



SPIRIT

SCHOOL AND RECREATIONAL



2026-2027 | RULES & REGULATIONS



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Red indicates a change/update from the 2025-26 competition season.

Information is subject to change

These Rules and Regulations are the exclusive property of Varsity Spirit and may not be reproduced, in part or entirely, for events not sponsored and approved by Varsity Spirit.

2026-27 USA COMPETITIONS GENERAL INFORMATION

CODE OF CONDUCT

Varsity Spirit encourages and supports sportsmanship, integrity and fairness among participants and coaches/owners/directors in all facets of team practice and performance. We strive to uphold the highest standards and promote this to the best of our abilities and believe that coaches are instrumental in promoting and instilling this among their respective team members.

To ensure the most positive experience for all attendees, Varsity Spirit asks that all participants, coaches, gym owners, directors and spectators adhere to and know the Code of Conduct and Prohibited Items for all Regional, Virtual, and Championships events.

To review the entire policy please click here: [Varsity Spirit - Safety](#)

EVENT ELIGIBILITY

Varsity Spirit will require that all coaches, directors, choreographers, and personnel wishing to access the warm up area, backstage, coaches' box, or athlete areas at our competitions have required credentialing, background check, and safeguarding as required by each event.

To review the entire eligibility policy please click here: [Varsity Spirit - Event Eligibility](#)

EVENT GUIDELINES

The coach/director of each team is responsible for understanding and following the Event Guidelines. Event Guidelines include:

- General Guidelines
- Safety Guidelines
- Music Guidelines
- Interruption of Performance
- Competition Area
- Warm Up Room Policy
- Spotter Policy

To review additional information, click here: [Varsity Spirit - Event Guidelines](#)

EVENT POLICIES

All attendees are expected to follow event policies to ensure a respectable and secure environment.

To review the event policies, click here: [Varsity Spirit - Event Policies](#)

USA SCHOOL DIVISIONS

Spirit and Recreation Divisions: [2026-2027 USA Spirit Competition Divisions](#)

TRADITIONAL RECREATIONAL GUIDELINES AND DIVISIONS

All Recreational teams must classify as ***BOTH*** of the following:

- **AFFILIATED**
 - The program must be affiliated with, report to, and be governed by an organization such as; YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, City/County Parks and Recreational Program, American Youth Cheer, Pop Warner Association, or other community run program not associated with All Star Cheer. The team must also cheer for a sport during the 2026-2027 season. Teams with a school affiliation may only compete in the

recreational cheer traditional division if at least half of the participants are in the 5th grade or younger and meet the age requirements. Teams with a school affiliation that have a majority of 6th, 7th, 8th and/or 9th graders must compete in the Junior High division. Teams with a school affiliation that have a majority of 7th-12th graders at that school must compete in the Junior Varsity or Varsity division.

- **TRADITIONAL**

- Routines must consist of cheer & music combination.
 - Routine Max: 2:30 minutes
 - Music Max: 1:45 minutes

DIVISION LIMITATIONS

Division limitations can be found within the Competitions tab under [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#) for all Spirit Divisions including: Show Cheer, Song/Pom, Song/Jazz, Pep Flag & Mascot.

USA DIVISION GUIDELINES

The USA and/or its competition personnel reserves the right to delete, combine, or divide categories and divisions as deemed necessary. If categories/divisions are altered, adjustments will be made in the awards.

An individual may **not**:

- Compete against her/himself in the same division/category (i.e., two Group Stunt teams).
- Represent more than one school at any given event.
- Participate on two teams within the same category type and/or divisions within a category when separated by size, stunt/tumbling/technical limitations, or squad level. For example, 1) Small and Large Varsity Show Cheer divisions 2) Show Cheer Novice and Show Cheer Advanced categories 3) JV Cheer and Varsity Cheer division 4) JV Song/Pom and Varsity Song/Pom division. 5) Jr. High Show Cheer Novice and Elementary Show Cheer Novice. The penalty for this violation will be disqualification of one of the routines.
- Compete at any Varsity event at a higher level and then move to a lower level for competition within the same year (i.e., a Varsity team for one event, and then JV team for another event).
- **Compete on two different School/Rec teams at the same event.**

A school may only have a coed and all-girl team in the same age level (i.e., Varsity Coed Show Cheer and Varsity Show Cheer) if there are no shared athletes between the two teams.

A school cannot have 2 teams in the same category type. For example:

- Varsity Show Cheer Advanced and Varsity Show Cheer Novice divisions.
- Show Cheer and Show Cheer Non-Tumbling divisions.
- Varsity Song/Pom Intermediate and Varsity Song/Pom Novice division.
 - The penalty for this violation will be disqualification of one of the routines. The only exception is Group Stunt (Advanced and Intermediate).

High School Freshman team members all must be in the 9th grade and must represent a high school. Jr. High/Middle School teams may not compete in a freshman division.

Jr. High/Middle School teams must represent a Jr. High/Middle School. A 9th grade team representing a high school may not compete in the Jr. High/Middle School categories/divisions.

A team must compete in the same category/division at Nationals for which it qualified in at a Regional unless prior written approval is received from the USA. For example:

- If you qualify for Show Cheer at a Regional, you may not compete in Coed Show Cheer at Nationals, unless you also qualify for that category at a Regional.
- If you qualify for Show Cheer - Novice at a Regional, you may not compete in Show Cheer - Advanced at Nationals, unless you also qualify for that category at a Regional. The above are two examples – other examples of this may exist.

