

INTERNATIONAL CHEER UNION (ICU)



History of The Sport of Cheer

SPORT OF CHEER - HISTORY

In the beginning (up to 1898)

Although various forms of Cheerleading (“Cheer”) have certainly been in existence for thousands of years (e.g. leading crowds in Cheers & Chants, and entertaining during sport events), the Sport of Cheer’s beginning is traditionally defined from an era when USA university students and faculty, at their respective university sporting events - led and entertained their crowds with Chants and Cheers starting in the later 1800’s. (See *ICU History* www.cheerunion.org).

Initially documented from “Ivy League” (USA founding universities located in the Northeast USA) university sporting events in the 1860s – university students were reported to sit in the venue seats - leading their fellow spectators in Cheers and Chants to encourage their sport teams to victory (also common in the United Kingdom during the same era). However, when Ivy League Princeton University class of 1882 graduate, Thomas Peebles, moved to Minnesota in 1884 and transplanted the idea of organized crowds cheering at American football games to the University of Minnesota (North Central USA) and to its students - the stage was set. With the fervor of the organized crowd-cheering environment underway on campus, it took one student to start it all. On Saturday 2 November 1898, one of the University of Minnesota students, Johnny Campbell, jumped from his seat onto the field of the University of Minnesota American Football game (v. Northwestern University, a Chicago-based university) - and started to lead the crowd in Chants and Cheers. Johnny Campbell’s “Cheer-leading” to involve the crowd and enhance the game environment was a huge success, the University of Minnesota won the game, and Johnny Campbell became the first Cheerleading athlete ever. The Sport of Cheer/Cheerleading was born!

Cheerleading continues to grow & develop (1898-1929)

Following Johnny Campbell’s footsteps/the start of Cheerleading in 1898, over the next decades – the concept of Cheerleading, and its game entertainment culture- spread to other university sporting events throughout the United States and also to secondary schools (“high schools”) sporting events as well. Through Cheerleading’s expansion, new techniques were developed to further entertain and motivate crowds, and the use of signs, flags, megaphones, poms (in a primitive form until the 1950’s), arm motions, simple partner stunts and tumbling skills were added as well, to enhance the performance and effectiveness of the Cheerleading athletes.

Performance Cheer Disciplines are introduced (1930-1940)

With Cheerleading’s increasing popularity continually growing in the USA, two individuals were instrumental in starting another version of Cheerleading - designed to also entertain school Sporting event crowds. Partially inspired by the popular and entertaining marching styles of school-based Reserve Military Officer Training Corps cadets at the time, and also as an initiative to include more female athletes in the sporting event environment; a new style called “Drill Team” (e.g. “Performance Cheer” in the style of “High Kick”) was created. The 2 individuals credited to form this new discipline of Cheer were Kay Teer Crawford and Gussie Nell Davis both located in Texas, South Central USA.

While a student at Edinburg High School in Edinburg, Texas, USA, in 1929, Kay Teer Crawford auditioned for and earned a place on the high school Cheerleading team; however, 90 of her schoolmates did not make the team. So in 1930, Ms. Crawford created a new style/a discipline of Cheer involving the same Cheerleading athletes- but in a different/complimentary but equally entertaining and crowd enhancing style. Mixing Cheerleading with the entertaining and popular Military marching high kick style (e.g. “Drill Team”) of the time- in 1930, Ms. Crawford first introduced the Edinburg High School "Seargentettes" with a performance to the school’s marching band music throughout the game. The Cheer Discipline of Drill Team /“Performance Cheer High Kick” was underway.

Within the same decade, Texas high school physical education teacher, Gussie Nell Davis, who had significant experience in music education and also in Cheerleading “Pep Clubs”, was hired by Kilgore College located in East Texas (South Central USA) - to form an all female team to perform and entertain the crowds at Kilgore College’s sporting events. The focus was to perform and entertain the crowd during game timeouts and half times – when the sport team wasn’t on the field of play. In a similar style to Kay Teer Crawford’s Edinburg High School Seargentettes, Ms. Davis was looking to start something different involving more female athletes, in a high kick style- performing in coordination with the official high school musical marching band. In 1939, at Kilgore College’s American Football Game, Gussie Nell Davis introduced the Kilgore College “Rangerettes”. The Kilgore College Rangerettes were an instant success – quickly becoming famous & highly requested to perform at numerous functions in the USA and around the world, further spreading the Drill Team/Performance Cheer High Kick Style around the USA.

