



A COACHING GUIDE

TO EASY AND FUN

CHEERLEADING TRYOUTS



Thoughts to Ponder

When it comes to planning for cheerleading tryouts, coaches have their work cut out for them. Not only do cheerleading coaches have to plan their tryout schedule but they have to deal with a large group of parents, a large number of disappointed girls, attitudes and many other factors. As a coach, if you can't conduct a well organized cheerleading tryout session, you probably aren't going to be able to work with your squad much better. That's why it is so important to get started out with a good plan, some outside help if you need it and a firm hand to control a group of very excited young people.

It is very important for you to remember as you begin to think about tryouts, what it is you hope to see in your team. You need to think about training and who will be best suited for the team and who won't be. Who will be a team player through your observation and who won't? It is your job to find a team which is going to perform well together as a team. You don't want any prima donnas on the team if you can avoid it because very often, one person can cause the team many problems.

Keep in mind as you begin to plan your tryout session, it is important to approach the tryouts with simplicity. Depending on the age group, you may or may not want to include any stunts or gymnastics in the tryouts. After all, a talented child who can do perfect handsprings will certainly show you this at the appropriate time just so they are certain you can see what they can do!

As a coach, you will have plenty of time to coach in the very near future. For now, it is just important to follow a tryout schedule and teach the group a few basics so you can move throughout the tryouts without consequence. If you jump in and coach a large group, you won't be able to pick up on the girls (Or guys) who have natural ability and you may waste a lot of time on some individuals who just don't get it. Find a plan to follow for the tryouts, make your tryout announcement, meet with parents and the girls separately, and then let the tryouts begin!

Posting your Announcement and Getting Ready

Once you have decided when you are going to run the tryout period, post your announcement through the options you have available. If this is a school sponsored team, then take the time to announce it over the intercom at the school you represent and give at least a week's notice. Community teams and other cheerleading squads can be posted in the newspaper and area bulletin boards. You can also send out flyers to the area schools too.

Once you have made your announcement, put together an information sheet which details when the girls should show up for day one of the tryouts. It is a good idea to have the parents meet the night before or an hour or so before the girls get together to start tryouts. Older groups can be kept together but for coaching younger groups, it is just a good idea to keep the girls separate from their parents for the initial meeting.

Before the initial meeting with the parents and youngsters you will be coaching, make some note so you are sure you cover everything you intend to cover the day of the meeting and first day of tryouts. Plan for a successful meeting and remember to maintain control over your groups when you speak so you can deliver your message on how things will be conducted at your tryout. You also need to go ahead and prepare your handouts so you'll have these ready too when it is time to meet! In your handouts, you will want to have a medical release form as well as any rules parents need to know.

Meeting with Parents

Some coaches think you should make your initial meeting with the parents and children together but if you want to get your point across, especially if you are dealing with middle school teams or an all-star team; separate the meetings. It just works to your advantage as a coach.

When you meet with your parents, the first thing you want to do is to explain who you are and a brief introduction to your background. Don't spend a lot of time on this and move on into the meeting. Explain you are going to be conducting a three day tryout, which is long enough by the way, and what your expectations are for the team. Then go right into covering what the girls will need for tryouts.

Basically, you want the girls to all dress pretty much the same during tryouts. White T-shirts or a solid color is fine with dark gym shorts. Explain that the girls should put their hair up in a pony tail if it is long and tennis shoes

are required. Beyond the basics, you shouldn't have too many restrictions on what parents will have to buy. Remember, this is a tryout and many parents can not afford to take a plunge for particular attire when they don't even know if their child is going to make the team.

After you cover what you expect the participant to wear, move on into what you will be looking for when you choose your squad. Based on several standard grading forms for cheerleading tryouts, the following are some thoughts on what you should cover:

- You are going to be looking for cheerleaders who can smile with some level of sincerity and hopefully a lot of it!
- You are going to be looking for someone who maintains eye contact.
- You'll be looking for a lot of enthusiasm and spunk.
- You want cheerleaders who can use sharp, precise hand motions in their cheers.
- You want the girls to be loud and project a lot of team spirit.
- You will look for team members who are capable of being a team player.
- Decide if you want to mention stunts and jumps and if you do, mention these too and what you are looking for such as timing and form.
- Tell the parents to encourage their kids to be fun and just be who they are!

