mistakes of individual players nor attempt to intimidate players or fans of the opposing team through words, actions, or cheers.
8. Spirit teams should behave in a respectful and quiet manner with regard to any injured player on the basketball floor, kneeling quietly until the player has recovered or been removed from the court.
9. When time expires at the end of a basketball game, all cheering should cease. Cheerleaders on the winning team should not continue to cheer beyond the game, as this promotes the perception of the winning team “gloating” over the losers.
10. Spirit teams should educate students and fans in order to promote appropriate sportsmanship and proper behavior by providing appropriate leadership before, during, and after games.
11. Obnoxious behavior should not be encouraged or permitted under the guise of supporting one’s team.
12. Opposing players, coaches, administrators, officials, and fans should be treated with the utmost respect by our teams. At no time shall a cheerleader approach an opposing coach, game official, administrator, or player in order to criticize. Spirit teams, as representatives of their team, should not use social media to degrade or criticize opposing players, cheerleaders, dancers, coaches, or fans after the game.

13. Cheerleaders and dancers should work to shift negative crowd attention caused by a disturbance in a positive manner, thus allowing a school administrator or security personnel to address the issue.
14. Every cheer team has the right to a safe environment in which to cheer without harassment from opposing fans. Cheerleaders should have a designated place to sit/stand during a game. Spirit cheer coaches should seek the game manager or security personnel if the situation becomes volatile or dangerous. Please go through your Athletic Director if he/she is in attendance.
15. It is strongly recommended that cheer coaches be prepared to greet visiting cheer/dance coaches and teams with a handout of the GHSA and NFHS rules and guidelines, in addition to specific rules enacted by their regions. (See forms section of this manual for an example.)

Sportsmanship statement from the NFHS Spirit Rules Book:

Sportsmanship is the foundation of every great athletic experience. At all levels of play- but, especially in high school sports- it is the most important value that athletes, coaches, parents, and spectators can uphold. Sportsmanship isn't just about playing fair or following the rules; it's about demonstrating respect, integrity, humility and teamwork, regardless of the final score. Spirit participants should strive to boost school spirit; promote good sportsmanship, develop good, positive crowd involvement; and help student participants and spectators achieve the most worthwhile educational objectives of the interscholastic program. Spirit leaders can effectively neutralize negative environments at any interscholastic contest."

SECTION FOUR: APPAREL

1. Spirit teams must be dressed uniformly. Teams should not mix junior varsity and varsity uniforms on the sidelines. Dance teams who cheer on the sidelines should follow the same guidelines as cheerleading teams. (no jewelry, no long nails, midriff covered, etc.)
2. The following is the excerpt out of the GHSA Constitution and By Laws:

CHEERLEADING APPAREL IS RESTRICTED AS FOLLOWS (AND DANCE TEAMS PERFORMING AT GAMES):

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 THAT FULLY COVERS THE ATHLETE'S ENTIRE TORSO. THE BOW SHOULD BE IN SCHOOL COLORS, AS WELL.
THE REQUIRED SKIRT OR DRESS SHOULD COVER THE BRIEFS, BLOOMERS OR ANY SPANDEX MATERIAL.

3. **ALL ATHLETES MUST WEAR THE SAME UNIFORM WHEN PERFORMING AT A GAME OR COMPETITION.**
4. All other restrictions continue to apply –sequins and rhinestones must be sewn in. Check the National Federation Spirit Rules book for current restrictions. Contact the GHSA office if you have any questions. Make sure you have cleared a new design for a uniform before purchase.
5. Piercings, jewelry, and glitter are all prohibited by both the National Federation and the GHSA. This rule applies to all cheerleaders in all situations in Georgia. (Note: It is not sufficient to place a band-aid over a piercing to disguise the presence of a piercing, earring, etc. A religious medal without a chain is allowed but must be taped and worn under the uniform. A medical-alert medal must be taped and may be visible.)
6. When standing at attention, a cheerleader's or dancer's apparel must cover the midriff.
7. Fingernails, including artificial nails, must be kept short, near the end of the fingers. This rule applies to all cheerleading and dance squads whether they are stunting or not.
8. Hair must be worn in a manner that is appropriate for the activity involved. Hair devices and accessories must be secure. Hair adornments such as beads are allowed as long as they are securely affixed. (NFHS 1.1.5) Hair must be secured above the waist.
9. Cheerleaders must cheer in uniform at all games. Homecoming and senior night activities should not alter the athlete's uniform during the game. Tiaras, sashes, corsages, pins, etc. should not be worn.