The new Drill Team/Performance Cheer High Kick style of Cheerleading quickly grew in popularity throughout the USA and new teams were being established at schools and universities throughout the country- in addition to the traditional Cheerleading teams. As new Drill Team/Performance Cheer High Kick Teams were forming, these teams were also adding a new Performance Cheer style as well – providing added value and variety for crowd entertainment purposes. The handheld “pom-poms” or “poms”, already popular with traditional Cheerleading teams, also became a part of many Drill Team/Performance Cheer Teams ensembles as well, and the Performance Cheer Style of “Pom” (e.g. Pom Team/Freestyle Pom Team) became an additional Performance Cheer style at almost every sporting event.

Women become the majority (1941)

In the beginning- and even with the launch of Performance Cheer in the 1930’s involving many female athletes, a majority of Cheerleaders in the USA (also called “Yell Leaders”) were primarily male athletes. However, once the United States entered the Second World War in 1941 with many males leaving the U.S.A. to serve in the war, Cheer was transformed to be comprised of a majority of female athletes (estimated 85%) - which remains the same to this day!

Cheer Education Organizations develop and encourage further growth (1949)

During the Second World War, Cheer became dominated with participation of female athletes, and following the Second World War, Cheer’s continued growth and high popularity led to an important need for further Cheer education to athletes around the USA. In 1949- Lawrence “Herkie” Herkimer, a former High School and University Cheerleader in Texas and then Graduate Student at the University of Illinois (Central USA), was asked to administer a Cheerleading educational clinic at Texas Teachers College for Cheerleaders requesting education (now called Sam Houston State University) in Texas, South Central USA. Herkie’s first clinic was conducted for 52 Cheerleaders, and – due to the 1st clinic’s success- a 2nd clinic followed consisting of 350 Cheerleaders - indicating the great demand for more Cheerleading education.

Lawrence “Herkie” Herkimer launched an organization called the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) to more efficiently and formally spread Cheerleading education around the country. Very quickly, NCA was administering Cheerleading education to tens of thousands of Cheerleaders throughout the USA. Lawrence “Herkie” Herkimer/NCA introduced greater team organization to Cheerleading, continued Cheerleading technique development – including a more sophisticated version of the Pom (the current version used today), further advancement of basic partner stunt skills, enhanced crowd techniques, including the signature NCA jump, called the “Herkie” named after NCA’s founder. With the ongoing and urgent demand for more Cheer education, other organizations were soon established. Robert Olmstead’s United Spirit Association (USA) established in California in 1950 (first to initiate Cheer half-time shows at NFL Games); Dr. Kay Crawford continued her work with the establishment of Miss Drill Team USA in 1967 in California (further promoting Performance Cheer); and many other education organizations throughout the USA, introducing new concepts to further advance Cheerleading and Performance Cheer.

Modern Day Cheerleading & Performance Cheer, Urban Cheer, Competitions & Television (1974)

In 1974, former University of Oklahoma Cheerleader, NCA Head Instructor, NCA Vice President & current ICU President, Jeff Webb (credited as the Founder of Modern Day Cheerleading), launched a new organization called Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA) - with the idea of additional advancement of Cheerleading athleticism, enhanced skills and crowd techniques with the focus of leading the crowd and entertainment of Cheer at sporting events. Through the efforts of Jeff Webb and his organization, new Cheerleading skills were quickly developed (e.g. progression learning and safety rules & techniques) including the introduction of skills that are the very foundation of Cheerleading today; including but not limited to: the Liberty, Elevator, Basket Tosses, Toss Stunts, and a wide variety of the advanced Pyramids. Additionally, through UCA’s university camps that included a UCA instructor opening demonstration of UCA’s new advanced Cheerleading techniques - these skills were put to music – in a music routine- and the concept of the Cheerleading Competition was born. By 1982, Jeff Webb placed the music/Cheerleading and Performance Cheer competition format - on National television (ESPN), and the concept of Cheerleading and Performance Cheer competition spread rapidly throughout the U.S.A. and soon – throughout the world through syndication of the ESPN broadcasts.

