

MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION
Girls Competitive Cheer Committee Meeting
East Lansing, January 25, 2023
9:30 a.m.

Members Present:

Ben Farkas, Hudsonville
Mike Fosburg, MIAAA
Brian Gordon, Royal Oak
Holly James, Lawton
Beth Lockhart, CCCAM
Phyllis Olszewski, East Jordan
Stacy Smith, Caledonia

Jessica Trefry, Michigan Center
JD Wheeler, Hartland
Meaghan Rourke, MATS (non-voting)

Members Absent:

Brittany Gunderson, Gaylord

Staff:

Kathy Vrugink Westdorp (Recorder)

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

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 19, 2023. 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.

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. When lines were drawn in March 2022, there were over 30 schools that were dropped due to non-participation for the two prior years, per the determination to remove schools that had indicated sport sponsorship but have failed to have either a team and/or individuals actually participate in the MHSAA tournament in the sport during the previous two MHSAA tournaments. As of the above date, the number of schools offering girls competitive cheer is 308 schools (76, 75, 75, 82).

GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER COMPARATIVE CONCUSSION INFORMATION

Committee members reviewed comparative information from the MHSAA Head Injury Reporting System by sport and year. Comparative data indicates that in 2018-19, participation in girls competitive cheer was 6715 students with an injury prevalence rate of 1.95%. In 2019-20 participation was 6567 with an injury prevalence of 2.09%. 2021-22 data shows participation as 5741 with a head injury prevalence rate of 1.67%. 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 54 head injuries in girls competitive cheer so far in 2022-23.

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:

- a. Add a Switch Back Walkover to the 1.2 category in Round 2
- b. Remove 10-point penalty for under-mandate in Round 2.
- c. Provide the allowance for additional transitions from and to static inversions.
- d. Round 1, 2 and 3 Deduction Charts.

DISCUSSION ITEMS BY COMPETITIVE CHEER COMMITTEE

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee continues 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 and information 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. Discussion indicated 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.

Because of the similarity between competitive cheer and sideline cheerleading, a school that sponsors MHSAA girls competitive cheer may currently not hold any cheer activities from the end of winter sports (last Monday of March) through the 3rd Friday in May. This restriction prevents competitive cheer teams or individuals from holding out-of-season activities under the premise of sideline cheer practices or tryouts. The committee suggested that this period be expanded and to start the period at the end of winter sports (current policy) until the end of post-season spring competitions. This would provide students in spring sports to have less of a conflict with scheduled cheerleading tryouts and/or other activities until the completion of all spring competitions.

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee also discussed and provided a proposal for the season of girls competitive cheer to start one week later, due to the overlap that is currently occurring with individuals who are also in sideline cheerleading (and cheering for football), oftentimes until late November. This one-week later start would provide a “rest gap” between moving immediately from one activity to another.

Discussion also included the restructuring of the various rounds and reorganizing the choreography chart. The focus will continue to be on how a format change can improve the sport and the long-time effects of doing so, as well as increasing participation in the sport.

The proposals provided initiated discussion regarding whether there should continue to be a penalty for teams that had less than their division-mandated number as there was sentiment that numbers were low in all sports and teams were not as large as in the past. The conversation evolved into whether the penalty was still necessary. There was opinion on both sides of the issue as some also felt that if the penalty was not in place, teams would put a minimal number of athletes on the floor.

Discussion included other proposals that came from the Competitive Cheer Coaches Association and the sub-committee which included some updates to the insert; review of the middle school rules; requiring flair points to be earned at elevator level and higher; as well as adding a switch back walkover to the 1.2 category in Round 2 with a specific definition provided. Also considered was the removal of the 10-point penalty for under-mandate in Round 2, while not removing the requirement that other rounds could not supersede the numbers placed on the floor in Round 2. A review of Round 1, 2 and 3 deduction charts was provided as well as consideration in providing the allowance for additional transitions from and to static inversions.

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 will continue. 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. Additionally, this group would be charged with adding any other new updates to the Girls Competitive Cheer Manual. Also discussed was the continuance of the Task Force for review of the choreography chart as well as restructure/realignment of the rounds of competition.

2021-22 GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER TOURNAMENT INFORMATION

The 2022-23 Competitive Cheer Tournament will hold Districts on Friday and Saturday, February 17 and 18, 2023. There will be six Districts in four Divisions which will each have four teams progress to eight Regionals the following week on Saturday, February 25, 2023. Four teams from each of the eight Regionals will move to the Finals at the McGuirk Arena at Central Michigan University on Thursday, March 2 and Friday, March 3, 2023. This will include four separate sessions of girls competitive cheer, scheduled at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Thursday and 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Friday.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

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

1. Expand the restricted period in girls competitive cheer to start at the end of winter sports (current policy) until the end of post-season spring competitions (3rd Saturday in June). This would allow students to participate in spring sports/activities and try out for sideline cheerleading after completing all spring competitions. (9-0)
2. Delay the starting date for girls competitive cheer by one week, which would reduce the length of the season by one week to provide a gap between sideline cheerleading and girls competitive cheer. This would mean practice would commence two Mondays before Thanksgiving rather than three Mondays before Thanksgiving. The finals dates would remain the same. (9-0)