

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



## SUMMARY OF CHANGES

As part of the rules process, 2026-27 is a “minor changes” year. Rules proposals for the 2027-28 school year can be submitted at <https://usacheer.org/college-cheer>.

- Added a definition for Prep Level.
- Added clarity to definition for spotter.
- C.3 – Added “middle layers” to list of positions from which a top can’t be released to an inverted position.
- C.5 – Requires a spotter of a released transition stunt to remain in position and spotting for two counts after the landing in order to make sure the stunt is stable.
- D.3.a – Clarified that a double cupie/awesome requires a spotter.
- D.8 – Added cradle to the list of skills from which a top person can be released to a hand-to-hand stunt.
- D.14.e.7 - Added wording to require three catchers only when flips with greater than one rotation land in a stunt (which includes cradles and prone positions). Landing on the performing surface now follows D.14.e.8 rules.
- E.2.g – Updated language to allow a pyramid spotter to move just prior to the dismount provided they remain focused on the top person and engaged with the pyramid. This allows an attentive spotter to move from front to back or vice versa even if they are not part of catching the cradle.

New or revised rules are highlighted in ***bold, underlined, italicized***.

## A. Definitions

Base - A person who is in direct contact with the performing surface and is supporting another person’s weight.

Cradle - Dismount from a stunt/pyramid/toss in which the top person lands in a face-up, semi-piked position.

Cupie/Awesome – A stunt in which both of the top person’s feet are in one hand of the base.

Dive Roll - An aerial forward roll where the feet of the performer are at or above the performer’s waist prior to the hands making contact with the performing surface.

Flatback - A stunt in which the top person is in a face-up, straight-body position parallel to the performing surface.

Flip - When a person is airborne while the feet pass over the head.

Height-increasing Apparatus - Any type of equipment that increases the height of a skill.

Inverted/Inversion – A body position where the shoulders are below the waist.

Loading Position - Any intermediate position below shoulder level that uses continuous motion to put a top person in a stunt or pyramid. Examples: Elevator/sponge load, basket load, smooch, scoop from the back, etc.

Middle - A person who is being supported by a base while also supporting a top person.

***Prep Level – A top person’s base of support is between approximately shoulder height and the top of the head.***

Primary Weight – Fifty percent or more of a top person’s weight. Example: A middle layer holding the foot of a hitched leg would not be considered primary weight.

Pyramid - A skill in which a top person is being supported by a middle layer person.

Rewind - Skill in which the top person starts with at least one foot on the ground, is tossed into the air and performs a forward, backward, or side flip into a stunt, pyramid, loading position, or cradle.

Spotter - A person who is ***in direct, weight-bearing contact with the performing surface whose primary function is to protect a top person’s head, neck and shoulders.***

Stunt - A skill in which a top person is supported by a base or bases.

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



Tension Drop - A pyramid/stunt in which the base(s) and the top(s) lean forward in unison until the top person(s) leaves the base(s) without assistance.

Top - A person who is either being supported by another while off of the performing surface or who has been tossed into the air by another person.

Toss - A release stunt in which the bases begin underneath the top person's feet, execute a throwing motion from below shoulder level to increase the height of the top person, and the top person becomes free from all bases, spotters, posts or bracers.

## B. General Program Guidelines

1. Cheerleading squads should be placed under the direction of a qualified and knowledgeable advisor or coach.
2. All practice sessions should be supervised by the advisor/coach and held in a location suitable for the activities of cheerleaders (e.g., use of appropriate matting, away from excessive noise and distractions, etc.)
3. Prior to the performance of any skill, the immediate environment for the activity should be taken into consideration including, but not limited to proximity of non-squad personnel, performance surface, lighting and/or precipitation. Technical skills should not be performed on concrete, asphalt, wet or uneven surfaces or surfaces with obstructions.
4. Advisors/coaches should recognize the particular ability level of all participants and should limit the squad's activities accordingly. Participants should not be pressed to perform activities until they are safely prepared.
5. Skills that have not been mastered should be performed only in a supervised practice environment.
6. Thorough training in proper spotting techniques should be mandatory for all squads.
7. All cheerleaders should receive proper training before attempting any form of cheerleading technical skills (tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps).
8. All cheerleading squads should adopt a comprehensive conditioning and strength building program.
9. An appropriate warm-up exercise should precede all cheerleading activities.
10. All programs should qualify cheerleaders according to accepted teaching progressions. Appropriate spotting should be used until all performers demonstrate mastery of the skill, and when spotting is required by specific rule.
11. In environments where there is close proximity to the athletic event and out of bounds plays pose a significant risk of injury to the participant, no technical skills should be performed while the ball is in play.
12. All partner stunts, pyramids, and tosses should be reviewed and approved by the coach prior to execution.