If a team qualifies for Nationals two or more times in the Intermediate or Advanced level at a Regional competition, then that team must receive written permission to move to a lower technical division at Nationals.

Any exceptions to the above must be requested in writing and pre-approved in writing by the USA office prior to and for the effected event. It is up to the sole discretion of the USA in what division a team may be placed. The USA also reserves the right to deny any team registration for its competition as a result of not having an appropriate division for that particular team.

SPLITTING CATEGORIES BY TEAM SIZE

At spirit competitions, Varsity, Junior Varsity, Freshman, Jr High and Recreation Show Cheer, Song/Pom and Song/Jazz are divided if there are 10 or more teams competing in that category. If there are 10 or more teams entered, indicating a possible division split, then there must be at least 3 teams in each division once a split occurs to keep the divisions separated by size.

ELIGIBILITY POLICY - HIGH SCHOOL

At the time of competition, entrants must be registered students in the school they are representing and official full-time members of their team. No members shall be younger than 9th grade or older than 12th grade. The penalty for an eligibility violation will be disqualification of the routine.

ELIGIBILITY POLICY - JR HIGH

At the time of competition, entrants must be registered students in the school they are representing and official full-time members of their team. No members shall be older than 9th grade. The penalty for an eligibility violation will be disqualification of the routine.

UNIFORM GUIDELINES

Appropriate attire suitable for all athletes should be worn. In all divisions (excluding mascots), an official school/rec uniform that is worn for game/sideline cheering or performing must be worn (i.e., skirt and top). Costuming is not allowed. If an accessory (i.e., hair bows) or an article of clothing adds to the overall effect and/or theme of the routine, it will be considered "costuming" and a deduction will be assessed. (Exception: Costuming is allowed in the Song/Pom category, the Song/Jazz category and for Mascots).

Shoes

All participants must wear soft-soled, non-marking shoes on both feet while competing. Shoes must have a solid sole and cover the toe and heel. This is a safety rule and if a violation occurs, a deduction will be incurred. (Exception: Half-sole shoes/dance paws/turners are acceptable in the Song/Pom and Song/Jazz categories. Performers who wear half-sole shoes/dance paws/turners while performing do so at their own risk. Shoes that cover the toe and heel are required at all other times when not directly performing). If damage

to any floor occurs, the performing school will be responsible for any charges that may result due to these damages.

Make-Up

If worn, make-up should be appropriate for both the performance and the age of the athletes.

Hair

Hair for all athletes does not have to be worn the same but must be secured off the face (cheer teams) with a simple and unexaggerated style that is acceptable to all diversities. Bows are not required. If worn, bows must be securely fastened and positioned in a manner to minimize risk for all participants.

APPROPRIATENESS

Appropriateness of Choreography, Music, and Outfitting

All facets of a performance or routine, including choreography, music selection, outfitting and cheer words should be appropriate and suitable for family viewing and listening. Uniforms for all team types should be appropriate for the age of the participants performing the routine. Cheer words should promote school pride, honor, tradition, and sportsmanship. Cheers that are negative, insulting to other teams or the judges may reflect a lower score.

In general, performances, including but not limited to the actual routine, signs, cheers, chants, and hand signals/gestures, should adhere to outfitting, performance and music guidelines and criteria in place and approved by the administration or institution which the team represents.

Deductions will be given for vulgar or suggestive choreography, which includes, but is not limited to, movements such as hip thrusting and inappropriate touching, gestures, hand/arm movements and signals, slapping, positioning of body parts and positioning to one another.

Deductions will be given for music or words unsuitable for family listening, which includes, but is not limited, to profanity and connotations of any type of sexual act or behavior, drugs, mention of specific parts of the body, and/or violent acts or behavior. Removing improper language or words from a song and/or replacing with sound effects or other words may be considered inappropriate, and deductions will be made accordingly.

Any uniform, choreography, words, or music in which the appropriateness is questionable or with which uncertainty exists should be submitted to the USA for approval prior to competing (USARules@varsity.com).

ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Judges are looking for enthusiasm and showmanship during entrances and exits. **Teams and individuals are encouraged to move on and off the floor as quickly as possible and will be limited to 30 seconds for each. Official entrance timing will begin when the first athlete touches the mat or performance area. Anything over 30 seconds will incur a deduction.**

All team breaks, rituals and traditions need to take place prior to the team being called to the performance floor. Organized entrances and/or marching processions are not allowed by any cheer team and can incur an overall routine length timing penalty. Teams should take the floor immediately with spirit and enthusiasm, but without excessive gestures. Example: chest bumps, hugs, handshakes, etc. All teams should refrain from any type of excessive celebration following the team's performance. Any team in violation may receive a "sportsmanship" penalty. There should not be any organized exits or other activities after the official ending of the routine.

ROUTINE TIME LIMITATIONS

For all divisions:

- Timing will begin on the first note of music, the first vocal command (for cheer squads), the first organized cheer or the first movement, and will stop with the end of the cheer or last note of the music. There is no minimum time requirement.

Show cheer:

- Maximum routine length is 2:30.
- Up to 1:45 (105 seconds) of the routine may be performed to music. Penalties will be deducted from the final average score for going over the 1:45 total music time limit.

Song/Pom & Song/Jazz:

- Maximum routine length is 2:30.
- Female members must use two poms for 80% of the routine.

Mascot:

- Maximum routine length is 2:00.
- Timing for prop set-up in the Mascot category will begin at the announcement of the team/participant(s). Set-up timing will stop when the routine begins. Mascots have 1 minute to set up props and 1 minute to exit the floor, including all props, at the end of their performance.