SECTION FIVE: DANCE AND MUSIC

1. Cheers, chants, and dance motions should be free of suggestive motions and/or words. Motions should not contain sexual overtones, draw unwanted crowd response, or appear suggestive or vulgar. It is the responsibility of the spirit basketball coach to review all cheers, chants, and motions for inappropriate words or motions.
2. Music played at basketball games for dance routines, during timeouts, and in pre-game warm-ups should be screened for inappropriate lyrics, vulgarity, and sexual implications prior to its use. It is the responsibility of the spirit basketball coach to review all music.

SECTION SIX: SIGNS

Run-throughs* (also called break-thrus) and game signs prepared by cheerleaders for both the football field and the basketball gym should reflect support of one's own school and team **in a positive manner, and should not be aimed "at" an opponent through the use of negative expressions.** Prohibiting inappropriate signs from being posted in the gym and on the football field can greatly diminish negative sportsmanship from spectators, fans, and students. The spirit cheer coach is responsible for determining that game signs and run-throughs meet the requirements of good sportsmanship. ****Remember that stunts cannot be involved in holding the run thru sign.*** (NFHS 1.1.7)

SECTION SEVEN: CHEERING FOOTBALL AND BASKETBALL

Note: Unless specifically denoted B (basketball) or F (football), these rules apply to both sports. Note key: National Federation Spirit Rules Book (NF); Section (Sec); Article (Art) Please check the basketball section in the Constitution and By-Laws for more information.

1. **(B) Cheerleaders/dancers at basketball games are restricted from performing “stomp” cheers/dances in the stands. “Stomp” cheers/dances may be performed on the gym floor.** (Reference: GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION MINUTES, STATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, April 18, 2016)
2. Practice and performance surfaces and areas must be suitable for spirit activities, i.e. appropriate surface/area, reasonably free from obstructions and excessive noise. Stunts and tumbling must be modified to be appropriate for the surface and/or area and in relation to other participants. (NFHS 1.1.7)
3. When using props (signs) with sharp corner/edges, a top person should not discard the prop (sign) from the top of a stunt or pyramid. NFHS 1.1.7b)
4. (B) Participants must not warm up stunts or tumbling on the court or sideline area during player warm-up if an alternate site is available. If no appropriate alternate site is available, the coach must take reasonable precautions to minimize risk to participants. (NFHS 1.1.13)
5. A participant who is bleeding, has an open wound, has any amount of blood on his or her uniform, or his blood on his/her person, shall be directed to leave the activity until the bleeding is stopped, the wound is covered, the uniform or body is appropriately clean, and/or the uniform is changed before returning to participate. (NFHS 1.1.17)
6. (B) An athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as a loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional. (NFHS Rule 1.1.18)
7.
 - a. The throwing of souvenirs (such as small basketballs, shirts, etc.) into the stands is prohibited in the basketball gym. (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws)
 - b. No artificial noise-makers (including megaphones, air horns, vuvuzelas, or thunder sticks) are allowed in the gym during basketball games. Noisemakers are subject to confiscation by school officials or game security. Megaphones are not allowed GHSA Constitution and By-Laws, page 50.
 - c. School bands are prohibited from playing while the game is in progress; **the home school is responsible for enforcing this rule.**

- d. Displays of unsportsmanlike conduct directed toward the opposing team or game officials will not be tolerated and may result in expulsion from the game. Please report these cases to penny@ghsa.net.
- e. Please see additional rules and guidelines in the GHSA By-Laws and Constitution.

