



SISC Safety and Loss Risk Management Bulletin

Cheerleading Safety Guidelines

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Cheerleading is fast becoming a “sport” of its own and many school districts have squads eager to participate in competitions and to press the limits of physical ability as well as gravity in performing stunts.

Injuries resulting from cheerleading accidents can be very serious, including broken bones and permanent disability.

A recent court case in Los Angeles County Superior Court and affirmed in the appellate court (*Aaris v. Las Virgenes Unified School District*) involved a cheerleading injury and was decided in favor of the school district. In the ruling, the appellate judge, Judge J. Yegan, observed that, “Not so very long ago, a row of docile cheerleaders would say, rah, rah, rah... maybe a leg or two would kick up into the air, perhaps a jump under the cheerleader’s own power... That, however, was yesterday. Today, even appellant (*Aaris*) recognizes... the acrobatic gymnastic nature of modern cheerleading. It is not unusual for modern cheerleaders to perform gymnastic stunts which may catapult a cheerleader many feet into the air. What goes up, must come down. This includes cheerleaders. Whenever gravity is at play with the human body, the risk of injury is inherent. While the appellate court has the power to change the law, we cannot change the law of gravity.”

Although the school district prevailed in the decision, it is important to note that several factors played a role in deciding the case. They include:

1. The appellant (student) had received formal stunt safety training and knew the stunts were dangerous.
2. The appellant attended cheerleading camps and received hours of instruction regarding stunts and maneuvers.
3. Her coach emphasized safety and properly supervised her when she was injured.
4. Her coach did not increase the risk of harm inherent in the activity.
5. The cheerleader’s mother signed a release on behalf of her child that barred recovery.

The above factors significantly influenced the outcome of the case and should be considered by every school district administrator with respect to the framework of their cheerleading program.

The minimum components of a cheerleading program should include: a knowledgeable (formally trained) coach, adequate practice facilities with matting, written safety procedures with formal instruction, emergency response plan, staff CPR/first aid trained, and parent waivers.

Specific Safety Regulations

Adapted from the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA)

Partner Stunts/Pyramids

1. All pyramids and partner stunts are limited to two persons high. "Two high" is defined as the base (bottom person) having at least one foot on the ground.
2. The top person in a partner stunt, pyramid, or transition may not be in an inverted (head below the waist) position, with the exception of a double-based forward suspended roll.
3. Suspended splits in a transition are allowed provided there are a total of four bases that support the top person; at least three of the bases must support under the legs of the top person, and the fourth base may support under the legs or make contact with the hands of the top person. The top person must have hand contact with the bases.
4. Basket tosses, toe pitch tosses, or similar tosses are limited to no more than four tosses and must be dismounted to a cradle position by two of the original bases, plus an additional spotter at the head and shoulder area. These tosses may not be directed so that the bases must move to catch the top person.
5. Partner stunts and pyramids higher than shoulder stand level must have a continuous spotter for each person over shoulder stand level. The spotter may help control the stunt but may not be underneath the stunt or be a primary support for the stunt.
6. Partner stunts, pyramids, or participants may not pass over, under, or through other partner stunts or pyramids. This rule applies to all airborne toss stunts.
7. When one person is bracing another (including over lapping of arms), one of the individuals must be at shoulder height or below. (Exception: Extensions may brace other extension.)
8. Hanging pyramids must be upright and stationary and must have a continuous spotter for each shoulder stand involved in suspending another person.
9. If a person in a partner stunt or pyramid is used as a brace for an extended stunt, that brace must not be supporting a majority of the top person's weight. (To demonstrate this, the foot of the top person's braced leg must be at or above the knee of his/her supporting leg.)
10. Triple-base straddle lifts must have an additional spotter for the head and shoulders of the top person.
11. Bird partner stunts must have a continuous spotter at the head and shoulder of the top person.
12. Double based forward suspended rolls are allowed as long as the bases have their feet on the ground and the top person and the bases maintain hand-to-hand contact throughout the skill.
13. Cradle dismounts from shoulder stand level and above must use a spotter in addition to the number of bases required for the stunt. Exception: A "chair" does not require an additional spotter. (A cradle is defined as a dismount from a partner stunt or pyramid in which the top person is caught in a face-up, piked position before being placed on the floor or remounting into another stunt or pyramid.)
14. Teeter-totters (pendulums) are allowed if performed from shoulder-stand level or lower. There must be at least four stationary catchers on each side.

15. Tosses that land in stunts (i.e., toss to hands, basket toss to elevator, etc.) are allowed; however, they cannot significantly exceed the height of the intended stunt. Tosses cannot land in a loading position for another stunt. (Exception: Single base tosses without assistance from another person are allowed into a loading position.)