Paralleling the growing popularity of Cheerleading and Performance Cheer throughout the USA in the 1970s, as well as the increasingly growing popularity of urban & hip hop culture of the time; the inner city metropolitan schools of the USA began to introduce a new style of Cheerleading - called “Urban Cheer”. Reflecting the traditional elements of crowd leadership and entertainment for school sporting events of traditional Cheerleading, with many teams incorporating Cheerleading specific skills and techniques - Urban Cheer introduced a different style of Cheer echoing the popularity of urban and hip hop culture. More associated with the highly entertaining inner city schools’ musical marching bands often performing together - Urban Cheer spread rapidly throughout the USA, continues to grow in popularity, and significantly continues to influence all styles of Cheerleading and Performance Cheer to this day.

Through the 1970s and 1980s as well, Performance Cheer (High Kick and Pom specifically) continued to expand quickly throughout the USA, with the added demand for entertainment and variety – specifically at indoor sporting events (e.g. Basketball). As a result, Performance Cheer athletes introduced new styles of “Jazz” and “Hip Hop” (in addition to “High Kick” and “Pom”) performed at games, soon to be added to the ESPN Performance Cheer Competition Broadcasts. Basketball Cheerleaders soon became famous and synonymous with wearing their team’s basketball jerseys during their Hip Hop half time/time out performances (still common to this day in Hip Hop performance), as well as at American Football games and various sporting events. Performance Cheer athletes and Cheerleading team athletes – continued to progress further as important Game time staples to sporting culture throughout the United States.

Global Expansion, Cheer expands beyond Scholastic Teams (1980s-1990s)

With global syndication of the ESPN Championships broadcasts - and the growing demand for Sporting event entertainment, interest in the Sport of Cheer began to further accelerate in various countries around the world. Cheer began to spread to new countries around the world including but not limited to Japan, Chile, Germany, United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden and Norway. Additionally, Scholastic Cheer (universities and schools) in the USA became overwhelmed with the tremendous surge of Cheer athlete interest, leading to massive participation not only within Scholastic programs, but also via the creation of new programs at privately owned athletic facilities (known as “All Star”) to handle the overflow/need for more programs, and also within numerous Multi-Sport Recreational “Rec” Leagues & within Community Clubs throughout the USA as well. The Sport of Cheer had reached a tipping point, with thousands of Cheerleading competitions being conducted in all cities around the USA, on almost every weekend - as a result of Cheer’s ever increasing popularity.

World Championships, USASF/IASF & ICU (2003 & 2004)

In 2003, as a final championship initiative for the many U.S.A. - based privately operated All Star “National Championships” events located throughout the USA, the United States All Star Federation (USASF) was established to promote consistency of All Star rules in the USA and to administer the “Cheerleading Worlds” (e.g. “Worlds”) – as a final championships of the very best All Star “National Champions” teams in the United States. Primarily due to its name, “Cheerleading Worlds”, non-USA teams began to express interest to compete in the “Cheerleading Worlds” as well, and soon, with the addition of teams from around the world - the name International All Star Federation (IASF) was added to the title of the event.

In 2004, due to the expressed interest to further organize the Sport of Cheer globally, the International Cheer Union (ICU), under the auspices of the IASF, held its first meeting in Orlando, Florida, USA on 26 April 2004 with 13 National Federations in attendance. The ICU’s objective was to further support global expansion of the Sport (Cheerleading and Performance Cheer), to assist National Cheer Federation development, to promote Sport recognition of Cheer, while encouraging athlete participation opportunities at “Worlds” and other events globally, as well as to launch the ICU World Championships for National Teams. ICU grew to over 100 National Cheer Federation members located on all continents, administered stakeholder education for over 90 countries, launched continental and regional championships, developed and initiated global Anti-Doping policies as a signatory of WADA, and initiated international recognition of the Sport.

ICU begins to seek International Sport Recognition, creation of STUNT, Game Day (2009 - 2011)

With great success and growth underway of the ICU and the Sport of Cheer, in 2009, the ICU submitted its first application for Sport recognition to SportAccord/GAISF (the union of recognized international sports), and ICU also submitted its first application to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2010 for IOC recognition.

While ICU was pursuing Sport recognition internationally, in 2011, due to a need for a dual team competition format for Cheerleading in the USA (for enhanced university scholarship purposes), ICU’s National Governing Body in the United States, USA Cheer, introduced a new Cheerleading team discipline called STUNT; a format allowing Cheerleading teams to compete in 4 rounds (quarters) of competition against one other opposing Cheerleading team. USA Cheer & ICU also created a new discipline format called - “Game Day”, a competition format consisting of Game Cheering (for Cheerleading and Performance Cheer disciplines) in categories that includes Game Day components (Cheer, Sidelines, Fight song, Band Chant, Timeout, Drum Line, etc.)- reflective of our Sport’s 100 year history of Cheering at Sporting events.