8. (B) During Basketball Quarterfinals, Semi-finals, and Finals

- a. Schools are limited to a maximum of twenty (20) cheerleaders in uniform at court side.
- b. Cheerleaders shall not occupy spectator seating and shall be in designated courtside areas.
- c. Mascots must be members of the student body.
- d. **(B)** Participants must remain outside the playing area during a thirty-second or less timeout in a basketball game. (NFHS 1.10)
- e. **(B)** 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 at all cheerleading practices and performances. (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws, Sec. 4 F)
- f. **(B)** Cheerleaders are restricted from standing/cheering/jumping in the area at the end of the basketball court during the time a game is in progress unless they are more than eight (8) feet from the boundary line of the basketball court. This includes cheerleaders in an "L" shape with part of the team on the sideline and the other part of the team on the end boundary line. The host school is responsible for enforcing this rule. (GHSA Constitution and By-Laws, Section 2, G, 1 a and b)
- g. **(B)** Participants may not tumble or stunt while the ball is in play in basketball or volleyball. (NFHS 1.1.10)
- h. **Cheerleaders should not create a shoulder sit, a shoulder stand, or any other partner stunt in order to provide support/stability for the crash-through sign the team runs out and runs through at the beginning of a game. (NFHS: 1.1.7)**
- i. Cheerleaders and dancers should quietly stand at attention during the playing of the National Anthem.
- j. Cheerleaders or dancers may go on the court during quarter changes and half time. They must not exceed 1 minute at quarter change and 2:30 at half time.

Note: All coaches should remember that individual school systems and regions may establish more restrictive rules to govern activities in their gyms or at their games. Visiting cheer teams, led by their coaches, should respect these rules and follow the dictates of individual schools or regions. It is the responsibility of the spirit cheer coach to understand and adhere to the rules of each gym his/her team enters for the purpose of spirit cheering. The officials are in charge of the game.

SECTION EIGHT: SCENARIOS

General Spirit Scenarios

- 1. A cheerleader is cheering while chewing gum.

Ruling: Cheerleaders **may not** chew gum or eat **during practice or performance.**

2. An elementary-aged student from a local school, dressed in a cheer or dance uniform, stands on the sidelines with the cheer/dance team.

Ruling: To be eligible to participate or perform with a high school sports team, an individual must be a **bona-fide student** of that school, enrolled fulltime in grades 9-12 and must meet all eligibility requirements of the GHSA.

3. A cheer/dance team which does not stunt or tumble wears small post earrings during the game.

Ruling: According to the National Federation Rules Book and the GHSA Cheer Manual, **no jewelry is permitted during practice or performance**, regardless of the team's intent to stunt or tumble. Religious medals and medical alert medals are not considered jewelry. A religious medal with a chain must be taped and worn under the uniform. A medical alert medal must be taped and may be visible.

4. A cheerleader loses her balance and falls during a performance and is momentarily unconscious. Her mother comes down from the stands and sits with her child. Within ten minutes, the mother assures the coach the girl seems to have recovered and she can go back to cheering.

Ruling: The athlete **may not return** to the game until she is cleared by **an appropriate health care professional**. Parents may not make this decision in place of the health care professional.

5. A cheerleader comes to practice with newly pierced ears and tells her coach that she cannot remove the posts in her ears because the piercing will then "close up." When contacted, the cheerleader's mother indicates that she is willing to sign a waiver releasing the school and coach of all responsibility if the cheerleader is injured or hurt in the area of her ears/head.

Ruling: The cheerleader or dancer **may not practice or perform until the posts in her ears are removed**. Cheerleaders, nor dancers, may wear jewelry at any time during a practice, performance, or public event. The mother's willingness to sign a waiver is not a factor and should not be considered as a condition of participation. It is not acceptable to cover the piercings with band-aides, as covering up the violation does not make the violation acceptable.

Basketball Cheer Scenarios

6. A cheer team does a "stomping" cheer in the stands at the beginning of a basketball game.

Ruling: Stomping cheers are restricted to the gym floor.

7. A home team completes a chant. The opposing cheer team starts the same chant as a rebuttal. This "echoing" the cheers of the visiting cheerleaders happens several times.

Ruling: **This is not appropriate sportsmanship**; "echoing" the same chant immediately after the opposing cheer team has completed that chant is prohibited.

8. A player is at the free throw line, ready to shoot, when the opposing cheerleaders yell, "Miss it, Miss it" at the player to disrupt his free throw.

Ruling: Cheerleaders and dancers should be quietly standing at attention while players of either team are shooting. **Spirit teams should cheer in a positive manner and in support of their own teams**. It is inappropriate to cheer "against" or "at" the other team or to cheer in an aggressive manner. (Example: "Miss it, miss it!" or "Oh yea, you walked, you walked....")