## C. General Restrictions

1. The use of any height-increasing apparatus (e.g., mini-trampoline, etc.) other than a spring floor is prohibited for performance.
2. When using props (signs, etc.) that are made of solid material or have sharp edges/corners:
  - a. A top or middle person may not release the props to the ground.
  - b. A person on the ground must gently toss or place the props.
  - c. A top person may not perform any skills (i.e., toe touch, twist, etc.) to a cradle.
3. Unless allowed below, the top person in a partner stunt, pyramid or transition cannot be released from bases **or middle layers**, or leave the floor unassisted with the intent to land or be caught in an inverted body position.
4. An individual may not jump, flip or dive over, under, or through partner stunts, pyramids or individuals from basket tosses, similar tosses, partner stunts or other tosses from hands.

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



5. A required spotter:
  - a. Cannot be in a position of providing primary support for a top person.
  - b. Must be in a position to protect the top person coming off of a stunt or pyramid.
  - c. Must remain visually focused on the head, neck and shoulders of the top person, except when it is necessary to briefly check other stunts, surrounding environment, and/or personnel.
  - d. Cannot hold objects.
  - e. **Must remain in position for a released transition (i.e., handspring ups, twisting to one-arm, etc.) until the stunt is clearly established with a minimum of two counts in the intended skill.**
6. Dismounts to the performing surface from shoulder level or higher require assistance from a base or spotter on the performing surface.
7. Drops (knee, seat, thigh, front, back and split) from a jump, stand or inverted position are prohibited unless the majority of the weight is first borne on the hands/feet which breaks the impact of the drop.
8. Jewelry of any kind is prohibited (e.g., navel jewelry, tongue jewelry, earrings, necklaces, etc.) Medical bracelets are allowed provided they are taped to the body.
9. Fingernails, including artificial nails, must be kept short, near the end of the fingers.
10. Soft-soled athletic shoes must be worn while cheering or competing. Gymnastics shoes, jazz shoes and/or boots are prohibited.
11. Supports, braces, soft casts, etc., that are unaltered from the manufacturer's original design/production do not require any additional padding. Supports/braces that have been altered from the manufacturer's original design/production must be padded with a closed-cell, slow-recovery foam padding no less than one-half-inch thick if the participant is involved in partner stunts, pyramids or tosses. A participant wearing a plaster cast or a walking boot must not be involved in partner stunts, pyramids, tosses, jumps or tumbling.

## D. Partner Stunts

1. Released load-ins and released transitions with more than 1 ¼ twists require a spotter.
2. Dismounts with more than 1 ¼ twists require a spotter that assists on the cradle.
3. Stunts in which the base uses only one arm for support require a spotter when:
  - a. The stunt is anything other than a **single** cupie/awesome or basic liberty. All other one-arm stunts require a spotter (e.g., **double cupie/awesome/liberty**, heel stretch, arabesque, high torch, scorpion, bow and arrow, etc.).
  - b. There is a released twisting load-in or dismount. The spotter must be in place during the twist and assist on the cradle during twisting dismounts.
  - c. The top person is popped from one arm to the other.
4. A single base release to shoulders requires a spotter to the side or back of the base during the release and landing phase of the skill.
5. Releases from a handstand position on the ground or a skill to a partner stunt (e.g., handspring loads, hand-to-hand releases) require a spotter.
6. Stunts in which the top person is in an extended handstand position require a spotter.
7. A top person can be released from a handstand position on the ground to a hand-to-hand stunt provided the top person is limited to ½ twist and does not rotate.
8. A top person can be released from a prep-level stunt, **cradle**, or standing position on the performing surface to a hand-to-hand stunt provided the following:

