

STUNT Game: Executive Summary

Over the past five years, USA Cheer has been exploring the creation of a new competitive discipline that would derive out of cheer as a way to grow the activity and expand participation opportunities for young people. USA Cheer recognizes that the growing prominence and movement on this issue at the interscholastic and intercollegiate level over the past year has elevated the urgency of **USA Cheer's** timing to develop a new, exclusively competitive discipline of cheer.

Specifically, there is a growing body of schools at both the high school and college level that have created different models of competitive cheer in hopes to count it as a sport for Title IX purposes. However, none of these programs have been successful so far in gaining the approval of the Department of Education. To ensure that this new sport is developed properly, in a way that preserves traditional cheerleading and creates a new discipline that provides additional opportunities for athletes, is feasible and compliant with the law, **USA Cheer** created a new sport called STUNT and launched an initiative to have it recognized as an NCAA Emerging Sport.

STUNT Overview:

STUNT is a new competitive team sport that has derived from traditional cheerleading. STUNT removes the crowd-leading and focuses on the technical and athletic components of cheer, which include partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, jumps, and tumbling skills. Each contest will consist of four quarters (Partner Stunts, Pyramids & Tosses, Group Jumps & Tumbling, and Team Performance) with a halftime in between the second and third quarters.

In STUNT, the rules and scoring system are focused solely on performance evaluation and there are only two teams competing at a time. There is one set of rules and one scoring system that is followed at every game. The competition is much more objective and thus easy to follow for the crowd with the head to head format. Judges are primarily in place to evaluate the execution of predetermined skills and the technique used by the team when performing their different elements.

Predetermined routines in each of the technical areas (Partner Stunts, Pyramids & Tosses, Group Jumps & Tumbling, and Team Performance) are distributed to all STUNT teams at the start of the season and the coach with possession selects the routine to be performed head to head. The new format incorporates all the excitement of a typical cheerleading competition, coupled with the coaching strategy of a regular sporting event. The fourth quarter is the "Team Performance," which allows teams to incorporate their entire team and arsenal into a two minute and 15 second routine.

Anyone who follows sports will be able to follow STUNT. The head to head format simplifies the scoring process, while also allows the fans to track the results of the competition as each quarter is completed. Games will last approximately an hour and fifteen minutes and teams compete simultaneously on the mat similar to most other sports. Because of the new format, teams will have records and national rankings which will determine their post-season play, much like other sports. In addition, post-season play can be tracked by the fans, much like "March Madness." For more details on STUNT, go to www.usacheer.net or <http://collegestunt.org>.

Dear High School Coaches and Athletic Administrators,

USA Cheer has developed a new derivation of cheerleading—STUNT (which is descriptive of the technical skills performed while competing)—as part of its NCAA Emerging Sport initiative that launched during the 2010-2011 school year. After careful deliberation with colleagues in the cheerleading community and consultation with Title IX and athletics experts, we believe that STUNT will be able to develop as a NCAA Emerging Sport and into a sport that can assist institutions in meeting their compliance requirements under Title IX, while still protecting and respecting the integrity of traditional cheerleading and the valuable role it plays on many college campuses today.

While our initial efforts are focused at the collegiate level, we also feel that STUNT can be a valuable addition to the athletic offerings for high schools as well. Not only does it offer a new sport opportunity to a wide pool of interested girls and women, but it also serves as a solution the growing criticism and scrutiny the Office for Civil Rights is placing on athletic associations and schools that count classic cheer for Title IX purposes.

STUNT provides an effective way for schools to expand participation opportunities for young people. It is an attractive sport for high schools to consider as:

STUNT Offers:

- High participation rates (30 person roster)
- High recruiting pool with significant interest in the pipeline
- Built in competition schedule and championship structure

During the 2011-2012 school year, USA Cheer will be working closely with high school administrators to craft STUNT in a way that will be most effective for the high school level. It is our hope that with input and assistance from coaches and administrators such as you, STUNT will become a widely adopted interscholastic sport for the 2012-2013 school year.

We have put together the following guide, to help familiarize you with the rules of STUNT and how USA Cheer can support you in your efforts to add this as a varsity sport at your school. Please keep in mind that this guide is meant to be viewed as a living document that will be improved and updated throughout the season.

This guide contains:

- **Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About STUNT**
- **Title IX Analysis of STUNT**

USA Cheer hopes that you will join our efforts to develop STUNT as an interscholastic sport and look forward to working closely with you in this endeavor.

To get started, or for more information, please contact Bill Seely at bseely@usacheer.net or (888)899-8964.