Pep/Short Flags:

- Maximum routine length is 2:30.
- Teams are limited to 30 seconds for entrance (from the announcement of team's name) and 30 seconds for exit (from conclusion of routine music). Choreographed entrances and exits will not be judged.

Due to the variability in sound systems, you should build leeway into your routine to avoid timing penalties. It is suggested that routines end 3-5 seconds prior to the routine length time limit.

Any time penalties will be deducted from the final averaged score for either going over the total routine time limit, specified music length (Show Cheer) or use of poms (Song/Pom).

COMPETITION PERFORMANCE AREA

Performance boundaries at competitions will be a regulation basketball court (unless otherwise noted). All Regionals will have a carpet bonded foam mat on the performance area that measures 54'x42'. Unless otherwise noted, the mat will be removed for the song/pom, song/jazz, and/or pep flag/short flag categories/divisions. Mascots may or may not perform on a mat. This will be based on performance order.

- There will be no practice on the main performance floor prior to the competition.
- Spring floors will not be used for school-based/rec cheer divisions.
- Participants may line up anywhere within the competition area but must start with at least one foot on the ground (Show Cheer, Game Day and Crowleader™ Teams divisions).
- All stunts and/or tumbling must be executed on the mat.
- Athletes must always remain within the boundaries of the performance floor.
 - A penalty will be assessed for any stunting or tumbling executed off of the mat **or athlete(s) out of bounds**. An athlete is considered outside the matted area when any part of the seat/torso or any combination of two hands and/or both feet are completely outside of the performance surface.
 - Judge decisions are final and will not be reviewed.

- The center will be marked on all performance surfaces. Center markers will not be allowed. This includes but is not limited to stuffed animals, toys, banners, etc. Teams are prohibited from bringing any non-used props to the performance area.
- Coaching staff, parents, fans and/or other members of the performing team entering the competition boundary before, during or after a performance is not allowed. The only people allowed on the performance floor are the competitors and competition personnel.

PROPS

Props are not allowed in Song/Pom, Song/Jazz or Pep Flag routines (exception: poms for Song/Pom and flags for Pep Flag). A prop is defined as any physical object used to enhance the overall effect and/or theme of your routine. See specific rules listed in division information below. Use of props in restricted divisions will result in a deduction.

Required use of props in the Show Cheer, Game Day and Crowdleader™ Teams divisions are limited to flags, megaphones, poms, signs, and other traditional sideline props (this includes rally towels, body flags and foam fingers). The following applies to all USA Spirit Divisions when props are allowed:

- Tossing, throwing or other projecting of any type of object outside the competition floor and/or into the crowd is not allowed.
- No use of water, glitter, or other substances that would be harmful to the floor and/or to another competitor.
- Signs and school/team flags are permitted but may not be worn as an article of clothing or accessory.
- Props cannot bear the weight of the performer.
- No air horns or artificial noise makers are allowed.
- All equipment tips on flagpoles must be padded or taped.
- All props must be able to fit through a standard size (36") single door.
- Props may be discarded off of the performance surface but not hit/banged on the floor outside the performance area.

ROUTINE SCORING

Sample score sheets and Scoring Guidelines can be found within the Competitions tab under [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

DIVISION LIMITATIONS, LEGALITY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For all Division Limitations, Legality and Additional Resources referenced in this section, please visit the USA website [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

2026-2027 USA DIVISION LIMITATIONS AND NFHS RULES – CHEER DIVISIONS

In addition to all rules covered in the “2026-27 National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Spirit Rules Book” additional rules apply to teams entering Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Non-Tumbling, and Junior/Elementary/Rec divisions.

[2026-27 USA Division Limitations – Cheer Divisions](#)

2026-2027 USA DIVISION LIMITATIONS – SONG/POM, SONG/JAZZ AND PEP FLAG

Please review the General Safety Rules and Division Limitations for Song/Pom and Song/Jazz.

[2026-27 USA High School Teams – Song/Pom and Song/Jazz Division Limitations](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book <https://www.nfhs.org/activities-sports/spirit/>
- [2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag General Safety Rules](#)
- [2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep Flag Glossary of Terms](#)

SCHOOL DEDUCTION SCORING GUIDELINES AND PENALTY VIOLATIONS

Please review the 2026-2027 Cheer Deduction Scoring Guidelines and Cheer/Song/Pom/Pep Flag/Mascot legality documents on our website under [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

Points will be deducted from the final team average for violations of safety rules, division limitations, general competition rules, and/or time limits, etc. Below are some penalties that are in addition to the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book, 2026-27 USA Division Limitations, 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules and the 2026-27 USA High School Teams Song/Pom and Pep/Short Flag Division Limitations. See [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#) for these documents.

Safety Rules

Points will be deducted from the final team average score for EACH occurrence of a safety rule violation or specialty skill/division level restriction.

Performance Order/Division Changes

A preliminary performance order will be posted in the coaches BAND group and on the USA website at usa.varsity.com at least 2 weeks prior to your competition date. It is the advisor's/coach's responsibility to check the preliminary schedule for accuracy of categories/divisions prior to the day of competition.

All changes to your original competition registration must be submitted through a change request on the registration within your myVarsity account.

At the USA's and/or competition director's discretion, a penalty may be assessed for any requested changes from the schedule that was posted on-line. To help avoid this penalty, any changes must be received by 5:00 p.m. (PST) the Friday one week prior to your competition date. There are no division changes allowed after this deadline.

