

Cheer team working to combat cheerleading stereotypes



BY NICOLE ZELNIKER
STAFF WRITER

Standing on the sidelines, the Guilford cheer/dance team raises their arms in unison, urging on the Guilford College football team.

As the ball flies beyond the goal line, the cheer team claps and screams, trying with all their might to be heard over the raucous crowd that now collectively holds its breath.

Whether in front of the bleachers or off to the sidelines, the cheerleaders work hard to perfect their performances.

"As a spectator, I thought cheer was just lifting your arms and jumping around, but you have to be strong," said sophomore cheer member Zi Huang.

The Guilford cheer team started last year as a club.

"A lot of people didn't even

know we had a cheer team," said sophomore cheer member Hannah Sones. "This year, we had a lot of interest."

Eleven students from various cheerleading backgrounds make up the team.

"I've never cheered before last year, so it was a new experience," said sophomore cheerleader Jeannine Harrell.

Others have experience with dance and decided to give cheer a try.

"I've always done something related to dancing, but it's not all about that," said first-year cheerleader Beatriz Caldas. "We work really hard to memorize cheers and do a lot of workouts."

Because of media exposure, many associate cheerleaders with not only femininity, but with anti-feminism.

"The cultural conception is that

it's really a 'girl' activity, not even a sport," said sophomore cheerleading co-captain Morgan Holmberg. "When cheerleading originally started, it was male-only. But men shouldn't be afraid; Zi is an awesome member."

Huang is one such example. The only male on the cheer team, he has demonstrated ability beyond his background in dancing.

"He's showing other guys that he's part of the cheer team, and it's not just for women," said junior cheerleader Vanessa Madonna. "More guys should join. It's not just a feminine sport."

Many spectators are not aware of how many men go on to cheer in college and beyond.

"The guys who cheer are awesome," said sophomore cheerleading co-captain Jocelyn Foshay. "A lot of the guys that

I cheered with as an All-Star cheerleader in high school are now on nationally ranked teams."

For Huang, this stereotype is not getting in his way.

"Guys should really give it a chance," said Huang. "It's a wonderful experience. Despite being a guy on the cheer team, the ladies treat me as just another member of the team."

Many female students struggle with the balance between cheering and feminism, although they are working towards an environment where the two can co-exist.

"It does feel unfair that we're always supporting other sports, but we do support the women's basketball team," said senior cheerleading co-captain Dakota McHenry. "I believe that feels more empowering to women than it does to cheer on the sidelines of a

football game."

For Huang, this is one experience he is glad he did not miss out on just because of gender norms.

"It's a wonderful experience," said Huang. "The ladies on the team really have helped me out."

One hope is that a multi-gendered cheer team can bring change to other sports on campus.

"There are so many sports that girls can participate in if people opened up their minds to it," said sophomore cheerleader Elizabeth Shelton.

This tight-knit team is always looking for new students of any gender to support the team in addition to looking out for their own.

"We've improved so much," said sophomore and cheerleader Sammy Toth. "It's astounding. We really look and feel like a team now, twisted ankles and all."

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SPORTS EVENTS

Sept./Oct.

MEN'S SOCCER

Sept. 27 @ 7 p.m.
v. VA Wesleyan
Armfield Athletic Center

MEN'S SOCCER

Oct. 1 @ 7 p.m.
v. Averett
Armfield Athletic Center

VOLLEYBALL

Sept. 30 @ 7 p.m.
v. Greensboro
Ragan-Brown Fieldhouse

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