

History of Cheerleading

Prior to 1898: Setting the stage for Cheerleading

The history of cheerleading is closely tied to the history of sports in the United States (i.e. American Football, Basketball and even Rugby), its sporting venues, as well as the historical development of overall crowd participation at many athletic events.

The first American Football university/college game, the initial sporting environment to witness the birth of cheerleading, was held in 1869 between Princeton University and host school Rutgers University located in Piscataway, New Jersey, Northeastern USA; setting the stage for cheerleading to begin.

By the 1880s, Princeton University's American Football sporting game atmosphere led to Princeton's students forming an all-male student "pep club" to lead "cheers" (unified chants and yells) in order to provide support to their team, as well as create a high energy sport environment. Cheers such as "Rah, Rah, Ray! Tiger, Tiger, Sis, Sis, Sis! Boom, Boom, Boom! Aaaaah! Princeton, Princeton, Princeton!" were commonly yelled from the seats of Princeton University's American Football stadium as a method to motivate their team on to victory.

In 1884, one of Princeton University's graduated students, Thomas Peebles, moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA (North Central USA), and introduced the Princeton "pep club" and "cheer" concept to the students of the University of Minnesota with great success at their American football games.

In the very same year, two University of Minnesota rugby players John W. Adams and Win Sargent created a "team yell" (SKI-YOU-MAH) to also help inspire their rugby team. Both rugby players decided to use the word "Ski", a native America Sioux battle cry meaning victory, and they also added their own word "U-Mah" as a sound representing the University of Minnesota which also rhymes with "rah-rah-rah" to form a team cheer. Their "yell" became popular throughout the University, and would soon be instrumental to a student named Johnny Campbell credited with inventing what is known today as cheerleading.

By 1889 stadium pep clubs, cheers, school yells, and even school "fight songs" continued to develop in many schools & universities around the USA to inspire their sport fans. Consequently in late October 1898, the University of Minnesota's American Football team had suffered 3 straight game losses, the university student body and student newspaper editorial made the following plea to their students, "Any plan that would stir up enthusiasm for athletics would be helpful" for their final game of the season versus rival school Northwestern University from the Chicago area.

1898: Birth of Cheerleading

As a result, the University of Minnesota "pep club" students developed a new plan to further involve their crowd in order to win their final game on 2 November 1898 versus Northwestern University. As later quoted in the 12 November 1898 edition of the University of Minnesota student publication "Ariel":

“The following were nominated to lead the Yelling today: Jack (sic) Campbell, F.G Kotlaba, M.J. Luby, Albert Armstrong of the Academics, Wickersham of the Laws; and the Litzenverg of the Medics. These men would see to it that everybody leaves the park today breathless and voiceless, as this is the last game here, it ought to be a revelation to the people of Minnesota in regard to University enthusiasm.”

One of these nominated students previously mentioned, Jack “Johnny” Campbell, takes the credit as the very first of these “yell leaders” to pick up a megaphone, jump onto the sports field, and lead the crowd with the already popular university organized cheer: “Rah, Rah, Rah! Ski-U-Mah! Hoo-Rah! Hoo-Rah! Varsity! Varsity! Minn-e-so-tah!” With much credit attributed to Johnny Campbell and his “yell leaders” abilities to motivate the crowd & their American football team, Minnesota won the game 17-6 and cheerleading was born.

Based on the success of Johnny Campbell and his fellow students at the University of Minnesota, cheerleading continued to grow and develop alongside the popularity of sports over the next coming years. As cheerleading continued to grow in participation, new techniques and skills were also added, and cheerleading would continue to refine itself into its current form.

Meanwhile, the sport of Basketball, invented 7 years earlier in Springfield, Massachusetts USA (1891) by Dr. James Naismith as a means to further promote indoor youth fitness during the cold northeastern USA winter months, would also grow in popularity as well as become a major indoor sports environment in which cheerleading would further develop and prosper. Many of the following developments were incorporated on the sidelines of both Basketball (indoor) as well as American Football (primarily outdoor) games over the next 100 years.

1923-1948: Women become the majority of Cheer athletes; new skills and techniques added.

For its first 25 years cheerleading was a “male only” activity. It wasn’t until 1923 that the University of Minnesota introduced the first women cheerleaders at their sporting games. Although women continued to participate as cheerleaders in various parts of the USA after 1923, it wasn’t until the 1940s that women became the majority of cheerleading’s athletes during an era when the university men students left the country to fight in World War II. Today, women comprise of more than 90% of the world’s cheerleaders.