Division changes may not be made the day of a Regional. At a Regional competition, a team performing in an incorrect division may be disqualified from the competition but may perform for evaluation only for the opportunity to qualify for Nationals.

USA SCHOOL DIVISIONS

All permitted cheerleading specialty skills, including tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps must follow the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book. Please see additional specific skill restrictions below for each category. All skills should be carefully reviewed and supervised by a qualified adult advisor/director/coach.

SHOW CHEER DIVISIONS

Number on Team

5-36 members

Divisions

Refer to division grid on usa.varsity.com under [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

Routine Procedure

Execute the routine of your choice using a combination of music and words. An emphasis on practical and effective audience participation (i.e., use of signs, spell-outs, crowd response chants, etc.), especially during

the cheer section, is encouraged. Props are required although costuming and/or certain props are not allowed. Up to 1:45 (105 seconds) of the routine may be performed to music. Penalties will be deducted from the final average score for going over the 1:45 total music time limit.

Total Routine Time Limit

2:30 minutes maximum

Safety Rules

As with all categories, routines in these divisions must follow the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book. Additional Division Limitations may apply to your chosen category.

DIVISION RULES: SHOW CHEER (ADVANCED, INTERMEDIATE AND NOVICE)

Specific Skill Restrictions

There are no tumbling or stunt/pyramid/toss restrictions in the **ADVANCED** division besides those listed in the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book.

INTERMEDIATE and **NOVICE** please refer to the 2026-27 USA Division Limitations document for all specialty skill restrictions for these divisions.

DIVISION RULES: SHOW CHEER – NON-TUMBLING (ADVANCED, INTERMEDIATE AND NOVICE)

Division Rules

The Non-Tumbling division prohibits all standing and/or running tumbling for ALL levels.

Specific Skill Restrictions

There are no stunt/pyramid/toss restrictions in the **ADVANCED** division besides those listed in the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book.

INTERMEDIATE and **NOVICE** please refer to the 2026-27 USA Division Limitations document for all specialty skill restrictions for this division.

GROUP STUNT

Number on Team

4/5 members, including spotter. There is no Coed division, teams must be all female or all male.

Divisions

Refer to division grid on usa.varsity.com under Competitions/Divisions, Rules & Scoring.

Routine Procedure

The participants all must be from the same school. Execute stunts of your choice. Background music is encouraged but must meet music licensing requirements. Additional spotters are not permitted.

Total Routine Time Limit

1 minute maximum

Safety Rules

As with all categories, routines in these divisions must follow the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book. Additional Division Limitations may apply to your chosen category.

DIVISION RULES: GROUP STUNT

Specific Skill Restrictions

There are no tumbling or stunt/pyramid/toss restrictions in the **Group Stunt ADVANCED** division besides those listed in the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book.

Group Stunt – INTERMEDIATE and Group Stunt – NOVICE (Jr. High Teams Only), please refer to the 2026-27 USA Division Limitations document for all specialty skill restrictions for these divisions.

MASCOT

Number on Team

1-10 members

Mascots may perform as individuals or as mascot groups. Participants in this category must be the official mascot(s) of the school and be in official mascot uniform or some other form of costume related to the theme of the routine. Proof from the school that an individual is an officially recognized mascot for the school may be required. Additional individuals, (i.e., cheerleaders and/or song/pom, etc.), are not permitted to be visible and/or perform as part of this routine.

Routine Procedure

- Execute any type of skit or novelty routine.
- Use of a theme and crowd involvement are encouraged.
- Competitors should use music, props, costumes and accessories.
- All props/accessories (either assembled or disassembled) are limited to “hand-held” in size.
- A back-drop to conceal props and/or non-visible members providing support for the routine is permitted. This back-drop may measure no more than 10' high x 20' wide and may be assembled prior to taking the performance floor. Moving the back-drop to the performance floor is part of the set-up and breakdown time limit for props.
- Please, no use of water, glitter or other substances that would be harmful to the floor and/or to another competitor. Materials that require clean up (i.e., confetti) are not permitted.
- Individuals assisting with props may not be visible during the routine.
- Tumbling, pyramids and/or basket tosses are illegal.
- Tossing, throwing or other projecting any type of object into the crowd is not allowed.
- A penalty will be assessed for any infraction of the above rules.
- Music used must meet music licensing requirements.

Total Routine Time Limit

2 minutes maximum. You will be limited to 1 minute to set-up your props and 1 minute to breakdown your props. Timing for prop set-up will begin when the team/participant(s) is announced. Set-up timing will stop when the routine begins. Mascots will have 1 minute to exit the floor at the end of their performance.

SONG/POM DIVISIONS

Number on Team

5-23 members

Divisions

Refer to division grid on usa.varsity.com under [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

Routine Procedure

A song/pom routine consists of visual effects, synchronization, clean/sharp pom motions and technical skills. Visual effects include level changes, opposition, group work, transitions and formations. Emphasis should be placed on proper pom/motion technique, proper dance technique, timing, and showmanship. All female members must use two pompons for 80% of the routine. Props other than poms are not allowed.

Total Routine Time Limit

2:30 minutes maximum

Uniform

An official school uniform that is worn for game/sideline cheering or performing must be worn. Costuming is allowed but not required.

Safety Rules

Routines in these divisions must also follow all the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules.

