



COACHES

GETTING READY FOR
CAMP

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A new year with a completely new squad is just getting started. You've had your Varsity rep fit the team for uniforms, and you've signed up for camp with your territory manager....What now? What do you do from now until camp to whip your team into shape? Regardless of what level you were at the end of last season, everyone is starting from scratch at this time of year. Here are some guidelines to get you where you want to be for camp!

At this point, squads should go through a full stretching routine at least three times a week, and general stretching should precede any activity. The benefits of stretching and increasing the range of motion of both muscles and joints include improved performance and a lowered risk of injury. It's easier to stretch muscles when they're warm, so begin by doing basic total body movement. Jumping jacks or jogging in place is a great warm-up for your stretching routine. When you start stretching, remember that static stretching is the safest way to stretch. Move the body to the point of tension and hold that position for at least eight seconds without bouncing.



Although you may want to jump into your new season headfirst, it is critical at this point to make sure all of your cheerleaders are properly stretched and conditioned before you start any serious physical activity. Stretch at the beginning of practice, and do some sort of group conditioning at the end, like circuit training. Granted, some of your cheerleaders may be in great shape, but some may have never been this physically active on a regular basis in their whole lives. Assess your squad's physical condition, and move forward once you feel comfortable that your entire team is ready to advance to more strenuous physical activity.

Once you are properly conditioned, start with the basics: motions. Your cheerleaders may hate you for this at first, but reviewing their motions will make practices for games and pep rallies easier down the road. Make your first practice a motion workshop. Go over all of the motions and check for correct motion placement. If you spot a wide high V, instead of fixing it yourself, stand in front of the erroneous V and have your cheerleader fix their motion. By having he/she fix the motion on his or her own, the cheerleader creates a memory of movement, and should now be able to hit that position on their own! If you put them in the right place every time, they will never know what it feels like to correctly place that high V.

Next, take some time to work on your squad's jumps. Make sure that all team members are using the same approach. If you're lacking a uniform approach, have all team members start with their hands in a high V and swing them inward toward each other, using that motion to initiate momentum for height. They will then stop their arms in a sharp T motion or a high V at the apex of their toe touch, herkie, hurdler, etc. Check for good form. Make sure each cheerleader's hips are directly under their shoulders. You don't want them to be leaning their shoulders down in a jump. Just because it's called a toe touch doesn't mean they actually have to touch their toes.

Start reviewing your traditional cheers and sidelines. Divide your squad into groups and assign a returning cheerleader in each group to lead the review and/or teach the new cheerleaders your squad's sidelines. Work on perfecting material the squad already knows. Review the material from tryouts, and add those cheers and sidelines to your cheer list. This review will help them focus on material long enough to perfect it, and it's a good trial run for cheer private coaching and evaluation at camp. In order to become the types of cheerleaders that can pick up material quickly, they have to practice learning and perfecting material. You can also put together a routine for the UCA Home Pom competition on the first night of camp. You can use your dance from tryouts, you can make up a whole new routine, or you don't have to do anything at all. It's completely optional! If you decide to participate, make sure that your routine does not exceed one minute and 15 seconds and does not include stunts and/or tumbling.

Several years ago, the Home Pom competition used to be an entire routine, with stunts, jumps, and tumbling. But the staff started to notice more and more cheerleaders coming to camp injured. Because of the inherent competitive nature of cheerleading, the Home Pom competition became fierce, and squads were creating routines that they weren't ready to perform. They were lacking the technique and conditioning to put together a nationals-caliber routine; but that was what teams were bringing to camp. In order to prevent injuries, UCA made the decision to prohibit stunting and tumbling from the home routine. They wanted the focus of camp to be less on competition and more on cohesion: of technique and team. Use this example as a guideline to prepare for camp. Camp is a place to get better, so don't push your team to have squad liberties for camp if they're not at that level yet. That's what the staff is for!

But if you'd like to get a head start on stunting before camp, remember to follow the proper partner stunt progressions! Work on beginning technique like step-up drills, L-stands, etc, so your squad will be able to move on to harder stunts quickly at camp. Depending on your squad's ability level, you can use some practice time before camp to set stunt groups and work on synchronization of lower level stunts. This is the time to make sure all of your top girls are prepping the same way to load into an elevator and doing the same thing with their arms when they ride their cradles. Just be sure not to overdo it...There will be plenty of time to stunt at camp!