Additionally, the 1920’s witnessed cheerleaders adding enhanced techniques and skills to improve their ability to lead and energize the crowd at games, witnessing the addition of various athletic skills, some tumbling, fight song team dances with traditional “motions” (arm movements), and acrobatics to their routines. A cheerleader at the University of Oregon (Northwest USA) introduced “flashcards” (now called “signs”) for the first time to increase crowd participation at their sporting events.

1948: Introduction of cheerleading training camps; expansion of cheerleading begins.

After beginning his cheerleading career at North Dallas High School and later Southern Methodist University (Texas), Lawrence “Herkie” Herkimer was requested to introduce a “cheerleading clinic” in the state of Texas at Sam Houston State Teacher’s College (now “Sam Houston State University”) in

1948. An immediate success to those interested in cheerleading, Herkie went on to develop his signature “Herkie” jump, the spirit stick, the “pom pon” (also called “shakeroos” in that time), all important elements in cheerleading to this day. Separate cheerleading pom pon teams (also termed “Cheerdance”) are also trained by Herkimer and begin to develop on sport sidelines around the United States as an added entertainment and game leadership component of cheerleading.

1961: National Cheerleaders Association (“NCA”); hundreds of thousands of cheerleaders trained.

By the 1960s, cheerleading could be found in virtually every high school and grade school across the USA, as well as pee wee and youth leagues everywhere in the country. In 1961, Herkimer incorporated the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) and conducted cheerleading camps, and clinics to hundreds of thousands of cheerleaders all around the United States. With these innovations and the creation NCA, cheerleading had become one of the fastest growing youth activities in the United States.

1974: Universal Cheerleaders Association (“UCA”), and start of modern day cheerleading.

In 1974, the former General Manager and Vice President of NCA, Jeff Webb, founded the Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA) to teach higher levels of skills to cheerleaders around the United States. Cheerleading specific skills (partner stunts & pyramids) were introduced to make cheerleading more entertaining, thus augmenting cheerleading’s traditional leadership function; a new era of cheerleading begins.

These advanced skills are first introduced in the Southern & Central United States, and the new style spreads rapidly across the United States. United States former cheerleaders and coaches trained on the enhanced style begin to introduce cheerleading while traveling in various parts of the world over the next decade.

1975: UCA combines cheerleading skills with music, birth of the “cheerleading routine”.

In July 1975, Jeff Webb’s UCA College Spirit Camp Instructors opened their university cheerleader training camp held at Memphis State University (now, University of Memphis) in Tennessee (South Central USA) with a demonstration of cheerleading skills incorporating music; the “cheerleading routine” is born.

1982: UCA hosts the 1st Cheerleading National Championship held on ESPN; syndication begins.

As a method to accommodate the thousands of requests for the new style of cheerleading, Jeff Webb places cheerleading on a new sports television network called the “Entertainment Sports Programming Network” or “ESPN”. This begins 30 years of highlighting cheerleading on television; an introduction of Jeff Webb’s modern cheerleading not only all parts of the USA, but also the world.

Based on syndicated programming of cheerleading national championships, music videos, and sporting events, cheerleading begins to further develop over the next few years in Canada, Great Britain, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Finland to name a few.

1987: Cheerleading safety standards published: American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (“AACCA”) is formed; establishing the safety standard for cheerleading, and begins to become duplicated globally.

With the rapid growth of cheerleading, Jeff Webb’s organization directs the development of a new non-profit entity called “American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators” (“AACCA”) to teach, as well as safety test cheerleading coaches around the USA, and eventually the world. It quickly becomes the standard for cheerleading safety in the USA, and begins to become duplicated globally in the promotion of cheerleading safety.

1988: UCA introduces cheerleading in Japan

Through business sports contacts in the United States, Japanese businessmen ask UCA and Jeff Webb to introduce cheerleading to the youth of Japan, and UCA Japan is born. Over the next 15 years, UCA operates training camps throughout Japan, and assists in the development of Japan’s cheerleading competitions. Japan cheerleading begins, the first organized training camps in Asia.

1989: UCA introduces parade cheerleading performances in the United Kingdom

Although cheerleading recently is started in the United Kingdom, UCA also decides to send USA cheerleaders each year to participate in the 1 January 1989 London New Year’s Day Parade providing a promotional platform for modern day cheerleading. Over the next 20+ years, over 1,000 cheerleaders from the USA, and also around the world continue to participate at this annual historical event before thousands of views in London’s streets.

1990: USA School Cheerleading reaches 1.7 million athletes; non-school Cheerleading Programs termed “All Star” begin to develop around United States.

By 1990, school cheerleading reaches 1.7 million athletes in the USA (source: National Federation of High School Associations); additionally, due to its popularity and overflow of interested athletes, non-school based organizations begin to offer cheer programs. Although initially started in the late 1980’s, the 1990’s see the beginning of non-school based cheerleading called “All Star”.