Tumbling/Gymnastics/Jumps

1. Dive rolls are prohibited. (A dive roll is defined as a forward roll where your feet leave the ground before your hands reach the ground.)
2. Participants may not tumble under or through partner stunts, pyramids, or over or under individuals.
3. Participants may not land in a partner stunt or in a catching position from an aerial tumbling skill. (Example: A back flip from a tumbling pass into a cradle is prohibited, however, rebounding from a back handspring into a cradle is allowed.)
4. Landing for all jumps must bear weight on at least one foot. (Example: A toe touch jump or kick to a hurdler position, to the seat, knees, or landing with both feet back, or to a push-up position are prohibited.)
5. All gymnastics stunts must originate from ground level. The person performing a gymnastic stunt may rebound (without hip-over-head rotation) from his/her feet into a cradle.

Prohibited Activities

1. All vaults.
2. Free falling flips, skills, or swan dives from any type of toss, partner stunt, or pyramid.

3. Backward suspended rolls and single based suspended rolls.
4. All backward dismounts from partner stunts or pyramids must use three catchers. The execution of any gymnastic skill (i.e., jump, twist, etc.) during a backward dismount is prohibited.
5. Twists greater than two rotations in stunts, tosses, or dismounts.
6. Knee drops.
7. Tension rolls and tension drops.
8. Helicopter tosses.
9. Single based split catches.
10. Toe pitch and leg pitch flips.
11. The use of mini-trampolines, springboards, or any other height-increasing apparatus.
12. Flips greater than one rotation.
13. Twists greater than two rotations.
14. A forward three-quarter flip to the seat or knees.
15. Participants may not land in a partner stunt or in a catching position from an aerial tumbling skill. (Example: A back flip from a tumbling pass into a cradle is prohibited, however, rebounding from a back handspring into a cradle is allowed.)
16. Landing for all jumps must bear weight on at least one foot. (Example: A toe touch jump or kick to a hurdler position, to the seat, knees, or landing with both feet back, or to a push-up position are prohibited.)
17. High kicks to a hurdler position.
18. Any type of hurdler position or the position with both feet back (sitting, landing, or lying) is prohibited with the exception of a "Z" sit.
19. Tosses through any type of prop.
20. Combination flipping and twisting dismounts from pyramids.
21. Inverted teeter-totters.
22. A person in a cradle position cannot be tossed over into a straddle position.

General Safety Guidelines

1. Cheerleading squads should be placed under the direction of a knowledgeable advisor or coach.
2. The cheerleading coach or another knowledgeable designated school representative should be in attendance at all practices and functions.
3. All cheerleaders should receive proper training before attempting any form of cheerleading gymnastics (tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids, and jumps).
4. All partner stunts should be mastered according to the "Partner Stunt Progressions" section of the AACCA *Cheerleader Safety Manual*.
5. All practice sessions should be held in a location suitable for the activities of cheerleaders (i.e., use of tumbling mats where available away from excessive noise and distractions, etc.).
6. Training in proper spotting techniques should be mandatory for all squads attempting cheerleading gymnastics.
7. Accessories, and apparel should be conducive to safe performance.
8. All jewelry, including items used in any form of body piercing, should be prohibited in all practice and performance settings.
9. Warm-up exercises and stretching should precede all practice sessions, pep rallies, games, competitions, and other physical activity.
10. All cheerleading squads should develop a conditioning and strength-building program.
11. The cheering surface, location, lighting, and weather conditions should be taken into consideration before engaging in physical activity.
12. Advisors/coaches should recognize the entire squad's particular ability level and limit the squad's activities accordingly.

Copies of these guidelines should be distributed to all squad members and any administrators involved with the cheerleading program. All guidelines should be understood and accepted by all parties involved in the cheerleading program, including advisors, coaches, assistants, squad members, parents, and administrators.

Note: The above safety guidelines are general in nature and are not intended to cover all circumstances. All cheerleading gymnastics, including tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids, and jumps should be carefully reviewed and supervised by a qualified adult advisor or coach.

The American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors makes no warranties or representations, either expressed or implied, that the above guidelines will prevent injuries to individual participants.

For additional information, contact the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA) on their website at <http://www.aacca.org>. District administrators should consider purchasing the AACCA Cheerleading Safety Manual for their programs. Copies are \$20 and can be obtained by calling AACCA at 1-800-533-6583 or printing an mail/fax order form from their web site.

A participation waiver/consent form may be obtained from the SISC Safety and Loss Control department (contact Sandi Harville, 661-636-4604) or you may print a copy from the SISC Safety web site (<http://sisc.kern.org/safetyandlosscontrol/forms>)