**Bill Seely
Executive Director, USA Cheer**

Questions and Answers: STUNT as an Emerging Sport

I Sport Overview

1. What is STUNT?

STUNT is a new competitive team sport that has derived from traditional cheerleading. STUNT removes the crowd-leading and focuses on the technical and athletic components of cheer, which include partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, jumps and tumbling skills. Each contest will consist of four quarters of play (Partner Stunts, Pyramids & Tosses, Group Jumps & Tumbling, and Team Performance) with a halftime in between the second and third quarters

2. How is STUNT different from traditional cheer?

In traditional cheerleading, teams are primarily focused on crowd leadership at other sports' athletic contests. When traditional cheerleading teams engage in competition, it is by combining the unique skills of crowd-leading. These routines include actual game cheers and chants as well as the use of signs and include "crowd leadership" and other entertainment categories in their scoring. The rules governing these skills take into account that they will be performing during games as well as in competition settings. For example, there are rules for traditional cheerleading that restrict what skills can be performed at basketball games. Being that there are a wide range of traditional cheerleading styles and ability levels, the rules may change from one competition to another.

In STUNT, the rules and scoring system are focused solely on routine execution and there are only two teams competing at a time. There is one set of rules and one scoring system that is followed at every game. The competition is much more objective with the head to head format. Judges are primarily in place to evaluate the execution of predetermined skills and the technique used by the team when performing their different elements.

II. Participation

3. Why should schools offer a varsity STUNT team for its students?

STUNT provides an effective way for schools to expand participation opportunities for women. It is a sport with widespread interest in the pipeline, as there currently are over 450,000 girls participating in the competition only discipline of cheer—All Star—at the youth level. With a 30-person roster, STUNT provides colleges and universities with an effective way to expand its female sports offerings and help improve compliance with Title IX.

4. Why does STUNT require such a high number to field a team?

Because of the physical exertion and nature of STUNT, the new sport requires a higher number of athletes to participate. The average quarter will utilize on average 16-20 athletes, providing an additional 10 athletes for development and potential substitution much like any other sport.

III. Legal Obligations

5. Do schools have a legal obligation to provide equal participation opportunities for men and women?

Title IX requires that schools provide equitable athletic participation opportunities for its female and male students. In order to comply with these requirements schools institutions must pass one of these three tests:

- a) Proportionality-males and females participate in athletics in numbers substantially proportional to their respective enrollments in school, or
- b) History and Continued Practice of Program Expansion-the institution shows a history and continuing practice of program expansion which is demonstrably responsive to the developing interests and abilities of members of the underrepresented sex, or
- c) Full Accommodation of Interests and Abilities- the institution demonstrates that the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex (females) are fully and effectively accommodated by the existing programs.

An institution fulfills the compliance requirement for participant opportunities if it adheres to any (or just one) of the three tests listed above. By adding a STUNT team for women, institutions can improve their ability to comply with these three tests.

6. How will STUNT meet the Office for Civil Right's standards of a sport to qualify for Title IX purposes?

To determine whether a team is engaging in a varsity sport, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has developed a detailed set of guidelines to determine on a case-by-case basis if the activity in question meets the criteria for sport. Specifically, it considers several factors related to an activity's structure, administration, team preparation, and competition.

Because there is a presumption by OCR that traditional cheerleading is not considered a sport for Title IX purposes, USA Cheer has developed STUNT as a separate discipline from cheer that is designed specifically in accordance with the OCR's guidelines for sport. For example, the exclusive purpose of the STUNT Team is competition, it has a fully developed regular season and post season competition schedule, and it is governed and regulated by an established national governing body—USA Cheer. USA Cheer is officially recognized by Cheer's international governing body, the International Cheer Union, which now has 91 countries as members.

USA Cheer is working closely with legal and Title IX experts to ensure that STUNT is created under the proper guidelines so that it can develop into a sport that qualifies for Title IX purposes. Because of the sensitivity to the entire issue of cheerleading as a sport, USA Cheer's development of STUNT with this clear differentiation will help expedite the approval process with OCR.

IV. Devising Programs

7. How will schools be able to identify enough participants to field a viable team without taking away from its traditional cheerleading squad?

Athletics is not a zero-sum environment in which the participation of students in STUNT comes at the expense of the loss of participation of students in traditional cheerleading. Opening STUNT teams to women should not be viewed as a loss of participation in traditional cheer, but a broadening of opportunities for women to compete that will only serve to expand the participation and growth of women in sports.

Furthermore, there are more than enough women and girls interested in Cheer and STUNT to field squads for both. For example, at the youth level, there currently are over 450,000 girls participating in the competition only discipline of cheer- All Star—and yet there are still over 600,000 high school girls participating in traditional cheer. By offering STUNT teams, high schools will open a whole new range of participation opportunities that were otherwise closed for these young women and girls to participate in their sport at an interscholastic varsity level.