DIVISION RULES: SONG/POM – HIGH SCHOOL VARSITY/JV (ADVANCED, INTERMEDIATE, NOVICE)

Specific Skill Restrictions

There are no additional restrictions in the **ADVANCED** division besides those listed in the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules. There are additional technical/specialty skill restrictions in the **INTERMEDIATE** and **NOVICE** divisions. Please refer to the 2026-27 High School Teams Song/Pom and Song/Jazz Divisions Limitations document.

DIVISION RULES: SONG/POM – HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN, JR. HIGH & ELEMENTARY

Specialty Skills Restrictions

There are no additional restrictions besides those listed in the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules.

SONG/JAZZ DIVISIONS

Number on Team

5-23 members

Divisions

Refer to division grid on usa.Varsity.com under [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

Routine Procedure

A song-jazz routine incorporates stylized jazz dance movements and combinations, visuals effects, level changes, formation changes and dance technique. Emphasis should be on uniformity of the selected jazz style, proper dance technique, timing and showmanship. Props are not allowed. Costuming is allowed in this category.

Total Routine Time Limit

2:30 minutes maximum

Safety Rules

Routines in these divisions must also follow all the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules.

DIVISION RULES: SONG/JAZZ – HIGH SCHOOL (ADVANCED & INTERMEDIATE)

Specific Skill Restrictions

There are no additional restrictions in the **ADVANCED** division besides those listed in the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules. There are additional technical/specialty skill restrictions in the **INTERMEDIATE** division. Please refer to the 2026-27 High School Teams Song/Pom and Song/Jazz Divisions Limitations document.

PEP FLAG/SHORT FLAG (2 FLAG) – HIGH SCHOOL

Number on Team

4-23 members

Divisions

Refer to division grid on usa.varsity.com under Competitions/Divisions, Rules & Scoring

Routine Procedure

A pep flag/short flag routine consists of visual effects, synchronization, twirls, tricks and tosses. Visual effects include level changes, opposition, group work, formations and transitions. Emphasis should be placed on proper twirling technique, timing, and showmanship. All team members must use flags for 80% of the routine. A deduction will be taken for each dropped flag shaft. A dropped flag is defined as a flag that is unintentionally released onto the performance surface. Props and/or costuming are not allowed.

Total Routine Time Limit

2:30 minutes maximum. Pep/Short Flags will be limited to 30 seconds for entrance (from the announcement of team's name) and 30 seconds for exit (from conclusion of routine music). Choreographed entrances and exits will not be judged.

Safety Rules

Routines in these divisions must also follow all the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules.

Specific Skill Restrictions

There are no additional restrictions besides those listed in the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep/Short Flag Safety Rules.

Equipment

To avoid floor damage, pep flag shafts must be covered on both ends.

GAME DAY ROUTINE DIVISIONS – RULES & GUIDELINES (CHEER)

GENERAL RULES

All permitted cheerleading specialty skills, including tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps for the Game Day Divisions must follow the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book. Please see additional specific skill restrictions below for each category. All skills should be carefully reviewed and supervised by a qualified adult advisor/director/coach.

Categories/Divisions

There are three stand-alone categories and one combined Crowleader™ category. Qualification to attend USA Nationals is required to compete in any of the Game Day categories below.

Stand-Alone Categories

- Band Chant
- Situational Sideline/Cheer
- Fight Song

Crowleader™ Teams - High School Only- combined category (includes Band Chant, Situational Sideline/Cheer, Fight Song)

There is no coed split of divisions for the stand-alone Game Day divisions.

See [2026-27 High School Spirit Divisions](#) for split requirements.

Competition Area – Unique to Game Day

- Participants must begin within the competition area with at least one foot on the performance floor.
- All permitted elements (kicks, jumps, turns etc.) and/or skills (stunts, pyramids, tumbling etc.) must be performed on the competition mat.
- Competitions comply with the NFHS & USA Cheer surface ruling that school-based programs may not compete on a spring floor. Approximate floor size will be a traditional carpet bonded foam mat of 54' (feet) wide by 42' (feet) deep – 9 strips.
- Tossing, throwing or other projecting of any type of object outside the competition floor and/or into the crowd is not allowed.
- Poms, signs, flags, megaphones, banners, foam fingers, and/or rally towels may be placed outside the competition area by a team member.

Time Limitations/Entrance/Exit – Unique to Game Day

- Stand-alone divisions - Each team will perform a routine not to exceed 1 minute.
- Crowleader™ combined division - Each team will perform a routine not to exceed 3:30 in total.
- **Teams may not set up props in advance of any stand-alone or combined category.**
- See specific category for details on the start and stop of each type of routine.
- All team breaks, rituals and traditions need to take place prior to the team being called to the performance floor.
- Teams should take the floor immediately with spirit and enthusiasm, but without excessive gestures. Example: chest bumps, hugs, handshakes, etc.
- All teams should refrain from any type of excessive celebration following the team's performance. Any team in violation may receive a "sportsmanship" penalty.
- There should not be any organized exits or other activities after the official ending of the routine.

Uniforms

Sideline/traditional school uniforms are required. Thematic/specialized costuming is not allowed.

Props

The use of props (i.e. poms, signs, flags, megaphones, banners, foam fingers, and/or rally towels) to lead the crowd is required.

