

Cheerleading: All That Glitters

By : [cheerchick2526](#)

A comparison between School and All-star Cheerleading.

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Morgan Taylor

Professor Judith Carr-Back

English III AP

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Females from all over are banding together to ensure a certain activity is classified as a sport. Although legally America does not consider this activity a sport; it is a sport to an enormous amount of people. This sport is cheerleading. Cheerleading has evolved dramatically at the All Star level; sadly NFL cheerleaders have not. It has multiplied its purpose also. Some people choose to partake in high school cheerleading. While others, mostly the ones who dedicate their lives to this sport, venture to become a member of a more difficult form of cheerleading; All Star cheer. These two types of cheerleading have very different practice sessions, physical skills, and spirit.

High school cheerleaders are at a disadvantage compared to All Star cheerleaders when it comes to practices. The high school cheerleaders normally practice in a school gymnasium. If they are lucky, they get the chance to pull out the wrestling mats and practice on top of those. All Star cheerleaders practice in a large, high-ceilinged building specifically built or bought for their practices. Not only is this building spacious, but it is also equipped with spring floors, trampolines, different foam pieces (used to train for tumbling), and sometimes cushioned walls.

The focus of practices also differs greatly between the two cheer types. High school cheerleaders spend practice learning new chants. If they are not learning new ones, they are perfecting old ones. They also use practice times for team bonding and planning. All Star cheerleaders use their practices for multiple things every single practice day. Often times they will work on tumbling (gymnastic moves), stunting (building people on top of people, like a pyramid), and dancing. However, their focus is normally on all of these combined to create a routine, and then perform the routine to a remixed version of music with a lot of sound effects. After they create their routine, the All Star cheerleaders and coaches will tweak it to a precise piece to music.

Besides practices, the physical skill needed and used between the two cheerleading branches is the largest difference they have. While high school cheerleaders do attempt cheerleading moves and motions, they do not compare to the challenging physical activities All Star cheerleaders perform. High school cheerleaders emphasize sharp motions. They may also do certain jumps, such as the most well-known jump, the toe-touch. Without a certified cheerleading coach, high school cheerleaders are not even allowed, legally by the school, to do most of the things All Star cheerleaders can. Furthermore, this is one of the reasons All Star cheerleaders have an advantage over high school cheerleaders. All Star cheerleaders undergo vigorous physical training. That training all leads up to their routines. These cheerleaders incorporate back handsprings, tucks, and full twisting layouts in their routines. It takes a lot of physical power and skill to flawlessly back-flip off the ground, and they can do this at a certain moment of a piece of music. Some high school teams are fortunate to have members that can tumble, which gives them an advantage over other teams. Some high school teams tend not to attempt tumbling because of the high risk of injury; therefore they have no tumbling at all.

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Another physical difference between the two cheerleaders is stunting. Stunting is a favorite of almost every cheerleader. Combining tumbling and stunting, high leveled All Star cheerleaders will do flips when tossed into the air. Again, you do not find a lot of stunting in high school teams because of rules or regulations the different corresponding schools have. Stunting, yet again, is a particular part of cheerleading that takes a large amount of knowledge, practice, and skill.

Finally, dancing is a major physical difference between All Star and high school cheerleading. Many high school cheer teams will do dance performances. All Star cheer dances are beyond the normal dances. They use precise and strong motions. Having tight and easily viewable motions is important to All Star cheerleaders. In addition, they use a very high paced music compared to most school cheer teams. High school teams on the other hand, tend to use simpler music that has an eight count in it. Altogether, All Star cheer requires the most physical rigor and skill out of all sections of cheerleading.

Spirit is a major part of cheerleading in general; however, in particular there are visible difference between the spirit of a high school squad and an All Star squad. Appearance is one of the easiest ways to spot spirit. All cheerleading teams will wear their team colors to show spirit. It is the detailed appearances where the differentiation shines through. For example, All Star cheerleaders will wear hair pieces. It is like a trademark to see All Star cheerleaders with unnaturally long and tightly curled hair. It is unnatural because they are indeed wearing pieces. They can also be found wearing thick, bright colored make-up. High school cheerleaders are seen more in a natural look. They tie up their own natural hair, and normally only wear cover-up and eye-liner. Almost all All Star cheerleaders can be found wearing a large, playful bow in their hair. Opposite of them, high school student might wear a ribbon in their hair to draw attention to their school colors, but that is not usually the case unless it is a special occasion. All of these small details are used to emphasize their spirit.

Personalities and facial expressions, ways to show spirit, are another way the two cheerleading sections can be found different. High school cheerleaders actually have a tendency to be shy. They are in front of all of their peers and stand out. Typically, most high school students are trying to avoid that. Either way, they are going to be highly self-conscious, causing them to be shy. Mainly high school cheerleaders try to always be smiling and loud, despite how they are feeling. All Star cheerleaders have extrovert personalities. They are very confident in themselves and have bubbly, happy attitudes. Their main goal is to use their attitude and skill to win the competition and make a name for their gym. Facial expressions are a huge thing for All Star cheerleaders, and high school cheerleaders could care less. High school cheerleaders mainly smile. It doesn't matter if it is a real smile; they know that part of being a cheerleader is to be smiling. Sometimes it seems as if a smile is just painted on their face, or even that they are in pain having to smile all the time. All Star cheerleaders use their facial expressions to woo the audience. Notice the plural on expressions; these cheerleaders do not plaster a smile on. They use a wide variety of facial expression from crazy to cute. Anyway to keep attention on the team is another point for them. The All Star cheerleaders will stick out their tongues, make kissy faces, and open their mouths really wide, all in the hopes that their audience will be intrigued. Even though facial expressions are not used in many, or any, other sports they play an important role in cheerleading. This in turn helps to distinguish that All Star facials are more entertaining than high school facial expressions.

With the wide variety taking place in the sport of cheerleading alone, it is often hard to think there is more than one kind. It is not helpful that cheerleading has such an awful stereotype in society which portrays cheerleading as a girly thing where participants just jump around yelling, "Go Team Go," while wearing mini-skirts. It is helpful, however, for the general public to learn the intensity of All Star cheerleading. Even though both high school cheerleading and All Star cheerleading portray the basic aspects of practice, physical skill, and spirit, they are phenomenally different. All Star cheerleading is much more difficult than high school cheer. In a way high school cheer is an introduction to All Star cheerleading. Just as high school football is an introduction to the NFL. All Star cheer teams are on a much higher level than cheer teams in

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high school. It is important to know this when thinking about cheerleading because most people are not introduced to anything other than the stereotype cheerleader.

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