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



- a. The top person does not twist.
  - b. The top person does not rotate beyond a  $\frac{1}{2}$  rotation into the hand-to-hand.
  - c. A spotter is present.
9. A top person can be released from a cradle position or a horizontal position below shoulders to an inverted position.
10. Single based split catches are prohibited.
11. Twisting mounts and dismounts greater than  $2\frac{1}{4}$  rotations are prohibited.
12. Front, back and side tension drops are prohibited.
13. Unless allowed by Rule D-14, all leg pitch, toe pitch, walk-in, sponge, and straddle catch flips to the performing surface are prohibited.
14. Flipping into and out of stunts is allowed with the following conditions. (Note that flipping from a basket or sponge loading position is a “toss” and must follow the Toss section rules.)
- a. The top person is limited to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  flipping rotations and one twisting rotation.
  - b. Flips must be caught by the original group and may not be directed so that the bases must move to catch the top person.
  - c. Bases are limited to  $\frac{1}{2}$  turn under the top person.
  - d. In rewinds:
    1. Rewinds require a spotter and may land in a stunt (including loads and horizontal positions), a standing position on the performing surface, or a cradle with assistance from the spotter.
    2. Spotters may throw from under a single foot or leg of the top person.
  - e. In flips from stunts:
    1. Flips from stunts must initiate from prep level or below.
    2. Flips that initiate from prep level or from below prep level in a cradle or horizontal position may land in a cradle, horizontal or vertical stunt, or in a standing position on the performing surface.
    3. Flips that initiate from an elevator toss may land in a cradle, horizontal or vertical stunt. They may not land in a standing position on the performing surface.
    4. Flips to vertical stunts or the performing surface may not perform any twists.
    5. Flips that land in a vertical stunt require a spotter.
    6. Landings from all other flips with a single rotation or less require two people.
    7. Landings ***in stunts or cradles*** from flips with greater than one rotation require three people. When landing in a cradle position, one of the catchers must be in a “scoop” position behind the top person.
    8. Flips to the performing surface require the top person landing on at least one foot with assistance from at least one base. A spotter must be active but is not required to make contact.
    9. In all other landings from flips, all required catchers must be active in assisting the top person during the landing by making contact.

## E. Pyramids

1. Pyramids higher than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  body lengths are prohibited. Pyramid height is measured by body lengths as follows: chairs, thigh stands and shoulder straddles are  $1\frac{1}{2}$  body lengths; shoulder stands are 2 body lengths; extended stunts (i.e., extension, liberty, etc.) are  $2\frac{1}{2}$  body lengths. Exception: an extended stunt on top of a thigh stand is allowed.
2. In all pyramids:
  - a. There must be at least two spotters designated for each person who is above two persons high and whose primary support does not have at least one foot on the ground.
  - b. Spotters must be in position as the top person lands in the  $2\frac{1}{2}$  high position and have a clear path to the front or back of the top person. They can load and move to this position as the top is loading.

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



- c. One spotter must have at least one foot behind the base'(s) feet. One spotter must have at least one foot in front of the base'(s) feet.
- d. In 2 ½ high pyramids with horizontal top persons (ie. Flat back, prone and Swedish variations), the required spotters may be at the head or on either side of the top person's hips. They may not be on the foot/leg(s) side of the top person. Spotters must be in 2 of the 3 legal spotting positions. The legal positions are as follows:
  - 1. on the left and right of the top person's hips,
  - 2. at the top person's head and the left side of the top person's hips.
  - 3. at the top person's head and the right side of the top person's hips.Note: See <https://usacheer.org/college-cheer> for examples.
- e. One of the required spotters is allowed to place one hand under the exposed sole of the foot or under the hands of a base in a support role. The other hand may be in contact with the body or may be free but it may not be directly under the sole of the foot of a middle layer or under the hands of a base in a support role.
- f. The other required spotter must not place their hands directly under the sole of the foot of a middle layer or under the hands of a base in a support role.
- g. Once the pyramid shows adequate stability and just prior to the dismount, either required spotter can move **provided they remain focused on the top person and engaged with the pyramid.**
- h. As pyramid design and loading varies greatly, we recommend a review of any new pyramids where the spotting position may be in question.
- i. Loaders may act as spotters. The key issue is that there is someone in position to provide assistance to the top person when they land.
- j. Only bases and middle layer persons can bear primary weight of another person.

Note: "In front of and behind" refers to the direction of the top person, not the orientation of the pyramid. In some transition pyramids, the top person's back may change the direction it is facing. See <https://usacheer.org/college-cheer> for examples.

- 3. In all "2-1-1 thigh stand tower" pyramids, there must be a spotter who is not in contact with the pyramid in place behind the top person. If a bracer is needed to assist the thigh stand middle layer, they do not fill this role and a spotter who is not in contact with the pyramid is required.
- 4. A top can be released from a stunt or an inverted position on the performing surface (e.g., handspring up) and land inverted in a pyramid with the following conditions:
  - a. A minimum of 2 base/spots must load the skill.
  - b. The top person cannot flip (must be less than one complete rotation).
  - c. The release is limited to ½ twist.
- 5. Twisting released mounts and dismounts greater than 2 ¼ rotations are prohibited.
- 6. Cradles and horizontal landings from pyramids over two high must use at least two catchers, one on each side of the top person.
- 7. Front, back, and side tension drops are prohibited.
- 8. Flipping dismounts from pyramids are allowed with the following conditions:
  - a. Front flip and Arabian dismounts may land in a cradle, face up horizontal position, or the performing surface to a minimum of two catchers who assist on the landing.
  - b. Front flip with up to one complete twist may land in a two-person cradle only.
- 9. Flips into a pyramid are allowed under the following conditions:

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



- a. The flip is initiated from a stunt prep level or below.
- b. The top person is limited to 1 ¼ flipping rotations and one twisting rotation.
- c. Top persons may not land in an inverted position.
- d. A rewind to a pyramid does not require a spotter for the rewind.