- Tossing, throwing or other projecting of any type of object outside the competition floor and/or into the crowd is not allowed.
- No use of water, glitter, or other substances that would be harmful to the floor and/or to another competitor.
- Props (other than megaphones) used for rhythm/back beats are not allowed on the mats.
- Signs and school/team flags are permitted but may not be worn as an article of clothing or accessory.
- **Props cannot bear the weight of the performer.**
- No air horns or artificial noise makers are allowed.
- All equipment tips on flagpoles must be padded or taped.
- All props must be able to fit through a standard size (36") single door.
- Props may be discarded off of the performance surface but not hit/banged on the floor outside the performance area.

Routine & Judging Requirements

- Emphasis should be placed on crowd involvement and interaction, as well as entertaining the crowd.
 - All material should be suitable and able to be performed multiple times during a game or pep rally/assembly.
 - Incorporated elements (kicks, turns or jumps) and/or skills (tumbling, stunts) are used to cue and encourage participation.
- The use of props to lead the crowd is required (listed above).
- Judging for all divisions will be based on the following criteria (any other specifics for each division will be listed separately below):
 - Ability to lead the crowd and encourage participation from all audience members.
 - Material is appropriate to the sideline but also elevated to enhance the entertainment value.
 - Visual effects, variety, creativity and musicality.
 - Execution (placement, synchronization, spacing, etc.)
 - Crowd appeal, showmanship, and confidence.

DIVISION RULES: BAND CHANT

- The Band Chant music must be an instrumental selection performed exclusively by traditional band instruments. Vocal tracks, lyrics, or voiceovers are not allowed.
 - Camp material may easily be adapted to fit this category. For example, any band chant learned at a 2026 Varsity Brands camp could be used for this routine. Examples might include “Rock ‘N Roll Part II,” “Land of A Thousand Dances,” etc.
- Band Chant performance must be made up of at least 50% cheerleaders. Non-cheerleaders may participate (i.e. song/pom, dance) but may not comprise more than 50% of the total team members.
 - Auxiliary groups (i.e. drummers, band members, etc.) may perform with the spirit squad. These “auxiliary groups” are not permitted on the carpet bonded performance mat.
- Timing will begin with the first organized movement, voice, or note of music, whichever comes first.
- Timing will end with the last beat of music or organized movement.

Specific Skill Restrictions – BAND CHANT

- Tumbling and/or stunting of any kind is prohibited.
- Kicks, jumps, leaps, and turns are permitted.

DIVISION RULES: SITUATIONAL SIDELINE/CHEER (2 elements to this routine)

- This routine requires **TWO** elements: a sideline cheer and a crowd-oriented cheer/chant/traditional yell/drum cadence.
 - Sideline cheer: response to a game time sideline situation (presented by the announcer). Announcer sideline script will be posted on the USA website.
 - Cheer/chant/traditional yell/drum cadence: a separate crowd-oriented cheer that is not directly related to the situational cheer, but rather an add-on following the situation cheer.
- The total routine length for both of these elements is 1 minute.
- In addition to the above criteria, judging will be based on the following:
 - Accurate response to the game situation.
- Timing begins once the situation is read and ends at the conclusion of the second element of the routine (cheer/chant/traditional yell/drum cadence).

- Music is not permitted except for a drum cadence during the Situational Sideline section only. A live drummer, or a drum track is allowed.
 - Auxiliary groups (i.e. drummers) are not permitted on the carpet bonded performance mat.

Specific Skill Restrictions – SITUATIONAL SIDELINE/CHEER

- No baskets, sponge, elevator, or similar tosses permitted.
- No stunt/pyramid inversions are allowed.
- No twisting dismounts **or released twisting stunt transitions** are allowed.
- Single leg extended stunts are limited to liberties and liberty hitches.
- No running tumbling is allowed.
- Standing tumbling skills are limited to single skills. **Allowed skills include back handspring, back tuck, forward roll, front walkover, cartwheel, standing aerial, jump back handspring and jump tuck.**

DIVISION RULES: FIGHT SONG

- Skills incorporation (stunts, pyramids and/or tumbling) is limited to three (3) consecutive 8-counts. If the fight song repeats, the incorporation will only be allowed if it is repeated exactly the same both times. Counting will begin with the first initiation of a skill and continue until:
 - Either the incorporation is complete or the end of the 3rd 8-count.
 - The routine ends within the 3 consecutive 8-counts.
 - **Building skills must be stationary prior to the end of the 3rd 8-count and may remain stationary until the end of the routine.**
 - **Dismounts following the completion of the routine will not be included for timing purposes.**
- Teams are encouraged to use their traditional school fight song. Should your school fight song exceed 1 minute, and no reasonable way to edit the routine is possible, please contact the USA office for approval USARules@varsity.com.
- Judging will be based on the criteria listed above, as well as elements noted on the score sheet.
- Timing will begin with the first organized movement, voice, or note music, whichever comes first.
- Timing will end with the last beat of music or organized movement.

Specific Skill Restrictions – FIGHT SONG

- No baskets, sponge, elevator, or similar tosses permitted.
- No stunt/pyramid inversions are allowed.
- No twisting dismounts **or released twisting stunt transitions** are allowed.
- Single leg extended stunts are limited to liberties and liberty hitches.
- No running tumbling is allowed.
- Standing tumbling skills are limited to single skills. **Allowed skills include back handspring, back tuck, forward roll, front walkover, cartwheel, standing aerial, jump back handspring and jump tuck.**
- A kick/jump may be performed at any time during the routine.

DIVISION RULES: CROWDLEADER™ TEAMS (High School Teams Only)

OVERVIEW AND PARTICIPATION

The Crowdleader™ Teams routine weaves together the three separate stand-alone categories offered as part of USA Game Day Competition divisions: Band Chant, Situational Sideline/Cheer, and Fight Song. It can be performed by a single team, or a combination of separate spirit groups from a school (cheer, song/pom, pep flags, mascot, dance team, and band).

