



## **Athlete Guide**

## **A STUNT Game: Executive Summary**

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Over the past five years, USA Cheer has been exploring the creation of a new competitive discipline that would evolve out of traditional cheerleading as a way to grow the activity and expand participation opportunities for young people. USA Cheer recognizes that the growing prominence and movement on this issue at the interscholastic and intercollegiate level over the past year has elevated the urgency of USA Cheer's timing to develop a new, exclusively competitive discipline derived from cheer.

Specifically, there is a growing body of schools at both the high school and college level that have created different models of competitive cheer in hopes to count it as a sport for Title IX purposes. However, none of these programs have been successful in gaining the approval of the Department of Education. To ensure that this new sport develops properly, in a way that preserves traditional cheerleading and creates a new discipline that provides additional opportunities for athletes, as well as being feasible and compliant within the law, USA Cheer has created a new sport called **STUNT** and has launched an initiative to have it recognized as an NCAA Emerging Sport.

### **STUNT Overview:**

**STUNT** is a new competitive team sport, derived from traditional cheerleading. **STUNT** removes the crowd-leading aspect and focuses on the technical and athletic components of cheer, which include partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, jumps, and tumbling skills. Each **STUNT** game consists of four quarters of play (Partner Stunts, Group Jumps & Tumbling, Pyramids & Tosses, and Team Performance) with a halftime in between the second and third quarters.

In **STUNT**, the rules and scoring system are focused solely on routine execution and there are only two teams competing at a time. There is one set of rules and one scoring system that is followed at every game. The competition is objective and the head-to-head format is easy to follow for the crowd. Judges are in place to evaluate and score the execution of predetermined skills and the technique used by the team when performing their different elements.

Predetermined sequences associated with each quarter's technical areas are distributed to **STUNT** team coaches at the start of the season. This new format incorporates all the excitement of a typical cheerleading competition, coupled with the coaching strategy of a regular sporting event. The fourth quarter is the "Team Performance," which allows teams to incorporate their entire team and arsenal into a performance routine they've uniquely designed and choreographed themselves.

Anyone who follows sports will be able to follow **STUNT**. The head-to-head format simplifies the scoring process, while also allowing fans to track the results of the competition as each quarter is completed. Games last approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and teams compete simultaneously on the mat similar to most other sports. In this new format, teams will have season records and national rankings that determine their post-season play, much like other sports. Post season play can also be tracked by the fans, much like "March Madness" through **STUNT's** interactive website.

For more details on **STUNT**, go to [www.usacheer.net](http://www.usacheer.net) or <http://collegestunt.org>.

Dear Athlete,

As the Executive Director of USA Cheer, the National Governing Body for all aspects of cheer, I am pleased to announce that our organization has developed a new derivation of cheerleading—STUNT—as part of its NCAA Emerging Sport initiative. The creation of STUNT is not to replace traditional cheerleading, but to exist alongside it. Traditional cheerleading has been an extremely important part of athletics for over 100 years and will be just as important and exciting going forward.

We feel that STUNT provides you with an exciting new opportunity to continue your interest in cheer at the collegiate level. It is an attractive emerging sport for female athletes to consider participating in as:

**STUNT Offers:**

- High participation rates (30 person roster)
- A varsity sport opportunity that receives full institutional support
- Full competition schedule with opportunities for post season championships
- Potential opportunities for college scholarships

During the 2010-2011 school year, USA Cheer worked closely with colleges and universities in the initial roll out of STUNT. It is our hope that with the participation and support from athletes like you, STUNT will become an NCAA Emerging Sport in the 2011-2012 school year.

We have put together the following guide to help familiarize you with the rules of STUNT and how USA Cheer can support you in your efforts to add this as a varsity sport at your institution. Please keep in mind that this guide is meant to be viewed as a living document that will be improved and updated as STUNT progresses.

This guide contains:

- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About STUNT
- Sample petition letter to supporting STUNT being added at your institution

This is a critical moment in the evolution of cheerleading at the collegiate level, and we are eager to drive this forward to the benefit of the entire cheer community.