8. Aren't injury rates, particularly for catastrophic injuries much higher for cheerleaders?

No. This is a common misconception that has been based on inaccurate media reporting. According to studies, ten other high school sports have a higher rate of injury, including three female sports: female soccer, female hockey and female gymnastics.

Studies that compare cheerleading to football don't include participation data nor the fact that cheerleaders participate year round. Studies that include this participation data actually show that injury rates are similar to that of women's soccer¹.

9. What type of training is required for coaches and administrators to provide STUNT Teams? What resources are available to assist with this process?

USA Cheer recognizes the benefits of the AACCA Safety Course, which is a risk management program that addresses risk minimization for cheerleading skills. As the skills in STUNT derive from cheerleading skills, the AACCA risk management course is an important resource for STUNT coaches. The course addresses the medical and legal responsibilities of a program as well as proper skill progression and performer readiness.

Again, as a derivative of cheerleading, there are many state and national coaching clinics where STUNT coaches can gather with their peers and stay up to date on skill and safety techniques. These venues will also provide opportunity to recruit and promote their STUNT program.

¹ See <http://www.aacca.org/safetystudy>

V. Rules Governing Competition

10. How will competitions/games/tournaments be structured to ensure that new STUNT Teams have enough regular season and post season competition?

STUNT will be designated as a Spring sport at the collegiate level. At the interscholastic level, USA Cheer will work with the state high school associations to determine the season that makes the most sense in that state. The competition format will feature teams competing in both head to head and a tournament style competition. As an interscholastic sport, each team would be required to compete in a minimum number of competitions during the regular season as other comparable varsity sports.

USA Cheer will work with institutions to identify competition venues in schools' area. Additionally, USA Cheer will assist administrators in working with other schools in their conferences to ensure that there is a reasonable expectation of competition within their same geographic region or conference.

STUNT competitions will be added as a new division level, for interscholastic varsity teams only, to existing cheerleading tournaments and meets in order to easily accommodate the competition requirement and minimize traveling costs for institutions. USA Cheer will work with tournament providers to host the post-season competition meet, which will feature the top teams, which are determined based on records and national ranking.

11. How will STUNT competitions be scored and evaluated?

STUNT competitions will be evaluated by trained officials that will determine the level of execution and synchronization between team members and team groups. Each STUNT game will consist of multiple events which will each produce a score that will be added to the score total for that team. Teams will be ranked according to their overall record and total points from their games.

12. What types of facilities and equipment will a STUNT team require?

The general facility requirements would be a basketball court with room to lay down the standard 54'x42' mat floor, and with a minimum ceiling height of 25 feet. A spring-loaded gymnastics floor is not a requirement but can be suitable for a practice area. There is no other required equipment, but additional optional equipment may be training aids such as wedge mats and spotting belts.

STUNT: Title IX Analysis

Legal Analysis:

In order for STUNT to qualify as a varsity sport for Title IX purposes, OCR considers, on a case-by-case basis, several factors related to an activity's structure, administration, team preparation, and competition. Below is a detailed description of these factors and how STUNT addresses these areas.

- I. **Program Structure and Administration**— Taking into account the unique aspects inherent in the nature and basic operation of specific sports, OCR considers whether the activity is structured and administered in a manner consistent with established intercollegiate or interscholastic varsity sports in the institution's athletics program, including:
 - A. Whether the operating budget, support services (including academic, sports medicine and strength and conditioning support) and coaching staff are administered by the athletics department or another entity, and are provided in a manner consistent with established varsity sports; and

STUNT: *As an interscholastic sport, STUNT teams will be subject to the state high school athletic association rules and regulations similar to other interscholastic varsity sports and entitled to the same benefits and treatment. This would include for example having access to comparable resources for training, coaching salaries, and facilities and equipment as other varsity sports at the institution. The general facility requirement for STUNT programs would be a basketball court with room to lay down the standard floor, and with a minimum ceiling height of 25 feet. Additionally, as an interscholastic, STUNT would be subject to the state high school athletic association rules and regulations concerning the elements of strength and conditioning, daily practices, structured state high school athletic association competition and academic eligibility standards.*

Whether the participants in the activity are eligible to receive athletic scholarships and athletic awards (e.g., varsity awards) if available to athletes in established varsity sports; to the extent that an institution recruits participants in its athletics program, whether participants in the activity are recruited in a manner consistent with established varsity sports.

STUNT: *STUNT team participants would be eligible for athletic scholarships at institutions. At the collegiate level, the number recommended for STUNT is a maximum of 24 scholarships, the actual allocation of which is based solely on an administrative decision and will most likely not reach 24 in the first year of development. Just as in any other varsity sport— male and female—institutional size and budget situation of each athletic department will determine scholarship availability.*

As an interscholastic sport, STUNT teams will be subject to the same recruiting rules and regulations as other interscholastic varsity sports. STUNT coaching staff will have recruiting budgets (if applicable as compared to other varsity sports) and will be able to tour the high school competitive cheerleading competition circuit in order to identify potential STUNT athletes.