## F. Tosses

1. Basket tosses or similar tosses may only be performed from ground level, can use no more than four bases, and must be cradled by three of the original bases, one of which must catch in a scoop under the head and shoulders.
  - a. Exceptions:
    1. Non-flipping basket and elevator/sponge load-ins can land in a stunt or pyramid provided that the toss does not significantly exceed the height of first contact with the bases and top.
    2. Elevator tosses may flip into stunts as outlined above.
    3. Elevator and basket tosses may flip into pyramids as outlined above.
2. Basket and elevator/sponge tosses may not be directed so that the bases must move to catch the top person.
3. The top person in a basket toss or similar toss that lands in a cradle cannot hold anything in their hands with the exception of poms.
4. In non-flipping baskets, the top person is limited to 2 ¼ twisting rotations.
5. In flipping basket/sponge tosses, only the following skills are allowed:
  - a. Non-twisting backward somersaults in a tuck, layout, or pike position with up to one additional non-flipping trick.
  - b. Non-twisting forward somersaults in an arched, tuck, layout, or pike position with no additional tricks.
  - c. Back Layout Full Twist.
6. The following backward somersault skills may only be performed if both side throwers and the backspot are male.
  - a. Layout Straddle Full Twist
  - b. Tuck X Out Full Twist
  - c. Tuck Kick Full Twist or Tuck Split Full Twist
  - d. Layout Kick Full Twist or Layout Split Full Twist
  - e. Layout Double Full Twist

(All other flipping basket positions and combinations are prohibited, i.e., Front Fulls, Arabians, Pike-open Full Twist, Side Sumis, Kick Double Full Twists, Double Flips and greater, etc.)

## G. Tumbling

1. Tumbling skills performed over, under or through partner stunts, pyramids or individuals are prohibited.
2. Tumbling skills that exceed one flipping rotation are prohibited.
3. Tumbling skills with two or more twisting rotations are prohibited.
4. Dive rolls are prohibited.
5. Airborne drops to a prone position on the performing surface are illegal. Examples: A back flip or a jump landing in a pushup position is illegal. A handspring to a pushup position is legal as it is not airborne prior to the prone landing.

## H. Specific Surface Restrictions

1. The following skills are only allowed on a mat, grass (real or artificial) or rubberized track surface.

# 2026-27 USA Cheer College Cheer Rules



- a. Basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses and other similar multi-based tosses.
  - b. Inversion releases from the ground or a skill (e.g., handspring loads, hand-to-hand releases).
  - c. Flipping skills into or from stunts, tosses or pyramids.
  - d. Two and one-half high pyramids. Mounts or dismounts to and from 2 ½ high pyramids may not flip or twist on a rubberized track surface.
2. At football games, kick double baskets and baskets that flip AND twist are only allowed during pre-game or half-time situations while on grass (real or artificial) or a matted surface with dimensions of at least 10' x 10'.
3. At basketball, volleyball, and other indoor games, the following skills are prohibited for all timeouts (regardless of matting) and for pre-game, half-time, or post-game performances without matting.
- a. Basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses and other similar multi-based tosses.
  - b. Partner stunts in which the base uses only one arm to support the top person. Exception: Non-twisting cupies/awesomes are allowed.
  - c. Flips into or from partner stunts.
  - d. Full releases to or from an inversion on the ground or in a stunt.
  - e. Extended inversions.
  - f. Twisting dismounts greater than 1 ¼ rotation. Twisting dismounts up to 1 ¼ rotation on the court require a spotter.
  - g. Two and one-half person high pyramids.
  - h. Airborne twisting tumbling skills (Arabians, full twisting layouts, etc. Cartwheels, roundoffs and aerial cartwheels are allowed.)
4. At basketball, volleyball, and other indoor games during pre-game, half-time, or post-game performances where sufficient matting is used, there are no additional restrictions to the standard rules. (Sufficient matting varies by skill. In general, there should be at least two to three feet of clearance between non-tumbling skills and the edge of the mat.)

The above rules are general in nature and are not intended to cover all circumstances. All cheerleading skills, including tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids, jumps and tosses should be carefully reviewed and supervised by a qualified and knowledgeable advisor or coach. USA Cheer makes no warranties or representations, either expressed or implied, that the above guidelines will prevent injuries to individual participants. Rules may change within a season for safety or clarification purposes. For the most recent safety rules and information, visit [usacheer.org](http://usacheer.org).