

2024 MHSAA GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, January 24, 2024, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ben Farkas, Hudsonville
Karyn Furlong, Richland
Brittany Hylton, Wayne-Westland
Beth Lockhart, CCCAM
Morgan Martinez, Fenton
Stefanie Miller, Paw Paw
Phyllis Olszewski, East Jordan
Stacy Smith, Caledonia
Jessica Trefry, Michigan Center

MEMBERS ABSENT

Judy Cox, Bay City
Mike Fosberg, MIAAA
Christina Wilson, Brighton

GUEST:

Kevin Fleming, Hanover-Horton (MATS)

STAFF:

Kathy Vrugink Westdorp (Recorder)

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee reviewed its responsibilities as a standing sport committee and the process of making recommendations to MHSAA staff and the MHSAA Representative Council. In addition, the Girls Competitive Cheer Committee reviewed the charge of the Girls Competitive Cheer Sub-Committee which met on January 17, 2024. This Sub-Committee studied the technical aspects of girls competitive cheer and made recommendations which were submitted to the Competitive Cheer Committee for additional review.

The Tournament Manager's Materials and Participating School Information were also reviewed. In addition, the minutes from last year's Girls Competitive Cheer Committee and the Manual insert were provided and reviewed. The District, Regional and Finals sites and times have all been posted at mhsaa.com. The committee also drew the finals rounds of competition.

HISTORY OF GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER

The history of girls competitive cheer was shared with the committee including how the MHSAA's first commitment was to have girls competitive cheer meet the definition of a sport. To that end, a format was created by Michigan cheer coaches and athletic administrators with the purpose of providing consistent rules, while allowing teams to perform all aspects of cheer techniques and styles designed to promote athleticism. Additionally, meeting the criteria of a sport provided by the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education, was imperative. Competitive cheer has presented a great opportunity for girls to participate in a sport in which involvement and spectatorship have soared. Those that choose to be involved in girls competitive cheer have the same responsibilities as all other interscholastic sport coaches, officials and administrators with respect to student-athlete capabilities, facility safety and good sportsmanship.

Included in the discussion of the history of girls competitive cheer was an analysis of the status of current schools that are offering the sport. As of the above date, the number of teams that have girls competitive cheer is 313 (79, 79, 78, 77).

GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER COMPARATIVE CONCUSSION INFORMATION

Committee members reviewed comparative information from the MHSAA Head Injury Reporting System by sport and year. In 2020-21, the data shows participation at 5171 with a head injury prevalence rate of .98%. The 2021-22 data provided participation at 5741 with a 1.67% prevalence rate. The 2022-23 participation was 5942 with a concussion prevalence rate of 2.14%. This data was reviewed by the Cheer Committee in an effort to have the necessary available sport injury data to make appropriate decisions for the sport of girls competitive cheer. Further information shared identified that most of the injuries occurred during practice (either at the middle or end) at the varsity level. Current information indicates that there has been a total of 67 head injuries in girls competitive cheer so far in 2023-24.

DISCUSSION ITEMS BY COMPETITIVE CHEER COMMITTEE

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee continued to discuss several topics regarding the evolution of girls competitive cheer as a sport. One of the biggest discussions was how the participants in girls

competitive cheer could be expanded as well as efforts that could be made to enhance the health and safety of participants. There were many opinions provided including the high amount of time throughout the school year that participation in cheer was occurring – especially if a student was in both sideline cheerleading and girls competitive cheer. There was discussion that in an effort to level the playing field and have far lesser individuals “burn-out” in the sport, that additional parameters needed to be in place and the restricted period of time should be expanded. This was done in 2023 however, there is still concern that girls competitive cheer has become a year-round sport. In addition, per the 2022-23 recommendation, starting in 2024-25, the season of girls competitive cheer will start one week later due to the overlap that is currently occurring with individuals who are also involved in sideline cheerleading. This one-week later start was intended to provide a ‘rest gap’ between sideline cheerleading and girls competitive cheer.

Further discussion involved that there are many coaches in the sport that have less than five years of experience and do not understand the progressions. Further education needs to be provided to these coaches to understand the progressions in stunting and tumbling when coaching girls competitive cheer and that the coaches association would identify those coaches new to girls competitive cheer and provide additional sessions for them at the coaches conference. There was also sentiment that there may need to be additional athletic director education regarding girls competitive cheer as well as providing clinics teaching how to “catch and fall” through safety certification. When additional ways to expand the numbers in girls competitive cheer were discussed, addition sentiment was to provide programs to younger students through community education resources.

Discussion included enhancing the deduction chart and a review of round order standards, as well as a continuance of the practice of having a spring/summer editing group of coaches and judges review the Competitive Cheer Manual and further update the Manual. This practice would include a review of non-safety and safety-related violations and lend further clarity to existing rules. It also involves the inclusion of girls competitive cheer recommendations approved by Representative Council and discussion of ways to provide a format for greater participation at all levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE COACHES ASSOCIATION AND/OR SUB-COMMITTEE

Recommendations were reviewed which were submitted by the Girls Competitive Cheer Coaches Association and/or sub-committee. These included:

- For high school only – in a braced suspended forward roll pyramid, the flyer and at least one bracer(s) must have a hand-to-hand/arm connection. This connection can be with one or both hands/arms of the bracer and connected to one hand/arm/foot of the flyer. Any connection with a bracer attached to the foot of the flyer must also have a second bracer attached to a hand/arm. This may only be performed to a cradle position, or in a forward suspended roll, and may not include any twists.
- For high school only – allow a backward suspended roll when it originates from the cheering surface and both hands of the flyer maintain continuous hand-to-hand, hand-to-arm contact with the original bases or back spot to be legal.
- For high school only – in an inversion, allow a temporary loss of contact with the flyer when transitioning to a double-based sponge.
- Provide additional definitions for release and non-stunter.

2023-24 GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER TOURNAMENT INFORMATION

The 2023-24 Competitive Cheer Tournament will hold Districts on Friday and Saturday, February 16 and 17, 2024. There will be six Districts in four Divisions which will each have four teams progress to eight Regionals the following week on Saturday, February 24, 2024. Four teams from each of the eight Regionals will move to the Finals at the McGuirk Arena at Central Michigan University on Friday, March 1 and Saturday, March 2, 2024. This will include four separate sessions of girls competitive cheer, scheduled at 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Friday and 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Saturday.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee makes the following recommendations to the Representative Council:

1. For high school only:
 - a. Allow for in a braced suspended forward roll pyramid, that the flyer and at least one bracer(s) have a hand-to-hand/arm connection which can be done with one or both hands/arms of the bracer and connected to one hand/arm/foot of the flyer. (9-0)
 - b. Allow a backward suspended roll when it originates from the cheer surface and both hands of the flyer maintain continuous hand-to-hand, hand-to-arm contact with the original bases or back spot to be legal. (9-0)
 - c. In an inversion, allow a temporary loss of contact with the flyer when transitioning to a double-based sponge with both feet of the flyer in the hands of the bases or to a cradle or to a shoulder-level or below stunt. (9-0)
2. Provide for some additional definitions within the Manual through work of the 2024 Manual Task Force. (9-0)