ICU/Cheerleading & Performance Cheer Recognition becomes reality (2013 -2016)

In 2013, ICU was accepted as a member SportAccord/GAISF – recognized as the world governing body for the Sport of Cheer. In 2014, ICU became part of the FISU Family - Fédération Internationale du Sport Universitaire/International University Sport Federation; and in 2016, the ICU was provisionally recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Cheerleading & Performance Cheer now & in the future

Through the many developments of the Sport of Cheer over the past 100 years, the Sport of Cheer continues to thrive at the grass-roots level for millions of Cheer athletes on all continents (Game Cheerleading/Game Performance Cheering and in Competition); is highlighted by its top athletes annually during the ICU World Cheerleading Championships, as well as at continental, regional and national championships around the world. At its core essence, the Sport of Cheer is its own unique sport, independent with its own Cheer-specific technical skills, history and culture, derived from 100 years of Sporting event performance and crowd leadership. Athlete age of participation ranges from 4 years of age and older, it is spectator and family friendly in all cultures, popular on all broadcast platforms (television, live stream, social media, etc.), and Cheer is a team sport welcoming athletes of all body types, male and female. Moving forward, ICU has expanded the Sport of Cheer to include divisions for Special Athletes (athletes with intellectual disabilities), ParaCheer/Adaptive Abilities Athletes (athletes with physical and intellectual disabilities), and has introduced Masters divisions welcoming athletes of all ages, confirming Cheer as a true lifestyle sport not only for competition, but also recreation.

For purposes of understanding ICU Rules, Divisions and Guidelines, the Sport of Cheer is defined by 2 discipline categories- with further explanations below:

1. CHEERLEADING (*also called "Cheer" and vice versa re: the Sport of Cheer- e.g. "World Cheerleading Championships"*): The original discipline category started by Johnny Campbell in 1898 designed to lead and energize crowds at sporting events— which still serves the same purpose, but has been updated and further developed over our 100 year history and into a variety of competitive and recreational formats.

Cheerleading has developed to include a span of seven (7) levels of skills (Beginner/Level 0 - Premier/Level 6) – noting that not all levels are available to all age groups/team types, and progression learning is mandatory leading up to the highest level achieved by an athlete. Team types includes Club, All Star, Recreational (Rec), Scholastic (school & university), Masters, Special Abilities, ParaCheer/Adaptive Abilities, National Team within all respective ages, teams sizes and gender groupings for each category. These disciplines can be further broken down into Team Routine, Partner Stunt, Group Stunt, Team STUNT, and Game Day competition formats.

2. PERFORMANCE CHEER (*originally known as "Drill Team"/"High Kick" but now also includes the styles of "Pom", "Hip Hop" and "Jazz"*): Created by Dr. Kay Crawford (1930) and Gussie Nell Davis (1939) as a new style of Cheerleading to entertain the crowd differently but in coordination with an official musical marching band, as well as the traditional cheerleading team. In its 90 years of history as a discipline category- Performance Cheer began in the tradition of Drill Team/High Kick (in a Military Marching High Kick Style), later developing and adding the styles of "Pom" in the 1940s, as well as Hip Hop and Jazz in the 1970s and 1980s for entertainment variety purposes.

Performance Cheer has developed to include the 4 "genres"/disciplines (High Kick, Pom, Hip Hop, Jazz) - within the team types of Club, All Star, Recreational (Rec), Scholastic (school & university), Masters, Special Abilities, ParaCheer/Adaptive Abilities, National Team types within all respective ages, teams sizes and gender groupings within each category. These disciplines can be further broken down into Team Routine, Doubles Routine, and Game Day competition formats.

Following the over 100 year uniquely rich history and culture of the Sport of Cheer for the Cheerleading and Performance Cheer discipline categories respectfully, enclosed herein please find the ICU Rules and Guidelines as a resource for National Federations, Coaches, Athletes and all stakeholders of our Sport. The International Cheer Union extends its great appreciation to everyone's great contributions in the past, present and future for the great success of the Sport of Cheer and looks forward to its future development for many years to come.

Respectfully,

International Cheer Union (ICU)