USA Cheer hopes that you will join our efforts to develop STUNT as NCAA sport and look forward to working closely with you in this endeavor. To get started, or for more information, please contact Bill Seely at [bseely@usacheer.net](mailto:bseely@usacheer.net) or (888)899-8964.

Bill Seely  
Executive Director, USA Cheer

# **Questions and Answers: STUNT as an Emerging Sport**

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## **I Sport Overview**

### **1. What is STUNT?**

STUNT is a new competitive team sport that has derived from traditional cheerleading. STUNT removes the crowd-leading and focuses on the technical and athletic components of cheer, which include partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, jumps and tumbling skills. Each contest will consist of four quarters of play (Partner Stunts, Group Jumps & Tumbling, Pyramids & Tosses and Team Performance) with a halftime in between the second and third quarters.

### **2. How is STUNT different from traditional cheer?**

In traditional cheerleading, teams are primarily focused on crowd leadership at other sports' athletic contests. When traditional cheerleading teams engage in competition, it is by combining the unique skills of crowd-leading. These routines include actual game cheers and chants as well as the use of signs and include "crowd leadership" and other entertainment categories in their scoring. The rules governing these skills take into account that they will be performing during games as well as in competition settings. For example, there are rules for traditional cheerleading that restrict what skills can be performed at basketball games. Being that there are a wide range of traditional cheerleading styles and ability levels, the rules may change from one competition to another.

In STUNT, the rules and scoring system are focused solely on routine execution and there are only two teams competing at a time. There is one set of rules and one scoring system that is followed at every game. The competition is much more objective with the head to head format. Judges are primarily in place to evaluate the execution of predetermined skills and the technique used by the team when performing their different elements.

## **II Benefits of Participation**

### **3. Why should I participate on a varsity STUNT team?**

First, you should know that USA Cheer fully supports traditional cheerleading and the incredible value it provides to America's schools and communities, as well as the positive experience it provides for millions of young people in America today. STUNT is designed not to replace cheerleading, but to complement it and provide an opportunity for those who choose to use their cheer-based skills in a strictly competitive environment (no cheering at games, pep rallies, etc.).

By participating on your school's STUNT team, you will be entitled to the same benefits and treatment that other NCAA athletes receive. For example, the varsity STUNT team will have increased visibility among sports at your school, increased funding and resources to support the

program and operational costs, opportunities to receive professional coaching, training, and administration, an expanded competitive schedule, as well as full inclusion in athletic departmental policy and planning.

In addition, there is a possibility that as a STUNT athlete, you could become eligible for an athletic scholarship at your institution. It is also important to note that only D-I and D-II schools have the capability of offering scholarships for any NCAA sport. NCAA D-III institutions do not offer athletic scholarships for any sports, but have other significant benefits. The maximum number of recommended scholarships for STUNT is 20, the actual allocation of which is based solely on an administrative decision and will most likely not reach 20 in the first year of development. Just as in any other varsity sport – male and female - institutional size and budget situation of each athletic department will determine scholarship availability.

Often, varsity coaches and administrations may decide to split a full scholarship among several athletes, offer other types of financial aid, or even help work with admissions for very strong prospects in a certain sport. It should be very exciting that you may be paving the way for a young female athlete to receive financial aid and all the benefits of varsity athletics that you may not have had access to as a club cheerleader on campus.

#### **4. Why does STUNT require such a high number to field a team?**

Because of the physical exertion and nature of STUNT, the new sport requires a higher number of athletes to participate. The average quarter will utilize on average 16-20 athletes, providing an additional 10 athletes for development and potential substitution much like any other sport.

### **III. NCAA/Legal Obligations**

#### **5. Do schools have a legal obligation to provide equal participation opportunities for men and women?**

Yes. Title IX requires that schools provide equitable athletic participation opportunities for its female and male students. In order to comply with these requirements schools or institutions must pass one of these three tests:

- a) Proportionality—males and females participate in athletics in numbers substantially proportional to their respective enrollments in school, or
- b) History and Continued Practice of Program Expansion— the institution shows a history and continuing practice of program expansion which is demonstrably responsive to the developing interests and abilities of members of the underrepresented sex, or
- c) Full Accommodation of Interests and Abilities— the institution demonstrates that the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex (females) are fully and effectively accommodated by the existing programs.