9. The cheerleaders and the fans boo and yell degrading comments at an opposing player who fouls a home team player.

Ruling: Obnoxious behavior should not be encouraged or permitted under the guise of school spirit. Opposing players, officials, and fans should be treated with respect and dignity. If inappropriate crowd behavior exists, assistance should be obtained from a school administrator or game manager.

10. The Basketball Boosters' Club has purchased a box of small souvenir basketball balls, and those are thrown out to fans during half time.

Ruling: The throwing of souvenirs (such as small basketballs, t-shirts, etc.) into the stands is prohibited. Spirit items of this type may be given out at the end of the game as fans exit the gym.

11. A gym has only three feet surrounding the outside of the playing court. The cheer coach of the visiting team positions her team in that area.

Ruling: This is not an appropriate place for cheerleaders to stand and cheer. Cheerleaders are restricted from the area at the end of the court during the time a game is in progress unless they are more than eight (8) feet from the boundary line of the court. This includes cheerleaders in an "L" shape with part of the cheer team on the sideline and part of the cheer team on the end line. The host school or tournament director is responsible for enforcing this rule. In this case the cheerleaders would sit or stand in the bleachers.

12. A local company gives a school souvenir megaphones imprinted with its logo. Cheerleaders give those megaphones to fans as they enter the gym.

Ruling: No artificial noise-makers (including megaphones, whistles, thunder sticks, etc.) are allowed in the gym during basketball games.

13. Cheerleaders place a game sign with the words "Ground the Eagles!" on the gym wall above the stands.

Ruling: This is an inappropriate sign and should not be displayed. Signs should reflect support of one's own school and team, and should not be aimed "at" an opponent. Prohibiting inappropriate signs from being posted can greatly diminish negative sportsmanship from fans and students.

14. An opposing player shoots an air ball, and fans and home cheerleaders immediately begin the "air ball" chant in an attempt to embarrass the player.

Ruling: This is inappropriate and an example of poor sportsmanship. The NFHS and GHSA disapprove of any form of taunting which is intended or designed to embarrass, ridicule or demean others under any circumstances including on the basis of race, religion, gender or national origin.

15. The visiting cheer team is clearly positioned beyond the 8 foot boundary line of the basketball court, but the referee tells the team to move from that area and instead be in the stands to cheer.

Ruling: Referees are in charge of the game and the gym, and may direct cheerleaders as they see necessary. Cheerleaders and cheer coaches must be mindful that a referee can assess a technical foul against their team for lack of cooperation or failure to follow the referee's directions.

16. A basketball cheer coach receives a flier from a nearby school, inviting her basketball cheer squad to join other local squads in a pre-season day (i.e. early November) of competition designed to sharpen their cheer skills. The flier indicates that concessions will be available as a fund-raiser for the home cheer squad, the competition is free and there is no admission charge for spectators.

Ruling: This is illegal. Cheerleaders may not participate in a competition during the school year that is not sanctioned by the GHSA, regardless of its intent as a fundraiser, whether admission is charged or not, or whether teams are charged a fee to compete or not.

Football Cheer Scenarios

17. A team is stunting on a track in light rain.

Ruling: This is illegal; no teams may stunt in the rain. Prior to the performance of any skill, the immediate environment for the activity should be taken into consideration including, but not limited to the proximity of non-squad personnel, performance surface, lighting and/or precipitation. Technical skills should not be performed on concrete, asphalt, **wet**, or uneven surfaces, or surfaces with obstructions.

18. Cheerleaders in a prep with a back spot hold the "run through" poles as the football team crashes through in a dramatic entrance at a Friday night game.

Ruling: This is illegal. The close proximity of other participants makes stunting in this situation unsafe.

19. A cheer team creates a Homecoming crash thru sign featuring graves marked with school names and a caption announcing those schools as "killed" by the home team in the course of the season.

Ruling: Use of this sign is illegal. Spirit leaders and their coaches are in a position to preview spirit signs that may be posted for their school's games, when such signs are allowed. Prohibiting inappropriate signs from being posted can greatly assist the administration in helping students, fans, and spectators to understand the purpose of positive signage, which is to create and maintain an appropriate and positive crowd atmosphere.

20. Cheerleaders are busily putting up signs on the fence when the band begins playing the National Anthem; they hurriedly continue in order to be ready for the kick-off.

Ruling: This is inappropriate. Cheerleaders should stand quietly at attention during the playing of the National Anthem.