Don't forget to use this time to let the girls get to know you and each other! Plan some squad bonding time. Some of the girls on the team may know each other from last year, but there will probably a few that will feel pretty left out of the group in the beginning. Plan a pot-luck dinner, an end-of-the-year barbecue, an at-home manicure and pedicure night, or a night of squad mini-golf. Check out the ESPN airdates of the national competitions, and schedule a nationals viewing night to get them pumped for the upcoming season. Whatever you decide to do to promote squad bonding, make sure you keep up with it throughout the year. Fostering strong relationships and genuine friendships can help the team work through any difficulty on the field or at practice.

That should do it! Don't stress out over being prepared for camp, because it is not required. But it is recommended! A good deal of time, money, and energy goes into your camp experience, and we would like you to get as much out of camp as possible!

PLANNING FOR A PRIVATE CAMP

Is this the first time that your squad isn't going away to camp? Do you worry about camp feeling too much like practice and you want to make sure that your camp experience stands out? Private camps are just as valuable as an overnight camp in terms of squad bonding and individualized attention. Just like any other camp, the amount of improvement and enjoyment that you will get out of the experience will depend on how much time and energy you put into those three days. A great attitude and a little planning can make your private camp really memorable!

GETTING PREPPED...

After you decide on a private camp, think about what you want your team to get out of camp. Then hold a team meeting to discuss what the cheerleaders want to get out of camp. Once you have identified your goals for camp, start getting in physical shape for camp and planning some fun bonding activities.

When you set up your private camp with your state director, request instructors who are strong in teaching the areas that you'd like to focus on. When your instructor contacts you prior to camp, be specific about your goals so that the instructor can tailor your camp schedule to concentrate on those areas.

Plan to have the kids wear the same outfits, whether they order them through Varsity, have them printed locally, or make them on their own. Try to fundraise for camp so that everyone can afford to go. The team will get so much more out of it if everyone can attend!

DURING THE DAY...

Throughout the week, make sure the team's focus is development of their relationships as well as their skills. Creating a camp atmosphere is more about your psyche than your location.

Video tape your team performing throughout the week. If your squad forgets any of the material, or there is an argument down the line about what a certain move is supposed to look like, you have something to reference. Plus it will be great footage for your awards banquet.

Ask questions and take notes. A lot of material is going to come at you during your camp and if you don't write it down, you may forget some valuable info!

Instructors will have ribbons and awards to give out, but you can still give out other prizes to recognize your team. Give out fun awards on the last day as well as serious ones like “most improved,” “dancing queen,” or “entertainer of the week.” If someone does something that stands out, award them for it.

On the last day, invite parents and friends to come and watch the squad perform their Xtreme routine, cheer, and whatever else you worked on that week. Their parents will be happy to see their money paid off well.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER FUN THINGS TO DO DURING YOUR PRIVATE CAMP:

- Paint signs for football season and get way ahead!
- Plan your first pep rally, public appearance, or parade.
- Have a pot-luck lunch.
- Designate one day as “hat day” where every team member must wear a hat.
- Plan a “race day” and have races during breaks. Have potato sack races, water balloon races, and relay races. Award prizes to the winners.
- Practice setting up and running on the football field and basketball court.
- Popsicles, silly string, water guns, and water balloons are a fun way to take a break and cool the squad off during an exhausting day.
- Conduct a ceremony to welcome new members.

AFTER HOURS...

Planning fun nightly activities can provide your private camp with the bonding normally associated with an overnight camp. The best part about camp is that it gives the cheerleaders the opportunity to work and play intensively for a three day period. You can easily recreate this bonding experience at home with a little creative preparation. Have your captains, seniors, or moms plan some fun activities for the team to do together at night. No matter what you choose to do, invite your instructors to come along. It will be a great time for you to pick their brains and for

the kids to get to know them better. Here are some suggestions for fun nightly activities for your private camp:

- Have a cookout at a team member’s home.
- Have a pizza party at a local pizza parlor.
- Have a bowling party with team members and parents. Award prizes for highest and lowest scores, craziest bowler, etc.
- Have a pool party with a luau theme. Team members can wear grass skirts and have a championship limbo contest!

- Rent old dance movies and have a slumber party. Get to know each other better by asking each other questions.
- Watch a national competition together.
- Hold All Star evaluations in a team member’s back yard. Ask your parents to join you!
- Assign big sister / little sisters on your squad by pairing up vets with new members. Give them an activity to do together like a scavenger hunt, treasure hunt, or make them do an amazing race around their town.

Try to keep in touch with your instructors throughout the year. You can usually get in touch with them through your state director. They will always be happy to hear how you are doing!

