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## There's a Lot to Cheer About in Cheerleading Competitions

By Cathy Dausman



The Miramonte Competitive Cheer team is serious about their sport, winning the national championship in the Varsity Small Show Cheer Division. Photo provided

Succeeding at Miramonte High School's National Champion Competitive Cheer Team is a bit like climbing the human pyramids its members build.

It began last April when 32 female students were selected as members of the Spirit Team Cheer, said parent Gina Armstrong-Smith. This group performed during MHS football and basketball games.

Several weeks later, a subset of 12 Spirit Team members were selected to form the Competitive Cheer Team. For three hours a day, three days a week, the team worked on physical conditioning and developed two-and-one-half-minute timed performances consisting of a dance routine, stunting (pyramids) and standing and running flips, known as tumbling.

Stature determines where each team member is placed; younger, smaller athletes top the pyramid while taller athletes take back row spots on the ground. Cheer moves are similar to gymnastics moves, and like gymnastics, performances may involve risks.

Junior Sydney Smith knows because she's been dropped. "It's pretty dangerous," Smith says.

Smith and best friend Jessie Musacchio, a senior with four years on the Cheer team, each bring 10 years of gymnastics know-how to Cheer. The two explain that gymnastics is a more mentally challenging sport for individuals, while Cheer is more a physically demanding team sport. Practice starts in October, and regional competitions begin in December and run through February. Win enough regional competitions, and the team advances to nationals, where as many as 1,000 students compete in categories ranging from small to super-sized groups in novice, intermediate and advanced classes. A team of four to seven judges award points for the energy, showmanship, difficulty, recovery, cheer and execution portions of each performance.

MHS Cheer placed first in three regional competitions this year and second in two others before competing against 23 teams in Anaheim this March to earn the Varsity Small Show Cheer Division National Championship.

And that, as they say, is something to cheer about.

Acalanes High School entered 28 competitors in the Super Large Varsity Show Cheer division in Anaheim but did not advance to the final round. Cheer coordinator Sallina Boynton said theirs was "a very hard division."

"Miramonte did phenomenal," Boynton said.

Campolindo High School does not have a Competitive Cheer Team.

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[back](#)

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