1991: Event based sports begin to flourish throughout Europe, as well as the need for game cheerleading; European advancement of modern day cheerleading accelerates.

Event based sports (American Football, Basketball and Handball, etc) begin to flourish throughout Europe, as well as the need for game cheerleading. Interest in modern cheerleading at games begins to accelerate throughout the continent. Throughout the 1990’s (started in the 1980s), various educational clinics are conducted in Europe; National Cheer Federations also begin to develop quickly internally in support of the growing interest of young European athletes.

1992: UCA introduces cheerleading performances in Austria and France, NCA in Ireland.

UCA sends USA cheerleaders to participate in the 1992 Paris New Years Day Celebration, and also the 1992 Vienna New Years Day Celebration introducing cheerleading to France & Austria for the very first time. NCA sends USA cheerleaders to Ireland's St. Patrick's Day Celebration in Dublin, Ireland the very same year. Both Paris and Dublin events will continue over the next 2 decades.

1994: UCA introduces cheerleading in Chile (Cheer Chile); South America & Caribbean Cheerleading begins.

Cheerleading enthusiasts in the country of Chile, Rodrigo Anguita and Irma Olvares Cea, ask Jeff Webb & UCA to introduce modern cheerleading to their home county of Chile, the first in the continent of South America. Over the next 16 years, their new organization "Cheer Chile" and UCA train thousands of cheerleaders throughout the country, and it begins to spread throughout the continent.

As syndication of the UCA National Cheerleading Championships on ESPN is shown around the Americas, and the world, cheerleading also begins to accelerate further interest in Costa Rica, Mexico, Canada, and Puerto Rico to name a few.

In the same year, the Universidad of Puerto Rico Bayamon sends 2 athletes to attend UCA College camp introducing cheerleading to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

1995: First International Cheerleading Performances (Japan & Chile), Walt Disney World Resort.

For the first time, cheerleading teams from Japan and Chile perform at the UCA United States College National Championship in January 1995.

Over the next years, as also with the development of All Star cheerleading, International Cheerleading teams begin traveling to various countries participating in World competition.

1996: Cheerleading participates in the Opening Ceremonies of the XXVI Olympiad.

Cheerleading participates in the Opening Ceremonies of the XXVI Olympiad, the 1996 Summer Olympic Games held in Atlanta, Georgia, USA; further introducing Cheerleading to the world. Future Olympiads would witness participation of Cheerleading at its various sport events.

1999: UCA introduces parade cheerleading performances in Australia, cheerleading clinics & competitions continue to flourish around the world.

UCA sends USA cheerleaders to participate in the newly formed 1999 Easter Day Parade held in Sidney, Australia; the first introduction of cheerleading to Australia and the Oceania Continent.

Cheerleading clinics, national competitions, continental events continue in Sweden, Finland, Great Britain, Germany, Chinese Taipei, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Canada, and various parts of the world.

2003: Largest United States Cheerleading organizations form & register the not-for-profit entity the “United States All Star Federation (USASF)” and also the “International All Star Federation (IASF)” to support international club cheerleading & the World Cheerleading Club Championships.

As international cheerleading continues to grow (school, university, club/all star), the United States All Star Federation (USASF) International All Star Federation (IASF) form & register a not-for-profit federation to support the growth of world club cheerleading.

2004: The USASF/IASF hosts the 1st World Cheerleading Championships.

The USASF/ IASF host the 1st World Cheerleading Championships or “Cheerleading Worlds” at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast; 14 of the top selected World Teams compete for a World Championship title.

2005: The USASF/IASF hosts the 2nd World Cheerleading Championships.

USASF/IASF host the 2nd World Cheerleading Championships “Cheerleading Worlds” at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast; 3 nations, 3 continents, 100 world teams compete for the World Championship title; 15 countries , 4 continents observe the championship and hold 1st Annual General meeting.

2006: The USASF/IASF hosts the 3rd World Cheerleading Championships.

USASF/IASF host the 3rd World Cheerleading Championships “Cheerleading Worlds” at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast; 15 nations, 4 continents, 150 world teams compete for a World Championship title: 17 countries, 5 continents observe and hold 2nd Annual General meeting.

November 2006: ICU directors conduct cheerleading training camps throughout the People’s Republic of China, and assist with 1st televised China Cheerleading National Championships held in Wuhan, PRC. ICU training courses continue annually throughout the country.

2007: The USASF/IASF hosts the 4th World Cheerleading Championships.

April 2007: USASF/IASF host the 4th World Cheerleading Championships “Cheerleading Worlds” at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast; 19 nations, 4 continents, 200 world teams compete for a World Championship title; 19 countries, 4 continents observe and hold 3rd Annual General meeting.