- Performance must be made up of at least 50% cheerleaders. Non-cheerleaders may participate (song/pom, pep flags, mascot, dance team, and band) but may not comprise more than 50% of the total team members.
 - Teams will be required to quantify the number of different programs that make up their routine (i.e. 25 cheer, 10 song/pom, 4 pep flag, 1 mascot).
 - The number of band participants does not count in the total number of participants in the routine.
 - Auxiliary groups (i.e. drummers, band members, etc.) are not permitted on the carpet bonded performance mat.
 - Other performance-based and/or spirit groups may not enter the division without their cheerleaders.

ROUTINE AND JUDGING REQUIREMENTS

Each team will perform a routine not to exceed 3:30 in total. This routine requires **THREE** components performed one after another (see descriptions and requirements above). Transitions should be seamless and remain crowd focused. Routine components must be performed in this order:

1. **Band Chant**
2. **Situational Sideline/Cheer**
3. **Fight Song**

SAFETY RULES

As with all categories, cheerleaders in the Crowdleader™ Teams division must follow the rules in the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book in addition to restrictions listed for each routine component as part of the 2026-27 Cheer Game Day Rules & Guidelines.

Song/pom, dance, or pep flag team members that are part of the Crowdleader™ division with their cheerleaders must follow the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom/Pep Flag Safety Rules or the 2026-27 USA Dance Safety Rules in addition to restrictions listed for each routine component as part of the 2026-27 Cheer Game Day Rules & Guidelines.

Mascots that are part of Crowdleader™ division with their cheerleaders are not permitted to be involved in stunts/pyramids and must follow the 2026-27 Cheer Game Day Rules & Guidelines.

GAME DAY ALL-IN-ONE ROUTINE DIVISION – RULES & GUIDELINES (SONG/POM)

GENERAL RULES

Categories/Divisions

There is an All-In-One Performance comprised of 3 routines: Fight Song, Spirit Raising, and a Performance Routine. All routine and judging requirements for each section are outlined below. Qualification to attend Spirit Nationals is required to compete in this division.

School/Organization Representation

All members of the performing squad must be current members of the official school song/pom team. These must be individuals who performed for games during the appropriate season. (Exception: this will not preclude participation from sister schools for same-gender schools as long as they are official members of the squad.) All Song/Pom Game Day routines are required to be comprised entirely of members of the school's song/pom team. Other performance-based and/or spirit groups may not enter the song/pom only divisions.

The team and each participating member/coach should constantly display good sportsmanship throughout the entire performance regarding respect for themselves, other teams and the viewing audience. Teams should refrain from any taunting, bragging, or suggestive expressions or gestures as well as discrimination of any nature. We recommend that the team and each of its members display an overall appearance conducive to serving as public representatives and ambassadors of their school in regard to grooming, traditional and appropriate attire, make-up, uniformity, etc.

Competition Area – Unique to Game Day

- Participants may enter from outside the competition area for their performance.
- Tossing, throwing or other projecting of any type of object outside the competition floor and/or into the crowd is not allowed.
- Teams may use poms, but they are not required in the Performance Routine category. Poms are required for all female team members for the Fight Song and Spirit Raising categories.
- The use of signs, flags, banners or other spirit-related props are permitted but not required.

Time Limitations/Entrance/Exit – Unique to Game Day

- Each team will perform a routine not to exceed 3 minutes in total, including transitioning from section to section.
- Teams may not set up poms in advance.
- All team breaks, rituals and traditions need to take place prior to the team being called to the performance floor.
- Teams should take the floor immediately with spirit and enthusiasm, but without excessive gestures. Example: chest bumps, hugs, hand-shakes, etc.
- All teams should refrain from any type of excessive celebration following the team's performance. Any team in violation may receive a "sportsmanship" penalty.
- There should not be any organized exits or other activities after the official ending of the routine.

Uniforms

Sideline/traditional school uniforms are required. Thematic/specialized costuming is not allowed.

- If an accessory (i.e. hair bows) or an article of clothing adds to the overall effect and/or theme of the routine, it will be considered "costuming."

Shoes

- All song/pom Game Day participants must wear soft-soled shoes on both feet while competing. Shoes must have a solid sole and cover the toe and heel. This is a safety rule and if a violation occurs, a deduction will be incurred.

Props

- The use of poms is required for all female members during the Fight Song and Spirit Raising. For the Performance Routine, the use of poms is permitted, but not required. The use of signs, flags, banners or other spirit-related props are permitted but not required.

ROUTINE AND JUDGING REQUIREMENTS

- Teams will perform the following routines in the below order to fulfill the All-In-One category:
 1. **Fight Song**
 2. **Spirit Raising**
 3. **Performance Routine**
- A team may begin on or off the performance floor for the start of the Fight Song. They must remain on the performance floor for the start of Spirit Raising and Performance Routine.
- Each routine will have a beginning and an end. Teams are encouraged to show spirit to the crowd between each routine.
- Emphasis for all sections should be placed on crowd interaction/involvement and entertaining the crowd. All material should be suitable and able to be performed multiple times during a game or pep rally/assembly.
- Judging will be based on the following criteria, as well as elements noted on the score sheet:
 - Game Day oriented material
 - Crowd communication skills
 - Incorporation of game day/sideline appropriate skills
 - Formations/transitions
 - Motion strength and placement
 - Spacing
 - Execution of skills
 - Crowd appeal and overall impression
- For each routine, see category description below for specific routine/judging requirements.