An institution fulfills the compliance requirement for participant opportunities if it adheres to any (or just one) of the three tests listed above.

As a female student-athlete, Title IX provides you with a great basis for support with your institution for adding a STUNT team. By adding a STUNT team for women, institutions can improve their ability to comply with these three tests.

#### **6. How will STUNT meet the Office for Civil Rights standards of a sport to qualify for Title IX purposes?**

To determine whether a team is engaging in a varsity sport, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has developed a detailed set of guidelines to determine on a case-by-case basis if the activity in question meets the criteria for sport. Specifically, it considers several factors related to an activity's structure, administration, team preparation, and competition.

Because there is a presumption by OCR that traditional cheerleading is not considered a sport for Title IX purposes, USA Cheer has developed STUNT as a separate discipline from cheer that is designed specifically in accordance with the OCR's guidelines for sport. For example, the exclusive purpose of the STUNT team is competition, it has a fully developed regular season and post season competition schedule, and it is governed and regulated by an established national governing body—USA Cheer. USA Cheer is officially recognized by Cheer's international governing body, the International Cheer Union, which now has 91 countries as members.

USA Cheer is working closely with legal and Title IX experts to ensure that STUNT is created under the proper guidelines so that it can develop into a sport that qualifies for Title IX purposes. Because of the sensitivity to the entire issue of cheerleading as a sport, USA Cheer's development of STUNT with this clear differentiation will help expedite the approval process with OCR.

#### **7. What regulations/obligations will arise out of STUNT being designed as an NCAA Emerging Sport?**

As an NCAA Emerging Sport, the STUNT team will be subject to NCAA rules and regulations similar to other intercollegiate varsity sports. The status and benefits of an NCAA varsity program are accompanied by an array of responsibilities that must be met by the institution, the team, the coaches and the student-athletes. For instance, depending upon off-season or playing season, the NCAA delegates a specific limit on hours of practice and strength and conditioning time.

The elements of academic study hall, strength and conditioning, daily practices, structured NCAA competition and academic eligibility standards are among just a few of the elements involved in the transition of the team structure. These changes, while demanding, will have positive effects on the program including increased funding and support for the team overall.

#### **8. What type of academic eligibility guidelines will we be placed under as athletes participating in an NCAA emerging sport?**

The NCAA has a specific set of requirements for each individual wishing to enter college as a student-athlete. All prospective student-athletes are required to go through the NCAA clearinghouse to determine their eligibility. Club players making the transition will be placed under

the same GPA and credit requirements per academic year the same as the rest of the student-athlete population.

Eligibility requirements are determined by the NCAA with many institutions having specific requirements based on Division and or school specific guidelines. Once enrolled as a student-athlete, your coach and athletic administrators will monitor academic performance and may provide academic assistance in the form of tutors or counseling when a student-athlete shows a need.

#### **IV. Participation**

##### **9. How will schools be able to identify enough participants to field a viable team without taking away from its traditional cheerleading squad?**

Athletics is not a zero-sum environment in which the participation of students in STUNT comes at the expense of the loss of participation of students in traditional cheerleading. Opening STUNT to women should not be viewed as a loss of participation in traditional cheer, but a broadening of opportunities for women to compete that will only serve to expand the participation and growth of women in sports.

Furthermore, there are more than enough women and girls interested in cheerleading and STUNT to field squads for both. For example, at the youth level, there currently are over 450,000 girls participating in the competition only discipline of cheer—All Star—and yet there are still over 600,000 high school girls participating in traditional cheer. At the college level, currently women have few opportunities to participate, as those 800,000+ girls are funneled into less than 40,000 opportunities to participate in traditional cheer—some of which are held by men. By offering STUNT teams, colleges and universities will open a whole new range of participation opportunities that were otherwise closed for these young women and girls to continue participating in their sport at the collegiate level.

