

SPORTS

CHEER PHI: MUCH RESPECT DUE

by Lesli Sample

During the first two and one-half weeks of the semester, I spent an extensive amount of time with some of the most intelligent, gifted, and industrious females Fayetteville State University has to offer. Whether it was from the week they spent on campus working hard before all the other students moved in, or the association from years past, these young ladies produced an aura of camaraderie and sisterhood that I soon not only felt comfortable with, but also a part of.

Often during their long practice sessions or on trips back and forth to the cafeteria, I would hear one or more of the girls recite what can only be termed as the group's informal motto. Some days I, too, would join in the chanting of "If you want some, come and get some; if you're bad enough come and take some." It wasn't until I really got to know these young ladies that I realized they were speaking of hard work, uncommon strength of will, and numerous obstacles.

Together, these young women have an average grade point average of 2.79; a few of them are even Chancellor's Scholars. They are studying in a wide variety of fields, including Computer Science, Biology/Pre-med, Math Engineering, and Physics. One of these young ladies is even a single mother. Two things all of these women have in common are their dedication and endurance.

You may be asking yourself, "Why haven't I met any of these outstanding ladies?" There is no need to ask, because almost everyone knows at least one of them. They are the Fayetteville State Cheerleaders, known more affectionately as "Cheer Phi."

Even if you don't personally know one of these young ladies, you've probably seen them entering or leaving the caf; hot, sweaty, and tired from the long, hard eight to ten hours a week they spend practicing together and individually. Speaking of the caf, I was shocked when one member of Cheer Phi was asked to leave or pay for her meal because she lived off campus. Yes, I am aware that there is a policy that states that off-campus students must pay to eat in the dining hall, but on this particular occasion, the cafeteria staff was either being negligent or just plain discriminatory. Before we entered the caf that day,

two ex-football players (both of whom now live off campus) entered without paying. The gentlemen were with some other present football players, so no one questioned them. Sure, it was the beginning of a new year with new and unfamiliar faces, but the members of Cheer Phi should have all been familiar to the staff. The entire squad had been in and out for over a week with no prior trouble. Captain Yolanda Johnson, stated that, if she had to, she'd "get up and walk across tables", bellowing in protest against the unfair treatment (my kind of sistah).

Be it sexist or not, this type of discrimination is often what the mem-



Cheer Phi practices their moves.

bers of Cheer Phi go through daily; and they receive it from the faculty and staff. An example is that Cheer Phi may not be getting much needed extra uniforms and shoes, even though they were promised them. I guess no one will see Cheer Phi's need until these ladies are sitting out games because uniforms need to be tailored or are just beyond repair. I wonder how many other FSU athletes have this problem. Another example is a judge (an FSU staff member) who was overheard saying that he/she would only favor the more attractive ladies who recently tried out, whether they could cheer or not.

The members of Cheer Phi also face discrimination from students; male and female. Is it because they are women that male students and athletes, don't take what they do seriously, see cheering as a sport, believe these ladies work hard, or give them the recognition they deserve? Or is the discrimination present because cheerleaders have for a long time been seen as promiscuous and enticing distractions, who were incapable of forming complete thoughts?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is yes, then many people (alumni, fans, and members of the university family) are being very hypocritical. They are being hypocritical each time they cheer on or give "props" to other organizations, while thumbing their noses at the cheerleaders.

In the past, members of certain other organizations at Fayetteville State have been charged with physical harassment of other students, brought before the judiciary board for the possession and use of alcoholic beverages, and received grade point averages of less than 1.0. What's worse is that today, some of

these same students remain active in their organizations. However, Mrs. Iris Hunt-Smith, Director of Residence Life, stated that no cheerleader has ever been brought before the board during her time here at FSU.

The members of Cheer Phi also have to maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average, and most of these young ladies' GPAs exceed the requirement. Cheer Phi also consists of an SGA senator, a community assistant at New Residence Hall, and a member of the Math tutorial program. So not only are these ladies doing a lot of that "Bronco Leaning", but they are also doing "a lot of pushing the pencils" as one member so eagerly stated.

I mentioned before that Cheer Phi received a great deal of discrimination from students. While spending time with the cheerleaders, I noticed that many females on campus have deep resentment toward Cheer Phi. I could only think of two reasons why. The first would have to be the relationship that the ladies of Cheer Phi share with the football players, and in turn the amount of attention the players and other males give the cheerleaders. I have only this to say to the young ladies who resent the cheerleaders (and I sincerely believe I speak for Cheer Phi as well): Grow up and stop being so insecure. Any sensible adult knows you can't ex-

pect any athletic team not to have strong ties to its biggest supporters. One, also, cannot expect people to be in the lime light and not get attention.

The second reason for such deep resentment would have to be jealousy. Why else would such a wonderful group of women be labeled as promiscuous (or more commonly, as "hos") when the majority of them are devoted to either one very special man or one very close family? Why else would people scoff at a workout equivalent to ten hours of high power aerobic exercise and gymnastics as if it were only a proverbial "walk in the park"? Last, and in no way least, why else would people who engage in little or no extracurricular activities, but have less than 3.0 or 4.0 grade point averages, waste valuable time bad-mouthing such an active group of young women? These are women who not only volunteer free time to cheer, but also tutor, counsel, represent their respective dorms at university functions, make the Chancellor's list, maintain above average grade point averages, and still find time to pile in cars for late night raids on Wendy's or crashing a good party.

I have to admit, my respect for the Fayetteville State cheerleaders is "brand new". These ladies do so much, and they do it with heart. It is a shame that Cheer Phi volunteers time that so many students can ill afford to give up at one of the only universities that does not offer scholarships for doing so, yet it clearly represents how devoted these young women are to what they do.

I would also like to commend Bobby Hostler and Jarrell Joyner, the two male cheerleaders. Not only do these young men cheer, but they also run cross country while maintaining above average grade point averages.

So, if you want some (the sisterhood, camaraderie, and closeness that is Cheer Phi) come and get some by getting to know these young women better. If you're bad enough, that is, if you have the talent, endurance, and mentality it takes to be Cheer Phi, then come and take some by taking the initiative and showing the courage to try out for a position as an FSU cheerleader.