Any team who is violating these rules should be reported to the GHSA office by emailing penny@ghsa.net or by calling the GHSA office at 706-647-7473 ext. 122.

SECTION 9: TRY-OUTS

REMINDER

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. The tryout period for the selection of **all squads (including Varsity Competition, Varsity Spirit, Junior Varsity Competition and Junior Varsity Spirit)** is limited to a maximum of one period of ten consecutive school days between February 1 and the last day students are in school. Each squad must use the same 10 days. The term **practice** refers to the time spent within the **ten day only** try-out period allowed by the GHSA.

Eligibility for tryouts and participation, according to the GHSA Constitution & By-Laws:

1. Students must be enrolled at the school in order to try out for that school's cheerleading program. A student may be enrolled in only one school at a time. (Exception: See By-Law #1:45 (g) addressing eighth graders trying out.)
2. Enrolled migrant students may try out for a cheerleading team, but may not represent the school at the varsity level during that school year until the migratory sit-out period has elapsed. (Reference: GHSA Constitution and By-Laws 1:60)
3. A student athlete must be currently eligible to try out for a team.

Suggestions for Tryouts

- Plan a meeting for all parents/guardians and potential cheer candidates well before the actual tryout clinic is to begin in order to share all necessary paperwork, to secure all signatures from both athletes and parents, and to communicate the specifics of the tryouts expectations, as well as the anticipated number of individual cheerleaders to be selected for each squad. It is appropriate at this time to announce all financial obligations and fund-raisers, the summer and pre-season practice schedule, and dates for future parent meetings. The next year school calendar, the football schedule, and a tentative competition schedule might also be made available to parents and athletes in this "orientation" meeting. The date and time of this initial meeting should be advertised well in advance in daily announcements, and via the school's website and social media. You may also like to decide if this team will compete at Game day. *Remember: Parents/Guardians always appreciate information provided in advance!*
- Coaches must check to be sure each cheer candidate is eligible according to GHSA requirements for tryouts **before the tryout clinic begins**. Check the GHSA Constitution and By Laws for eligibility requirements of student athletes.
- Coaches must check to be sure each cheer candidate has a current physical on file with the school's athletic department. Those without a current physical form are required to obtain a physical on the required GHSA physician's form (available on the GHSA website under FORMS) **before participating in the tryout clinic**. After receiving the completed physical form back from the cheer candidate, coaches are reminded to check the physical form to ensure that the physician has indicated that the individual is cleared for all sports without restrictions and that the form is properly signed and dated by the physician, the cheer candidate, and the parent of the cheer candidate.
- Other forms which require parental and student signatures, as well as relevant medical information, **before tryouts begin** include the **Inherent Risk Form**, the **High School Athletic / Activity Medical Authorization Form**, and the **GHSA Concussion Information & Sign-Off Page**. These forms are available in Section 9 of this manual. **The signed Concussion Information Sheet should be kept on file.** *It is essential that parents be given a copy of the concussion information sheet in order to have available the symptoms and signs of concussions if necessary.*

- Create a judging sheet to use as you evaluate your athletes during tryouts. Confer with other coaches assisting with tryouts. Follow all safety rules related to tumbling and stunting. (See the National Federation rules book for safety in stunting and tumbling.)
- Before final team selections are made, confer with all cheer candidates the possibility of not making the team, and explain the benefits that trying out one year will have for the next year's tryout. Remind all candidates that making the cheer team is a time for compassion and concern for those candidates who were not successful.
- There are many veteran coaches across the state willing to help rookie coaches during the tryout process. Access the Georgia Cheerleading Coaches' Association website for members of the leadership team who will be of valuable assistance in your process.

Coaches' Questions about Tryouts

1. Can I use my 10 day tryout period, announce my team and then three weeks later cheer at the spring football game?

Response: Your team may cheer at the spring game, but they may not practice in preparation for the spring game. The GHSA rules state that once tryouts are complete, no practices may be held until school is out. A better idea is to plan your ten-day tryout period to conclude on the day of the spring game, teaching game cheers and chants as your tryout material so that your "new team" is prepared to cheer at the spring game.

2. I am planning my tryouts during the school year, possibly early spring. May I use graduated cheerleaders from my program to return to campus to teach tryout material during the ten day tryout period?