##### **10. I like cheering for my school's football and basketball teams. Will I have to give this up in order to participate in a STUNT team?**

Like any varsity college athlete, your ability to participate in activities outside your school sport will be regulated by the NCAA and your individual institution. The NCAA has strict regulations regarding student-athletes who wish to participate in multiple varsity sports and student-athletes who compete in professional or Olympic competition outside of their collegiate sport season. In addition, some athletic programs or coaching staffs set team policies that restrict the activities they permit their athletes to participate in during the off-season, (which may range in everything from alcohol use to skiing to participation in other sporting activities such as sideline cheer.) Therefore, your ability to continue participating in traditional cheerleading will really depend on the specific rules and regulations of your institution, STUNT team, and the NCAA as it applies to your individual circumstances.

## **V. Program Considerations**

### **11. I really like the coaches I have now for my club or traditional cheering team. Will we be able to keep our same coaching staff for the STUNT team?**

Just as a new position is created in any business industry, it is the obligation of the athletic department and institution to open the position up for interviews. While club coaches may not have an automatic offer of employment, there is no regulation or procedure that excludes them if they wish to apply for the job.

For example, with the emerging sport of equestrian, in approximately 50% of the cases for the transition from club to varsity, the club coach became a part of the professional staff. In the cases where the club coach was not selected or did not choose to stay with the program, reasons included the club coach having prior commitments to their professional full time job while others' philosophy of the sport may not have fit the requirements the athletic department was looking to invest in. Some programs may start with a part time coach that the club coach may fill, but later on will transition into a full time STUNT coach.

The creation of varsity programs not only creates opportunity for athletes, but also creates professional opportunities for interested coaches and judges with applicable skills, just as other prominent varsity sports have.

### **12. How will STUNT competitions be scored and evaluated?**

STUNT games and tournaments will be staffed with trained officials that will evaluate execution and synchronization between team members and team groups. Each STUNT game will consist of four quarters which will each produce a score that will be added to the score total for that team. Teams will be ranked according to their overall record and total points from their games.

### **13. Will STUNT athletes have access to better facilities?**

As we have answered many of these questions, this will depend on many factors. While some visible characteristics of being a student-athlete involve premium uniforms and gear, paid travel, equipment, medical access and playing facilities, these elements are secondary to the overall benefit of inclusion of the team with intercollegiate status.

In most cases, upgrades to facilities for practice and play have been progressive, meaning there is not overnight change in facilities— but over time, the team will likely gain access to upgraded facilities, including playing and practice fields, indoor practice facilities, and locker rooms. Facility access and availability is also an administrative allocation and can depend on team performance and even alumni donations, which can be a major boost.



#### **14. What can I do to help expedite the process for developing a STUNT team on my campus?**

The first step in the process is to ensure that the athletic director at your institution knows that there is interest in starting a STUNT team. It is important that your interest, and that of your friends and teammates, is expressed in writing to the athletic department.

To get started, sign the attached petition and submit it to your Athletic Director. As part of their Title IX obligations, Athletic Departments must be responsive to the expressed interests of female student-athletes. Submitting the petition is one of the first and most critical steps to assist your club team in elevating and assist your institution in making history as a pioneer in STUNT, athletics and gender equity. The process typically takes years and can be based on a variety of elements including institutional need for the sport, gender equity issues, budgetary factors and much more.

While your signature does not automatically actuate the creation of a varsity team, it is one of the key tools in beginning the process. Keep in mind that signing the petition does not signal the elimination of club or traditional cheer opportunities, but creates an additional avenue and level of play for the expansion of the sport and creates opportunities for young female athletes of the future.

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## **STUNT Team Student Petition**

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**Date:**

**Institution Name:**

We, the undersigned, support the development of a varsity STUNT team at \_\_\_\_\_  
University. If added as a varsity sport, we would be interested in participating on the team.

**Name (Print)**

**Signature**

**Graduation Year**

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