- Tell the parents you will be looking at all of these things when the girls work together on group cheers as well as when they are working on cheers as individuals.
- While you have the parents together, go over the commitment factor. Cheerleading can be a financial burden on some families and you need to address this as well as time commitments. Some teams, especially all star teams will make practices mandatory. If the participant can't be at practices, then they can lose their space on the team. Whatever your policy is, make sure you cover it before the tryouts begin.
- Anything you can cover which you feel will make it easier for the parents and for you as far as rules and expectations should be covered thoroughly.

Basically, you want to get the point across you are looking for natural cheerleaders who can have fun being themselves while making it look easy trying out for cheerleader. Instruct the parents to really encourage their son or daughter to be enthusiastic.

Think of Taylor Hicks on American Idol in 2006. The man could literally dance and sing his way around anyone and pep them right up. One reason many fans liked him was because he really stood out in a crowd. You could tell he really wanted to win the competition but his showmanship was so natural. The best thing he did when he was in groups with the other idols was to bring out the best in them by encouraging them to cut loose. This showed he was a star. Cheerleading coaches need that kind of enthusiasm from their cheerleaders. They need the kind of enthusiasm which will drive

the stadium crowds or gymnasium crowds to their feet because as the old adage states, “enthusiasm is contagious”.

At the parent meeting you need to make it perfectly clear how you will be judging the girls and how you will make your cuts and so forth. Many coaches recommend a three-day tryout schedule with a cut at the end of days one, two and three and if you run a three-day schedule, you will probably need to do this. If you run a four-day schedule, at the end of day one, you will not make a cut. However, when the girls finish day 2, a cut will be made and again at day 3 and day 4.

If you are conducting tryouts for a school team, don't be insensitive, make your cuts after practice so the participants who didn't make it can have time to go home and adjust. It's really thoughtless for teachers and coaches to announce a cut by posting it on the wall at school for students to see first thing in the morning at school. It's actually pretty stupid too because in some cases, the student becomes so upset, the parent must pick their child up early. Please, as a coach show some maturity and conduct the cuts in an adult manner.

When you meet with your parents, explain to them how many girls will make the squad, re-iterate what you are looking for if needed, and discuss when the cuts will take place. Go over how they should approach this with their children should their child not make the cut. Also mention you will not be changing your mind once the cuts have been made and enforce that all decisions are final. Then ask for questions and dismiss.

The girls who are trying out for cheerleader will probably have more questions and you probably won't be so lucky to have a short meeting with the participants who are trying out! Let's move on to tryouts now.

Meeting with Your Cheerleading Hopefuls

From the beginning of the tryouts, you need to establish some ground rules, go over expectations and what it will take for someone to earn their spot on your squad. You'll want to keep things moving along because if you slow down you won't have time to observe everyone fairly. A well thought-out plan should help you keep the tryouts moving along. Day one should take about 3 ½ hours which will enable you to meet with the girls and then move straight into the tryouts. This is one reason it is a very good idea to meet with parents the day before if possible so the girls show up prepared.

From the start, as we mentioned, this is a time for you to plan more than coach so making tryouts as simple as possible is in your best interest. When you first meet with the girls, tell them who you are and what you are looking for in a team. Tell them what you are going to expect from them if they are chosen for the squad and how many places are even available on your team. Then move into covering as many of the following points as necessary.

- For starters, you need to let the girls know the more popular girls, the prettier girls nor the girls who have the most money will find their spot on your team unless they are a good cheerleader. While this may even be a bit difficult to discuss in some cases, you still need to skim

right over and then move on. Make the girls understand you don't care how great they are, you care how good they can cheer and what they will do for the overall squad. Everyone starts on the same page and with an equal chance to make your team.