Response: **No, a graduated cheerleader** from your program is considered "**outside help**" and it is illegal to use outside help during the school year. You may, however, use your senior cheerleaders to teach tryout material. They remain **bona-fide students** of your school and therefore are eligible to assist in teaching material for tryouts.

3. May I have cheer tryouts after school is out?

Response: **Yes**, the GHSA does not require tryouts to be held during the school year.

4. May I use "outside judges" to come to my school and judge my cheer tryouts?

Response: Yes, but these "**outside judges**" **may not demonstrate or teach tryout material, or conduct your tryouts in any way**. Their only role should be to judge for a limited time (i.e., two hours on one day) your cheer candidates as they perform previously learned tryout material.

5. May I use one ten-day period to conduct tryouts for my spirit team and a separate ten-day period to conduct tryouts for my competition team?

Response: No, the GHSA allots one period of ten consecutive days between Feb.1 and the last day of school for selection of all cheer squads at Georgia high schools. Practice for tryouts (i.e. learning

the tryout material) is also included in this one ten day period of consecutive school days allotted for tryouts.

SECTION 9: FORMS

The forms included in the last pages are provided to coaches as a courtesy of the GHSA. These forms include the following:

- Welcome to our school handout.
- The GHSA High School Emergency/Activity Medical Emergency Authorization Form
- GHSA Concussion Information Sheet and Parent / Athlete sign-off section
- The Inherent Risks Consent Form and Parent / Athlete sign-off page



Welcome to our school!

A cheerleading coach or the Game Manager will show you where you can stand and put your things. Please remember that all stomping cheers may only be performed on the gym floor for basketball games.

To ensure safety and sportsmanship, our Athletic Director and Principal have established the following guidelines:

- Make sure to cheer in a positive manner, not at or against the opposing team.
- Make sure there are no aggressive motions or words (i.e. pointing to the scoreboard) directed towards the opposing team.
- Always represent your school well and set an example of good sportsmanship for your school.
- Make sure all cheer and dance motions are free of vulgarity and sexual implication.
- In basketball, please stay quiet during all free throws.
- Please understand that if you are breaking the rules, you will be reported to the GHSA office.
- Please remember that no one should stunt while holding run through signs.

Remember these important NFHS and GHSA spirit rules that are followed here:

- Remove all jewelry while cheering.
- Only bona fide students are allowed to cheer with your team. (no young children) Mascots should be a member of your student body.
- Uniforms will fit properly with no midribs showing. All cheerleading team members should be wearing the same uniform. Constant adult supervision should be administered while your team is warming up and during games.
- Coaches are responsible for ensuring that surfaces are appropriate for warming up/practicing stunts and cheers.

Please do not hesitate to let the game administrator, cheer coach or AD know if you need assistance of any kind. My cell number is: _____

If you should have issues or concerns, please ask your Athletic Director to speak with our game manager to discuss them.



**Georgia High School Association
Student/Parent Concussion Awareness Form**

SCHOOL:

DANGERS OF CONCUSSION

Concussions at all levels of sports have received a great deal of attention and a state law has been passed to address this issue. Adolescent athletes are particularly vulnerable to the effects of concussion. Once considered little more than a minor "ding" to the head, it is now understood that a concussion has the potential to result in death, or changes in brain function (either short-term or long-term). A concussion is a brain injury that results in a temporary disruption of normal brain function. A concussion occurs when the brain is violently rocked back and forth or twisted inside the skull as a result of a blow to the head or body. Continued participation in any sport following a concussion can lead to worsening concussion symptoms, as well as increased risk for further injury to the brain, and even death.

Player and parental education in this area is crucial – that is the reason for this document. Refer to it regularly. This form must be signed by a parent or guardian of each student who wishes to participate in GHSA athletics. One copy needs to be returned to the school, and one retained at home.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSION

- Headache, dizziness, poor balance, moves clumsily, reduced energy level/tiredness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Blurred vision, sensitivity to light and sounds
- Fogginess of memory, difficulty concentrating, slowed thought processes, confused about surroundings or game assignments
- Unexplained changes in behavior and personality
- Loss of consciousness (NOTE: This does not occur in all concussion episodes.)