July 2007: 1st Panamerican meeting held in Memphis, Tennessee. 9 Panamerican Nations attend.

September 2007: The IASF National Federation membership (19 nations) also forms the International Cheer Union (“ICU”) as an additional 501 (c) not-for-profit organization to enhance efforts in supporting national federation & continental confederation development, World Championships for national teams, world recognition efforts by international sports authorities, and to support the safe development of cheerleading around the world.

September 2007: Along with many other developing national federations, the United States Federation for Sport Cheering (“USA Cheer”) is registered as a not-for-profit 501 (c) organization as the National Governing body for Cheer in the USA.

International Cheer Union grows from 19 to 35 member federations.

2008: The IASF/ICU hosts the 5th World Cheerleading Championships, ICU submits provisional documents to the International Olympic Committee, ICU training continues around the world.

January 2008: The ICU holds its first European meeting in Orlando, Florida; 19 European Nations attend.

April 2008: IASF/ICU host the 5th World Cheerleading Championships “Cheerleading Worlds” at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast; 25 nations, 4 continents, 300 world teams compete for a world championship title; 29 countries, 5 continents observe and hold 4th Annual General Meeting.

July 2008: International Cheer Union holds its first coaches and athlete training on the Africa continent in Kampala, Uganda for the ICU NF Uganda Cheerleading Association. ICU training sessions in Africa continue over the coming years.

September 2008: International Cheer Union holds first European Coaches Training in Berlin, Germany. Over 100 coaches from 15 countries attend certification. ICU European Coaches Training Course becomes an annual event.

September 2008: International Cheer Union grows to 50 member federations; submits its provisional membership application to the International Olympic Committee.

November 2008: International Cheer Union conducts for ICU Judges Course in Helsinki, Finland. Judges training will reach over 25 countries within the year.

December 2008: International Cheer Union holds first Southeast Asia/Pacific Training in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; over 80 coaches from 12 countries attend certification. ICU Southeast Asia/Pacific Training Course becomes an annual event.

December 2008: International Cheer Union grows to 56 member federations.

2009: The IASF/ICU hosts the 6th World Cheerleading Championships; National Team divisions judged by ICU trained judges panel representing 25 countries; ICU submits formal SportAccord application for membership.

April 2009: IASF/ICU host the 6th World Cheerleading Championships “Cheerleading Worlds” at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast; 38 nations, 4 continents, 400 world teams compete for a world championship title; 45 countries, 5 continents observe and hold 5th Annual General Meeting.

April 2009: 1st Asia, Oceania Continental Meeting is held in Orlando, Florida. 10 Asia/Oceania Nations in attendance.

May 2009: ICU hosts 2009 Eastern European Cheerleading Open in Moscow, Russia. 5 Eastern European Federations and athletes participate in the event.

July 2009: 2nd Panamerican National Annual meeting, Panama City, Panama; 22 Panamerican Nations in attendance.

August 2009: ICU grows to 76 member federations; submits its formal membership application to GAISF / SportAccord.

September 2009: ICU hosts first ICU European Open at Disneyland Paris, 17 nations, 1,500 cheerleaders compete for European Open title; ICU hosts 2nd ICU European coaches conference at Disneyland Paris.

October 2009: ICU hosts first ICU Caribbean Coaches Training in Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad & Tobago; to become annual program.

November 2009: International Cheer Union Anti-Doping Code is accepted by the World Anti-Doping Agency for Cheer.

December 2009: To date, the International Cheer Union has conducted judges, coaches, and athlete training in 75 countries on 5 continents around the world.

International Cheer Union grows to 79 member federations; cheerleading participation reaches 3.5 million athletes throughout 79 countries around the world. (source: NFHS, IASF, NFs)

2010: The IASF/ICU hosts the 7th World Cheerleading Championships; ICU Continental Regional Meetings Conducted, as well as 6th AGM; ICU presents at the 44th SportAccord General Assembly in Dubai.

April 2010: IASF/ICU host the 7st World Cheerleading Championships "Cheerleading Worlds" at the Walt Disney World Resort taped for the ESPN global broadcast, April 2010: 60 countries, 5 continents hold 6th Annual General Meeting.

April 2010: ICU Continental and regional meetings are conducted for the following:
Panamerica. Continental Regions: South America, Central America/ the Caribbean, North America.
Asia & Oceania. Continental Regions: North Asia, Southeast Asia & Oceania.
Europe & Africa: Continental Regions: Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa.

April 2010: The International Cheer Union presents "Cheer" to executives from over 100 international sports federations and organizations at the 44th SportAccord General Assembly in Dubai.

International Cheer Union grows from 79 to 87 member federations.