- Explain that in order to be considered for the squad, the girls must be on time and they must be dressed out and ready to try out. No exceptions unless they have a viable doctor's excuse.
- Let the girls know conflicts have no place on your squad and if they make the team, you will be addressing this more directly.
- All cuts are final. Make the girls understand that cheerleading isn't for everyone and this squad isn't for everyone. Explain to them just because they don't make your squad doesn't mean they won't make it some other time or doesn't mean they should just give up.
- Explain to the team whether or not stunts will be part of the practice, which really isn't recommended, and then give safety instructions if stunts will be included.
- Only people who are trying out for cheerleader should be at the practice. In other words, leave the boyfriend and parents outside of practice and tryouts.
- Be respectful of others when it is their turn to tryout.
- Go over what you are looking for in your cheerleaders such as pep, enthusiasm, athletic ability, cheer motions, timing, voice projection, appearance, vocal strength and good eye contact are just a few things you should cover.
- If this is a school team, cover what you expect from members of the team. Some squads require a C+ average or better and an attendance

policy too. Also, cover moral issues and how this is important to the squad.

Generally, you want to cover your expectations for the team and what you are looking for in cheerleaders but you also want to get a point across too. You don't have time for foolishness on your squad. Particularly when you group together a bunch of girls, you can have problems keeping a good focus on what's important. Show the participants what you view as important, firmly cover your expectations and move into tryout mode.

Expectations for Tryouts

After you have gone over general guidelines with the girls trying out for the squad, you need to move into a tryout schedule. Many variations of tryouts can work but generally, it is wise to split the girls up into several groups and have a previous squad member who isn't trying out for a place on the team to introduce chants and cheers. For a three-day tryout, 2 cheers and a chant is about all you can expect the girls to learn along with a group cheer. For a four-day tryout, maybe add another group cheer. This can be at your discretion.

After you have organized groups, have the group leader teach the cheers and motions to the girls. Include some cheers which incorporate the high "V" motion, the candle sticks, touchdown and "L" motion as well as any others. Teach the motions and cheers for individual cheers. Ideally, as the groups are working on perfecting their skill, the coach and any judges should move

around the room so they can take some notes. Also, keep your ears open. Do you hear a trouble maker in the group? If so, remember it because you want to avoid placing a gossip on your team if it is blatantly obvious. As you are walking around the room, pay attention to who appears to catch on quickly and who doesn't. See who understands what coaches want to see and who doesn't.

If you are making a first cut the same day, make the last cheer exercise a group cheer and then move the girls into tryout mode. Break the group down into groups of 4 or 5 and ask for name introductions. Most likely a round-off or a cartwheel will accommodate the introduction but not always.

Sometimes jumps precede the introduction too. After all of the girls have introduced themselves, have them start the cheer. At the end, move to the next group and so on. During the tryouts, use a rating system for deciding who you want to keep and who gets the cut.

One rating system which has been proven to be very effective is the following:

COMPONENT	Poor(1)	Fair (2)	Good (3)	Perfect (4)
Good Motions				
Appearance				
Vocal				
Eye Contact				
Energy				
Enthusiasm				
Group Cheer				
Single Cheer				
Overall				

On the last page of this booklet, is a pull-out sheet for you to use in your tryouts which you will find very effective. It is handy to use when you want to keep everyone's scores together. Simply make copies and pass these out to your judges.

Once you have a score for everyone, this system makes it easy to compare and make your selection based on the overall score for each person. Once you have the score, you can move to make the announcement. During the tallying process, have someone go over the cheers one last time and make comments on things to remember. Offer encouragement as the girls wait for the big news.

Once the tally process is over, the head coach should make the announcement in regards to the first cut. Explain the scoring process and then explain how very often the scores all run extremely close and can not be used as an indicator in their overall talent when matched up for comparison. Many coaches will give the girls their score sheets everyday but this is a mistake. Only offer score sheets the final day the person leaves and if possible in a sealed envelope. If you don't offer the scores, this can also be a mistake because the girls do need to know where they can improve.

The best way to decide how to cut the girls is by dividing it out equally. For example, if you have 40 people trying out for 10 spots then you would make three cuts of 10 with the final 10 left standing as the cheerleaders who made the squad.