Skill Restrictions

- For all sections, teams will follow the same Safety Rules as all other USA Song/Pom Song/Jazz Divisions. These restrictions must be followed whether a song/pom competitor is in a Song/Pom Game Day category or a combined routine under one of the Cheer Game Day categories.

For specific Song/Pom Game Day questions, please email USADanceRules@varsity.com.

ALL-IN-ONE: FIGHT SONG SECTION

ROUTINE AND JUDGING REQUIREMENTS

- Teams are encouraged to use their traditional school fight song.
- As the first routine in the All-In-One division, a team may begin on or off the performance floor for the start of their music. Once the team name is called and the music begins, timing of the overall routine starts.

- The use of poms is required for all female members.
- The use of signs, flags, banners or other spirit-related props are permitted but not required.
- Choreography should represent a traditional Fight Song that your team performs at games or community events.

SPIRIT RAISING SECTION

ROUTINE AND JUDGING REQUIREMENTS

- The performance should have an emphasis on crowd appeal, encourage crowd interaction and involvement (i.e., yell backs, spell outs, school colors, etc.), and display excitement and genuine school spirit.
- The performance should consist of one or more of the following types of material:
 - Band Chant
 - Drum Cadence
 - Sideline Routine
 - Stand Routine
- Camp material may easily be adapted to fit this category. For example, any band chant learned at a 2026 Varsity Brands camp could be used for this routine. Examples might include “Party in the USA,” “Rock ‘N Roll Part II,” “Land of A Thousand Dances,” etc.
- These routines are intended for quick, spur-of-the-moment game day situations. There may or may not be a repeated sequence of choreography.

PERFORMANCE ROUTINE SECTION

ROUTINE AND JUDGING REQUIREMENTS

- Timing for the All-In-One routine will end with the last beat of music or organized movement in the Performance Routine.
- The Performance Routine must be in the style of pom, jazz, hip hop, kick or combination of any of these styles.

FINALITY OF DECISIONS

By participating, each team agrees that the decisions made by the judges will be final, and results may ONLY be reviewed for clarification. Each team acknowledges the necessity for the judges to make prompt and fair decisions, and each team therefore expressly waives any legal, equitable, administrative or procedural review of such decisions.

LEGALITY REVIEW (PRE-EVENT):

SAFETY RULES INQUIRY – CHEER/SONG/POM/JAZZ/PEP FLAG

Routines at all USA competitions must follow the 2026-27 NFHS Spirit Rules Book and 2026-27 USA Division Limitations, Rules and Restrictions or 2026-27 USA Song/Pom/Jazz/Pep Flag Safety Rules and the 2026-27 USA Song/Pom and Song/Jazz Division Limitations.

- For all legality, division limitations, or questions regarding specific performance elements, you may submit a video that contains the skill in question.
- Submitting a video is the only way to review a routine for potential safety violations. All video inquiries for safety rule legalities, for one-day events, must be submitted 14 days or more prior to the competition date.
 - Note that submission of a routine and/or its elements does not preclude a team from being assessed a penalty while at a specific USA competition, as performances from the video submission may differ from those executed on the competition floor during a live event.
 - Submission of a routine does not guarantee that it can be reviewed.
- **Cheerleading** videos and any specific cheerleading stunt and safety question that pertain to the NFHS Spirit Rules Book, or to the 2026- 27 USA Division Limitations should be submitted using the following form:

[USA Legality Inquiry Form – Cheer and Mascot](#)

USA rules and division limitations may be viewed at [Divisions, Rules & Scoring](#).

- **Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep Flag** videos and any specific skill and safety questions that pertain to the 2026-27 Division Limitations or 2026-27 Safety Rules should be submitted using the following form:

[USA Song/Pom Legality Inquiry Form – Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep Flag](#)

For all Spirit divisions: performing the skill at a prior event or in a prior round of competition does not ensure that a skill is legal nor that it would have warranted a legality warning.

USA RULES & REGULATIONS AGREEMENT

By accepting the Terms and Conditions as the authorized person from my program I agree and acknowledge that (i) I am the sponsor/director of the team (ii) I have read and understand the foregoing, (iii) I will be solely responsible for communicating the foregoing to all coaches/directors in my program that will be coaching and directing teams at USA Regional, Championship, and National Competitions, (iv) I will ensure that my teams will comply with all rules and regulations at all times, and (v) my team will support the results of the competition, as I am a role model for my programs. I have read and reviewed both these specific USA Rules and Regulations.

Save the Date!



**2027 USA Spirit Nationals
Anaheim Convention Center
Anaheim, CA
February 18 - 22, 2027**

Nationals Qualification Requirements

All Divisions, including Game Day - Prior qualification through a USA Regional competition or other sanctioned event/process is required in order to attend USA Nationals in any division.

Bids to Nationals are awarded to teams receiving 80% of total possible points for all cheer, group stunt, and game day cheer divisions and 75% of total possible points for all song, pep flag, mascot, and game day song divisions, regardless of any penalties received.

All High School and NEW for all Junior High and Rec Divisions: 75% of the team competing at USA Spirit Nationals will be required to complete the Varsity Spirit/NFHS Squad Credentialing Program. More information about this can be found [here](#) or by contacting your Varsity Spirit State Director.

***Share your journey with us on Instagram and follow
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