BY-LAW 2.68: GHSA CONCUSSION POLICY: In accordance with Georgia law and national playing rules published by the National Federation of State High School Associations, any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion shall be immediately removed from the practice or contest and shall not return to play until an appropriate health care professional has determined that no concussion has occurred. (NOTE: An appropriate health care professional may include licensed physician (MD/DO) or another licensed individual under the supervision of a licensed physician, such as a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or certified athletic trainer who has received training in concussion evaluation and management.

a) No athlete is allowed to return to a game or a practice on the same day that a concussion (a) has been diagnosed, OR (b) cannot be ruled out.

b) Any athlete diagnosed with a concussion shall be cleared medically by an appropriate health care professional prior to resuming participation in any future practice or contest. The formulation of a gradual return to play protocol shall be a part of the medical clearance.

By signing this concussion form, I give _____ High School permission to transfer this concussion form to the other sports that my child may play. I am aware of the dangers of concussion and this signed concussion form will represent myself and my child during the 2025-26 school year. This form will be stored with the athletic physical form and other accompanying forms required by the _____ School System.

I HAVE READ THIS FORM AND I UNDERSTAND THE FACTS PRESENTED IN IT.

Student Name (Printed)

Student Name (Signed) Date

Parent Name (Printed)

Parent Name (Signed) Date

(Revised: 3/17)



**CONTACT INFORMATION
STUDENT INFORMATION**

High School Athletic / Activity Medical

Emergency Authorization Form

Student _____

Print Last First

School _____ **Grade** _____

Sport _____ **Coach** _____

Home Phone:

() _____ Please indicate best way to contact.

Mother's Name: _____ Phone: _____

Mother's Email: _____ Cell: _____

Father's Name: _____ Phone: _____

Father's Email: _____ Cell: _____

Other Contact: _____

Name and Relationship: _____

Student Information:

Date of Birth: _____ Physician: _____

Physician's Phone #: _____

Allergies: _____

Epipen? Yes ____ No ____ Where will it be? _____

Inhaler? Yes ____ No ____ Where will it be? _____

Chronic Illness? _____

Regular medications? _____

Date of last Tetanus Imm: _____

Hospital or facility where I prefer my son/daughter is taken in an emergency:

(Name and Location of facility)

Concussion History

List of date(s) of any previous concussions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(You are required to report any concussion(s) sustained that are not listed or are sustained during the season, including those that occur during a GHSA activity/event, and concussions occurring outside of the school or school activities.)

Medical Authorization/Consent

Insurance Company: _____

Policy / Consumer No. _____

I, _____ authorize all medical, surgical, diagnostic, and hospital procedures as may be performed or prescribed by a treating physician for _____ if I cannot be reached in an emergency.

Date _____ Signature _____
(Legal Parent or Guardian)

Address: _____



INHERENT RISKS CONSENT FORM

Athlete's Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Grade: _____

School: _____ Sport: _____

We accept and understand that the sport/activity of **cheerleading** involves certain inherent risks, dangers and hazards that may cause serious personal injury, including death, severe paralysis or brain injury necessitating long term care and significantly impairing enjoyment of life or life activities. We accept and understand that the above-described injuries and other injuries, including but not limited to: concussions; serious neck and spinal injuries potentially resulting in complete or partial paralysis; brain damage; blindness; serious injury to all internal organs; serious injury to all bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons; contusions; dislocations; sprains; strains; and fractures, may occur as a result of participating in this sport/activity. We accept and understand that certain activities such as tumbling and stunting carry with them a greater inherent risk of injury.

1. We understand that the inherent risks of this sport/activity cannot be eliminated without jeopardizing the essential qualities of the activity/sport. We have reviewed all of these risks and we understand and appreciate them and still desire to participate in the activity.

(Student Initial)_____ (Parent Initial)_____

2. We certify that (Student Name) _____ has no medical or physical conditions which could interfere with or compromise his/her safety in participating in this activity.

(Student Initial)_____ (Parent Initial)_____

3. I authorize qualified emergency medical professionals to examine, and in the event of an injury or serious illness, to administer emergency medical care to the above-named student.

(Parent Initial)_____

4. In the event it becomes necessary for school district staff to obtain emergency medical care for the above-named student, we understand that neither the staff member nor the school district assumes financial liability for the expenses incurred because of the accident, injury, illness and/or unforeseen circumstances.

(Student Initial)_____ (Parent Initial)_____

5. I certify that my household has sufficient medical insurance to facilitate any necessary medical care or resultant care for any injury that may be sustained by the above-named student.

(Parent Initial)_____