

Planning Ahead for Competition by Joyce E. Pennington

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In the past ten years, dance/drill team competitions have become the third “season” of the year for teams that perform at football games, basketball games, and need a spring activity to continue the motivation of the team to the end of the season. Some teams have chosen to do a spring show instead of contest and many will alternate each year with attending contest and have a show.

The preparation for contest should actually begin in the end of summer or early fall when the director is planning the activities for the year. In choosing the contest or contests the team attends, she will make a strategy of how her team can achieve their greatest level of success. For the seasoned contest team, the director will choose the two to four contests that will each be a stepping stone for the team’s personal improvement.

For a first time participant, it is usually best to start by taking your officers to observe an early contest. There are many “seasoned” contest teams that know what to expect and how to approach the first contest where the beginner will need some preparation. Plan to stay for most of the day and especially through the awards so that they will know what to expect from going to and from dressing areas to sitting together in the stands and having a team representative retrieve the trophies during awards. These are small details that can make the difference in your team’s confidence level going into the event.

Once the contest or contests have been selected for your team, here are some steps to take during the season that will take you toward the best results:

Contest Season
☆ Contest Preparation
☆ Beat the Scoresheet
☆ From a Judge's Eye
☆ Planning Ahead for Competition
☆ Hints for Soloists
☆ Ensemble Scoresheet
☆ Solo Scoresheet
☆ Officer Scoresheet
☆ Team Scoresheet
☆ ADTS Contest Handbook

SEPTEMBER: Choose your contest(s). If you are new to contests, choose one that is possibly in late February or early March to give you and your officers a chance to go to several contests to observe. Choose a contest for your team that will give them a chance to see other outstanding teams yet not so large to overwhelm them for their first experience. If your team is seasoned, you will probably choose two to three contests. The first one should be in February and will be considered the “ice-breaker” to test your routines for effectiveness. The second will be to measure the improvement from the first. The third will be to vault your team’s confidence to its highest level. Ideally, give

your team at least two weeks between each contest to polish and correct any errors from the previous event. If you will be traveling out of town to contest, your parents club should be consulted to assist in fund-raising efforts to offset expenses, as well as submitting to various travel agencies for travel bids. Beware of always choosing the lowest bid. There may be hidden expenses that may come up after your arrival.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER: Select your music, props, costumes as well as set up any outside choreographers. This is a most critical point in that these decisions will set the whole tone for your team's experience at contest. In selecting the music or theme, it is critical not to choose a tune that may be outdated or redundant by the time it is performed. If it is over used at a contest, it may draw a negative response from the crowd. If you are using an outside choreographer, allow him/her to be consulted in order that they may have valuable input. Make sure to take the time and effort to have your music professionally recorded. Too often teams spend thousands of dollars on costumes and pennies on poor quality tapes. A good tape professionally recorded with edits will cost between \$20 to \$50. If your parents are making the costumes or if you are having them professionally made, have them draw or make up several designs. It can also be helpful to have one of your team members "test" a prototype for its performability. Sometimes the greatest costume ideas have fallen apart on the floor during the performance or at the dress rehearsal when it is too late. Choose costume designs that are simple and effective. Remember that they will have to be transported easily as well as changed in an out several times during the course of a day. Some teams will use a basic colorful unitard and accessorize with different overlays that completely change the look for each routine but make changes quick and efficient. An easy costume change can lower your team's stress level at contest.

DECEMBER-JANUARY: Depending on the length of your football season. It is best to start teaching the contest routines early. Remember that your team will have three to four to learn and perfect and your officers may have double that many (including solos, officers, ensembles). You and your officers will certainly want to choreograph some of your contest numbers and the team may want to choose a favorite instructor from camp to do one or two routines. This will give your routine presentation a variety. Make sure to begin with the most challenging routine as it will require the most memory time and polishing. Allow time for learning and basic polishing before you go on to the next routine. It is advisable to encourage your officers to schedule their own rehearsal time for their routines separate from the team's practice time and that the team events are the first priority. This would be a good time to reserve your school buses and give exact times a week prior to the contest.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY: After all routines are taught, it is time to polish in small groups to "fine tune" the routines. You should hold auditions for each routines to select the best performers in each. Make sure that each team member is included in at least one routines provided she is eligible (grades, weight). Make sure to have alternates for each routine that know the routine well enough to step into any slot that might be vacated due to illness or ineligibility. Once the selections are made, it is time to block the routine into its exact formations and patterns. Teach the girls to utilize only the basketball lines

on the court as other lines may not be on the performance floor on contest day. Also make sure to rotate your alternates into various positions during rehearsal so they will be ready if needed. Prior to the first contest, hold a special “show off” for parents and friends that will be your dress rehearsal. This will give the team an audience as well as an opportunity to perform in costume and preview any technical problems in advance. This would also be a good opportunity to have one or two critique judges come to give them scores and comments on their routines. Have any solos, officers or ensembles perform also. Make sure to time each routine to make sure that they fall into the time limit and insure that the tempo is correct. This “show off” should take place at least two weeks prior to the first contest so there will be ample time to make any necessary changes.

CONTEST DAY PREPARATION: Just before you go to contest, make sure to let your parents as well as team members know what you expect from them. It is always great to have a large showing of parents at contest and many will wear special shirts or jackets to display their support in school colors. Type up a general guideline sheet that will tell the location of the contest, times, any ‘house rules’ about dressing areas or food, and special instructions from you, the director. Make a checklist of items that your team members will need to have with them at contest. Some extras besides their costumes: bobby pins, hair spray safety pins, rubber bands, water bottle, whole fruit, crackers, sleeping bag or pillow (if a long day), zip lock bags, walkman (to practice on own). Encourage them to leave all valuables at home. Most contests will not offer a completely secure dressing area. Make sure that your team has cleaned their dressing area before departure. If you are going out of town, be more specific with your guidelines and have an itinerary mapped out with plenty to keep everyone busy.

Your team can have a very positive experience through competitions. There are many contests that will provide them with a quality, positive and rewarding experience. Make sure that you have covered your plans well and that you are confident in yourself as well as your team.

http://www.danceadts.com/edsupport/planning_ahead.htm