When making cuts, a good way to do this is to divide up the participants in several groups and then ask for group one to meet you outside and tell them as they leave if they are going home or if they are coming back the next day. This is good to help minimize rejection and to help alleviate any “rubbing the person’s nose in it”. Simply divide the girls up and step outside in a quiet area and before you tell the girls they can move on to the next day, instruct them to hold their enthusiasm until they are in the car headed home. For the group you are sending home, offer quick words of encouragement and then send them on their way.

Remember, a good coach is a people-builder and a team player, so trying to find ways to gently let down young people is best for everyone. Remember, kids can be cruel sometimes so you don’t want to set up anyone to have their feelings hurt. Cheerleading is often a little girl’s dream and if coaches will view it as such, perhaps they can find a way to be kind to the kids who are unable to realize their dream.

After day one, you should have a general idea of whether or not you have a good group of girls trying out for cheerleader. If you think you need to see more of what the girls can do, add another cheer or change things up. Be creative because this is your tryout!

Remember, you are looking at a team who will be with you quite a few hours per day. You will spend a lot of time with the girls who make your squad. You want to make the right choice and in order to do this, you need to be fair to the girls and look at the well-rounded person—personality,

voice projection, eye contact, and everything else we've discussed should all be considered as equal components of the score card.

As you move through the tryout session, keep in mind you should run the cuts the same after days one and two. Remember, your third and final cut will occur on day three. Rather than split the girls up into large groups, split them up into pairs and meet them outside to tell each pair whether or not they made it. A lot of reason for doing the cuts like this is because no one is left to feel alone when they hear the bad news which makes the news a little more tolerable. Another way to handle the final cut is to ask the girls to come outside one by one and you can ask the parents to wait outside with you. Hand the girls their envelope which will give them their results and they can find out when they open the envelope at home.

Remember, forethought and organization will help you run a smooth and successful cheerleading tryout. Plan ahead for the best squad you've ever had and make this an enjoyable and unforgettable season. If you run a tight tryout session, you'll end up with the best possible cheerleading squad.

Practice Plan Suggested for the Tryouts Day One

3:00-3:30 Meet and explain groups and proposed schedule

It is important for the girls to know exactly what is expected of them and they should know what you will be looking for when you begin judging. You should let the girls know time is of the essence and they must focus on learning the cheers.

3:30-4:00 Break up into groups for practice

When you break up into groups, you need to immediately begin to work on the cheers the girls will need to know for the tryouts at the end of Day One. It is important for you to give the girls an easy cheer to learn for the first tryout so they can catch on fast and sail through the tryout without a big problem. Cheer movements for this cheer should be very basic.

4:00-4:10 Take a 10 minute break

4:15-5:00 Finish cheer practices in groups

Go ahead and show the girls all of the cheers they will need to know for the tryouts and then revisit the cheer they need to know for the tryout on day one. Then, energize your group, it's time to tryout!

5:05-5:30 Tryouts

Using the score cards in the back of the book, judge your participants on their performances.

5:45-6:00 First Cut

Practice Plan Suggested for the Tryouts Day Two

3:00-3:15 Brief Meeting

Go over what you want your cheerleaders to focus on in their groups and move towards quickly going into the groups for practice.

3:15-4:15 Break up into Groups

Focus the first group meeting on the cheers which will be performed for the day's tryout.

4:15-4:25 Take a ten minute break

4:25-5:00 Finish Cheer Practice in Groups

Go over the cheers for the rest of the tryout period and pump up your groups with enthusiasm day two tryouts are straight ahead!

5:00-5:30 Tryouts

5:45-6:00 Second Cut

Practice Plan Suggested for the Tryouts Day Three

3:00-3:15 Brief Meeting

Go over what you want your cheerleaders to do in their groups and go quickly into the groups for practice.

3:15-4:15 Break up into Groups

Focus the first group meeting on the cheers which will be performed for the final tryout.

4:15-4:25 Take a ten minute break

4:25-5:00 Finish Cheer Practice in Groups

Go over the cheers again and remind your group that this is the last chance to prove they are meant to be a cheerleader on this squad!

5:00-5:30 Tryouts

5:45-6:00 Final Cut