II. Team Preparation and Competition — Taking into account the unique aspects inherent in the nature and basic operation of specific sports, OCR considers whether the team prepares for and engages in competition in a manner consistent with established varsity sports in the institution's intercollegiate or interscholastic athletics program, including:

- A. Whether the practice opportunities (e.g., number, length and quality) are available in a manner consistent with established varsity sports in the institution's athletics program; and
- **STUNT:** *As with other varsity sports, the high school athletic association will designate a specific limit on hours of practice and strength and conditioning time for both the off-season and playing season.*
- B. Whether the regular season competitive opportunities differ quantitatively and/or qualitatively from established varsity sports; whether the team competes against intercollegiate or interscholastic varsity opponents in a manner consistent with established varsity sports;
- When analyzing this factor, the following may be taken into consideration:
 - 1. Whether the number of competitions and length of play are predetermined by a governing athletics organization, an athletic conference, or a consortium of institutions;
 - 2. Whether the competitive schedule reflects the abilities of the team; and
 - 3. Whether the activity has a defined season; whether the season is determined by a governing athletics organization, an athletic conference, or a consortium.

STUNT: *STUNT will be designated as a Spring sport at the collegiate level. At the interscholastic level, USA Cheer will work with the state high school associations to determine the season that makes the most sense in that state. The competition format will feature teams competing in both head to head and a tournament style competition. As an interscholastic sport, each team would be required to compete in a minimum number of competitions during the regular season as other comparable varsity sports.,*

USA Cheer is working with institutions to identify competition venues in schools' geographic region. Initially, STUNT games and tournaments will be added as a new division level, for interscholastic varsity teams only, to existing cheerleading competitions in order to easily accommodate the competition requirement and minimize traveling costs for institutions.

- C. If pre-season and/or post-season competition exists for the activity, whether the activity provides an opportunity for student athletes to engage in the pre-season and/or post-season competition in a manner consistent with established varsity sports; for example, whether state, national and/or conference championships exist for the activity; and

STUNT: *USA Cheer will work with the state high school athletic associations to host a post-season national championship at the end of the season, which will feature the top interscholastic teams playing in a tournament. The teams attending the national championship will be determined based on overall record and national ranking.*

As more STUNT teams are added at the interscholastic level and conferences reach a minimum of five teams, USA Cheer will work with high school conferences to develop conference play, conference standings and a conference championship that will feed into the national championship. In addition, USA Cheer will establish the STUNT All Conference and All American program that will be administered through USA Cheer's All American Selection Committee (a committee of STUNT coaches, administrators and former athletes). All Americans will be nominated by position, by their coaches and are selected by the selection committee based on three primary areas; Athletic Ability, Academic Performance and Leadership Abilities.

- D. Whether the primary purpose of the activity is to provide athletic competition at the intercollegiate or interscholastic varsity levels rather than to support or promote other athletic activities.
- When analyzing this factor, the following may be taken into consideration:
 1. Whether the activity is governed by a specific set of rules of play adopted by a state, national, or conference organization and/or consistent with established varsity sports, which include objective, standardized criteria by which competition must be judged;
 2. Whether resources for the activity (e.g., practice and competition schedules, coaching staff) are based on the competitive needs of the team;
 3. If post-season competition opportunities are available, whether participation in post-season competition is dependent on or related to regular season results in a manner consistent with established varsity sports; and
 4. Whether the selection of teams/participants is based on factors related primarily to athletic ability.

STUNT: *The sole purpose of STUNT is to provide interscholastic athletic competition opportunities. STUNT is governed by a permanent and uniform set of rules and guidelines that all STUNT teams must use in all competitions. STUNT was established by USA Cheer, the national governing body for all disciplines of cheer, USA Cheer is a board governed 501 (c) 6 that through its delegate membership provides a formalized structure to serve all the stakeholders in the cheer community with National Championships, formalized safety*

standards and rules that are designed specifically for each discipline and over 1,000 competitions across the country. In addition, each year USA Cheer puts together two national cheerleading teams to represent the United States in international competition.

Unlike traditional cheerleading, STUNT removes all the crowd-leading and performances, and instead focuses exclusively on the technical and athletic components of cheer. This includes partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, jumps and tumbling skills. Each game will consist of four quarters with a halftime between the second and third quarter. 1) Partner Stunts; 2) Pyramids & Tosses; 3) Group Jumps & Tumbling; 4) Team Performance.

STUNT games and tournaments will be staffed with trained officials that will evaluate execution and synchronization between team members and team groups. Each STUNT game/tournament will consist of four quarters which will each produce a score that will be added to the score total for that team.